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Love, Adam; Kim, Seungmo

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Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Sport: A Perspective from Athletes

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Abstract

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) refers to acts by members of an organization that are not formally required, but that contribute to the effective functioning of the organization. The current study investigated the types of OCB in which athletes engage as well as athletes' perceptions about the nature of OCB in sport. Through qualitative interviews with current and former college athletes, the investigators found that athletes engage in a wide variety of OCB, some of which appears to be unique to the context of sport. With respect to the nature of OCB in sport, participants identified the existence of a substantial "gray area" regarding what is and is not required of athletes. Notably, the pressures that can coerce people to engage in "voluntary" activities may be particularly strong in sport. Ultimately, the current study serves a pioneering role in helping to illustrate the unique nature of OCB in sport.

Keywords: organizational behavior, performance, qualitative research

Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Sport: A Perspective from Athletes

Sport organizations commit substantial resources toward achieving success. At the elite level, the intense nature of competition has sparked what some researchers refer to as a “global sporting arms race” in which governments and national sport organizations invest ever-increasing sums of money into the development of elite athletes (De Bosscher, Bingham, Shibil, van Bottenburg, & De Knop, 2008). Given the high stakes involved in elite sport, researchers have focused substantial attention on investigating factors that impact athletic performance. Specifically, sport psychology researchers have often focused on individual-level elements (e.g., motivation, personality, emotions, beliefs), while sport management researchers have focused on organizational-level elements (e.g., policies, facilities, organizational support) related to the development of elite athletes (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). Given that both individual- and organizational-level factors may impact athletic performance, Wagstaff, Fletcher, and Hanton (2011) highlighted the important role of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) in organizational performance in elite sports.

At a basic level, OCB can be defined as “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ, 1988, p.4). There are two key points in this definition of OCB. First, citizenship behaviors involve activities that are not formally required. Second, although the behaviors may seem minor, the cumulative effect of such behaviors can have a profound impact on organizational effectiveness. In the context of sport, for example, a veteran pitcher on a baseball team may share pitching secrets, training methods, and offer advice to young players about how to handle pressure in their careers, even though sharing such information is not an officially required component of the veteran’s job. In turn, these prosocial,

voluntary behaviors can result in improved organizational effectiveness and team performance (Chelladuari, 2006).

In the field of organizational behavior, the concept of OCB has received substantial attention from practitioners and researchers as a prototypical positive organizational behavior (POS; Luthans & Youssef, 2007) because such behaviors have a beneficial influence on individual and organizational effectiveness (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000; Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009).

However, there has been little research (Andrew, Kim, Mahony, & Hums, 2009; Aoyagi, Cox, & McGuire, 2008) regarding OCB and the relationships between OCB and other variables in sport, despite its potential impact on team performance. Given this background, the purpose of the current study was to investigate how athletes perceive organizational citizenship behavior in the context of sport. Specifically, the current study serves as an initial effort to identify types of OCB in which athletes engage on sports teams and to explore athletes' perceptions about the nature of OCB in sport.

Theoretical Foundation: Organizational Citizenship Behavior

In the field of organizational behavior, there has been substantial research regarding OCB and its related constructs since the concept was introduced in two pioneering studies (Bateman & Organ, 1983; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983) in the 1980s (LePine, Erez, & Johnson, 2002). Such related constructs include prosocial organizational behavior (POB; Brief & Motowidlo, 1986), extra-role behavior (ERB; Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean-Parks, 1995), civic organizational behavior (Graham, 1991), and contextual performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). In particular, the concept of contextual performance has emerged as relevant to the study of OCB; the original concept of OCB stemmed from the notion that job satisfaction might influence

organizational effectiveness, and the concept of contextual performance emerged from the concern that research has traditionally focused not on activities related to the social and psychological context of work, but on activities that specifically contribute to an organization's productivity (Motowidlo, 2000). Borman and Motowidlo (1993) identified these former activities as "task performance" and the latter activities as "contextual performance." Organ (1997) recognized that the original concept of OCB ignored the idea of contextual performance, and defined OCB as including behavior that contributes to the "maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance" (p. 91).

Dimensions of OCB

OCB can be classified into two categories based on either the types of OCB in question or the targets of OCB. The former method has been used most commonly in the literature, while fewer studies (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Lee & Allen, 2002; McNeely & Meglino, 1994; Williams & Anderson, 1991) have adopted the latter approach.

Dimensions of OCB based on types. Researchers (Organ, 1988; Smith et al., 1983; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996) have suggested several taxonomies of OCB. The two-factor model, proposed by Smith et al. (1983), was the first to measure the concept of OCB types. The model consisted of two dimensions of OCB—altruism and generalized compliance. Altruism represents behaviors that help other members of an organization (e.g., assisting others who have heavy workloads), while general compliance refers to behaviors demonstrating obedience to the rules and policies of the organization. Organ (1988), meanwhile, categorized OCB into five dimensions—altruism, sportsmanship, civic virtue, courtesy, and conscientiousness. While quite similar, Organ's definition of altruism was narrower than that of Smith et al. (1983). Sportsmanship was defined as a willingness to bear unavoidable trouble (e.g., remaining silent

about trivial inconveniences in the work place). Civic virtue was defined as responsible involvement or participation in governing activities that stem from the employees' recognition of being a part of their team. Courtesy referred to behaviors that consider others' feelings (e.g., consulting with coworkers before taking actions). Conscientiousness, a narrowed version of generalized compliance from Smith et al. (1983), referred to voluntary acts of creativity and innovation to enhance one's work tasks. Van Scotter and Motowidlo (1996), meanwhile, proposed a two-dimensional model of contextual performance that incorporated Organ's (1988) categories—interpersonal facilitation and job dedication. In their model, interpersonal facilitation included the dimensions of altruism and courtesy, while job dedication included the dimensions of sportsmanship, civic virtue, and conscientiousness.

Dimensions of OCB based on targets. Williams and Anderson (1991) proposed a target-based distinction of OCB, consisting of individual targeted OCB (OCBI) and organizational targeted OCB (OCBO), while McNeedy and Meglino (1994) similarly argued that OCB directed to the organization or individuals in the organizations should be distinguished from one another. According to Williams and Anderson, OCBO refers to citizenship behaviors that provide direct benefits to the organization, while OCBI represents citizenship behaviors that do not provide direct benefits to the organization, but instead contribute indirect benefits to the organization through people who are primary beneficiaries of OCBI.

Antecedents and consequences of OCB

Numerous studies regarding OCB-related antecedents have been conducted to identify ways to increase the level of employees' OCB (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Studies identifying OCB antecedents (Ilies et al., 2007; Lavelle, Konovsky, & Brockner, 2005; McNeedy & Meglino, 1994; Organ & Ryan, 1995; Podsakoff et al., 2000) have examined the impact of (a)

employees' characteristics, such as demographics (e.g., tenure and gender), attitudinal variables (e.g., job satisfaction and organizational justice), and dispositional variables (e.g., personality and affectivity); (b) leaders' characteristics (e.g., transformational leadership and leader-member exchange); and (c) other work-related characteristics (e.g., characteristics of task and organization).

With respect to the consequences of OCB, researchers have been primarily interested in two topics—the impact of OCB on supervisors' performance appraisals and reward decisions and the impact of OCB on organizational performance and success. Organ (1988) stated that OCB does not necessarily exclude behaviors that are tangibly rewarded, and also suggested that OCB, in the long run, could influence the organization's impressions and evaluations of its employees. In other words, employees could potentially receive rewards from the organization as a result of non-required behavior. In fact, a meta-analysis conducted by Podsakoff et al. (2000) found that OCB was positively correlated with supervisors' performance evaluations and decisions concerning their subordinates and, more importantly, had a considerable influence over the supervisors' judgment. Podsakoff et al. summarized the results of four studies (Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie, 1997; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994; Walz & Niehoff, 1996) and found that OCBs explained, on average, 19% and 18% of variances in performance quantity and quality, respectively. Another analysis by Podsakoff et al. (2009) also found positive relationships between OCB and organizational-level outcomes (e.g., overall performance and customer satisfaction) as well as individual-level outcomes (e.g., employee's performance rating, reward allocation).

Despite the existence of these positive consequences, it is also important to consider potential negative outcomes associated with OCB. For instance, Bolino, Klotz, Turnley, &

Harvey (2013) identified three main reasons why performing OCB may not always be classified as prosocial. First, people may have self-serving motives (e.g., impression management), mundane motives (e.g., boredom with in-role tasks), and negative forces (e.g., transgressions and dissatisfaction with personal life) that lead them to perform OCB. Second, OCB can have a negative impact on performance and effectiveness, such in cases where a person performs OCB at the expense of formal, required tasks. Further, people who are engaged in OCB may experience increased job stress, work-family conflicts, role ambiguity, and excessive workload if they feel undue pressure to perform OCB. Such concerns may be particularly relevant in sport, a context in which coaches wield substantial power over their athletes.

OCB in Sport

In a discussion of the emergence, application, and future of organizational behavior research in elite sport, Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) specifically identified OCB as an area deserving further attention in order to better understand psychosocial dynamics in sport teams. Related to this area of research, Aoyagi et al. (2008) collected data from student-athletes at NCAA Division I and Division III universities in the United States to examine the relationships among leadership, athlete satisfaction, team cohesion, and OCB. The findings indicated that leadership had significant impacts on team cohesion and OCB, but there was no significant relationship between athlete satisfaction and OCB. Andrew et al. (2009) also conducted a study with student-athletes at a Division I university in the U.S. and found affective organizational commitment had a significant impact on OCB. The initial findings of research on the relationship between OCB and other constructs justifies the need for additional research, given that positive interpersonal relationships within a sport team would likely be linked with overall team effectiveness (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009).

Many researchers in the field of sport management have applied various constructs of organizational behavior, such as leadership, organizational support, organizational justice, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, to sport settings under the belief that such constructs should influence performance. However, despite the important differences between sport organizations and organizations in other fields, many studies have been limited to simply using scales developed in mainstream business settings, modifying the original items or dropping sub-dimensions inapplicable to the context of sport. On the topic of OCB in sport, two studies (Andrew et al., 2009; Aoyagi et al., 2008) have used existing OCB scales from general business contexts with some modifications. In some cases, sport management researchers have created their own scales in applying leadership (Chelladurai & Saleh 1980), athletic and coaching satisfaction (Chelladurai & Ogasawara, 2003; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1998), and organizational justice (Hums & Chelladurai, 1994; Kim, Andrew, Mahony, & Hums, 2008) to investigate the unique nature of organizational culture, climate, and environment in sport-specific settings. However, before developing a scale to measure the role of OCB in sport performance more precisely, it is necessary for us to better understand the unique nature of OCB in sport. Therefore, the current study serves a pioneering role by investigating the following research questions: (1) What types of organizational citizenship behavior do athletes engage in? (2) What are athletes' perceptions about the nature of organizational citizenship behavior in sport?

Method

The current study employed a qualitative approach broadly informed by grounded theory. In qualitative research, the focus is on *meaning*, particularly “what things mean to the people being studied” (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 4). Consistent with the qualitative aim of

understanding people's social realities and exploring their experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), our intent in the current study was to gain a sense of athletes' perspectives about OCB.

Participants

Fifteen current or former athletes (7 current, 8 former; 11 women, 4 men) participated in interviews for this study. Given that our aim was to gain a general understanding of athletes' perspectives about OCB in sport, the inclusion criteria for the current study simply required that participants had competed at the NCAA Division I level, which is the highest classification of college athletics in the United States. This ensured that all participants had experienced sport at a rather competitive and serious level. While in college, five of the participants had competed in softball, two in baseball, two in basketball, two in track and field, one in golf, one in swimming, one in volleyball, and one participant had competed in both baseball and American football. As a group, participants had competed for eight different universities. All participants reported having received meaningful playing time during their college careers.

Data Collection

After receiving approval from a university Institutional Review Board, the investigators contacted prospective participants via email to inform them of the nature of the current study and ask if they would be willing to participate in an interview. In identifying prospective participants, we initially engaged in convenience sampling, meaning that researchers drew upon personal networks to contact individuals who were accessible and arrange interviews with those who were willing and able to participate. We also employed snowball sampling, as participants assisted in directing the researchers to others who would meet the study's criteria for inclusion and would possibly be willing to participate (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). For example, if participants knew of someone else who might be willing to assist with the study, they would often assist the

researchers in initiating contact with the would-be participant. People who agreed to participate signed informed consent documents prior to beginning the interview process. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a location of the participants' choosing. All participants were either living, working, or attending school in the same region at the time of the study, which helped facilitate the scheduling of interviews. Interview locations were sufficiently private so as to preserve participants' confidentiality.

In the current study, we used a semi-structured interview format, which involved a pre-planned interview guide to give some direction to the interactions, while posing open-ended questions to give participants the opportunity to report their own thoughts and feelings (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In this vein, we began each interview by explaining that our purpose was to examine "voluntary behaviors done by athletes that are not formally required, but that may contribute to the success of the team." We then followed with an open-ended question, such as "what types of things have you done that were not formally required, but that helped contribute to the success of your team?" Based on a person's response, we would ask follow-up questions to elicit more detailed information. For example, if a participant mentioned that he/she would share advice with teammates outside of practice, we would follow-up by asking such questions as, "what type of advice do you share?", "with whom do you share advice?", and "why do you share advice?" This approach gave each participant substantial influence over the specific directions a given interview took; in this way, the semi-structured interviews facilitated the collection of data conducive to grounded theory analysis (Kerr & Stirling, 2012).

Interviews ranged in length from 22 to 51 minutes. Both investigators were present for all interviews, with the exception of the final three interviews in which only the lead investigator was present. In cases where both investigators were present, the lead investigator would begin

the interview, while both investigators would ask follow-up questions intended to elicit detailed information from participants. The three instances in which only the lead investigator was present were due to scheduling issues. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber within 72 hours after the completion of each interview. The data collection process ended when data saturation had occurred across interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), meaning that new codes or categories were no longer being generated from additional interviews and the main themes to be discussed in the research findings were robustly developed.

Data Analysis

As the initiators of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) described the method as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (p. 2). In the current study, our data collection and data analysis processes were overlapping; the analysis of data from initial interviews helped the researchers engage in theoretical sampling in which further data collection was guided by ideas meaningful to the emerging codes (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). After an interview, the first step in our data analysis involved a search for meaning within a particular interview transcript. This involved *open coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), in which the researchers independently studied each passage of an interview, associating each line of the interview with potentially relevant codes and categories. Such a process involved a *constant comparison* approach, in which “words, sentences, paragraph, codes, concepts, categories and literature are constantly compared with each other throughout the research” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 120). Following independent analysis of transcripts, the researchers also conferred at certain points to compare their interpretations of the interview and discuss emerging themes.

This involved discussion about the meaning of words, concepts, and codes in the transcripts and sharing ideas about categories that had been identified.

In the second stage of data analysis, we sought to put the data “back together” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) by making comparisons between interviews and engaging in *axial coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As each interview was conducted, each researcher would analyze the new interview transcript using the process described above, while also considering the codes and categories that had emerged from the existing data. We repeated this cycle of comparison between “old” and “new” data throughout the analysis process (Boeije, 2002). Again, this involved both independent analysis of the data by each researcher as well as conferral between the researchers to discuss codes and categories. As we reflected on the data collected from different interviews, we engaged in axial coding (termed “axial” because it takes place at the axis of categories) with the aim of linking higher-order categories to lower-order subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Finally, the third stage of data analysis involved *selective coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in which the researchers refined and integrated major categories into a cohesive theory. Once again, this process involved each researcher engaging in independent analysis as well as conferring with each other to refine and integrate the categories. In doing so, we sought to achieve *theoretical saturation*, meaning that no new ideas or insights important for the development of theory continued to arise in the analysis process (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In the current study, the data analysis process was aided by the use of QSR NVivo 10 software, which facilitated coding and organization of data during multiple steps of analysis. Specifically, NVivo allowed the researchers to highlight passages of text from interviews and code the text as belonging to certain categories. NVivo helped researchers efficiently code data as categories and

subcategories were refined throughout the analysis process. Ultimately, through a data analysis process informed by grounded theory, our aim was to provide “a plausible explanation for what is going on” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 146) with respect to OCB in sport.

In order to enhance trustworthiness of the research, the investigators gave particular attention to considerations of dependability, confirmability, transferability, and credibility. *Dependability* is a facet of qualitative inquiry that involves demonstrating how the research process is logical and traceable (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). In the current study, we followed an approach that was appropriate to the nature of the research questions, then collected and analyzed data systematically using established methods. *Confirmability*, meanwhile, entails efforts to ensure that data and interpretations are grounded in the perspectives of research participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Along these lines, we engaged in a “disciplined subjectivity” in order to avoid “bad bias” that exerts undue influence on the research (Wolcott, 2005). This involved reflecting on our own preconceptions throughout the research process, including regular communication, both in-person and via email, to discuss our interpretations of the data. While we did draw upon personal networks to identify prospective interviewees, none of the participants were close personal friends of the researchers nor had they frequently interacted with the researchers prior to the current study. *Transferability*, meanwhile, is akin to the quantitative concept of generalizability in the context of qualitative research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). As a means of enhancing transferability of the current study’s findings, we recruited participants who participated in a range of sports at the NCAA Division I level. Finally, we sought to establish credibility in our findings by using strategies such as building rapport with participants during the interviews, repeating questions with altered wordings to elicit detailed information, sharing completed interview transcripts with participants in order to ensure

accuracy, and engaging in both independent and collaborative interpretation throughout the data analysis process.

Findings

Types of Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Sport

With respect to our first research question, athletes reported engaging in a broad range of activities that they considered to be examples of OCB. Primary themes with respect to types of OCB identified by participants included getting extra practice, motivating and supporting teammates, helping teammates (outside of sport), bonding with teammates, performing community service, exceeding academic expectations, recruiting, being social with fans, and giving good effort. Each theme is discussed in more detail below with representative quotes to further illustrate the meaning of the theme.

Getting extra practice. Putting in extra work outside of formal practice time was a common example of OCB mentioned by athletes. For example, basketball players would stay after practice to work on shooting, softball players would do extra fielding work after practice, and track athletes would get in extra running on the weekends. This extra practice was done both individually and with other teammates. Such work was perceived to demonstrate organizational citizenship because it helped improve team performance, but was not officially mandated or monitored by coaches. For example, a track and field athlete discussed how such activities might be organized:

Sundays we have, like, 30 minute runs. This kid on the team...was like, 'hey, do you wanna go run with me?' He put it on social media and they just started adding. And, like, we had a whole group come together and we went out and ran.

As the excerpt illustrates, the athletes themselves often take a role in organizing their teammates for extra training sessions. In turn, many athletes described how such activities serve an important team bonding role since coaches are not present.

Of course, participants also discussed examples of extra practice being done without the accompaniment of teammates. For example, a football player mentioned a teammate who actually hired a private trainer to guide him in workouts and drills during the offseason. In particular, athletes who had suffered an injury sometimes mentioned having to put in extra work outside of required practice in their recovery efforts. A softball player, for instance, explained that anytime she felt a “tweak” that might turn into a more serious injury, she would spend extra time in the training room before and after practice to receive treatment from the sports medicine staff.

Motivating and supporting teammates. Another common example of OCB cited by athletes involved actions designed to motivate, support, encourage, and provide guidance to teammates. Often, this consisted of encouragement during a difficult practice or workout. For example, a basketball player described someone who was “constantly trying to pick up other teammates” during a difficult practice with positive comments such as “hey, come on. You can do it. I know it’s hard, but you can make it through.” The player continued, describing a situation in which she would physically assist a teammate during a running drill, “so that they make their time so that the team doesn’t have to suffer and run another sprint.” Beyond supporting teammates during a difficult workout, participants also mentioned cheering for teammates during a successful performance as an example of OCB. As a swimmer explained:

I mean, you’re there as a teammate to be a cheerleader for your other teammates....Look, we’re here to help each other out, not bring each other down, so let’s cheer each other on.

If somebody does good on a set, slap him on the back and, you know, high five him and congratulate him!

In addition, rather being a response to a teammate's negative or positive performance, many participants simply mentioned examples or providing general encouragement and inspiration to others. As a softball player mentioned, "if somebody sees something [a motivational phrase] they'll shoot it into our big group [mobile phone] text and that way...they share it with everyone else." Participants viewed this type of behavior as OCB because it was helpful for the team, but coaches did not explicitly require athletes to motivate teammates in this type of way.

Another type of support that athletes would provide to one another involved reminders about various team responsibilities. This would often involve senior players seeking to hold younger players accountable. As a basketball player explained, "Let's say we had five upperclassmen and we had five freshmen or something....The upperclassmen would make sure we all get there, like, get to practice or get to where we need to be on time." A softball player, meanwhile, described a "buddy system" in which each player was responsible for a teammate: "In past years we had trouble with, like, one girl not waking up and being late for her 5:30s [5:30 AM workouts]....so we took the leadership stance, I guess, and kind of created the buddy system." Notably, this example was perceived as OCB because the coach had no involvement in creating or organizing the "buddy system" mentioned by the participant. Further, instead of allowing the player to face the punishment that might result from being late, the participant perceived it as better for team cohesion to help the player arrive on time and avoid discipline from the coaching staff.

Related to the action of providing reminders about responsibilities, some participants described situations in which they would explain coaches' instructions as an example of OCB.

As a basketball player expressed:

If one player, who was just a freshman, messes up a drill or passes the ball to the wrong person before a coach can get to them, one of the other players will either yell at them, but not in a bad way, or go up to them after the play is done or whatever it may be. And you'll see them diagramming in the air, "hey, you're supposed to go screen over there," or "hey, if the ball comes here, you gotta pass it there and then go down screen on the back side."

In this case, the participant cites an example in which a coach would likely provide corrective instruction, but a player took the initiative to voluntarily explain an instruction to a teammate prior to intervention by a coach. In the example above, the participant mentioned yelling at a teammate, "but not in a bad way." In contrast, other participants mentioned instances in which they would make negative comments to teammates in an attempt to motivate them, which is somewhat different than the previously mentioned examples of encouragement toward teammates. For example, a football player cited an example of a teammate who was particularly good at "firing up" other players:

Most of the time he would talk to them—maybe not in a friendly way. He may use a little vulgar language...and he would be so fired up himself, he would even challenge the guys, you know. He would say—I used to call it crazy stuff—he would say things like, "if you don't want to play ball, you stay in the locker room!" You know, stuff like that...and that's how he motivated some of the guys.

The participant viewed this as an example of OCB because the player demonstrated a voluntary effort to motivate teammates to put forth a greater effort and perform better. As the examples above illustrate, there are many ways in which athletes seek to motivate and/or support teammates in order to improve team performance.

Helping teammates (outside of sport). In addition to the previous examples of motivating and supporting teammates, which generally took place within the context of sport (e.g., during practice), participants also mentioned instances of helping teammates in situations outside of sport. As a basketball player explained:

I know for like my freshman and sophomore year, I didn't have a vehicle. So, um, in order for me to get to practice, I had to have a ride. So a lot of times upperclassmen would come and pick me up. Or if we even needed to go somewhere outside of practice. So, like, a grocery store, Walmart, or something like that. That was really helpful, knowing that we could have somebody, you know, to kind of depend on in a sense, to kind of help us out with certain things like that.

This example goes beyond the simpler words of encouragement or motivation highlighted in the previous section.

Participants also mentioned helping out teammates in social settings. For instance, a baseball player cited the following example:

If one of our players is hanging out with the wrong crowd, somebody better be responsible enough to go to that player and say, "Hey, man, you're putting yourself in jeopardy. You're putting all of us in jeopardy. You better not do that."

In a related example, a football player described how players would "watch" each other's "backs" in social situations:

We had guys that used to drive each other home. You know, one guy that didn't even drink, he would go and he would drive the guys home if they got tipsy, or whatever you want to call it. We tried to, you know, they call it having each other's backs. We had to try and cover each other's backs. Yeah, they said, "Watch my back," so we tried to cover each other and be real teammates. Keep guys from getting in trouble.

In these examples, participants describe situations in which athletes provided voluntary help to teammates that went beyond anything required by a coach or other authority figure.

Bonding with teammates. Some athletes in the current study identified efforts to bond with teammates as a form of OCB. For example, a track and field athlete discussed the importance of team bonding activities outside of formal practices or events:

On Fridays we all—a group of people on the team will get together and, like, have family dinners at a restaurant. Or we'll go watch a movie. Or we'll go over to each others' houses or something like that. It's not required but, like, we're bonding, you know?

A baseball player also suggested that, as a teammate, you should:

Take it upon yourself to get to know everyone on the team. I think that's very, very important when you're talking about a team structure. You know, coach is not going to sit there and say, "Hey you need to get to know this guy, you need to get to know that guy."

For the athletes cited above, strong social bonds with teammates were seen as having a potentially important impact on a team's performance.

Performing community service. Another example of OCB cited by participants entailed performing community service with teammates. As a golfer explained:

I always viewed community service being a big part of it....I wanted to make sure that we [the team] did get out and we did go participate and read to kids or we go collect food for Thanksgiving and participate in things like that.

Although athletics department staff members played a role in organizing community service activities, athletes reported that participating in such activities was often voluntary.

Demonstrating the potentially overlapping nature of the themes identified in the current study, some athletes viewed community service as a valuable team bonding experience. As a softball player explained, "Experiencing those powerful things [community service projects] with your teammates just makes you so much closer....It just brings us all closer together to see how lucky we really are." Although community service may not seem as directly related to team performance as some of the previous examples cited, many participants perceived it as helping improve a team's image while providing a social bonding experience for teammates, which could subsequently benefit performance.

Exceeding academic expectations. All athletes involved in NCAA competition must maintain a certain level of academic performance to remain eligible to participate. However, some participants in the current study talked about exceeding expectations as a form of OCB. For example, a basketball player explained her perspective about behavior in the classroom:

The first day of class, walk up to your professor. Shake your professor's hand. Let him (sic) know that you are a member of the women's basketball team. You may miss class, but you have an excuse letter. You'll follow up with it. You'll attend office hours—that kind of thing. Sit in the front of class, no cell phones out.

In other words, maintaining a certain grade-point average is a formal obligation required by policy. However, participants perceived behavior in the classroom, which includes voluntary

actions (e.g., introducing yourself to a professor, attending office hours) that cannot be specifically governed by policy or monitored by a coach, to represent an example of OCB. While such examples may have individual benefits, participants also believed such actions were of benefit to the team (e.g., awards may be given to a team for a high cumulative grade-point average).

Recruiting. College athletes are generally expected to have some role in “hosting” recruits during visits to campus. Some participants, however, also described involvement in the recruiting process as a type of OCB. For example, a golfer discussed the case of a teammate who, due to injury, was unable to compete during the season:

Since she can't help on the golf course right now, she feels her goal is to really help us with recruiting. So, she's up at 7:00 o'clock in the morning meeting to walk people around campus and staying until 7:30 [at night] after dinner.

Such a case served as an example of OCB because the athlete was doing more than was required in an effort to help the team.

Being social with fans. Another example of OCB cited by participants in the current study was the practice of interacting with fans, spectators, and boosters. Such interaction often occurred after a practice or game, or at special events. Although athletes are required to be present at a number of events, the practice of actually being social with fans or boosters was seen as somewhat voluntary. As a softball player explained:

I guess when there were fans that came and watched us practice, we always went and, like, talked to them...it wasn't necessary for us to go talk to them and to, you know, do some autographs and stuff like that. But we did it anyways, because, I mean, you see someone coming out to watch you play. I mean, obviously they think pretty highly, you

know, they want to come watch you. So it was nice for us to, you know, go and talk to them.

Participants viewed this as a type of OCB that helped the team by creating a good image among fans.

Giving good effort. The final general category of OCB identified in the current study involved having a positive attitude and putting forth good effort in practices, competitions, and other team events. For example, a swimmer explained the voluntary nature of giving a good effort during practice:

I think just being there [at practice] is the only mandatory part of it. I think any effort that you give is voluntary. Um, how much effort you decide to give, I think that shows your true grit or, you know, how good you want to be. So, I mean, if you show up and give 60 percent effort, that 60 percent is voluntary. I mean, the coach can get on you and yell at you, but I don't think that they can't make you give 65 [percent effort] if you're not willing to give 65.

In this case, the participant was discussing a quality (i.e., effort) that coaches may expect, but that is difficult to formally measure. In the participant's view, a coach can require an athlete to be present at practice, but they cannot actually force an athlete to put forth a full effort.

Therefore, giving good effort was seen as a type of OCB in that the coach cannot force it, but putting forth a full effort would certainly help the team's performance.

The Nature of Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Sport

With respect to our second research question, athletes discussed a number of unique complexities related to the nature of OCB in the context of sport. Such complexities generally

revolved around the existence of a “gray area” between what is and is not formally required of athletes. This complexity is discussed in more detail below.

Gray area. One of the intricacies regarding OCB in sport that participants often discussed in great detail was the existence of a “gray area” between what is and is not formally required of athletes. In other words, athletes frequently described the distinction between what is and is not voluntary as being quite blurry in sport. Given the extent to which athletes discussed this topic, we highlight several specific dimensions of this “gray area” below.

Coaches’ expectations. Many participants explained that in addition to formally written rules, their coaches had a set of unwritten expectations that athletes needed to be familiar with. As a volleyball player described:

There’s always a rulebook that’s given [to players] at the beginning of every year, and that lays out how this year is going to go, what the expectations are, if you break a rule this is what happens, blah, blah, blah. But then there are things that you just do, like recruiting visits that you—they’re not mandatory, but if you’re not there for a team dinner it’s frowned upon. And if you’re not wearing nice clothes, it’s frowned upon. And there’s a bunch of things that are not mandatory, but frowned upon [if you don’t do them].

In this case, by suggesting that a failure to do certain things may be “frowned upon” by the coach, the participant highlights some of the ways in which coaches may send subtle and potentially confusing signals to athletes about what is and is not required. A softball player offered a similar explanation about the nature of “voluntary” practice sessions:

I would say, putting in extra work, especially at this level [a top athletic conference]—it’s definitely not a requirement to stay after [practice] and hit ground balls, or hit balls off

the tee, or get ground balls or fly balls, but it's an expectation. An unspoken thing of, well, if you maybe don't do well in a game or don't do well in practice, a comment might be said [by the coach], "Well, I haven't seen you working extra or getting ground balls or hitting a front toss." So it's not necessarily a rule—they can't require you to do it, but it's definitely noticeable if it's not happening.

As these quotes illustrate, many things that are not formally required of athletes are still informally expected by the coach.

Extra work as necessary. Beyond the influence of a coach's expectations, some athletes expressed a belief that doing extra work is just something that is necessary to be successful at an elite level of competition. As a softball player explained about trying to be successful in a very competitive athletic conference:

[This conference] for softball is a very, very high conference. So it's tough, and everybody at this level has the athletic ability, but it's those who push even further than that and put in the extra time. So that [doing extra work] is something that's constantly in your mind.

A swimmer offered a similar thought about the role of extra work in a team's success, stating, "I don't think you can have a successful team if they just stick to what the coach's expectations are." A volleyball player, meanwhile, spoke about the nature of being a college athlete at a high level of competition, suggesting, "when you sign up to be a college athlete, nothing's really voluntary if that makes sense. Everything is kind of mandatory. Everything that will put you in a better place for the team is mandatory." As these examples demonstrate, many participants suggested that "voluntary" practice is simply a necessity to compete at a high level in sport.

A matter of degree. Some participants suggested that there are different “degrees” to which something is or is not required, as well as distinctions between what is required of different athletes. The following explanation by a volleyball player was illustrative of this idea:

Yeah, there’s probably degrees of being more and less [required]...and then things that go into that would be how your coach favors you to begin with, or how they see you to begin with. Because certain people can get away with not doing something because the coach likes them versus some people will get yelled at a lot. If you’re better, you don’t need to do it. Very plainly. Um, or you can get away with not doing as much generally. Most of the time, if you can perform on the court, it’s not as big of a deal how you get there, or how you do the things you do to be able to perform. If you’re not performing, then they [the coaches] are going to go back and critique everything you’ve done or haven’t done to get to that point. So, someone that’s performing, they never really go back and look at, “Well, were you at the summer workouts? Were you doing this? Were you doing this?” Because there’s no need to, because you’re performing how they want. But if someone that’s not [performing well], and is having a bad week or something, it’s like, “Well, maybe if you came to the workouts. Maybe if you did this. Maybe if you did this. Maybe if you were putting in extra time then you’d be getting better.”

In other words, the quote above suggests that athletes’ levels of performance may impact the extent to which coaches expect them to engage in certain types of behaviors that might represent OCB. This example reveals that there may be a number of dynamic factors unique to a particular team that can add complications with respect to the “gray area” that exists with OCB in sport.

OCB as leadership. In addition to expectations that originate with the coach, participants expressed that idea that performing certain types of OCB simply come along with the role of

being a team leader. For instance, a basketball player offered, “as a leader, you’re going to do things that aren’t spelled out [by a coach].” In a similar vein, a football and baseball player spoke about the way in which a teammate of his led by example:

He was a great leader, and he used to...set the pace as a player, and often it would make all the guys want to play really hard, just like he did. He would lead by example...I mean, he would just play his heart out every game, and he led by example. And I kind of, you know, we kind of watched it and tried to fall in line with him.

In particular, leading by example seemed to involve going “above and beyond” expectations and was often identified as an expectation of older players. As a softball player explained, “the classes above you [the older players] are doing these things, and you almost feel like, ‘Well, I have to do these things because everyone else is doing them.’”

NCAA rules. Participants identified NCAA rules that limit practice time (particularly in the offseason) as a key factor contributing to the existence of a “gray area” with respect to OCB in college sport. A golfer indicated that practicing for a block of time about three hours long is what would be most effective in the sport of golf. However, NCAA rules generally allowed for only two hours of “required” practice each day. The golfer explained that, therefore, coaches set up the practice schedule according to two hour blocks of “required” practice with a “voluntary” hour at the end. However, all athletes commonly remained to practice for the entire three hour period. Along the same lines, a baseball player suggested that “if you’re passionate and it’s something that you really want to do [play baseball], that hour and 30 minutes [of required practice] is not going to allow you to get better.” Similarly, a volleyball player discussed the existence of “captain’s practice” during the summer months, which was a practice session ostensibly organized by the players because coaches were only allowed limited “official”

practice time during the summer. She suggested that while such practices were not mandatory, coaches would be aware of who did and did not attend, and, in turn, they may question a player's commitment if she was not attending the "captain's practices."

Hostility among teammates. Another complexity regarding OCB in sport that participants discussed was the existence of hostility or resentment among teammates. In some cases, athletes may resent a teammate who goes "above and beyond" expectations. As a swimmer recalled, "they [teammates] would look at me and they'd be like, 'Man, slow down! Why you working so hard? You're making us look bad!'" He further explained:

A lot of what I would get flack for would be I would push it in practice. I mean, if we were going to do a set, I was gonna maximize it, and I was gonna bust it out. Where a lot of my teammates—and I say a lot—I'd say probably 95 percent of them would hang back and just barely make the set, you know, barely get by, when I was trying to crush each set. And, you know, they would make fun of me. They'd laugh. They'd be like, "Hey, man, you know, this isn't the meet. This is just a workout! You can back it down!"

A track and field athlete shared a similar story about a teammate:

[A teammate] always did above and beyond what was, like, asked of him...I think he benefited the team, but also kind of made them [other teammates] upset because they wanted to be lazy. And he would go above and beyond, so I guess it kind of had a negative effect to some people, even though it was helping the team. I know one particular day we had to run 200s, like, back-to-back, and it was pouring down rain. And it was cold, and everybody just wanted to jog so that it wasn't painful to them. And he was burning it, and I think...they [other teammates] were just whining and complaining like, "Oh, he always does the most, and he's the coach's pet, and blah, blah, blah." He

was like, “well, I just want to be better. And I want the team to win, so if I have to basically carry the weight for everybody else, then I guess I’ll be the one.” But I think it created, like, a lot of tension within the team.

She then elaborated about how the coach treated this particular team member:

[The coach would say] “he’s going above and beyond, and he’s doing this and he’s getting better at the meets.” And then, [the coach] would point out [at other team members], like, “and you, you’re staying the same...” And then, of course, they [other teammates] go back in the locker room and they’ll be talking bad about the person [who was praised by the coach].

As these examples illustrate, there may be factors on a particular team that both encourage and discourage engaging in OCB. While perceptions about a coach’s expectations may compel athletes to put in extra work in some cases, team dynamics may discourage athletes from putting in a full effort in other cases.

Discussion

With respect to the types of OCB in which athletes engage, the current study identified a number of behaviors that appear to align with previous research outside the context of sport. While existing literature on the concept has identified as many as 30 or 40 forms of OCB (LePine et al., 2002; Podsakoff et al., 2000), Organ et al. (2006) summarized OCB as falling along seven common dimensions: (a) helping, (b) sportsmanship, (c) organizational loyalty, (d) organizational compliance, (e) individual initiative, (g) civic virtue, and (h) self-development. The themes of “motivating and supporting teammates” and “helping teammates (outside of sport)” from the current study align closely with the previously identified dimension of “helping.” The theme of “giving good effort” is comparable to the dimension of “organization

compliance” developed in research outside of sport. The themes of “recruiting” and “exceeding academic expectations,” meanwhile, share connections with the “individual initiative” dimension of OCB. Further, themes such as “performing community service” and “being social with fans” align with OCB based on “civic virtue” and “organizational loyalty.” Finally, the theme of “getting extra practice,” which was quite prominent in the current study, shares similarities with the “self-development” dimension of prior OCB research.

Notably, one previously identified dimension of OCB that did not appear to be particularly salient to participants in the current study was the dimension of “sportsmanship.” In the context of OCB, “sportsmanship” refers generally to employees’ tolerance for undesirable situations in the organization, demonstrated by behaviors such as not complaining when they disagree with a policy or decision (Organ et al., 2006). At first glance, it may seem surprising that athletes would not regularly mention such behaviors as an example of OCB. However, given the amount of power that coaches generally have over the athletes on their team, it may simply be an unconscious expectation that athletes accept coaches’ directions and decisions without question (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). In other words, this type of “sportsmanship” may be viewed by athletes as mandatory and, in turn, not seen as an example of OCB. Further, the way in which the term “sportsmanship” has been used in the OCB literature seems quite different from its common usage in sport, which generally entails ideas about the importance of respect for rules, officials, opponents, and other social conventions (Vallerand, Deshaies, Cuerrier, BriÈre, & Pelletier, 1996). Notably, participants in the current study also did not identify these types of traditional “sportsmanship” behaviors as being examples of OCB either.

In addition, the current study identified elements of OCB that did not appear to be prominent in research outside the context of sport. Most notably, participants in the current study

spoke of bonding with teammates as an important element of OCB in sport. This often took the form of social activities outside of practices and games, such as community service activities or teammates simply getting together for a meal. Given the emphasis placed on “team chemistry” in sport (Yukelson, 1997), it may be the case that athletes perceive a high level of bonding or cohesion as being necessary for team success. In turn, athletes may view social activities, such as going out to eat together, as important elements (although not formally required) in building a successful team. In non-sport workplaces, meanwhile, employees may not perceive the same level of “team chemistry” to be necessary. Table 1 provides an overview of the alignment between themes identified in the current study and dimensions of OCB identified through previous research in contexts outside of sport.

With respect to the nature of OCB in sport, the existence of a “gray area” regarding what is and is not formally required of athletes shares some apparent connections with OCB research outside of sport. For example, Bolino, Turnley, Gilstrap, and Suazo (2010) suggested that citizenship behaviors are not always voluntary because expectations or pressure to perform OCB may come from supervisors’ expectations (Vigoda-Gadot, 2006) or arise from a belief by employees that OCB is simply a part of their jobs (McAllister, Kamdar, Morrison, & Turban, 2007). Employees in a variety of work contexts may also engage in OCB because they want to be seen as “good soldiers” and demonstrate to supervisors that they are exceptional employees (Bolino et al., 2010; Salamon & Deutsch, 2006). The pressure to be a “good soldier,” however, may be especially strong in sport, particularly at elite levels such as NCAA Division-I. In this context, athletes may go to great lengths to prove themselves by conforming to a set of norms that involves making sacrifices, striving for distinction, and refusing to accept limits in their pursuit of success (Hughes & Coakley, 1991).

As previously mentioned, coaches wield remarkable power over athletes, who are often expected to accept coaches' actions and directions without question (Stirling & Kerr, 2009). At the NCAA Division I level, for instance, coaches not only control whether an athlete plays or not, but also decide if athletes will be awarded scholarships, then determine whether they will be retained on scholarship from year to year. Ultimately, given the extent to which coaches control and monitor their athletes' training and performance, some participants in the current study raised the question of whether anything in a sport setting was truly a "voluntary" form of OCB. As a volleyball player suggested, "nothing is voluntary unless no one knows that you're doing it and you're just doing it for yourself." In other words, athletes may always feel some level of pressure to impress their coaches, and any activity that a coach might be aware of could potentially influence coaches' assessments of their athletes. In this vein, athletes may face particular uncertainty about what activities are and are not voluntary.

Given the power and influence that coaches can exercise over their athletes, combined with the "gray area" regarding what is and is not formally required of athletes, the current study has some important practical implications. The nature of sport often makes athletes vulnerable to abuse from coaches (Sterling & Kerr, 2014). By highlighting athletes' perceptions about OCB in sport, including the sense that "voluntary" activities are not actually perceived as voluntary, the current study can help coaches and administrators appreciate the potential that exists for athletes to be exploited and abused. For example, if a team activity is supposed to be voluntary, yet the coach is aware of who does and does not attend, some athletes may view the activity as voluntary "in name only" and feel compelled to attend. Such an understanding of athletes' perceptions, combined with an appreciation of the types of OCB in which athletes engage, can help coaches and administrators set appropriate limits as they develop team policies and practices. In other

words, the findings of the current research could serve as a starting point to help coaches identify the types of OCB that are most important for the success of their particular team, then work to create an environment in which athletes focus on these key OCB activities while not feeling undue pressure to overwork themselves by doing everything and anything they might imagine to impress the coach. Importantly, this could help coaches avoid issues such as athlete burnout that may occur from overtraining (Gustafsson, Kenttä, & Hassmén, 2011).

While the current study identified a common belief in a “gray area” regarding what is and is not required of athletes, there is still much that needs to be understood about athletes’ motivations for engaging in various types of OCB. The research questions addressed in the current study were largely descriptive in nature, seeking to investigate what types of OCB athletes engage in and gain a general understanding of how athletes perceive the nature of OCB in sport. One promising avenue for further research will be to investigate in more detail the reasons why athletes feel particularly compelled to perform various types of OCB, particularly in contexts where coaches may wield substantial power over athletes. Notably, factors such as perceptions of leaders’ ethics may moderate the relationship between leaders’ use of power and followers’ performance of OCB (Reiley & Jacobs, 2016). Research along such lines can help to provide enhanced understanding of the ways in which undue pressure to perform OCB may contribute to negative outcomes for athletes, such as burnout and overtraining. Further, an appreciation of the variety of factors that motivate athletes to engage in OCB can help coaches and administrators better support the athletes with whom they work. For instance, MacDougall, Budkley, Johnson, and Mecca (2016) suggested that employees constantly engaging in OCB due to perceptions of pressure should be protected by supervisors, whereas those engaging in OCB for more functional purposes may benefit from increased oversight.

An important limitation associated with the current study is the fact that all NCAA Division I athletes in the U.S., which is the highest classification of competition in American college sport. Another direction for future research will be to examine the nature of OCB at other elite levels (e.g., professional and Olympic sport) as well as how norms of OCB might impact athletes at lower levels of competition (e.g., NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III, high school, and youth levels). Additionally, the majority of participants in the current study were women (11 women, 4 men), which may limit the transferability of the current study. Assessing gender differences was not an intent of the current study, and future research might investigate whether women and men perceive or experience differences with respect to dynamics of OCB on sports teams. Further, the current study was limited in that it did not specifically consider the ways in which the gender of an athlete's coach may impact the dynamics that affect perceptions of OCB, which presents another potentially intriguing avenue for future inquiry. Indeed, previous research has raised particular concerns with the power dynamics underpinning relationships between female athletes and male coaches (Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). Finally, another limitation exists in that participants were not asked about their racial or ethnic identity, and it may be fruitful for additional research to investigate the potential ways in which racial dynamics may shape perceptions of OCB. Ultimately, researchers might also build off this initial qualitative work by developing a sport-specific scale to measure OCB from a quantitative perspective. While numerous scales to assess OCB have been developed outside of sport, having a sport-specific scale could help us better understand the unique nature of OCB in the context of sport.

Conclusion

The results of the current study indicate that athletes engage in a wide variety of activities that may be considered OCB. Some of these activities (e.g., getting extra practice, motivating

and supporting teammates, giving good effort, recruiting, exceeding academic expectations, performing community service, and being social with fans) share clear connections with facets of OCB identified in non-sport settings. Other types of OCB identified by athletes, most notably bonding with teammates, had not been prominent in prior research outside the context of sport. Further, the OCB dimension of “sportsmanship,” which had been salient in prior non-sport research, was not identified by athletes in the current study as an example of OCB.

With respect to the nature of OCB in sport, the current study identified the existence of a “gray area” regarding what is and is not required of athletes. While employees in a variety of work settings may feel pressures that can coerce them to participate in supposedly “voluntary” activities, the nature of this pressure may be particularly strong in sport. Some participants even doubted whether any activities that could potentially contribute to athletic success should be considered as truly “voluntary.” Overall, the current research paints a picture in which there are a number of connections, but also some important areas of uniqueness, between OCB inside and outside of sport (see the discussion section above for more detail about these connections and areas of uniqueness). Ultimately, understanding the unique nature of OCB in sport can help coaches and administrators better develop team policies and practices that can encourage athletes to focus their efforts on the most valuable types of OCB, while avoiding undue pressure that may lead to overtraining and burnout.

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