

**Parental Involvement in the Lives of Intercollegiate Athletes: Views from Student-Athletes and Academic Advisors for Athletics**

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The topic of parental involvement in the lives of their children, and the concept of over-involved parents has been growing as an area of research. The current study aims to fill this gap by examining parental involvement in the context of intercollegiate athletics. Specifically, a qualitative case-study method was utilized to examine parents' involvement in the academic and athletic lives of their student-athletes, including a focus on the concept of over-involvement in relationship to this population. Participants included eight NCAA Division I intercollegiate student-athletes (five male and three female) and the five academic advisors for athletics that worked with them. Participants completed two interviews and one journal, and all of the data was analyzed utilizing thematic analysis. The five themes that emerged were types of involvement, increasing involvement, over-involvement, outcomes of over-involvement, and the fine line between healthy involvement and over-involvement. The present study offers insight into how student-athletes and academic advisors perceive parental involvement. This knowledge can be used by practitioners to improve how they communicate with parents and student-athletes. Also, researchers can employ this information to improve the overall understanding of parental involvement in regard to athletes.

Student-athletes make up a unique population because their experience is unlike the average college student experience given of the athletic demands

that are placed upon them (Gayles, 2009; Jolly, 2008). In addition, these student-athletes face conflicting roles of being a student and an athlete (Comeaux, 2010).

Learning to deal with this role conflict may have been influenced by how their parents raised them, and continue to be involved in their lives. Adding to this conflict is the developmental stage that the student-athletes are in, that of emerging adulthood. This is a stage where individuals are working to learn who they are and want to be while gradually becoming more independent from parents (Arnett, 2000; 2004). This growing independence can mean the student-athletes are attempting to handle their role conflict on their own for the first time as they are separated from their parents. However, research has shown that parents often have an influence over their child's athletic and academic behaviors, and this influence continues into college (Baumrind, 2013; Stewart, 2008). Therefore, it is important to explore how parents are still a major influence in their emerging adult child's academic and athletic careers.

One way that parents can influence their children is by being involved in their lives. Parental involvement is considered anytime a parent is a part of their child's life including the provision of tangible and intangible resources, which is the definition utilized for this study (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Lowe & Dotterer, 2017; Ratelle, Larose, Guay, & Sénécal, 2005). This could include being in communication with their child, giving their child advice, or intervening when their child has a problem (Cullaty, 2011). It could also include spending time and attention on their child (Ratelle et al., 2005). When including

all types of involvement, studies have found that parental involvement is on the rise, especially in regard to parents with college-aged children (Cullaty, 2011; Dorsch, Dotterer, Lowe, & Lyons, 2016a).

Overall, most researchers agree that parental involvement is beneficial to their offspring (Dorsch et al., 2016a; Odenweller, Booth-Butterfield, & Weber, 2014). However, this involvement may go too far, which can be termed over-involvement, and may lead to negative outcomes (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, & Murphy, 2012). Previous studies show that parental involvement has an impact on child outcomes, however, one consistent definition of parental involvement and over-involvement has been lacking, especially with reference to student-athletes (Dorsch et al., 2016a; Dorsch, Lowe, Dotterer, Lyons, & Barker, 2016b).

Intercollegiate student-athletes may need support as they attempt to navigate their dual roles of being students and athletes while also trying to define their new parent-child relationship. In response to this need, the NCAA has required Division I universities to offer support services for student-athletes (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Gill & Farrington, 2014; Johnson, 2013). One of the offerings of these departments is academic advisors who are knowledgeable about both NCAA eligibility standards and the academic requirements of the university (Johnson, 2013; Parietti, Weight, & Spencer,

2013). These advisors meet with athletes to assist them with keeping their grades up (Holsendolph, 2006; Parietti et al., 2013) and helping them choose a major and classes to take (Brown, 2007). They also work with student-athletes to assist them with the transition to college (Parietti et al., 2013). While interviewing academic advisors for athletics, Parietti et al. (2013) discovered that they saw themselves as mentors for the student-athletes, and they spent the majority of their time at work meeting with student-athletes. This relationship allows academic advisors to have unique insights into the student-athletes' experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Emerging Adulthood**

Major shifts in the American culture over the past 50 years has led to the proposition of a new stage of life development for individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 called emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; 2004). The theory of emerging adulthood suggests that this period of life is a unique time between adolescence and adulthood that has emerged as individuals wait longer to get married and have children (Arnett, 2000; 2004; Sussman & Arnett, 2014). According to Arnett (2004) emerging adulthood is characterized by five qualities: a) identity exploration, b) instability, c) self-focus, d) feeling in-between, and e) possibility. Overall, this developmental period is a time when individuals are able to explore who they are and who they want to be as they

negotiate separation from their parents. Another aspect that has contributed to emerging adulthood is an increase in the number of people who now pursue higher education, which is a place where these individuals have the freedom to perform the exploration just discussed (Arnett, 2004). Multiple researchers have studied this time frame in regard to parental involvement because of the uniqueness of this developmental period (Dorsch et al., 2016a, 2016b; Hill, Burrow, & Sumner, 2016; Lowe, Dotterer, & Francisco, 2015; Padilla-Walker, Nelson & Knapp, 2014; Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, & Montgomery, 2013). However, few have examined parental involvement during this developmental period among intercollegiate student-athletes (Dorsch et al., 2016a).

#### **Parental Involvement in Emerging Adulthood**

Emerging adulthood is characterized as a period of life that has less parental control than the preceding period of adolescence (Arnett, 2004; Hill et al., 2016; Padilla-Walker et al., 2014; Sussman and Arnett, 2014). However, researchers have found that parents are becoming more involved in the lives of their college-aged emerging adults (Cullaty, 2011; Savage & Petree, 2013). Cullaty (2011) shared that there has been a cultural shift in how parents are involved in their child's life since the year 2000, when evidence emerged that parents were becoming more involved on college campuses. College student affairs have also

been giving more attention to how parents are involved in the lives of their children (Harper, Sax, & Wolf, 2012; Lowe & Dotterer, 2017; Savage & Petree, 2013). The University of Minnesota Parent Program does a biennial survey to examine parent/family services, and they have discovered that since the early 2000s universities are increasingly including parents because of the impact they may have on the academic success of college students (Savage & Petree, 2013). Research has recently shown that more than 20% of emerging and young adults indicated intense parental involvement in their lives (Fingerman et al., 2012). Also, other studies have found that over 50% of participants were in contact with parents once a day with 25% being in contact multiple times per day (Givertz & Segrin, 2014), and that college students included parents in important life decisions (Pizzolato & Hicklen, 2011).

The quality of involvement needs to be considered when examining parental involvement (Bradly-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Lowe & Dotterer, 2017) as parents can be involved in their child's lives in different ways. Involvement can be more communication-focused, where parents talk to their emerging adult and give advice or chat about daily events (Cullaty, 2011; Dorsch et al., 2016a; Fingerman et al., 2012; Lowe & Dotterer, 2017). Another avenue of involvement is action-focused, such as when parents do things for or with their child, such as assisting with academic work or practicing a sport (Cullaty, 2011; Lowe &

Dotterer, 2017; Odenweller et al., 2014). Communication-focused and action-focused involvement can be considered different qualities of involvement as they do different things for the emerging adult. For example, communication can guide an individual through a problem, but action may fix the problem with minimal effort from the individual. Another way of looking at quantity and quality of involvement is who has authority in a student's life. For instance, Padilla-Walker et al. (2014) found three different parent-child authority patterns within the college student population: shared control, personal control, and parental control. With shared control, parents have some authority over the college student's life other than their personal domain. Under personal control, the emerging adult retains all the authority. Finally, parental control is when parents retain authority in all domains of their college student's life. When considering quality of involvement, researchers have suggested that parents can go too far, and this can be considered over-involved parenting (Brussoni & Olsen, 2012; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2012).

### **Over-involvement**

There have been many popular press articles and books that have suggested that parents may be too involved in their child's life (Brussoni & Olsen, 2012; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2012). Brussoni and Olsen (2012) implored researchers to examine the concept of over-involved

parenting because of how popular the idea has become in the public. While research has been increasing on this topic, the line between a healthily involved parent and an over-involved parent has not been clear in the literature. This can be seen in the multiple terms that are used to discuss the concept of parents being excessively involved in their child's lives such as over-involvement (Givertz & Segrin, 2014), over-parenting (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Segrin et al., 2012), overprotection (Brussoni & Olsen, 2012), high levels of involvement (Cullaty, 2011), helicopter parenting (Lowe et al., 2015; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Schiffrin et al., 2014), bulldozer parenting (Taylor, 2006) and intense parental support (Fingerman et al., 2012). This study utilizes the term over-involvement.

The conceptualization of over-involvement has not been clearly delineated in the literature but has included the amount and type of behaviors exhibited by parents, that compromises the development of future independence (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Brussoni & Olsen, 2012). Development can be compromised through over-involved parents fixing their children's problems for them, intervening in their child's life, or directing their child's behavior (Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Odenweller et al., 2014). Other researchers have conceptualized over-involvement as parents providing support multiple times a week (Fingerman et al., 2012) or being in

constant communication with their child (Odenweller et al., 2014). Utilizing previous researchers' conceptualizations, we defined over-involvement as parents who are in frequent contact with their child (at least once a day), provide frequent support to their children (at least once a week), give their child advice and direct their behavior, and occasionally step in to solve issues or make decisions for their child. In regard to intercollegiate student-athletes this could play out in parents assisting with athletic or academic matters, such as talking to coaches, advisors, or faculty members on behalf of their emerging adult. Parents' involvement in athletic matters is one possible difference between student-athletes and their non-athlete peers. Based on this, it is important to study student-athletes to discover the possible impact over-involved parenting has on both their academic and athletic responsibilities.

There are many possible antecedents to over-involved parenting. Researchers have suggested that parents may become over-involved if they are worried about their emerging adult child's life path, meaning they may attempt to be more of a safety net if they think their child needs that (Segrin et al., 2013; Swartz, Kim, Uno, Mortimer, & O'Brien, 2011). Lowe et al. (2015) found that the more parents paid for their college student's education, the more likely they were to be over-involved, and that this was especially true if the student did not have a scholarship. Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan (2014) discovered parents were

more likely to be over-involved if their college student child lived at home and/or if they had fewer siblings. Researchers have also shared that poor communication may lead to over-involved parenting (Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Segrin et al., 2012).

Researchers have suggested that there are several negative outcomes of over-involved parenting for emerging adults. Segrin, Givertz, Swaitkowski, and Montgomery (2015) found that children of over-involved parents responded to social problems by withdrawing, and they had a more challenging time connecting with others. Negatives also included lower levels of family satisfaction, life satisfaction, self-efficacy, feelings of autonomy, coping skills, and academic engagement (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Cullaty, 2011; Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2013). Researchers have also tied other negative outcomes to over-involved parenting, such as higher levels of interpersonal dependency, neuroticism, depression, narcissism, and entitlement (Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Odenweller et al., 2014; Schiffrin et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2012; Segrin et al., 2013). Overall, these researchers have suggested that over-involved parenting hinders children's development (Odenweller et al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2013).

While many researchers have found negative outcomes for over-involvement, a few have suggested that there may be positive correlations to highly involved

parenting. Fingerman et al. (2012) found that emerging and young adults reported higher levels of well-being and a better sense of their goals when their parents were intensely involved in their lives. Harper et al. (2012) discovered that highly involved parents had children that were more socially satisfied with their college experience. Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) found that children of over-involved parents saw their relationship as "high in guidance, involvement, and emotional support" (p. 1186). Whether over-involvement causes more positive or negative outcomes is unclear. However, most researchers have suggested that parents who are over-involved typically want the best for their child (Brussoni & Olsen, 2012; Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2012). Also, it has been discovered that the majority of parents are not over-involved, but it is important to understand the impact of those who are (Lowe et al., 2015).

More research is required to better understand parental involvement and over-involvement within the collegiate student-athlete population so that a more comprehensive understanding of outcomes can be acquired. This is especially true for intercollegiate student-athletes, which is a unique population that has received little attention from parental involvement scholars with a few key exceptions (Dorsch et al., 2016a & 2016b). Intercollegiate student-athletes are also in a unique period of development, that of emerging adulthood

(Arnett 2000; 2004). Both the uniqueness of being a student-athlete and being an emerging adult make this a very important population to study.

### **Current Study**

Overall, there is a dearth of research in regard to parental involvement in the lives of student-athlete emerging adults. Emerging adulthood is characterized as a time when people negotiate relationship changes with their parents as they strive to figure out who they are as an individual. This study strives to add to the knowledge base of this time frame by examining intercollegiate student-athletes and their advisors' views of parental involvement during college. The uniqueness of the intercollegiate student-athlete population requires that it be studied as separate from other college students or from athletes in other developmental stages. The purpose of this research is to assist with filling this gap by examining parental involvement in regard to intercollegiate student-athletes and their athletic and academic endeavors through the viewpoints of both student-athletes and academic advisors for athletics. Specifically, it examines parental involvement in the lives of their intercollegiate student-athlete emerging adult. It also explores the concept of over-involvement as it relates to this population.

The information obtained in this study can be utilized to obtain a better understanding of parental involvement and over-involvement in the lives of

intercollegiate student-athlete emerging adults, which can be disseminated to practitioners and researchers to better assist this population. Having a better understanding of parental involvement in the lives of these student-athletes can assist all those who advocate for this population to assist them with their transition to college and beyond.

The following research questions were assessed in this study: a) How involved do the student-athletes and their advisors feel parents are in the lives of intercollegiate student-athletes? b) In what ways are parents involved in their intercollegiate student-athlete's lives? c) What is the relationship between over-involved parenting and outcomes for intercollegiate student-athletes? and d) How do the views of student-athletes compare to those of their academic advisors for athletics in regard to parental involvement?

### **Methods**

#### **Research Design**

There is a lack of research on the topic of parental involvement in regard to intercollegiate student-athletes. Therefore, it was beneficial to obtain a qualitative comprehensive account about this subject from athletes (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2009). A qualitative, case study method was employed to obtain these accounts and help to uncover information about parental involvement and over-involvement (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Stake, 1995). This method was appropriate

for this study because it allows for a greater understanding of the perceptions held by participants (Stake, 1995).

There are several characteristics that define case study research including a focus on a particular situation, a study of a phenomenon that has space and time boundaries, the use of multiple information sources, and rich descriptions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). In regard to this study, the particular situation is parental involvement in the lives of student-athlete emerging adults. This study was bounded by space; it took place at one large Midwestern university. It also was bounded by time; it took place during the 2014-2015 academic year. Multiple information sources were used including both student-athlete and their academic advisors for athletics. Also, interviews and journals were employed. Finally, this study utilized rich descriptions throughout the results and discussion by including quotes from the participants' interviews and journal entries.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

For this study, all of the researchers have a strong interest in sports and personal experience with their parents' involvement in their sport participation, which impacted their views of the research. The first author has worked in intercollegiate student-athlete services and as a faculty member, and through both positions has heard from both student-athletes and academic advisors for athletics about parents' involvement. She has also volunteered to be an assistant

coach for a junior high girls' basketball team and a high school ultimate Frisbee team. This provided another view of how parents are involved in the lives of their athlete child(ren). She is also the parent of an infant, who she plans to have participate in sport in the future. Both her work and personal life has led her to have some initial opinions on parental involvement. To help limit the impact of her experiences, the author kept a journal throughout the process to help her understand her thought processes. Also, the first author worked with the other authors on this paper and with other colleagues to talk through the research to help limit her personal biases.

### **Participants**

Student-athletes and academic advisors for athletics from a large NCAA Division I institution were asked to participate in this study. Emerging adults who also identify as student-athletes have an important perspective on parental involvement in their lives, since they are one half of the parent-child dyad. With this in mind, student-athletes were included in this study to better understand their experiences. Academic advisors for athletics were also chosen as participants in this study because of their close connection to both students and their parents (Parietti et al., 2013).

A purposive sampling design was used when finding student-athletes, which was aided by the Student-Athlete Support Services Office at a large Midwestern university. This office aided in identifying

potential participants who fit the criteria for this study. The criteria included student-athletes that participated in football, baseball, or softball. These sports were chosen because they were not in-season, and therefore the athletes were available to participate. The student-athletes were also required to have spent most of their childhood living with at least one biological parent. All student-athletes that the advisors indicated met the criteria for this study on the football, baseball, and softball teams were contacted via email about the purposes and procedures of the study. All non-respondents were sent follow-up emails once a week for the next three weeks. A total of three football, two baseball, and three softball players self-selected to participate in the study (Table 1).

We used a purposive sampling to find academic advisors for athletics. The five advisors that worked with the student-athletes that participated in the study were contacted regarding this study. Each of the advisors agreed to be a part of the study. In that way, every student-athlete that participated also had their advisor participate, which made it possible to better compare the two groups. Four of the advisors currently worked directly with student-athletes and one supervised two of the other advisors. Two of the advisors requested to not be directly cited in this paper. The demographic profiles of the advisors are not included in order to limit the ability to identify the participants.

## **Data Collection**

The five advisors and eight student-athletes that agreed to participate in this study were asked to complete a demographic survey. The student-athlete survey included gender, ethnicity, age, sport team, length of participation in their sport, and who they lived with while growing up. The advisor survey included gender, ethnicity, age, teams currently working with, and length of career as an advisor. Each participant was asked to participate in two interviews and to complete a two-week journal.

**Interviews.** Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted twice with each participant by the primary author. Each interview was audio recorded with the approval of the participant, and was conducted in an unused office on the university's campus. The first interview (I1) for student-athletes focused on the student-athlete's relationship with their parents, including how their parents were and currently are involved in their academic and sport lives. Examples of questions include: "How is(are) your parent(s) involved in your athletics currently?" and "How is(are) your parent(s) involved in your academics currently?" The academic advisor's first interview was similar in that it focused on what they had heard from both student-athletes and their parents on their relationships and the advisor's opinions on parental involvement. The questions included "Overall, how involved do you think parents are with their child's athletics?"

In what ways?” The first interviews lasted an average of 22 minutes with a range of 12 minutes to 40 minutes.

The first interview was transcribed prior to the second interview. The second interview (I2) was held two weeks after the first (within two days for all participants) in the same location, and it covered questions that were sparked by the reading of the first interview’s transcripts. The participants turned in their journals when they arrived at their second interview, or emailed them just before the interview, so the only question asked about the journal was their experience completing the journal. Participants were also asked to give feedback about themes that we discovered while going over their first interview, such as how the student-athletes felt about their parent’s involvement and the outcomes advisors saw in regard to parental involvement. Two student-athletes did not complete a second interview. Both explained that they did not have any time for a second interview because of their sport requirements. As the second interview mostly consisted of follow-up questions from the first interview, they were shorter in length, averaging 14 minutes, with a range of 10-22 minutes.

**Journal.** Participants were asked to complete a hand-written or typed journal (J) for two weeks (whichever method they felt most comfortable with). Student-athletes were asked to record when they talked to their parent(s) by any method (e.g., in-person, by phone, text, etc.), which parent(s) they talked to, for how long, and a

summary of the conversation. It was explained to the student-athletes that they did not need to go into detail on any topic that they felt was too personal to share. Advisors were also asked to keep a journal of any conversation they had with parents by any type of contact. They were asked to record when they talked to parents, for how long, and a summary of the conversation. It was made clear that they did not have to add any detail that could be considered inappropriate to share, but they should include information about any sport or academic specific information. All participants indicated that they made a record of each contact with parents, which was determined as an adequate level of participation. One student-athlete did not complete the journal because he left the study. He did allow for the data from his first interview to still be used. It is important to note that this did not allow for triangulation of his information or follow-up questions. Overall, four advisors and six athletes completed both interviews and journals. The data from all participants was still analyzed understanding the limitations presented by having three participants not complete every part.

## **Data Analysis**

After interviews were transcribed and journals were collected, thematic analysis was performed. Pseudonyms were used for all participants. The first step was reducing the data by marking sections of interest (Clarke & Braun, 2014; Seidman, 1998). For

this study, we highlighted any passages that related to the research questions, stood out as unique, seemed interesting, or were related to topics that were repeated by several of the participants. In alignment with Clarke and Braun's (2014) second phase of thematic analysis, these sections were coded based on what they had in common or was unique about them and each transcript was compared to the others looking for repeated ideas or unique items. The third step was to categorize the codes into themes based on the relationships that they share (Clarke & Braun, 2014; Glesne, 2011; Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2006; Seidman, 1998). As suggested by Clarke and Braun's (2014) fourth and fifth phases, the potential themes were reviewed with all of the data and then named. The themes that emerged were types of involvement, increasing involvement, over-involvement, outcomes of over-involvement, and the fine line between healthy involvement and over-involvement.

### **Credibility**

Triangulation was utilized in this study in the forms of multiple data sources: student-athletes and academic advisors, and multiple methods: interviews and journals (Schwandt, 2007). Multiple data sources allowed for the examination of parental influence from two viewpoints, the children of the parents themselves, and people who work with the student-athletes and often hear from them about their parents or hear from their parents directly. By interviewing

both of these parties, we were able to compare what the student-athletes share in the interviews, to what they tell their advisors, and what the advisors have directly experienced by interacting with parents. Journals allowed for a comparison between what the participants shared in the interviews and the actual conversations they had with parents.

For this study, member checks were completed by conducting second interviews. These follow-up interviews included questions that arose after examining the first interview, and questions based on the themes and interpretations that we had discovered. These checks allowed us to corroborate the findings with the participants (Schwandt, 2007). It also helped to give the participants more power to have their "voice" heard accurately (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

An attempt at thick description has already been included in this methods section. We have endeavored to be very detailed in what methods were used and for what purpose. We also used direct quotes from the participants within the results section. Two advisors asked to not be directly quoted for their study, so their information was utilized only for overall perceptions of parental involvement. Our goal was to have readers feel that they would have come to the same interpretations that we did, and that they could replicate the study in a context of their own interest (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Sparkes, 1998).

Any negative or unique cases were explored through the analysis phase of this study. There were a few areas where one or two participants disagreed with the others. This information was studied and shared in the results section. This was done to give the most complete, accurate account possible (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

### **Findings**

How parents are involved in their child's life can have a large impact on how they influence their children. Overall, the participants indicated that parents are often involved in the lives of the student-athlete. As the advisors described it, parents wanted to be informed of what was going on in their child's life. Joe explained that from his "previous experience with parents, they just want to be informed and in the know" (I1). The student-athletes talked about how their parents were always there in some capacity in their lives, even once they entered college. April said, "I'm glad they're still around...to be involved still as I'm in college" (I2). Parental involvement may take different forms and levels.

From the data collected from both the student-athletes and the advisors we discovered several themes. The themes that emerged were types of involvement, increasing involvement, over-involvement, outcomes of over-involvement, and the fine line between healthy involvement and over-involvement. Types of involvement included the different ways that parents were involved in the life of their emerging

adult. Increasing involvement discusses how parental involvement has been on the rise recently. The theme of over-involvement arose from the participants discussing when parents are too involved, and then they discussed the outcomes of parents being overly-involved. Finally, participants shared that while parental involvement was normally good, it could easily cross a fine-line into being too involved.

### **Types of Involvement**

The student-athletes indicated that since they started college, their parents were still very involved in their lives. For example, Devin explained that his parents tried to be as involved as they could still be with his college athletics. "My mom's still the head freshman mom" (Devin, I1). They also shared that their parents were involved in their lives in different ways. The ways parents are involved in their children's lives as described by the participants in this study can be categorized as communication-focused or action-focused involvement.

Communication-focused involvement included any time parents talked to their student-athlete. All of the student-athletes in this study had frequent contact with their parents. They each talked to their parents almost every day, and most had contact with their parents multiple times a day. Each of the student-athletes were asked what they typically talked to their parents about. As indicated by these participants, a lot of their communication was about their general lives. This included basics about their life or

details about their day. For example, April reported that she spoke about, “just pretty much how our days are going” (I2).

A specific form of communication-focused involvement was the giving of advice. In these cases parents were involved by talking to their emerging adult about a decision, problem, etc. Many times these conversations were driven by the students as reported by Alec, “I definitely look to them for advice. I trust them a lot to lead me in the right direction” (I1). Ron shared that he would, “go to them if I have you know, issues with coaches or anything like that” (I1). Although Ron’s parents never talked to the coaches, they would help him deal with the issues himself by helping him “put the pros and cons on the table and make the best decision” (I1). Other times the conversations were started by the parents. If Devin had a problem he would “call my mom and dad and figure out a solution together as we always do if something happens” (I1). Paul explained that he would only involve his parents if a problem “was really big and something that I would say could be really either beneficial or detrimental” (I1). Denise shared that, “He [her father] finds things to give me advice about” (I2). April indicated that her parents often provide her with advice, “they still give me advice every day of how to interact with people, how to drive my car, to be careful for black ice, to just keep in contact with people” (I1). All of the student-athletes said they received some

sort of advice from their parents since they had started college.

In some cases, parents helped to steer their student-athlete toward certain decisions such as classes to take and experiences to pursue. April shared that her mother encouraged her to take classes to help her interact with people, which led to her pursuing a minor in that area despite it not being an initial interest of hers. April indicated that, “at the end of the day, they know what’s best for me” (I1). Renee shared a similar experience where she shared, “my dad is probably the biggest influence, like for my job/career because we’re always talking about this wildlife officer thing, and he’s the one who brought it up to me, like made me actually think about it.” (I1). In this way, these parents were very involved in their emerging adult’s academic and career choices.

Action-focused involvement included anytime parents stepped in and did work for the student-athlete or talked to others in order to assist their emerging adult. Brad shared a time when his mother spoke to his coach when Brad had an issue with the coach’s approach but indicated that this was “the only situation that’s ever been really, my parent who stepped in for me personally” (I1). Parents found other ways to be actively involved. Paul’s mother talked to his coach and discovered that he could possibly get some benefits to assist with paying for his academics. Paul felt that that his mother pushed to help him but it seemed that he was not sure how to

capitalize on the situation because he did not fully understand, “she was talking about something that I need, that some coach told her I should do about, I don’t even know, like help, I’m not even sure, to help put me in some position or something like that” (I2). In addition, Denise and Paul stated that their parents helped to proofread their papers for class, which showed an active involvement in their academics.

### **Increasing Involvement**

The advisors that participated in this study shared that they have seen an increase in how involved parents are in the lives of their student-athlete. Joe shared that “I don’t think parents were that involved when I first started in this industry...I probably started seeing this maybe about five, six years ago” (I1). Frank agreed by saying “they’re more involved than they were five years ago” (I1). Anna has found that parents are continuing to be more involved, saying “compared to when I got in this field four years ago...now you have parents come in more” (I2). All the advisors agreed that they had seen an increase in the involvement of parents over their career. The student-athletes all shared that their parents were very involved in their lives. “They’re involved a ton” (April, I1). The student-athletes were not able to provide insight into how parental involvement has changed in regard to intercollegiate student-athletes since they did not have the experience of interacting with intercollegiate sports over an extended period of time. Therefore, they

were unable to provide insight into the changing nature of parental involvement for intercollegiate student-athletes.

### **Need for Involvement**

The advisors and the student-athletes believed that parental involvement was needed, even at the college level. Frank explained that he “always have been under the belief that more kids that had success here have been the ones who have gotten support from their mom and dad” (I1). Anna also believed parental involvement was important; she shared that “there’s those parents who...[are] involved kinda right away. Typically, what I’ve found is students are pretty well prepared for college” (I1). All of the student-athletes talked about how they appreciate their parents being involved in their lives.

The student-athletes were asked how they would react if they could not talk to their parents for one week, and the majority shared that it would be an extreme hardship. April answered, “I would be devastated” (I2). For Brad, not talking to his parents for a week would make him feel, “terrible...their kind of my support system. I really depend on them for a lot of emotional and mental support” (I2). The student-athletes wanted to be able to talk to their parents whenever they wanted to talk to them.

### **Over-Involvement**

The advisors shared that while parental involvement is important, there are times

when parents take it too far. None of the student-athletes addressed over-involvement or possible outcomes. This may be because they do not have the “outside” perspective that the advisors had or because they all believed their parent’s level of involvement was “just right.” Also, the advisors did not refer to any parents directly, so it was impossible to know if they were referring to any of the parents of the student-athletes that participated in the study.

The advisors used the terms helicopter and bulldozer to describe some of the experiences they had with parents. For example, Joe explained that he:

had experiences with helicopter parents. The new term is the bulldozer parent. My son cannot do wrong and you know, basically if he failed the exam, you know, it’s not their son’s fault, it’s whatever support was given to that son. (I1)

Each of the advisors at some point mentioned either helicopter or bulldozer parents, without any prompting. It was a topic that they all felt was important.

Some of the advisors gave examples of times that parents were highly involved in their student-athlete’s life, to the point of possible over-involvement. Anna shared a story of a student-athlete whose mom had called her about a problem the student-athlete was having with his class schedule. She explained that, “his mom reached out first. So he obviously went to his mom and then his mom came to me...it’s kinda that,

almost what we’ve started to call not even helicopter parents anymore but bulldozer parent” (I2). Anna believed that the student should have come to her to discuss any issues with his class schedule instead of his mother. Frank told of a transfer student with whom he had been working and how he had talked more with her mother than he had with her; it was “like the kid just runs to mom and then mom and dad try to take care of everything” (I2). These were all examples of very involved parents.

However, the advisors did share that the majority of the parents that they worked with were not over-involved. Anna said “rarely do I see, at least, oftentimes, the kind of bulldozer parent that’s clearing the way...for the most part, the parents kind of keep themselves in check” (I2). All the advisors said that they only dealt with a handful of parents that they would label as over-involved each year.

While the advisors had seen parents that were over-involved in their college student-athlete’s lives, the student-athletes that participated in this study all believed that their parents were involved just the right amount. When asked how she felt about her parent’s involvement in her life, Denise responded, “I love it...I wouldn’t have it any other way how they are now” (I1). To the same question April replied, “they’re involved a ton. I love how involved they are” (I1). The student-athletes did not appear to think that their parents were over-involved.

## **Outcomes of Over-involvement**

All of the advisors believed that they had encountered parents that were over-involved, and they all shared that this type of involvement was detrimental to the student-athletes. The advisors shared that they believed the over-involved parents wanted to help their emerging adult. “I think both parties think they’re actually helping, but I think in my mind, it’s actually hurting.” (Frank, I2). Overall, the advisors believed that parents wanted to be helpful, but they sometimes went too far, and that only hurt their children. There were two main areas that they believed were negatively impacted when parents were over-involved: the preparedness of the student-athletes and the student-athlete’s development.

The advisors shared that student-athletes whose parents were over-involved came to college less prepared. “I personally think the students are just less and less prepared because mom and dad are doing more and more” (Frank, I1). “What concerns me is they come in with these habits almost of their parents doing it for them from high school” (Anna, I2). Both of these advisors believed that when parents did work for the students when they were younger, the students did not know how to do work for themselves once they went to college. The other advisors agreed that student-athletes were less prepared to face a lot of the administrative parts of being in college because they were used to other people doing the work for them.

Along with being less prepared to start college, the advisors believed that student-athletes with over-involved parents were inhibited in their development. This was especially true when parents stepped in to fix problems for their student-athlete. Frank shared that “they [parents] try to be supportive, but I think it becomes more detrimental to the kids, it doesn’t allow them to grow, it doesn’t allow them to just face the consequences of a bad decision” (I1). Joe shared that overall he thought, “we’re starting to see a generation of kids that have been enabled all their life and not ever really had to learn how to be independent or learn how to advocate for themselves” (I1). These advisors felt that student-athletes’ development was inhibited if their parents were too involved.

## **Fine Line**

Overall, the advisors believed that parents should be involved in their student-athlete’s life, but they should not be too involved. There is a fine line between helping and hurting their child. “What worries me is that they don’t know how, when to pull back...It’s definitely important to have a role in it [academics], but I think that they [parents] need to almost know their place a bit” (Anna, I2). Joe shared that “parents need to let their students face adversity and learn how to deal with the coping skills to learn how to deal with that” (I1). An example of a parent doing this was Brad’s mother, who he shared would give him advice and was very involved in his life.

However, she also told him to, “make your own decision, develop your own leadership abilities and character traits, but you’re going to have to also deal with the consequences” (I1). Joe would likely have found this a “healthy” level of involvement. The implication was that parents need to be careful with the boundaries of their involvement in their child’s life.

The advisors shared that they believed the overinvolved parents wanted to help their child:

The scary part of it for me is...I think both parties think they’re actually helping, but I think in my mind, it’s actually hurting. I don’t think the parents are doing it to stifle their kid’s growth, and I don’t think the kids doing it to take advantage of their mom and dad. It’s just that’s the nature they’ve been raised and to try and help them break through of that, we’re doing more at the college level now than we’ve ever had to do. (Frank, I2)

Overall, the advisors believed that parents wanted to be helpful, but they sometimes went too far, and that only hurt their children. This is a fine line because parental involvement is helpful, even necessary, up to a point. Past that it can become very detrimental. The advisors all indicated that this line existed, but no specific guide for what was too far was offered.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of intercollegiate

student-athletes and academic advisors for athletics on the topic of parental involvement in the lives of student-athlete emerging adults. While there has been an abundance of research on parental involvement, minimal work has been done considering the emerging adult student-athlete population. Overall, this study attempts to fill some of this gap in the literature on this population and parental involvement. A qualitative case-study was done considering the research questions: a) How involved do the student-athletes and their advisors feel parents are in the lives of their intercollegiate student-athlete? b) In what ways are parents involved in their intercollegiate student-athlete’s lives? c) What is the relationship between over-involved parenting and outcomes for intercollegiate student-athletes? and d) How do the views of student-athletes compare to those of their academic advisors for athletics in regard to parental involvement?

The themes discovered through the data analysis were types of involvement, increasing involvement, over-involvement, outcomes of over-involvement, and the fine line between healthy involvement and over-involvement. Overall, these themes both support and add to previous research on parental involvement during emerging adulthood, specifically within the student-athlete population. Themes aligned with the view that parents are still an important agent of support for student-athlete emerging adults (Dorsch et al., 2016a; Lowe & Dotterer, 2017). Unlike previous research,

this study included academic advisors for athletics, who had a unique vantage point from which to discuss parental involvement since they were involved in both the academic and athletic lives of student-athletes. Also, the advisors were able to give the perspective of seeing the evolution of parental involvement in regard to intercollegiate student-athletes that the student-athlete participants did not have.

### **Parental Involvement**

Overall, the current study shows that parents are involved in the lives of student-athletes in many ways that include both academic (e.g., assisting with classes and helping choose majors) and athletic elements (e.g., attending games and talking to coaches). The addition of the athletic element makes the student-athletes unique from their peers. The academic advisors explained that most of the student-athletes that they worked with had parents that were involved. It appeared with this study that the student-athletes wanted their parents to be involved in their lives. They all felt that their parents were very involved in their lives, and they all loved how involved their parents were. This was similar to the findings of Dorsch et al., (2016a), Fingerman et al. (2012), and Cullaty (2011) who all found that the majority of their participants felt that their parents provided just the right amount of support. Combined with previous research, it is possible that emerging adults, including student-athletes, will see whatever level of involvement they

are used to their parents displaying as the “right” amount, no matter what that amount is.

Researchers have suggested that parental involvement on college campuses has been increasing since the early 2000s (Cullaty, 2011), which was supported by the academic advisors in this study, the majority of whom indicated they’d seen an increase since they started working. Similar to Givertz and Segrin’s (2014) study, the student-athletes in this study were in frequent communication with their parents. The student-athletes in this study shared that one of their reasons for communicating with their parents was to receive advice. Our findings were contrary to Pizzolato and Hicklen (2011) who found that almost half of their participants involved their parents when making important decisions, but most of them only chose to do that once. We found that the participants in this study indicated that they chose to include their parents more often. This disparity could be because the current study had a small sample of students who all indicated they were very close to their parents, therefore, how “close” student-athletes are to their parents may be related to how often they include parents in their decision-making.

It should be noted that according to the participants in this study, parents were involved in their emerging adult’s lives in different ways and to different levels. Bradley-Geist and Olson-Buchanan (2013) shared that it is important to consider the quantity and quality of parental

involvement. The participants indicated that the support they received was similar to the findings of Fingerman et al. (2012) who shared that most of the support their participants received from their parents was in the form of listening, emotional support, and advice. This could be considered communication-focused involvement because the parents are not taking an active role in doing things for their student-athlete. The participants in this study also received more action-focused involvement from their parents in the form of helping to solve problems and assisting with academic work. Dorsch et al. (2016a) also found that parents were still actively involved in the lives of intercollegiate student-athletes. This again shows that it is important to consider how parents are involved once athletes go to college.

Overall, the participants felt that parental involvement was a good thing. This follows what previous researchers have found (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Cullaty, 2011; Dorsch et al., 2016b; Odenweller et al., 2014). The advisors explained that they felt student-athletes were more prepared for college and were better able to handle the transition when their parents were involved. The student-athletes in the current study also felt that they could make important decisions, and that their parents would support whatever those decisions were. However, according to the advisors in this study, the involvement could go too far into over-involvement.

**Over-involvement.** Researchers have found little consensus on how to conceptualize over-involvement. This study utilized a definition that combined a few of the different conceptualizations; over-involvement is when parents are in frequent contact with their child (at least once a day), provide frequent support to their children (at least once a week), and occasionally step in to solve issues or make decisions for their child. The advisors indicated that they had interacted with parents that would fit that definition. They shared that they would term some of these parents helicopter or bulldozer parents, which are the colloquial terms used in the popular press to identify over-involved parents (Bradley-Geist & Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Odenweller et al., 2014; Schiffrin et al., 2014). This shows that over-involved parents are of concern for those who work with student-athletes, as the advisors had all found need to negotiate those relationships.

The definition of over-involvement used in this study requires parents to meet four criteria frequent contact, frequent support, advice giving/directing behavior, and occasionally stepping in. Following this definition, none of the student-athletes in this study had over-involved parents. However, they all had parents that met three of the four areas. Each of the student-athletes were in frequent contact with their parents and received frequent support. Most of the student-athletes also shared that they received advice from their parents. Two of the student-athletes, April and Renee,

indicated that their parents had directed their behavior by leading them toward a minor or major. Only one student-athlete shared that his parent had stepped in to solve an issue for him while he was in college. Brad's mother had talked to a coach about how his coaching style was not conducive to Brad's success. His mother might be considered the most involved because of this, but Brad did not indicate that he received support at least every week from his mother, so she does not fit this study's definition of over-involvement. The fact that none of the student-athletes indicated that their parents fit the definition of over-involved parenting could be why they all saw positive outcomes with their athletics and academics. It is also possible that the definition utilized for this study is too specific, and may need to be adjusted (e.g., meeting three of four criteria).

The advisors in this study had strong feelings against over-involved parenting. Similar to the findings of Dorsch et al. (2016b) the advisors in this study felt that when parents were too involved they hurt their student-athlete's preparedness for college and their overall development. One of the reasons they said this happened was because the student-athletes felt entitled in that they believed other people should do their work for them because their parents had done so. Givertz and Segrin (2014) and Segrin et al. (2012) both shared that children of over-involved parents had a greater sense of entitlement than those who did not have over-involved parents. Some researchers,

such as Fingerman et al. (2012), Harper et al. (2012), and Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) all found some positive correlates to over-involved parents. While the advisors in this study did not see any positives, the fact that the student-athletes in this study all had very involved parents and they felt it was a good thing suggests that parents being heavily involved might not be bad.

Researchers have found that over-involved parenting often happens because parents are concerned about their children and want to protect them (Brussoni & Olsen, 2012; Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Segrin et al., 2012). Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) and Segrin et al. (2015) both suggested that over-involved parents were worried about their child's wellbeing. The advisors in this study also suggested that the parents that they had encountered wanted to do the best for their children.

The line between a parent being involved and being over-involved is blurry. The advisors all indicated that there was a point where involvement went too far, but they did not offer a specific line. The only indication they gave was that it was very important for parents to be involved, but at some point, the involvement would hurt the student-athletes. From what they did share, this point appeared to be whenever parental involvement prevented the student-athletes from facing adversity and learning to cope with it.

Some might consider the parents of the student-athletes in this study to be too

involved because they were in frequent contact, and their parents provided large amounts of advice and support. However, when examining what previous research has discovered about the outcomes of over-involved parenting, there is evidence that the student-athletes in this study did not have over-involved parents. The majority of the student-athletes in this study were successful both athletically and academically. This would indicate that their parents' involvement in their life was beneficial in those areas. This was unlike the findings of Padilla-Walker and Nelson (2012) who found lower levels of academic engagement when parents were over-involved. Next, the student-athletes in this study shared that they believed that they had the autonomy to make their own decisions, and that their parents would support their decisions. Again, this was unlike what previous researchers suggested happened when over-involved parenting existed (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012; Schiffrin et al., 2014). These signs are indicative that the student-athletes in this study did not have parents that were over-involved. Though, it is possible that other areas of their lives were more negatively impacted by how involved their parents were. This study did not examine areas such as self-efficacy, dependency, neuroticism, depression, narcissism, and entitlement that other researchers had discovered as issues with over-involved parenting (Dorsch et al., 2016a; Givertz & Segrin, 2014; Schiffrin et

al., 2014; Segrin et al., 2013; & Odenweller et al., 2014).

### **Limitations**

This study has a few limitations. As a qualitative study with a small participant sample, this research cannot be generalized. The participants in this study self-selected to participate and all self-identified as Caucasian. It is possible that this skewed the results as only students who had parents that were involved may have chosen to participate. The lack of racial/ethnic diversity could be a limitation as previous research has found racial/ethnic differences in parental involvement (Hill et al., 2004), which could not be examined in this research. Also, this study was solely conducted at one NCAA Division I university, with a small subset of teams, and therefore may not be representative of student-athletes at any other university, in other sports, or of any other age. Finally, no parents were involved in this research based on a lack of access, which prohibits any discussion of how parents see their relationship with their children. Future research can attempt to address these limitations by obtaining access to different types of participants and/or by conducting a quantitative study which would allow for more generalizability.

### **Implications**

This study offers implications for both practitioners that work with athletes and researchers. Both parties can benefit from a

greater understanding of how parents are involved in the lives of their intercollegiate student-athletes. This study shows that parents are involved to different extents and in different ways. Future research can more fully examine the differences in how parents are involved through further exploration of the viewpoints of any individuals who may experience this relationship such as student-athletes, parents, advisors, coaches. Research can also be done to determine the outcomes of the different types of involvement. Practitioners can utilize this information to better communicate both with athletes and their parents because of a greater understanding of how parental involvement is perceived and connected to intercollegiate student-athlete outcomes.

This study has shared that there is a fine line between a healthy involvement level and a parent being over-involved in their emerging adult's life. It is possible that the parents and the student-athletes do not even realize that the parents are over-involved. All of the student-athletes in this study thought their parents were involved just the right amount, but some of them indicated that their parents were involved to the point that could be considered over-involved. It might be useful those who work with student-athletes to sit down with parents and have a discussion about the benefits of giving their emerging adult more freedom to make mistakes and fix their own problems. The advisors shared that they had seen student-athletes who were inhibited by their parents' involvement, and it might benefit

parents to hear how their actions may be influencing their emerging adult. Hopefully, this would encourage some parents to examine their relationship with their student-athlete to see how they may improve their involvement strategies. They may also explore why their relationship is the way that it is. Student-athletes might also benefit from knowing if their parent is over-involved so that they can work with their parent to find a more healthy balance of involvement. Many individuals who work with intercollegiate student-athletes (e.g., advisors and coaches) also have interactions with parents. They can include discussions on parental involvement when they meet with parents and student-athletes or they can refer both parties to resources on parental involvement, such as current research or popular press articles that explain current research.

Researchers can utilize the information discovered in this study to more closely examine the concept of over-involvement and how it impacts all athletes. Additional quantitative studies could be conducted that gives a more wide-spread view on the issues of parental involvement and over-involvement by including several universities and/or teams. Quantitative studies could also examine parental involvement outcomes, such as academic and/or athletic performance. Also, research can be done that includes the views of parents and how that relates to how athletes view involvement and over-involvement. This would offer another perspective on

parental involvement, which would give a more complete picture of the topic.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, this study offers more insight into parental involvement in regard to emerging adult student-athletes. Notably, findings revealed that most parents are involved in the lives of intercollegiate student-athletes through different types of involvement that could be categorized as communication-focused or action-focused. Also, it showed that similar to what universities have been experiencing as a whole, intercollegiate athletics has also seen an increase in parental involvement. Importantly, the advisors in this study were able to give unique insights into the increase in parental involvement as well as the concept of over-involvement and the possible outcomes of overinvolvement. Overall, it was determined that there is a very fine line between healthy involvement and over-involvement that needs to be considered more fully in future research. Findings from this research help to identify how parents are involved in the lives of their intercollegiate student-athlete emerging adults to assist all who are involved with this population. This will potentially benefit student-athletes' development and the operation of athletic programs.

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## Tables

Table 1

*Demographic Information about Student-Athletes*

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Team	Parent Lived With
1. Alec	Male	White	18	Baseball	Mother and Father
2. Ron	Male	White	21	Baseball	Mother and Father
3. Devin	Male	White	19	Football	Mother and Father
4. Paul	Male	White	20	Football	Mother and Father
5. Brad	Male	White	20	Football	Mother
6. April	Female	White	20	Softball	Mother and Father
7. Renee	Female	White	21	Softball	Mother and Father
8. Denise	Female	White	22	Softball	Mother and Father