The Relationship Between Ethical and Abusive Coaching Behaviors and Student-Athlete Well-Being

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Drawing on social–cognitive theory, this research examined the impact of college coaches' ethical and abusive behavior on their athletes' college choice satisfaction, perceptions of the team's inclusion climate, and team members' willingness to cheat. We examined the relative impact of these coaching behaviors controlling for team gender as well as the contextual influences of the profile of the sport, National Collegiate Athletic Association Division, and ethical climate at the school. Results from a multilevel analysis of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's quadrennial *Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Learning of Students in College* (GOALS) survey ($N = 19,920$ student-athletes) provided general support for our theoretically derived hypotheses. Ethical leadership was positively related to student-athletes' college choice satisfaction, as well as their perceptions of inclusion climate on the team. Abusive coaching behavior was also positively related to team members' willingness to cheat. Perceptions of the ethical climate at the school were related to all 3 outcomes. We found only partial support for the relationship between abusive behavior, inclusion climate, and college choice satisfaction. Unexpectedly, ethical leadership was unrelated to student-athletes' perceptions of their teammates' willingness to cheat.

Keywords: multilevel modeling, NCAA, college choice satisfaction, willingness to cheating, inclusion climate

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The ability of coaches to impact the performance of their athletes is well established (Horn, 2008; Weiss, Smith, & Stuntz, 2008). Coaches prepare athletes for competition through physical training, planning, and instruction (Cote, Yardley, Hay, Sedgwick, & Baker,

1999; Mallett & Cote, 2006). They also design strategies and game plans that affect the performance of their athletes and teams during competition (Cote et al., 1999).

More generally, through their leadership styles and motivational tactics, coaches impact athletes' attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Smoll & Smith, 1989). Research suggests that coaches who provide high levels of encouragement, support, and autonomy are more likely to foster positive psychological responses in their athletes and ultimately lead to higher levels of performance (see Horn, 2008 for a review).

Preparing and motivating athletes to succeed during competition is important. However, achieving performance goals is meaningless without considering how those results were achieved. The moral dimension of sports, particularly the demonstration of good sportsper-

sonship among participants, has long been a concern among academic researchers and other stakeholders (see Kavussanu, 2012 for a review). Through modeling of (in)appropriate behaviors, approval or sanctioning of unfair play, the motivational climate, and moral atmosphere that they create (Weiss et al., 2008), coaches are a key source of influence on the moral performance of their athletes. Whether or not coaches "develop character or characters" (Weiss et al., 2008, p. 210) depends on a deliberate decision by coaches to understand the requirements of moral leadership, and put them into practice (Bredemeier & Shields, 2006). Recent identification of coaching behaviors related to the promotion of sportspersonship and the development of an instrument to measure them (Bolter & Weiss, 2013) represent advances in our understanding of the ethical dimension of coaching. In this research, we take an alternative approach to studying the ethical (and unethical) leadership of coaches by drawing from the field of behavioral ethics (see Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006 for a review).

The purpose of this study was to examine how ethical (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005) and abusive (Tepper, 2000) behaviors of college coaches are related to athletes' outcomes, particularly, inclusion climate on the team (research question 1), athletes' satisfaction with their college choice (research question 2), and willingness to cheat (research question 3). These particular outcomes are relevant because they have important practical implications for student-athletes. Athletes' satisfaction with their college choice, feelings that their team is inclusive, and sense of belongingness to a team that competes fairly and ethically are likely to affect their commitment to graduate from the college in which they have matriculated.

Recent events such as the termination of Mike Rice as the head coach of men's basketball at Rutgers University for verbally (and in some instances physically) abusing his players (Prunty, 2013) serve as a powerful reminder that understanding ethical and unethical coaching behavior is important. From a research perspective, this study provides sports psychologists and other scholars with new avenues for conceptualizing ethical and unethical coaching behaviors. It also sheds light on how such behaviors can affect not only sportspersonship but

also a broad set of factors pertaining to student-athlete well-being.

Theory and Hypotheses

Social–cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) has been used to explain the impact of coaching behaviors on athletes (Smith & Smoll, 2007). One of the primary tenets of social–cognitive theory is that individuals learn by observing and imitating the behaviors of models. Numerous studies have shown the effects of *modeling* on many types of behaviors including those related to athletics (McCullagh, Law, & Ste-Marie, 2012). Although there are many potential models to choose from (teammates, opponents, parents, professionals), in this research we focus on coaches because, by virtue of their leadership role, they are most directly positioned to serve as models for their athletes. Coaches have legitimate authority over their student-athletes and control valued outcomes (e.g., starting lineup, playing time, scholarship allocations), thus making them attractive and credible models in their athletes' eyes.

Another important tenet of social–cognitive theory is that individuals are capable of self-regulating their performance. Self-efficacy, an individual's belief that he or she is capable of taking action to achieve particular outcomes in specific situations, is a vital component of the self-regulatory process. There are four mechanisms proposed by Bandura (1977) that can affect an individual's self-efficacy beliefs. *Vicarious learning* (i.e., modeling) occurs by observing others. *Mastery experiences* (i.e., prior experience with successful enactment of behavior) have the most powerful impact on self-efficacy in multiple domains including athletics (Beauchamp, Jackson, & Morton, 2012). *Verbal persuasion* from others, such as a coach, boosts self-efficacy through feedback and encouragement. *Physiological and affective states* (e.g., anxiety, fear, pain, exhaustion) of the athlete, also affect self-efficacy beliefs. Overall, self-efficacy can have important impacts on personal, relational, and team performance (Beauchamp et al., 2012).

Ethical Leadership

Previous research (Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003; Treviño, Hartman, & Brown, 2000)

in the field of behavioral business ethics has identified traits and behaviors associated with perceptions of ethical leadership. Treviño et al. (2000, 2003) proposed that to be perceived as an ethical leader, a leader must be seen as both a *moral person* and *moral manager*. Moral persons are honest, trustworthy, caring, open to input, principled, and respectful of others. As moral managers, ethical leaders set and communicate ethical standards, and hold others accountable when those standards are violated (Treviño et al., 2000, 2003).

Brown et al. (2005) conceptualized ethical leadership from a social learning (Bandura, 1986) perspective. In a series of seven studies, they developed a construct of ethical leadership and an instrument, the ethical leadership scale, to measure followers' perceptions of ethical leadership. They defined ethical leadership as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown et al., 2005, p. 120). Their research indicated that ethical leadership is related to important follower attitudes and outcomes including trust in leader, interactional fairness, leader effectiveness, satisfaction with leader, and willingness to report problems to management. Additional research has found that ethical leadership is especially important in promoting positive, and reducing negative, behaviors in organizations (Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009; Walumbwa, Mayer, Wang, Wang, Workman, & Christensen, 2011).

Bandura's social–cognitive theory, especially with its focus on modeling, is central to understanding the ethical leadership influence process. Ethical leaders set high standards for ethical conduct and punish followers when those standards are violated (Treviño et al., 2000, 2003). They model ethical conduct and are seen as trustworthy and fair. Coaches who model ethical leadership behaviors will be observed and imitated by their athletes (Bolter & Weiss, 2013; Gibbons & Ebbeck, 1997). They will foster a team climate that is characterized by mutual trust, concern, and respect (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009)—one that is accepting of personal differences and inclusive of all individuals. We predict that ethical leadership

coaching behavior is positively related to inclusion climate on the team (hypothesis 1a).

The fruits of this ethical modeling behavior will also show up in the way that team members treat their opponents. Ethical leaders are known for caring not only about successful performance, but also that success is achieved using ethical means (Brown et al., 2005). Coaches who demonstrate ethical leadership behavior offer encouragement (positive persuasion) to their athletes to achieve athletic and ethical excellence, which should discourage the temptation to cheat. Furthermore, having been treated with respect by a coach who demonstrates ethical leadership behavior, athletes will treat competitors with similar respect. We hypothesize that ethical leadership is negatively related to team members' willingness to cheat (hypothesis 2a).

Overall, research in business settings shows that ethical leadership is associated with higher levels of follower self-efficacy (Walumbwa et al., 2011). Similarly, numerous studies have found a link between ethical leadership and follower satisfaction and commitment to the organization (Brown et al., 2005; Neubert, Carlson, Kacmar, Roberts, & Chonko, 2009). We hypothesize that the ethical leadership of coaches will generate similar outcomes, especially athletes' satisfaction with their college choice (hypothesis 3a).

Abusive Coaching Behavior

While ethical leadership represents the potential of leaders to do good, other research from the field of behavioral business explores the dark side of leadership (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Much of this research has focused on the construct of abusive supervision, which is defined as "subordinates' perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact" (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Abusive supervision has many negative impacts on followers such as reduced self-efficacy (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002), anxiety (Harris, Kacmar, & Boonthanum, 2005), and depression (Tepper, 2000). Like the construct of ethical leadership, social–cognitive theory has been used to explain the relationship between abusive supervision on followers.

Abusive supervisors model negative behaviors. Athletes who observe abusive coaching

behaviors (regardless of whether they are targets of such abuse or simply observers) may come to mimic such behaviors themselves. These athletes will display similar hostile and disrespectful behaviors to teammates and opponents. Furthermore, research by Tepper, Moss, and Duffy (2011) shows that when leaders perceive dissimilarity between their own values and beliefs and those of their subordinates, they are more likely to engage in abusive supervision. This intolerance for difference leads us to predict that abusive coaching behaviors would inhibit an inclusion climate on the team (hypothesis 1b).

In addition to modeling, abusive coaching behavior also affects athletes' self-regulation via other mechanisms. Targets of abuse are likely to experience negative affective and physiological outcomes, making it more difficult to cope with the normal demands of everyday life. Such ego depletion leaves the athletes more vulnerable to engage in cheating and other unethical behaviors (Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, & Ariely, 2011; Mead, Baumeister, Gino, Schweitzer, & Ariely, 2009). Thus, abusive coaching behavior is associated with athletes' willingness to cheat (hypothesis 2b).

Athletes who experience these negative states as a result of abusive supervision will experience many negative attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, because abusive coaching behavior, as measured in this study, is based on verbal, not physical, abuse, verbal persuasion in the form of discouragement will further degrade athletes' motivation and satisfaction. Overall, we predict that abusive coaching behavior is negatively related to athletes' college choice satisfaction (hypothesis 3b).

Method

Data for this study were collected as part of a large-scale national study of the academic, athletic, and social experiences of current National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) student-athletes called the Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Learning of Students (GOALS) survey. For the purposes of this study, only a subset of the items in the total instrument was examined. The GOALS data were collected at a single point time. Thus, our hypotheses are tested using cross-sectional data.

Participants

Participants for the study included 19,920 student-athletes (40.8% women) from 1,321 teams across 609 NCAA member-institutions. The sample was limited to student-athletes in the 24 sports sanctioned by the NCAA (11 men's and 13 women's). For the purposes of analysis, the sports were grouped into two categories: "high-profile" sports (those typically attracting the most media attention), consisting of men's baseball, basketball, and football (34.0%), and "lower-profile" sports, consisting of the other 21 sports sampled in the study. Participants came from all levels of the NCAA's three divisions: Division I (36.8%), Division II (27.3%), and Division III (35.9%). Race-ethnicity self-identification was 71.8% White, 15.4% Black or African American, and 12.5% "other" or multiracial.

Procedure

During the spring semester of 2010, the NCAA randomly selected one to three sport teams at each NCAA member-institution and invited each school's faculty athletic representative (FAR), to administer the GOALS survey on their campuses. The surveys with instructions and accompanying materials were mailed and e-mailed to the FARs. After approval was granted by each school's institutional review board and a coach provided approval for his or her team to participate in the study, surveys were distributed among student-athletes for completion on a confidential and voluntary basis. Coaches and staff were asked to not be present. One prepaid package per sport sampled was provided for returning the surveys to a third-party vendor that handled all completed surveys and created an electronic database (see "Directions for Paper Administration," 2010, for further details about data collection procedure). Almost 60% of NCAA FARs and their teams took part in the study.

Measures

Inclusion climate. Team inclusion climate was measured with three Likert-scale items (e.g., *My coach has created an inclusive environment for all members of the team*) on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) response scale.

Willingness to cheat. Student-athlete perceptions of their teammates' willingness to cheat were measured with a single Likert scale item (*My teammates would be willing to cheat in order to win*) scaled from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

College choice satisfaction. Satisfaction with the choice of college was measured with three Likert-scale items (e.g., *I am glad I made the choice to be at this school*) that were on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) response scale.

Ethical leadership. Ethical leadership of the coach was assessed with six Likert-scale items adapted from Brown et al. (2005). The six items (e.g., *My head coach defines success not just by winning, but by winning fairly*) used a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale.

Abusive coaching behavior. Abusive behavior of the coach was assessed with three Likert-scale items adapted from Tepper (2000). The three items (e.g., *My head coach makes negative comments about me to others*) used a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale.

Control variables. We controlled for team gender, the profile of the sport (high or low), NCAA Division (I, II, and III), and perceived ethical climate at the school. Ethical climate in school was measured with three Likert-scale items (e.g., *Our school encourages student-athletes to practice good sportsmanship*) on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) response scale.

Data Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted in SPSS version 21.0 statistical package and included descriptive, reliability, and correlation analyses. To answer the research questions, a multilevel approach to data analyses was used in HLM 6 Hierarchical Linear and Nonlinear Modeling software version 6.08 (Raudenbush, Bryk, & Congdon, 2004). Single-level models were deemed inappropriate for the current analyses, because student-athletes within a given team are likely to have correlated errors leading to a violation of the basic assumption of linear regression of independency. Multilevel models account for nonindependence of errors by disentangling the effects of between- and within-group variance (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

This study used two-level models with student-athletes at level 1 and teams at level 2. Although models with more levels can be represented in multilevel analysis, the basic two-level models have the essential statistical features for the majority of studies (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In this study, the two-level models were chosen over other models because the indicator and outcome variables had a team focus (i.e., coach's ethical leadership and abusive behaviors, team's inclusion climate, and teammates' willingness to cheat).

All scale scores were standardized using SPSS prior to the multilevel analyses. Before introducing predictors into the two-level models, unconditional models (one-way ANOVAs with random effects) were run for each outcome variable to obtain intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). ICC measures the proportion of the variance in the outcome that is between the level-2 units (similarity among individuals within a group) and indicates whether multilevel modeling is appropriate and needed. Similar to Lee (2000), we used the ICC criterion of $\geq 10\%$. Given that a multilevel approach was appropriate, the full models were built in three steps to investigate model fit indices and proportional reduction in ICC. In the first step, team characteristics (i.e., gender, sport profile, and division membership) were dummy coded and entered uncentered at the team level (level-2), allowing for comparisons between the subgroups (Model 1). The reference groups were male, high-profile sport, and Division I. In the next two steps, student-athletes' perceptions were also introduced into the models. Specifically, ethical climate in school was entered first (Model 2), followed by ethical leadership and abusive coaching behavior (Model 3). At the individual level, these three variables were group-mean centered. Therefore, all inferences were drawn about athletes in relation to their teammates within their sport team ("pond effects"). At the team level, the student-level data were aggregated into team-level and centered around the grand mean, allowing for between-team inferences (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). When deleting the nonsignificant parameters did not affect the fit of the model to the data, the pruned models were deemed to be final (Model 4).

Once the models were built, estimates for the final multilevel models were explored to answer the research questions. Because the multilevel analyses were run using the standardized scale scores, the coefficients were interpreted in terms of one standard deviation increases. Due to the large sample size, the alpha level was set up to a more conservative level of $\alpha = .01$. Significance was also determined using confidence intervals and effect sizes presented in between-team standard deviation units (see Lee, 2000 for details). Values between 0.1 and 0.3 constituted a small effect, 0.3 to 0.5 a medium effect, and ≥ 0.5 a large effect.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 presents the correlation coefficients, means, standard deviations, range, and Cronbach's alphas for all the variables studied. All measures showed acceptable internal reliability, with alpha coefficients ranging from .78 to .92. Correlations between all variables were significant and in the expected directions. Although there was a moderate negative correlation between ethical leadership and abusive coaching behavior, these coaching styles were not completely mutually exclusive. Based on one-standard deviation below and above the mean—(a) 17.3% of coaches were classified as low and 22.1% as high on ethical leadership; (b) no coaches were classified as low, but 16.6% were high on abuse; and (c) 15.7% were classified as high on both ethical leadership and abusive behavior. Missing values were below 5.0% and were assumed to be missing at random. The scale scores were standardized and the multilevel analyses were carried out. The normality of the residuals was assessed, indicating some deviation from the normality in level-2 residuals for all three outcomes. Therefore, full information maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors was used. Full information maximum likelihood handles analyses of data with missing values (Peugh & Enders, 2004). Robust estimates allow for obtaining more accurate results when the team-level variances are not normally distributed and there are 100 level-2 units or more (Maas & Hox, 2004).

Table 1
Summary of Pearson Correlations, Descriptive Statistics, and Cronbach's Alphas for the Measured Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Inclusion climate on team	—					
2. Willingness to cheat	−.16** [−.17; −.14]	—				
3. College choice satisfaction	.41** [.39; .42]	−.16** [−.18; −.15]	—			
4. Ethical climate in school	.27** [.26; .29]	−.21** [−.23; −.20]	.26** [.25; .28]	—		
5. Ethical leadership	.58** [.57; .59]	−.11** [−.12; −.09]	.39** [.38; .40]	.24** [.22; .25]	—	
6. Abusive coaching behavior	−.39** [−.40; −.38]	.24** [.23; .26]	−.27** [−.29; −.26]	−.17** [−.18; −.15]	−.52** [−.53; −.51]	—
M (SD)	4.92 (0.95)	2.01 (1.26)	5.46 (1.55)	4.63 (0.56)	4.01 (0.97)	2.03 (1.14)
α	.81	—	.92	.78	.92	.92
Range	1–6	1–5	1–7	1–5	1–5	1–5

Note. 95% confidence intervals are in brackets.
** $p < .001$.

Inclusion Climate

Model fit. The results for inclusion climate are presented in Table 2. Clustering student-athletes at the team level accounted for 16.0% of the variance in inclusion climate, providing evidence that the natural clustering of the data is important to account for by conducting a multilevel model, because some of the variance of the outcome variable was uniquely explained by team membership. Introducing control (team characteristics and ethical climate in school, Models 1 and 2, respectively) and predictor variables (ethical leadership and abusive supervision of coaches, Model 3) significantly improved the model. Team characteristics (gender, sport profile, and division) helped to explain the least variance in inclusion climate on team, whereas ethical leadership and abusive coaching behavior helped to explain the most variance, especially at the team level. The pruned model was accepted as the final model (Model 4).

Control variables. Small effects of gender were found on the outcome with women's teams reporting higher inclusion climate. Ethical climate had small effects on team's inclusion climate at the individual level ($\beta = .07$, $p < .001$, ES = 0.17) and medium effects at the team level ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$, ES = 0.35). In other words, athletes who perceived their school as one with a stronger ethical climate in comparison with their teammates reported a higher inclusion climate on the team (individual level). Additionally, being on teams with a greater aggregate ethical climate compared with other teams was also related to a higher inclusion climate (team level).

Ethical and abusive coaching behaviors. The inclusion climate was the highest for athletes who, in comparison with their teammates,

Table 2
Multilevel Results for Inclusion Climate

Variables	Model 1 Coefficient	Model 2 Coefficient	Model 3 Coefficient	Model 4 Coefficient	95% CI	t	ES
Estimation of fixed effects							
Level 2: Team							
Intercept	−.08 (.03)	−.03 (.03)	−.05 (.02)	−.04** (.01)	[−.06, −.02]	−3.82	−0.10
Division II	−.04 (.04)	−.01 (.03)	−.02 (.02)				
Division III	.13** (.03)	.10* (.03)	.02 (.02)				
Sport profile	.04 (.04)	.05 (.03)	.01 (.02)				
Gender	.03 (.03)	−.07 (.03)	.05 (.02)	.05* (.02)	[.01, .09]	2.98	0.12
Mean ethical climate		.14** (.01)	.07** (.01)	.07** (.01)	[.05, .09]	7.47	0.17
Mean ethical leadership			.32** (.01)	.34** (.01)	[.32, .36]	37.29	0.84
Mean abusive supervision			−.02 (.01)				
Level 1: Student-athlete							
Ethical climate		.27** (.01)	.14** (.01)	.14** (.01)	[.12, .16]	17.51	0.35
Ethical leadership			.47** (.01)	.47** (.01)	[.45, .49]	43.06	1.16
Abusive supervision			−.13** (.01)	−.13** (.01)	[−.15, −.11]	−13.58	−0.32
Model fit							
ICC	15.6%	15.8%	6.9%	6.9%			
Deviance/*df*	52306.2/7	50565.6/11	44008.8/22	44017.3/18			
Proportional variance explained at level 1	0.0%	9.5%	28.8%	0.0%			
Proportional variance explained at level 2	2.5%	8.2%	71.9%	0.0%			
Δ Deviance/Δ*df*	29.2/4	1740.6/3	6556.8/11	8.5/4			
AIC	52320.2	50587.6	44052.8	44053.3			

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. CI = confidence interval; ES = effect size; ICC = intraclass correlation; AIC = Akaike information criterion. For sex, 0 = men, 1 = women; for sport profile, 0 = low profile sports, 1 = high profile sports; for divisions, Division I = 0; ethical leadership, abusive supervision, and ethical climate = group-mean centered; mean ethical leadership, mean abusive supervision, and mean ethical climate = grand-mean centered. Unconditional model: ICC = 16.0%; deviance/*df* = 52335.3/3; AIC = 52341.3.
* $p < .01$.   ** $p < .001$.

perceived their coach as a more ethical leader (β = .34, p < .001, ES = 0.84) and were on a team that aggregately scored their coach as more ethical (β = .47, p < .001, ES = 1.16). Abusive coaching behavior had medium effects on the outcome and was negatively associated at the individual level only (β = −.11, p < .001, ES = −0.32). Athletes who perceived their coach as a more abusive leader compared with their teammates reported a less inclusive climate on their team. Yet, students' perceptions of a team's inclusion climate were not related to whether all athletes on the team viewed their coach as a more abusive leader (as viewed by all athletes on the team) compared with other teams.

Willingness to Cheat

Model fit. The results for willingness to cheat are presented in Table 3. Clustering stu-

dent-athletes at the team level accounted for 17.8% of the total variance in willingness to cheat, indicating that some of the variance of the outcome variable was uniquely explained by team membership and the multilevel analysis was important. Introducing control (Model 1 and Model 2) and predictor variables (Model 3) significantly improved the model. Most of the intercept variability in willingness to cheat was associated with team characteristics, rather than athletes' perceptions. Ethical leadership and abusive coaching behavior explained more within-team variance than between-team variance (see proportional variances explained at level 1 and 2). The model was pruned and the results are described below (Model 4).

Control variables. Women's teams reported a lower willingness to cheat than men's teams in low-profile sports (β = −.34, p < .001, ES = −0.81), and men's teams in high-

Table 3
Multilevel Results for Willingness to Cheat

Variables	Model 1 Coefficient	Model 2 Coefficient	Model 3 Coefficient	Model 4 Coefficient	95% CI	t	ES
Estimation of fixed effects							
Level 2: Team							
Intercept	.12** (.03)	.08* (.03)	.07 (.03)	.07* (.03)	[.01, .13]	2.89	0.17
Division II	.02 (.03)	−.01 (.03)	.01 (.03)				
Division III	−.12** (.03)	−.09 (.02)	−.06* (.02)	−.07* (.02)	[−.11, −.03]	−3.20	−0.17
Sport profile	.27** (.04)	.26** (.03)	.21** (.03)	.21** (.03)	[.15, .27]	6.70	0.50
Sex	−.42** (.03)	−.35** (.03)	−.34** (.03)	−.34** (.03)	[−.4, −.28]	−12.56	−0.81
Mean ethical climate		−.12** (.01)	−.10** (.01)	−.10** (.01)	[−.12, −.08]	−8.88	−0.24
Mean ethical leadership			.01 (.01)				
Mean abusive supervision			.10** (.01)	.09** (.01)	[.07, .11]	8.67	0.21
Level 1: Student-athlete							
Ethical climate		−.15** (.01)	−.12** (.01)	−.12** (.01)	[−.14, −.10]	−15.31	−0.29
Ethical leadership			−.02 (.01)	−.02 (.01)	[−.04, 0]	−2.07	−0.05
Abusive supervision			.19** (.01)	.19** (.01)	[.17, .21]	18.43	0.45
Model fit							
ICC	9.8%	8.5%	8.7%	8.7%			
Deviance/df	52959.3/7	52316.0/11	51259.4/22	51260.5/20			
Proportional variance explained at level 1	−0.1%	3.2%	7.4%	0.0%			
Proportional variance explained at level 2	49.4%	17.5%	3.3%	0.0%			
Δ Deviance/Δdf	520.5/4	643.4/4	1056.6/11	1.1/2			
AIC	52973.3	52338.0	51303.4	51300.5			

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. CI = confidence interval; ES = effect size; ICC = intraclass correlation; AIC = Akaike information criterion. For sex, 0 = men, 1 = women; for sport profile, 0 = low profile sports, 1 = high profile sports; for divisions, Division I = 0; ethical leadership, abusive supervision, and ethical climate = group-mean centered; mean ethical leadership, mean abusive supervision, and mean ethical climate = grand-mean centered. Unconditional model: ICC = 17.8%; Deviance/df = 53479.8/3; AIC = 53485.8.
* p < .01. ** p < .001.

profile sports reported a higher willingness to cheat than men's teams in low-profile sports ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$, ES = 0.50). Small effect of division was found with athletes in Division III reporting slightly lower willingness to cheat ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .01$, ES = −0.17) than athletes in Division I. Schools' ethical climate was negatively associated with teammates' willingness to cheat at both the individual ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .001$, ES = −0.29) and team levels ($\beta = -.10$, $p < .001$, ES = −0.24). Athletes who perceived their school as one with a greater ethical climate in comparison with their teammates were likely to report a lower willingness to cheat. Additionally, being on teams with greater aggregate ethical climates compared with other teams (i.e., being in a school with a greater ethical environment) was associated with a lesser willingness to cheat.

Ethical and abusive coaching behaviors. Ethical leadership did not relate to willingness to cheat at either the individual or team level. These results indicate that athletes may be willing to cheat regardless of whether their coach emphasizes fair play. Abusive coaching behavior, however, was positively associated with willingness to cheat at both the individual ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$, ES = 0.45) and team levels ($\beta = .09$, $p < .001$, ES = 0.21).

College Choice Satisfaction

Model fit. The results for college choice satisfaction are presented in Table 4. Clustering student-athletes at the team level accounted for 17.8% of the total variance in college choice satisfaction, indicating that the multilevel modeling was important. Introducing control and predictor variables significantly improved the model. Ethical leadership and abusive coaching behavior explained more between-team variance than within-team variance (see pro-

Table 4
Multilevel Results for College Choice Satisfaction

Variables	Model 1 Coefficient	Model 2 Coefficient	Model 3 Coefficient	Model 4 Coefficient	95% CI	t	ES
Estimation of fixed effects							
Level 2: Team							
Intercept	.01 (.03)	.07 (.03)	.06 (.03)	.09** (.01)	[.07, .11]	6.03	0.21
Division II	−.16** (.04)	−.13* (.03)	−.14** (.03)	−.15** (.03)	[−.21, −.09]	−5.98	−0.35
Division III	.12** (.03)	.08* (.03)	.02 (.03)				
Sport profile	−.18** (.04)	−.17** (.04)	−.14** (.03)	−.16** (.03)	[−.22, −.10]	−5.83	−0.38
Gender	.07 (.03)	−.04 (.03)	.02 (.03)				
Mean ethical climate		.17** (.01)	.13** (.01)	.13** (.01)	[.11, .15]	11.16	0.31
Mean ethical leadership			.19** (.02)	.19** (.01)	[.17, .21]	15.83	0.45
Mean abusive supervision			−.01 (.01)				
Level 1: Student-athlete							
Ethical climate		.21** (.01)	.13** (.01)	.13** (.01)	[.11, .15]	15.21	0.31
Ethical leadership			.32** (.01)	.32** (.01)	[.30, .34]	28.75	0.76
Abusive supervision			−.08** (.01)	−.08** (.01)	[−.10, −.06]	−8.82	−0.19
Model fit							
ICC	16.0%	14.3%	13.4%	13.3%			
Deviance/*df*	53582.4/7	52098.7/11	49117.9/22	49119.6/19			
Proportional variance explained at level 1	0.0%	6.7%	15.7%	0.0%			
Proportional variance explained at level 2	12.0%	18.9%	21.8%	0.0%			
Δ Deviance/Δ*df*	110.1/4	1483.7/4	2980.8/11	1.7/3			
AIC	53596.4	52120.7	49161.9	49157.6			

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. CI = confidence interval; ES = effect size; ICC = intraclass correlation; AIC = Akaike information criterion. For sex, 0 = men, 1 = women; for sport profile, 0 = low profile sports, 1 = high profile sports; for divisions, Division I = 0; ethical leadership, abusive supervision, and ethical climate = group-mean centered; mean ethical leadership, mean abusive supervision, and mean ethical climate = grand-mean centered. Unconditional model: ICC = 17.8%; Deviance/*df* = 53692.5/3; AIC = 53698.5.
* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

portional variances explained at level 1 and 2). The model was pruned and accepted as final (Model 4).

Control variables. Medium effects were found for the differences in students' satisfaction across sport profiles and division membership. Athletes on men's football, basketball, and baseball teams were less satisfied with college choice than those on other teams ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .001$, ES $= -0.38$). Division II athletes were less satisfied than athletes in Division I ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .001$, ES $= -0.35$), and Division II athletes in the men's football, basketball, and baseball teams were satisfied the least (combining the effects of sport profile, $\beta = -.16$, and school Division, $\beta = -.15$). Ethical climate in school and its aggregate had medium effects on college choice satisfaction. Student-athletes who perceived their school as one with a greater ethical climate were more satisfied with their choice of college ($\beta = .13$, $p < .001$, ES $= 0.31$) compared with their teammates (the individual level). Likewise, students on the teams with a higher team-aggregated ethical climate reported a higher college choice satisfaction ($\beta = .13$, $p < .001$, ES $= 0.31$).

Ethical and abusive coaching behaviors. The results indicated large effects of the ethical leadership at the individual level ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$, ES $= 0.76$) and medium effects of its aggregate at the team level ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$, ES $= 0.45$). Thus, college choice satisfaction was the highest for athletes who perceived their coach as a more ethical leader compared with their teammates, and were on a team with a higher aggregate for their coaches' perceived ethical behaviors. Abusive supervision had small effects at the individual level only ($\beta = -.08$, $p < .001$, ES $= -0.19$). Yet, whether the coach was a more abusive leader (as viewed by all athletes on the team) compared with other teams did not relate to college choice satisfaction.

Discussion

This study used a multilevel framework to examine the association of ethical leadership and abusive behavior of coaches at NCAA institutions, with important outcomes such as student-athletes' willingness to cheat, their college choice satisfaction, and the inclusion climate on the team. The results showed that, consistent

with our hypotheses, the ethical leadership behavior of coaches was positively associated with student-athletes' perception of an inclusion climate on the team (hypothesis 1a) and satisfaction with their choice of a college (hypothesis 3a). These results held at both the individual and team levels. Surprisingly, ethical leadership did not predict perceptions of teammates' willingness to cheat at either level of analysis as hypothesized (hypothesis 2a). Although previous research has found relationships between ethical leadership and negative outcomes such as unethical work behaviors (Mayer et al., 2009), most studies that found such effects did not control for abusive supervision. When abusive supervision has been controlled for, an effect of ethical leadership on negative outcomes has not been found (Detert, Treviño, Burris, & Andiappan, 2007). Detert et al. (2007) explained their findings by drawing on research that indicates bad or negative stimuli are more powerful than good ones (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001).

Consistent with the "primacy of negative over positive" interpretation of our results, abusive supervision was positively related to perceptions that team members would be willing to cheat at the team and individual levels (hypothesis 2b). Yet, contrary to the "primacy of negative over positive" explanation, our results indicated that abusive coaching behavior were negatively related to student-athletes' perceptions of an inclusion climate on the team (hypothesis 1b) as well as their satisfaction with their college choice (hypothesis 3b) at the individual level only, providing partial support to the hypotheses. An alternative way to interpret these findings is that the relative influence of each leadership style depends on alignment in the valences (positive or negative) between the leadership behaviors and outcomes. Our findings indicated that the positive style (ethical leadership) had a strong effect on positive outcomes (college choice satisfaction and inclusion climate) compared with the negative style of supervision (abusive coaching behavior). The opposite is also true in that abusive coaching behavior more strongly predicted the negative outcome (willingness to cheat) relative to ethical leadership.

Most notably one of the control variables, student-athletes' perceptions of the ethical climate at the school, was significantly related to

all three outcomes across both levels of analysis. Compared with ethical leadership and abusive coaching behavior, ethical climate was most strongly associated with the outcome for willingness to cheat at the team levels. It was second only to ethical leadership in the others (inclusion climate at individual and team levels, college choice satisfaction at individual and team levels).

Finally, our findings showed differences across the sports. First, women's teams are slightly more likely to report higher inclusion climate. Second, men's teams in general are much more willing to cheat to win a game than women's. The men's football, basketball, and baseball players reported the highest willingness to cheat. Third, Division II teams reported lower college choice satisfaction than Division I teams, with men's football, basketball, and baseball teams being satisfied the least.

Limitations

Although this study expanded knowledge about how behaviors of coaches contribute to perceptions of athletes, a few limitations are important to mention. First, the data were exclusively from self-reported measures collected from student-athletes. Thus, common methods bias may have affected our results. Student-athletes are the most appropriate source for rating their coaches' behaviors, college choice satisfaction, and the level of inclusion climate on the team. Asking student-athletes to report on their teammates' willingness to cheat as opposed to self-reporting their own cheating intentions is also appropriate given the potential of social desirability bias to skew the results (Paulhus, 1991). Nevertheless, future research might consider multiple sources of data (e.g., archival data on student-athlete retention, actual instances of anti-inclusive behavior, NCAA infractions) to mitigate against this. Second, the data are entirely cross-sectional, implying no causation between independent and dependent variables. Although we think it is unlikely, it is possible that student-athletes' satisfaction with their college choice, and perceptions of inclusion and willingness to cheat, might lead them to rate their leader more positively or negatively. Future research might consider using longitudinal research designs. Another limitation is that the willingness to cheat measure

consisted of a single item. While a single-item variable may suffice if the measured construct is narrow or unambiguous to the respondent (Sackett & Larson, 1990), its use is often discouraged because it tends to have greater measurement error than a variable informed by multiple items. Many of the measures that appeared on the GOALS survey were shortened, due to the long length of the survey. Future research should seek to replicate and expand on our findings using multi-item measures that have been previously validated without modification. Finally, there are many other factors that contribute to a willingness to cheat that were not included in this data collection. For example, a study by Schaubroeck et al. (2012) has shown ethical leadership and the ethical context at higher levels within organizations are likely to have indirect effects on ethical intentions and behaviors of individuals at lower levels. Thus, one of the tasks for future research on student-athletes is to develop a more complex understanding of the effects of ethical leadership and ethical climate at multiple levels of analysis (team, athletic department, conference). Using a multilevel structural equation modeling framework might provide an opportunity to address this task.

Implications for Practice

One of the primary conclusions from this study is that coaches' ethical performance has important implications for their student-athletes. Strong ethical leadership from coaches can enhance student-athlete satisfaction with their college choice and make their team environment more inclusive. On the other hand, abusive coaching behaviors can bring out the worst in their team by fostering an atmosphere where student-athletes are more willing to cheat, less inclusive toward others, and less satisfied with their college choice. Efforts to promote better coaching ethics and discourage the use of abusive coaching tactics have the potential to pay off not only in terms of sportspersonship, but also in terms of student-athlete satisfaction and well-being. Teaching coaches both what to do (ethical leadership), as well as what not to do (abusive behaviors), may pay off in terms of higher retention and graduation rates for student-athletes.

Another important implication has to do with the role of ethical climate. Given that ethical climate was consistently related to the outcomes in this study, and produced some of the strongest effects, it is important for researchers and practitioners to turn their attention to the role of ethical context in promoting good sportspersonship and ethical behavior among college athletes. Behavioral ethics research shows that the ethical context of an organization is an important influence on employee attitudes and behaviors (Treviño et al., 2006). For example, efforts to promote ethics in organizations are most effective when employees perceive that their employer values ethics because "it is the right thing to do" and not simply to comply with the law (Weaver & Treviño, 1999). Given the NCAA's focus on rule making, enforcement, and sanctioning of infractions, it is possible that many schools might not move beyond a legal compliance mindset and embrace a strong ethical culture. The results of our study suggest that efforts to promote ethical climate within teams, athletic departments, and schools are likely to enhance a number of important student-athlete outcomes, including many unrelated to ethics (college choice satisfaction and team inclusion climate).

Finally, our findings showed differences across the sports. Thus, a third implication for practice is to better understand why such differences exist so that corrective action may be taken.

Conclusion

In sum, this study provides a new way of looking at coaching behavior through the lens of ethics. Borrowing approaches from research in the field of behavioral ethics, we found that both ethical and abusive coaching behaviors have unique impacts on important student-athlete outcomes. Furthermore, the ethical climate in school also influenced these outcomes. The impact that athletic coaches have on their athletes potentially affects everything from retention and chances of graduation to how these student-athletes coach future generations of young athletes. Thus, it is conceivably worthwhile for athletic departments to invest in workshops or other interventions to improve the ethical leadership among coaches. Future research should build on the results of this study to consider other impacts of ethical and abusive coaching behaviors, as well as the role of the ethical climate within colleges and other levels of sport.

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