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Informational and Normative Influences in Youth Sport

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Running head: INFORMATIONAL AND NORMATIVE INFLUENCES IN YOUTH
SPORT

Communication Capstone: Honors Thesis

Informational and Normative Influences in Youth Sport

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Literature Review	5
Social Influence Theory.....	5
Media Influence.....	5
Parental Influence.....	9
Coaches Influence.....	11
Methodology	12
Data Collection.....	12
Sample.....	13
Strengths/Limitations.....	13
Hypotheses.....	13
Methods	14
Population.....	14
Sample.....	14
Sampling Procedure.....	15
Data Collection Method.....	15
Instrument.....	16
Data Analysis Procedure.....	17
Data Results	18
Discussion and Conclusions.....	27
Limitations.....	28
Future Research.....	28

References.....30

Appendix.....32

Introduction

It is widely accepted that participation in youth sport has abundant benefits. These include improving overall fitness, higher self-esteem, and socialization with others. In a 2014 study on those between the ages of six to 18, 27 million reported participating in team sports, and 60 million reported participating in any form of organized athletics within the United States (DiFiore et al.). Sports are an enormous part of American society and a great pastime for viewers and players alike. Most athletes report starting their sport at an early age, and many adults claim some of their best memories are from their days in youth sport. However, growing pressure from parents and coaches, combined with societal messages from the media can negatively impact a child's enjoyment in youth sport participation. This study is intended to create a conversation about the external factors young athletes are exposed to as they develop on and off the field. Using social influence theory, this study is conducted to explore how influential these factors are.

Literature Review

Social Influence Theory

The social influence theory involves two influences: informational and normative. Li (2013) states that informational social influence is “influence to accept information obtained from another as evidence about reality,” while normative influence is based on a desire to “elicit positive evaluations from others”(PAGE NUMBER). Informational influence involves one having an opinion based on information or evidence presented. Normative influence involves a higher sense of performing because of social pressures (Li, 2013). For the purpose of this study, informational influence is advertising and media fed to evolving athletes, with a concentration on the NCAA “Stay in Bounds” program studied by Stahley and Boyd in 2006. The normative influence is the athletes’ parents and coaches, as many young athletes perform in the hopes of pleasing them. Both influences within the social influence theory are suggested to effect one’s behavior, and are thus used in this study.

On and Off the Field

Stahley and Boyd (2006) conducted a case study about the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s “Stay in Bounds” program. This program is meant to “teach children to be good sports both on and off the field” (Stahley & Boyd, 2006, p.311), and places a value on the notion of excellence. Excellence is a complex topic, because what is excellence to be measured in? Victories? Championships? Well-rounded students? Academic achievements? A good effort? The researchers explain that if excellence is linked to winning, the *student* in *student-athlete* diminishes (Stahley & Boyd, 2006). During my senior year in high school, the varsity baseball

team was finally good enough to have a chance at winning the district championship. This was due to the team's strongest asset, a senior star pitcher committed to play Division I baseball. However, the pitcher was caught plagiarizing for the second time in the season, with the most important game in the season right around the corner. A usual punishment for plagiarizing would be out-of-school suspension for a few days, which would make the pitcher ineligible for the game. Thus, the school decided to let the pitcher go without discipline, demonstrating a clear minimization of the *student* in *student-athlete*.

During Stahley and Boyd's (2006) ethnographic study, a video was shown to the children explaining the RICHER principles (respect, integrity, caring, harmony, excellence, responsibility). In this video, excellence is simply shown as 'doing one's best.' Yet Stahley and Boyd recognize that a paradox is formed when the groups are also taken to the NCAA Hall of Champions, which has an inevitable focus on winning NCAA championships. The question remains: is the NCAA's definition of excellence a) doing one's best or b) winning championships? Stahley and Boyd (2006) candidly state:

As visitors search through the records, they will most likely be browsing through statistics such as "most consecutive wins by a Division I football coach" or "longest jump in a Division II track and field meet." They will not be able to look at statistics that read "Division III team that tried its hardest during a rough season." (p. 320)

Although it is comforting to think one can achieve excellence by trying their best, it is called Hall of *Champions*, not Hall of Everyone Who Tried Their Best but it Still Wasn't Good Enough. From an outsider's perspective, the NCAA appears to try to get student-athletes to be good people on and off the field, succeed academically, and in their sport; However, they create

a paradox for themselves by being an organization that has a primary focus on winning championships.

It should be noted that one with a primary emphasis on winning, over one's character can be truly problematic, as many collegiate and professional athletes have lost sight of what the "Stay in Bounds" program attempted to teach: continuing to be a good person off the field (Stahley & Boyd, 2006). Dix (2017) conducted a study to analyze this, in terms of interpersonal domestic violence within professional sports. He discovered that the athletes accused of this are seen as less successful on the field if accused of domestic violence off the field. In more detail, Dix (2017) states:

A professional athlete who has been accused of interpersonal domestic violence is perceived as a failure in his personal life which triggers a spillover effect that results in the professional athlete being concurrently perceived as a failure in his athletic life. (p. 76)

This can easily be multiplied within a group setting. Washington Redskins Quarterback, Patrick Ramsey was reportedly taped to a goalpost and had a bucket of ice dumped on his head by his team. Colorado Rockies rookie players were forced to wear adult diapers and platform shoes. A Methodist College football player was beaten and sodomized by his team (Van Raalte, Cornelius, Linder, & Brewer, 2007), all under the argument that hazing "promotes team cohesiveness, and team cohesiveness enhances team performance" (Dix, 2017, p. 494). These teams thought their destructive behavior would create a deeper bond within the team, thus becoming more successful. The study found that hazing continues to affect sport participants, but does not create a sense of deeper team cohesion. It is important to express that this is not an argument saying that everyone who enjoys winning and excelling in their sport are going to haze

and sexually abuse their team members, but simply an example of the dangers of those who have their values in the wrong areas.

The kinds of values associated with sports attitude were studied by Gau and Korzenny (2009). These include friendship, love, creativity, independence, curiosity, education, equality, family, freedom, honesty, learning, loyalty, preserving the environment, religion, success, and wealth. It was shown that those who placed an importance on sports, placed more importance on taking risks and less importance on honesty than the non-sports group. This can be seen as an expansion of hazing and immoral habits, as risks are often taken with a lack of honesty in these types of behaviors.

Media Messages

The authority of sports celebrities on young athletes' values should also not go unnoticed. Similar to values and ideals shown through the NCAA, celebrities and other media sources have the power to be strong informational influences within the social influence theory, as young athletes often view information through this lens and consider it true (Li, 2013). This is common in simple celebrity-athlete endorsements targeted towards teenagers. It was found that "celebrity sports athletes have a positive influence on adolescents' word-of-mouth and brand loyalty. This suggests that celebrity sports athletes *are* important to adolescents when they make brand choices and talk about these brands positively" (A. Bush, Martin, & V. Bush, 2004, p.113). Therefore, it is no surprise that if there is an avid young golfer that is a fan of Tiger Woods, then they are more likely to buy Nike products. Athletes have the position to be positive, informational role models in the media for young athletes, and should consider this when making their decisions on and off the field. Although these celebrities are not the athlete's parents or personal coaches, they act as a major factor in what can affect a young athlete, in their

purchasing habits, sports they participate in, and overall lifestyle choices. This is increasing as media continues to become more popular in American culture, yet is likely not as intense as the parental and coach influence in the student-athlete.

Parental Normative Influence

This study is meant to uncover some of the faults within sports, but it is not to take away from the benefits sport can provide, especially in cases of shaping an athlete for the better. Since sports often improve our society and the athletes themselves, most athletes start training at an early age. Consequently, the competitive nature of youth sports is increasing. DiFiori et al. (2014) claim that this leads to “extensive training, sport specialization, and large numbers of competitive events at young ages” (p. 5). Through their research on burnout in youth sports, they claim that parental goals are a large part of children being involved in this high-intensity training. Yet if too much pressure is placed on the child, withdrawal from the sport is likely, as they are under the influence they are unable to meet the “physical and psychological demands of the sport” (DiFiori et al., 2014, p.14). This is seen in young athletes trying to satisfy elevated parental expectations, who reportedly experience lower self-esteem, increased anxiety, loss of sleep and appetite, and an overall lower expectation of their personal performance (DiFiori et al., 2014). They make an interesting discovery in their research stating, “in children compared with adults is that there appears to be more of a psychological component to burnout and attrition with adult-supervised activities” (p. 15). They uncover that children are more subjective to the damaging environmental factors than adults, especially when it is under adult direction.

This current research coincides with DiFiori et al., vowing to the weight parental figures have on young, developing athletes. However, it is being argued that athletes that have a healthy

and supportive relationship with their parents experienced a higher level of enjoyment in their sport, rather than focusing on the damage unhealthy parent relationships can cause. In the application of social influence theory in this study, parents of an athlete are a normative influence, which thus causes the child to attempt to meet parental expectations in hopes of gaining their approval and admiration.

Research by Stefansen, Smette, and Strandbu (2018) dissects the increase in parent involvement in youth sports through the years. They explain parent involvement by “considering parents as a generation of former youth” (p. 163). Most dedicated parents of young athletes participated in sports in their own childhood, or were dedicated viewers of some type of sport while growing up. Therefore, the involvement is arguably equal throughout their life, only it makes a shift from sport participant to sport observer. If a high value is placed on sports from an early age, it is likely that it will remain valued in their lives as parents, and thus effect their children’s perception of it. Stefansen, Smette, and Strandbu (2018) propose that “the increase in parental involvement in youth sport is fueled both by parents’ childhood experiences and by the parenting ideas they encounter and negotiate as adults” (p.164) In this context, parents have the opportunity to be an extremely helpful normative influence to the young athlete as motivators, initiators, transporters, resource providers, and role models, and as well as decrease the likelihood of sport burnout as suggested by DiFiori et al.

The young athlete should be motivated towards success, but not to the point that that success seems unobtainable. Kolayış, Sarı, and Çelik (2017) looked into parent-initiated motivation versus self-determined motivation. They found a connection that if a healthy motivational climate is formed by the parents, it increased the young athletes’ self-determined

motivation. Subsequently, negative parent behavior has the impact to do the opposite. It is stated that:

Some behaviors of parents such as not trusting children's abilities, comparing them with the other children instead of evaluating whether their children have improved their performances, and raising them in a way in which children get afraid of making mistakes, could be detrimental for self-determined motivation. (Kolayış, Sarı, & Çelik, 2017, p. 221)

As supported in the research of DiFiori et al., if a child feels that the goals set for them by the nominal influences are inaccessible, withdrawal from the sport is likely. However, if a healthy level of motivation is present, desirability of the sport is just as likely.

Coach Normative Influence

As parents have an astronomical influence in their children's participation and enjoyment in sports, coaches arguably have the next spot in line. Most athletes can point back to a time in their sports career where they had that one coach, who changed the way they think about sports for the better or for the worse. A coach that supports team cohesion by hazing, as stated earlier, clearly is abusing their role and the power that comes with it. Van Raalte, Cornelius, Linder, & Brewer (2007) reported a high school freshman wrestler being subjectively beaten by his teammates, which was encouraged by the coach as "a way to administer discipline and attitude adjustment" (p. 494). These researchers also claimed that other negative behaviors from coaches such as creating an environment of inequity, humiliation, and ridicule reduced team cohesiveness. Suitably, if a coach utilized positive behaviors such as constructive criticism and words of encouragement, team cohesiveness was high (Van Raalte, Cornelius, Linder, & Brewer,

2007). With coaches being able to have such a prominent role in their players' lives, they become a normative influence for this study as well, knowing most athletes perform in such ways in order to please their coaches and gain praises.

Yet most coaches are not perfect in this, and often abuse their power acquired with the role as coach. Cranmer and Goodboy (2015) explore athlete-coach relationships and what the manipulation of that can cause. Since youth sports are so popular worldwide and in the United States specifically, it is imperative for one to attempt to understand this relationship. When utilized for its benefits, it has the potential to “encourage affective, cognitive, and behavioral learning of a sport” (Rocca, Martin, & Toale, 1999, p. 445). An athlete can recognize their coach is in a position to provide them with “psychological, social, or tangible rewards or benefits,” and thus perform to satisfy and identify with their coach (Cranmer & Goodboy, 2015, p. 616). Cranmer and Goodboy (2015) define these instances as reward and referent power, but for the purposes of this study, it is defined as a normative influence within social influence theory stated by Li (2013). With this research, it was found that coach power use is a fundamental element of the athlete-coach relationship. When the athletes believe the coach has the ability to supply rewards, knowledge, or praise, positive communication increases. However, if athletes believe coaches will cause punishment and abuse of power, communication is decreased significantly (Cranmer & Goodboy, 2015).

Methodology

Data Collection

The study collected quantitative research in the form of survey responses from 150 collegiate student-athletes. The role and values presented by the NCAA are questioned to the

participants. Also, survey responses will be compared regarding the support (or lack thereof) from parents and coaches, and the athletes' subsequent enjoyment in the sport.

Sample

Collegiate athletes are surveyed, with no emphasis on one specific gender or race. This group directly correlates with the purposes of this study. This is the group attainable for me to examine, but it would be recommended for someone to survey professional athletes in a similar, future study.

Strengths/Limitations

There is strength in this study, as most studies regarding sports are solely focused on race and gender. While those subjects are essential, more research needs to be done outside of those two subjects, especially regarding the mental fitness of the athlete. There are limitations of this study, with the main one being completed during a worldwide pandemic. This has caused me only being able to distribute online surveys. Originally, face-to-face interviews would have been the first choice in collecting data. Another limitation is the small amount of people wanting to take the time to complete the survey, which limits the amount of results from the study.

It is through this research that three hypotheses were formed:

H1: The NCAA places more emphasis on excelling in sport than excelling academically, or excelling in one's character.

H2: Children with a healthy level of support from their parents had a higher level of enjoyment and motivation participating in their sport more than those who did not.

H3: Children with healthy level of support from their coaches had a higher level of enjoyment and motivation participating in their sport more than those who did not.

Methods

Population

This study is attempting to understand how the student-athletes' relationships with their parents and coaches effect their level of enjoyment in their sport. The amount of emotional involvement parents had in their children's lives is being studied, and if that has made a difference as well. Athletes' perspectives on the NCAA is being studied to see if the athletes report the NCAA placing as much value on academics and moral character, as they do on winning sport championships. Participants are asked their opinions on what they believe the NCAA places the most value on. These topics were chosen because not enough research has been done on these topics. Many researchers have rightfully studied race and gender, but the mental health and attitudes of athletes needs to be given attention as well. There has been some research done in philosophy and science, but hardly any from a communications perspective. Using social influence theory, a door for studies similar to this one will be opened.

Sample

150 student-athletes from eight universities were surveyed for this study. Out of the 150 responses, 79 were men and 71 women. 80.7% of the population reported being Caucasian, 11.3% African American, 3.3% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 4% Hispanic, and 0.7% Native American. 18% were college freshman, 24% were sophomores, 27.3% were juniors, 25.3% were seniors, and 5.3% were graduate students. DI, DII, and DIII athletes were all offered the same

survey. Not a particular race, gender, or division level of athletes were targeted, as all of the athletes have had a strong background in sports before playing at the collegiate level. Having this broad range allowed more participants to partake in this study, and get more accurate responses to represent the entire student-athlete population across the United States.

Sampling Procedure

In most of the academic research that inspired this study, data was collected through surveys or an ethnographic study. To find participants, 26 different colleges and universities were contacted all across the country to send the survey to their athletes. From there, the university contact emailed the survey link to all of the student-athletes at the university to voluntarily take the survey. However, only eight out of the 26 universities distributed the survey, which caused a limitation in the results. The survey was not created to be specified for any gender, race, or division of athletics, as the goal was to get as many diverse student-athletes as possible, to create more accurate results that didn't just represent one type of athlete, but the entire student-athlete population as a whole.

Data Collection Method

Since an ethnographic study is impossible at this time, surveying was chosen as the method of procedure. This study is being conducted during the summer and during a time of social distancing. Therefore, Google Forms were utilized to create a digital survey. This method also allowed for more participants to be contacted and data to be collected. Then, links were sent to contacts in the athletics department of the 26 schools. Even though sitting down with and interviewing student-athletes would be helpful for this study, surveying was the safest, and most

efficient way to gather data during a short time-span. Patten (1998) explains the proficiency in this form of data collection, and also points out the anonymous advantage as well. Since this survey involved rating one's parental level of support, it is important that the results remained anonymous. This would not be possible in another form of surveying. However, it also results in the response rate being very low. Patten (1998) stated that this is one of the biggest disadvantages of this type of data collection method, and it was evident in this study. However, it was decided that creating a digital survey will make it easier for the participants to complete the survey, and easier to analyze the data and find patterns in the results.

Instrument

The brief survey consisted of 17 questions. Demographic questions were asked to find any similarities between student-athletes. Since background was not a primary concern in this study, only brief gender and ethnicity questions were asked, along with the year of the student-athlete, and what division they competed in. The college or university the participant attends was asked, what sport they play, and what age they started their sport. Participants were asked to rate on a 1-5 scale the following questions, with 1 being no emphasis and 5 being the most emphasis: *How much emphasis does the NCAA place on you succeeding in sports?*, *How much emphasis does the NCAA place on you succeeding in academics?*, and *How much emphasis does the NCAA place on you succeeding in character (your morals, values, etc.)?* These three questions were asked to see if the athletes believe the NCAA places as much emphasis on academics and character as they do on sports. These questions were also inspired by the Stahley and Boyd (2006) ethnographic study, as they argued that the NCAA's focus is on competitive sports, and the rest falls short.

Also on a 1-5 scale, participants were asked to rank how emotionally supportive their parents and coaches were in their sports growing up, and also how financially supportive their parents were. In the Kolayış, Sarı, and Çelik (2017) study, it was examined how parents should act to motivate their children in sports. Because of this study, the children and student-athletes themselves were asked about their parental influences in the present study. They were also asked to rank how much pressure they felt from their parents and coaches to solely win in their sport. They were asked if they ever contemplate quitting their sport and were given the options of: very often, often, sometimes, rarely, and never.

Finally, the student-athletes were asked to rank their reasons for participating in their sport. They were given the choices: to build relationships, to be fit, to please myself, to please my parents/family, to gain financial aid/scholarships, and to win. This question was inspired by Gau and Korzenny's (2009) examination of values associated with sports attitude and consumption behavior. In this study, sixteen different types of values were listed as sports fans and non-sports fans ranked what they valued most and least. Similar to Gau and Korzenny, the present study had athletes rank their reasons for participating in sports 1-6.

Data Analysis Procedures

To analyze the data, patterns between the level of healthy parent involvement and sport enjoyment will be examined. Similarly, it will show if those who had unhealthy parent relationships didn't enjoy their sport as much. Rating of the NCAA's values will be analyzed to see if severe pressure on succeeding solely in sport affected their attitudes towards the NCAA as well. Participants' attitudes will be compared to what was found in the Stahley and Boyd (2006)

study, which concluded that the NCAA forms a paradox of values by attempting to value academics but failing due to being an organization that thrives off of championships.

Results

One hundred and fifty student-athletes completed the survey, coming from eighteen different sports: football (15.3%), baseball (15.3%), lacrosse (12%), golf (8.7%), women's soccer (7.4%), tennis (6.7%), women's basketball (6%), softball (6%), men's basketball (5%), volleyball (2.7%), men's soccer (2.7%), equestrian (2.7%), wrestling (2.7%), cheer (2%), sailing (1.4%), cross country (1.4%), field hockey (1.3%), and beach volleyball (0.7%). While the survey was sent to over thirty colleges and universities for distribution, eight schools participated. These consist of Johns Hopkins University (39%), College of Charleston (18.9%), Coastal Carolina University (23.8%), University of Akron (7.7%), Ohio State University (5.0%), Michigan State University (0.7%), Marywood University (1.4%), and Kutztown University (3.5%). 52.7% participants were male and 47.3% were female. Five different ethnicities were reported: Caucasian (80.7%), African American (11.3%), Hispanic (4%), Asian American/Pacific Islander (3.3%), and Native American (0.7%). 18% of student-athletes that participated are freshmen, 24% are sophomores, 27.3% are juniors, 25.3% are seniors, and 5.3% are graduate students. Of those, 55.3% reported playing DI sports, 2.7% reported playing DII sports, 41.3% reported playing DIII sports, and 0.7% play at the intramural level.

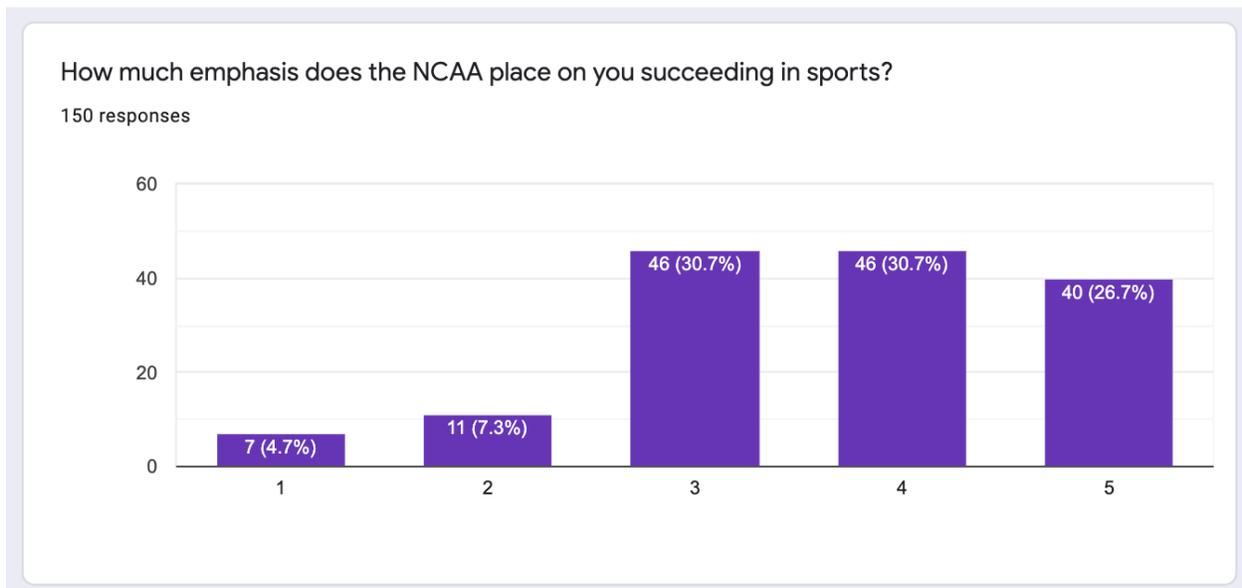
NCAA Values: Sports, Academics, Character

Student-athlete participants (n=150) were asked three questions in this survey: (1) How much emphasis does the NCAA place on you succeeding in sports?, (2) How much emphasis

does the NCAA place on you succeeding in academics?, and (3) How much emphasis does the NCAA place on you succeeding in character (your morals, values, etc.)? These three questions were asked to strengthen or weaken *Hypothesis 1: The NCAA places more emphasis on excelling in sport than excelling academically, or excelling in one's character.*

When asked about the level of emphasis the NCAA placed on sports success, 4.7% of participants reported minimal emphasis, 7.3% reported some emphasis, 30.7% reported average emphasis, 30.7% reported high emphasis, and 26.7% reported extreme emphasis. It is shown that the majority of results rested in average to high emphasis, with extreme emphasis showing a notable percentage as well. Out of all three of the questions, the least number of participants chose minimal emphasis or some emphasis in this question than the others.

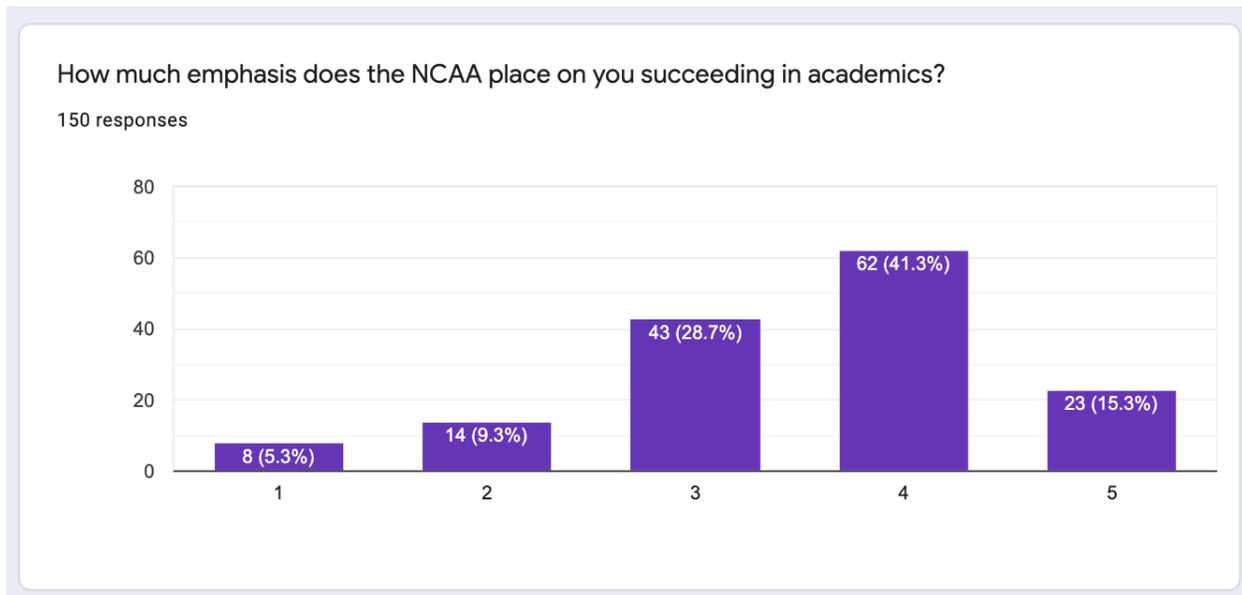
Table 1.1



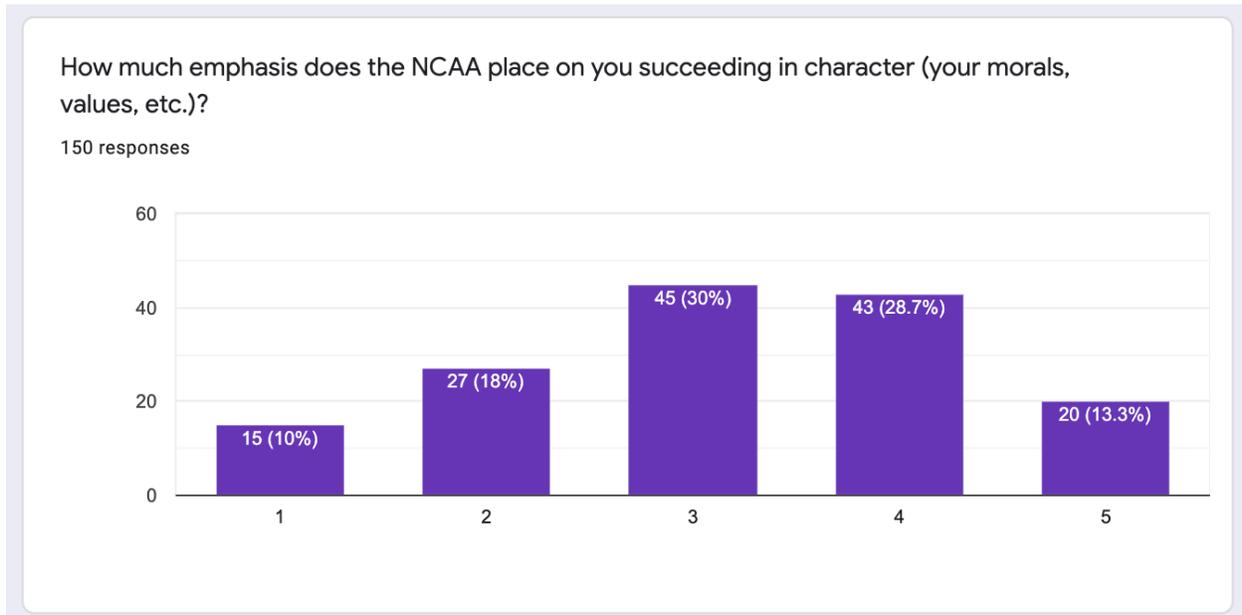
When asked about the level of emphasis the NCAA places on academics, 5.3% of participants reported minimal emphasis, 9.3% reported some emphasis, 28.7% of participants reported average emphasis, 41.3% reported high emphasis, and 15.3% reported extreme emphasis. There was a large majority in those who picked high emphasis, indicating a lot of

emphasis on academics but not enough to choose 5 (extreme emphasis) on the scale. Similar to the last question, barely any participants chose minimal or some emphasis on the scale, but there was still more responses than the previous question, as shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2



When asked about the level of emphasis the NCAA places on character, 10% of participants reported minimal emphasis, 18% reported some emphasis, 30% reported average emphasis, 28.7% reported high emphasis, and 13.3% of participants reported extreme emphasis. These results appear to be much more level than the others, but still holding a majority in the middle, showing an average amount of emphasis from the NCAA. These results also showed higher numbers of participants choosing minimal or some emphasis on the student-athletes' character.

Table 1.3

Results for the NCAA placing a high emphasis on sports were consistently high, as shown in Table 1.1. And while less participants chose extreme emphasis on the scale for academics and character, results were still high in the average to high emphasis range. Therefore, responses indicate that the majority of participants feel that the NCAA emphasizes all three of these subjects, with sports being the most consistent, highly-rated response.

Parental Influence

Student-athletes' parental support was analyzed to either support or weaken *Hypothesis 2: Children with a healthy level of support from their parents had a higher level of enjoyment and motivation participating in their sport more than those who did not.* The first question asked participants (n=150) how emotionally supportive their parental figures were, with 0.7% reporting not supportive, 4.7% reporting a little supportive, 6.7% reporting supportive, 18.7% reporting highly supportive, and 69.3% reporting fully supportive. The second question asked how financially supportive their parental figures were. 0.0% reported not supportive, 4.7% reported a

little supportive, 5.3% reporting supportive, 16.7% reporting highly supportive, and 73.3% reporting fully supportive. In both questions, the results on those who chose fully supportive on the scale were remarkably higher than the other options, as shown in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2. It can be concluded that the majority of student-athlete participants had very supportive parents throughout their lives in regards to their participation in sports.

Table 2.1

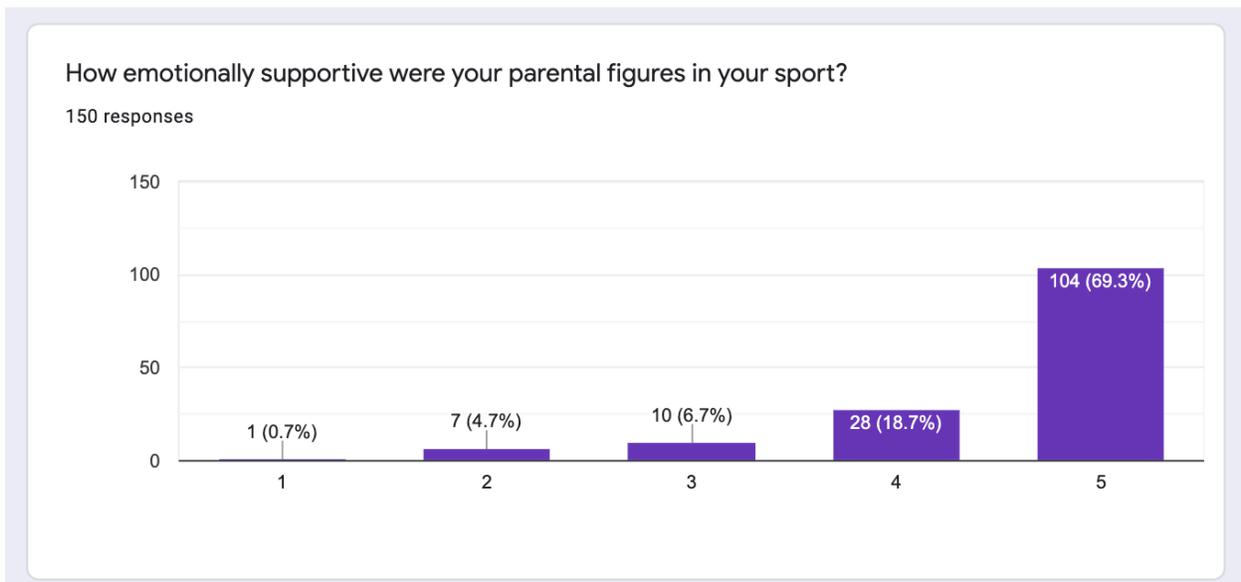
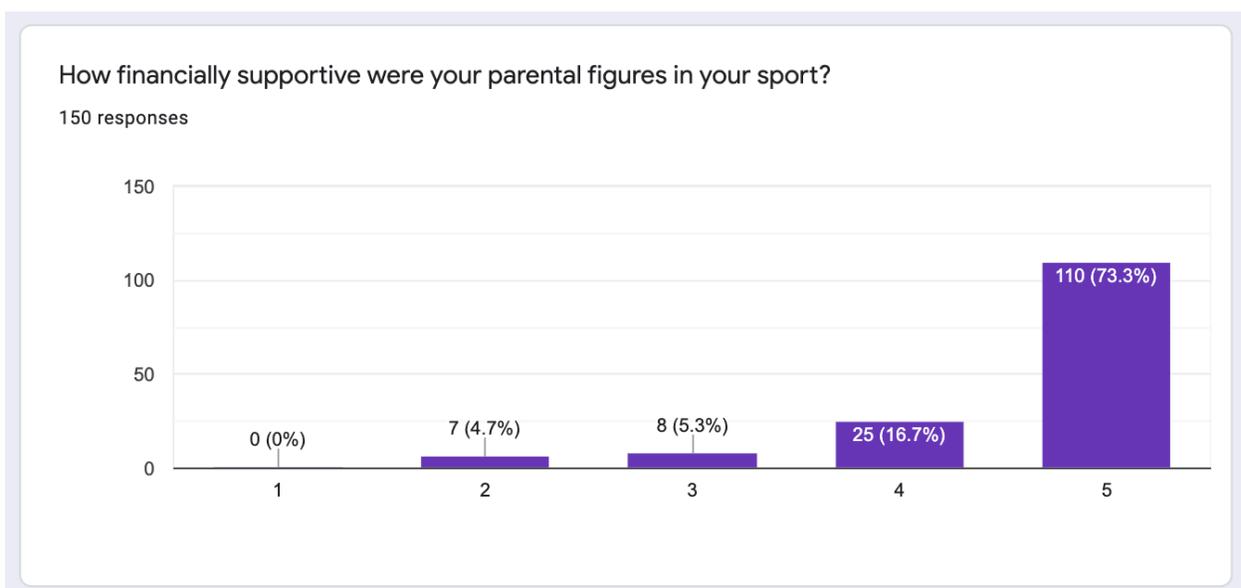
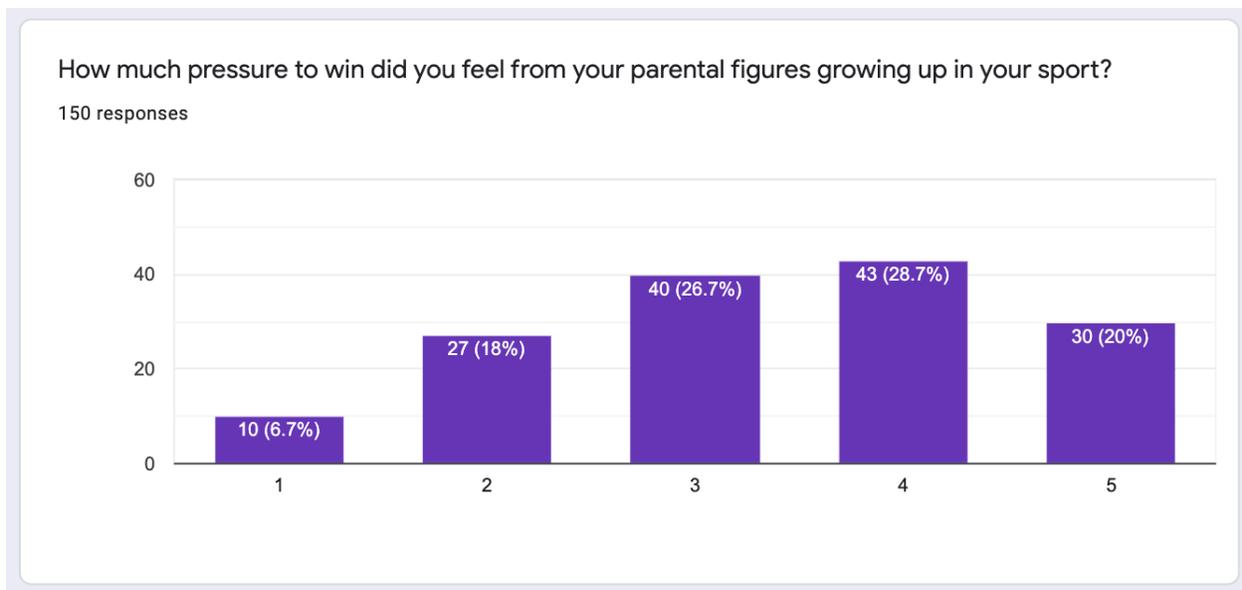


Table 2.2



When participants were asked how much pressure they felt to win from their parental figures growing up in their sport, 6.7% reported no pressure, 18% reported little pressure, 26.7% reported average pressure, 28.7% reported high pressure, and 20% reported extreme pressure. Those who reported extreme pressure most likely felt too much pressure from their parents, but those who reported either average or high pressure probably had a healthy amount of pressure to succeed in their sports. As shown in Table 2.3, there were hardly any responses choosing 1 on the scale, indicating no pressure. Therefore, most student-athletes received some type of pressure from their parental figures.

Table 2.3

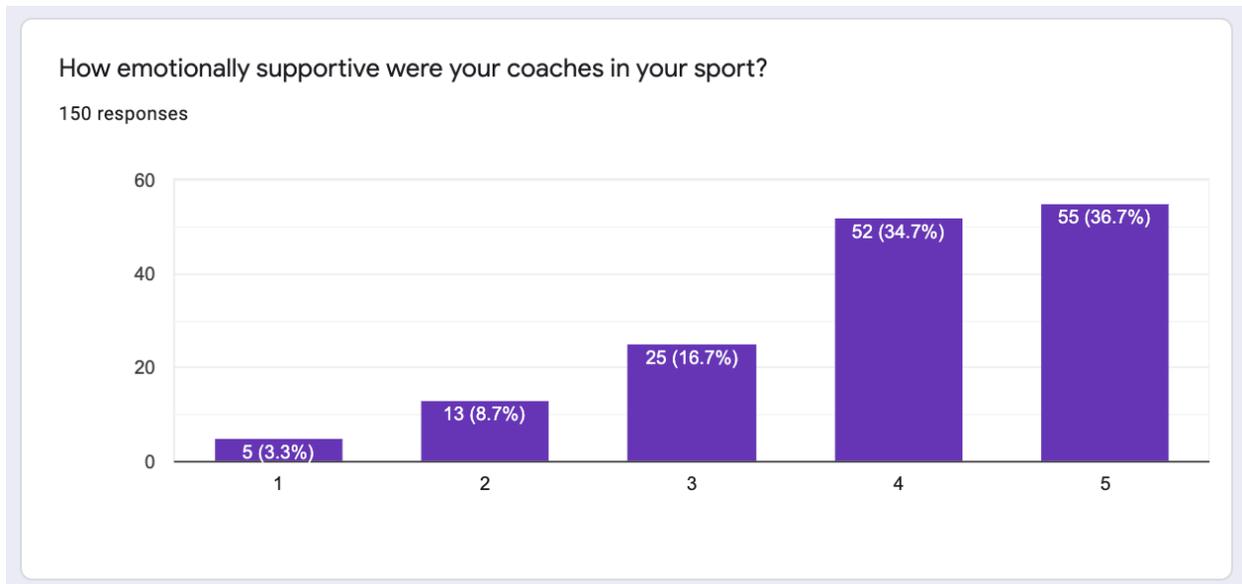


Coaches' Influence

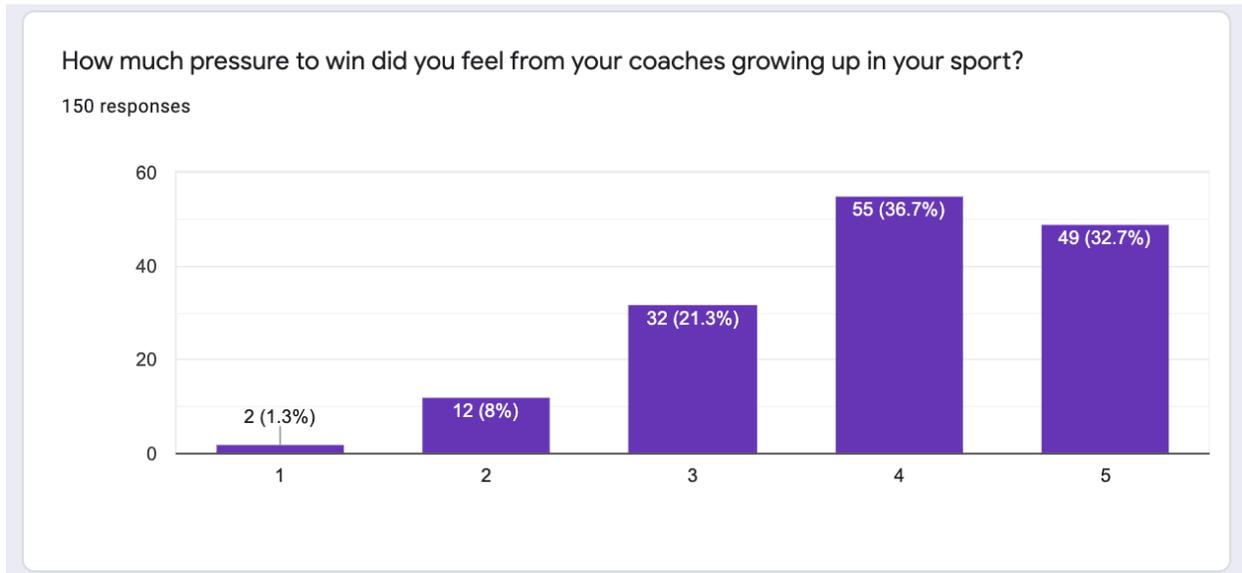
Similar questions were asked regarding the coaches that the student-athletes have had. These survey questions were meant to either support or weaken *Hypothesis 3: Children with healthy level of support from their coaches had a higher level of enjoyment and motivation participating in their sport more than those who did not*. When asked, about the emotional level

of supportive from coaches, 3.3% reported not supportive, 8.7% reported a little supportive, 16.7% reported supportive, 34.7% reported highly supportive, and 36.7% reported extremely supportive. As shown in Table 3.1, the numbers rose as the level of emotional support rose, signifying that most student-athletes had positive experiences with their coaches.

Table 3.1

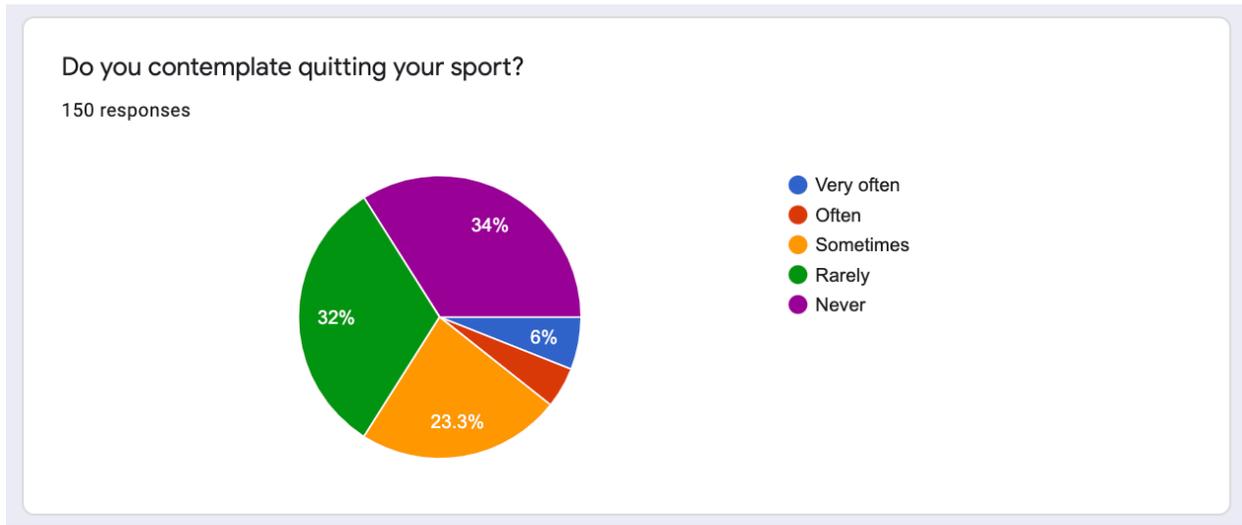


When participants were also asked how much pressure they felt to win from their coaches, 1.3% reported no pressure, 8% reported little pressure, 21.3% reported average pressure, 36.7% reported high pressure, and 32.7% reported extreme pressure. The highest number of participants chose 4 on the scale, which is a healthy amount of pressure, without being overwhelming for the athlete. This is exhibited in Table 3.2

Table 3.2

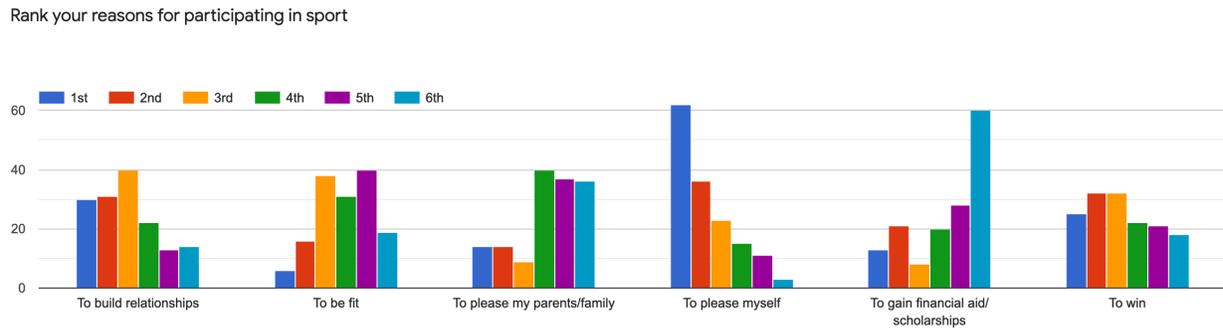
All of these athletes have made it to the collegiate level, so it is logical that most of them reported having supportive parents and coaches. The numbers for supportive parents and coaches alike show positive results.

Because of this analysis, it makes sense that when participants were asked if they contemplated quitting their sports, the results were very negative. 34% said they never contemplate quitting their sport, 32% reported rarely, 23.3% reported sometimes, 4.7% reported often, and 6% reported very often. This is exhibited in Table 4.1. These results coordinate with the earlier analysis, stating that those who have had better relationships with their parents and coaches throughout their sport are more likely to have a higher level of enjoyment, and are therefore less likely to quit. Therefore, responses indicate that children with a healthy level of support from their parents and coaches had a higher level of enjoyment and motivation participating in their sport than those who did not.

Table 4.1

Reasons for Participation

Lastly, the participants (n=150) were questioned on their reasons for participating in sports. They were given six options: to build relationships, to be fit, to please my parents/family, to please myself, to gain financial aid/scholarships, and to win. While the results were close, the choice “to please myself” was picked 62 times as the top choice, considerably more than the others. Next, “to build relationships” was chosen as the second most popular choice, with 30 responses. In third, “to win” received 25 first-place responses. “To please my parents/family” was chosen 14 times, “to gain financial aid/scholarships” was chosen first 13 times, and “to be fit” was chosen six times. Therefore, pleasing oneself was the most popular answer out of this group of participants. It is also important to notice that gaining financial aid and scholarships was chosen last much more than the rest of the answers, with 60 participants ranking that option sixth.

Table 5.1

Discussion and Conclusions

This study uses social influence theory to identify different influential factors in the student-athlete's life. For the purpose of this study, parents and coaches are identified as normative influences, and the NCAA and other media messages are classified as informational influences. This is due to Li's definition that normative influence refers to conforming to others expectations, while informational influence refers to accepting outside information as reality (2013). Both of these have the power to effect one's attitude and behavior. In this study, most of the participants had high opinions of the NCAA's influence, and also had helpful parents and coaches throughout their childhood. Having positive experiences with both the informational and normative influences created an overall positive opinion of the sports the student-athletes participate in. Although Stahley and Boyd's (2006) study indicated that the NCAA was primarily focused on winning in sports, the participants in the current study believed the NCAA to have a huge on emphasis on academics and character as well. There was no significant difference in the results between sports, academics, and character, which differs from the conclusions that Stahley and Boyd came to in their ethnography.

Most participants reported having emotionally and financially supportive parents, as well as parents and coaches that applied a healthy amount of pressure on them to succeed. Therefore, the DiFiori et al. (2014) study on burnout and others about the negative effects of overbearing parents could not be directly applied to this study. The participants had positive experiences in their childhoods, and therefore had positive responses in the current study.

Limitations

This study was limited by being conducted on athletes during the off-season. Many students are not locked in, and are not checking their email regularly. Perhaps if it was distributed during the school year, more would have participated. Only 150 student-athletes participated, when over 1,000 had the opportunity to.

It is also likely that those who enjoy their sport more were more inclined to participate in the study. If one was very unhappy in their sport, they are less likely to take the time to complete a survey that revolves around their lifetime experience in that sport. A limitation was surveying those who already have very high opinions of their sports and the experiences they have had prior.

Future Research

Future research should attempt to study those student-athletes who have already burnt out from their sport. Studying athletes that have already made it to the collegiate level is much more likely to get positive results regarding their opinions of the NCAA, and the relationships they have had with their parents and coaches. Future research should target athletes that have quit their sports and their reasons for doing so. It could also target younger athletes, and their

opinions on continuing sports in college. Research can be done on those who could have played college sports, but chose not to.

The current research was meant to bring more attention to the minds of athletes, rather than their sole physical capabilities. Many athletes are just viewed as physical being, instead of a human with emotions and an immense amount of mental pressure. Future research should expand from this idea, and look deeper into the mental health of athletes, rather than physical ability.

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Appendix

Survey

1) What college/university do you attend?

2) What sport do you play?

- Football
- Men's basketball
- Women's basketball
- Men's soccer
- Women's soccer
- Baseball
- Softball
- Golf
- Tennis
- Lacrosse
- Volleyball
- Other _____

3) What age did you start your sport?

4) How much emphasis does the NCAA place on you succeeding in sports?

1

2

3

4

5

No emphasis

Extreme emphasis

5) How much emphasis does the NCAA place on you succeeding in academics?

1 2 3 4 5

No emphasis

Extreme emphasis

6) How much emphasis does the NCAA place on you succeeding in character (your morals, values, etc.)?

1 2 3 4 5

No emphasis

Extreme emphasis

7) How emotionally supportive were your parental figures in your sport?

1 2 3 4 5

Not supportive

Extremely supportive

8) How financially supportive were your parental figures in your sport?

1 2 3 4 5

Not supportive

Extremely supportive

9) How emotionally supportive were your coaches in your sport?

1 2 3 4 5

Not supportive

Extremely supportive

10) How much pressure to win did you feel from your parental figures growing up in your sport?

1
2
3
4
5

No pressure
Extreme pressure

11) How much pressure to win did you feel from your coaches growing up in your sport?

1
2
3
4
5

No pressure
Extreme pressure

12) Rank your reasons for participating in sports.

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
To build relationships						
To be fit						
To please myself						
To please my parents/family						
To gain financial aid/scholarships						
To win						

13) Do you contemplate quitting your sport?

- Very often
- Often

- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

14) Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other _____

15) What level of sports do you compete at?

- DI
- DII
- DIII
- Intramural

16) Ethnicity:

- Caucasian
- African American
- Asian American/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- Other _____

17) Year:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate