

12-2020

High School Athletic Administration's Policies and Rights to Sanction Student-Athlete's Social Media Use

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High School Athletic Administration's Policies and Rights to Sanction Student-Athlete's
Social Media Use

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of the Department of Leadership Education

College of Education

of Winona State University

by

Eric S. Peterson

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

Date: December 9, 2020

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Abstract

This qualitative survey investigated how much authority high school athletic directors have when monitoring student-athletes’ social media accounts while also determining whether athletic directors believe it is necessary to implement social media policies for student-athletes.

An in-depth literature review supports evidence of the legality of athletic code of conducts based on previous court cases and a theoretical framework. Twenty-five athletic directors from the state of North Dakota participated in the study via an online survey. The study obtained basic demographics and determined how the administrators have implemented current social media policies, along with understand their views on policies for student-athletes' social media accounts. Analysis of the study showed that student-athletes' social media usage may be regulated by school administrators if the post contains speech that causes or creates a reasonably, foreseeable, and substantial disruption to the school environment. The researcher determined that policies include the sanctions that are implemented when a student-athlete violates the athletic code of conduct. However, there was a decisive number of athletic directors who do not see the necessity of implementing a social media code of conducts as they believe the challenges of creating guidelines outweigh the benefits of providing policies. The researcher determined that in order for athletic directors to feel inclined to create a code of conduct one must create explicit details pertaining to the legality of social media policies. While social media policies may not be the preferred method for athletic directors it provides efficient and legal guidance on how to handle any problems that may arise.

Keywords: Social media, policies, high school, athletic directors, code of conducts

Introduction

Social media has become a major communication tool for many high school student-athletes around the United States and carries both benefits and risks. It is used as a strategic tool for athletic administration to market and brand their athletic programs, along with engaging with fans. Additionally, social media is a major resource for high school athletes to gain exposure for college recruiting. Student-athletes also use multiple forms of social media to communicate (Sanderson, 2018).

The increase in communication via social media has created a complex environment for high school administration. It is difficult to control all student-athletes' social media activity as they can post at any time, from any device that contains an Internet signal. Moreover, administration has even less control over messages sent than in the past, creating risk management challenges (Sanderson, 2018). To deal with these challenges, the United States Supreme Court have long used the *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community Sch. Dist.*, 1969 court case to deal with students' free speech rights in the context of an educational environment. While *Tinker* is a great precedent for courts to go back to, social media has changed immensely over the last decade. This means the laws and athletic codes of conduct for these athletes needs to as well.

Problem Statement

Citizens in the United States, which includes students, are guaranteed the constitutional right of freedom of speech. However, school administrators also need the authority to regulate student speech that may be disruptive to the educational environment or demeaning to coaches or

staff members. This leads to the question of how do school administrators balance students' First Amendment rights and the justification to regulate speech, especially outside school property? The U.S. Supreme Court has attempted to balance the protection of the right to free speech for students and the complete authority of school administrators. Students are not required to "shed their constitution rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate," as explained by *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community Sch. Dist.*, 1969. It was established in *Tinker* by the U.S. Supreme Court that it can only be justified for school officials to prohibit student expression if they are able to demonstrate that the "student's conduct would materially and substantially interfere with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school" (Bemiller, 2012).

The "schoolhouse gate" has now become outdated in today's landscape as outlets of student expression are now varied and constant. The Internet has made it, so students have greater fluidity between on- and off-campus expression. This has created a challenge for administrators in determining when student speech, either delivered via social media or physically spoken on school grounds, deserves disciplinary action. *Tinker's* standards now need to be reinterpreted into a 21st-century context (Blacher, 2013).

Courts have turned the current standard into a smoke screen that conceals a school's obligation to address fundamental social responsibilities of civil dialogue in a democratic society. This is supposed to be the primary purpose of education. Furthermore, courts have dismissed and excused personal responsibility of the adolescents. Recent cases have shown how schools are reluctant to reach past the perimeter of their physical campus to deal with student misconduct in the wider physical and online communities. These cases have made it clear now is

the time to discard the antiquated concept of the “schoolhouse gate,” reconsider the rights of student speech, and strengthen standards of civil discourse (Blacher, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine how much authority athletic directors have when monitoring student-athletes’ social media accounts. There is a lot of gray area in regard to students’ free speech right. This study is meant to determine what is and what is not authorized for athletic administrators when sanctioning athletes at their school. In addition, the research will determine whether athletic directors believe it is necessary to create policies that limit social media use by student-athletes.

The punishment applied by administration is not necessarily meant to hurt the students-athletes, but rather hold them to a standard of academic excellence and prepare them for their future college and work endeavors. By informing school administrators when it is appropriate to sanction student-athletes for violations of their athletic code of conduct they are able to monitor and regulate social media use more confidently. It also gives athletic directors the ability to better inform what is considered acceptable and unacceptable to all student-athletes. Students also have a more definitive understanding of what is considered right and wrong when it comes to social media activity.

Background of the Problem

The nature of a “substantial disruption” has changed since Tinker. Instead of involving walkouts, demonstrations, marches, or any other over-the-top event that intentionally disrupt class time, substantial disruptions are now almost entirely invisible, silent, and covered in façade and pretext (Blacher, 2013).

An example of the courts using the outdated “schoolhouse gate” and “substantial disruption” concepts took place in 2010 in a California federal court case. A student, J.C., went to a local restaurant in Beverly Hills, California with other students and recorded a four-minute, thirty-six second video that was revolved around another student, C.C. The conversation included C.C. being called a “slut” and “spoiled” among other derogatory terms. J.C. eventually uploaded the video to You-Tube where it was viewed by fellow students, including C.C. School administrators investigated the situation and ultimately disciplined J.C., but J.C. had responded by saying the school could not discipline her. She emphasized that the speech took place off campus and the speech was consistent with the First Amendment, and the U.S. District Court agreed with J.C. After a thorough review of case law, Judge Stephen Wilson concluded that applying the Tinker rule, the school administration could not discipline J.C. The court held that the speech did not meet the “substantial disruption” standard (Blacher, 2013).

Research Questions

Do high school athletic directors have the ability to sanction student-athletes for violating athletic code of conducts for their use of social media?

Are high school athletic directors concurrently inclined to create policies that restrict student-athlete social media use?

Limitations/Delimitations

The research for this study was administered to every high school athletic director in North Dakota through an online survey. While the goal is to get a response from every participant it is not feasible to receive a 100% response rate.

The participants selected in this study are all high school athletic directors located in North Dakota. Therefore, the results of this study may not be applicable to those in other geographical regions, school levels, or professions.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are being operationally defined for the purpose of this study:

Athletic Director: Responsible for budgeting and fiscal management of the athletic department, revenue generation, arranging for athletic contests, contracting for services rules compliance, hiring and firing head coaches, representing the athletic department to external constituents, fundraising, alumni relations, and capital projects (Greenburg, 2016).

Athletic Code of Conduct: A set of conventional principles, values and expectations that are considered binding on any person who is a member of a particular group (Raveendran, 2014).

Sanction: A way to enforce rules through rewards for positive behavior and punishments for negative behavior (Sanction, 2014).

Social Media: web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd, 2007).

Student-Athlete: An individual who engages in, is eligible to engage in, or may be eligible in the future to engage in, any sport (Sports, 2004).

Summary

The introduction to this study included an overview of how communication between high school students has changed with the evolution of social media. The use of social media comes with both benefits and risks for student-athletes, making it difficult for school administrators to regulate.

The Tinker court case was also discussed in this chapter and has long been the precedent to deal with students' free speech rights in the context of an educational environment. It is important to use as a tool for future court cases, but social media has changed the definition of the "schoolhouse gate." With that, regulation for school administrators and how they are able to sanction their student-athletes' behavior needs to be reinterpreted into a 21st-century context. Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine how much authority administrators have when student-athletes' social media accounts. Background on the study, as well as the research question, were included in this chapter as well. Additionally, limitations along with delimitations were listed at the end of Chapter 1.

Review of the Literature

This chapter is organized first by introducing the history of off-campus Internet speech at the high school level. Next, the theoretical framework is examined, followed by the use of policies by school administration for social media. The final section that is reviewed is the regulation of student-athlete's social media.

Court cases have long used Tinker as a precedent for off-campus Internet speech. Speech taking place outside school property are organized into three separate classifications. The first classification is off-campus speech that target school personnel. The second classification entails off-campus speech that targets other students. The final classification includes speech that involves threats. While each classification has different standards in the courtroom, they all look at if the speech creates a substantial disruption in the school.

The theoretical framework looked at self-determination theory, perceptual control theory, and psychodynamic perspectives to gain more perspective on student-athletes' use of social media. These theories all look at the reasoning as to why adolescents log on to social media accounts and what they do when they are on social media.

Creating policies on social media usage can be a challenge for school administrators. The goal for the administration is to balance student-athletes' right to free speech and the authority to regulate their social media use. Within this section are subsections that include: social media's role in social activism, the posting of problematic or inappropriate content, the regulation of private information, and the risks that surround policy.

The final section included in the literature review is the regulation of student-athlete's social media. This segment takes an in-depth look at certain court cases that involve high school

student-athletes. After going over the court cases, the application of the cases to regulating social media is examined.

Historical Overview of the Problem

The U.S. Supreme Court has made it difficult for school administrators to know when they are authorized to intervene over student off-campus Internet speech. Federal court cases do provide guidance, but they have become a case-by-case basis as to whether online speech creates a substantial disruption at school. Once a student's online speech is deemed to have created a substantial disruption within the school, administrators are allowed to act (Eckes, 2015). The following classifications of court cases have addressed student off-campus online speech. Each set of cases examine how much authority school officials have been given in monitoring this type of expression.

Off-Campus Speech That Targets School Personnel

In the court case *Doninger v. Niehoff*, 2008, a Connecticut high school student posted that the superintendent, along with other school officials were “douchebags” from her home computer. She inclined that the high school administrators were “interfering with the students’ plans to hold a jam fest in the school auditorium.” School officials later learned of the online post and prohibited the student from running for student council. In response, the student, along with her mother, appeared on a local news station to discuss the situation. Students in the high school also protested by wearing “vote for Avery” t-shirts to school. The 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals ultimately upheld the district court’s decision granting summary judgement to the school district. The 2nd Circuit found that the student’s speech likely would create risk of substantial disruption (Eckes, 2015).

Unlike the 2nd Circuit, the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals reached a verdict in favor of students between two cases that involved online speech involving school personnel. In Pennsylvania, two court cases, *Layschock v. Hermitage Sch. Dist.*, 2011; and *J.S. v. Blue Mountain Sch. Dist.*, 2011. These cases included two different students that used their home computers to create a parody of their principals. Both students were disciplined by their school district. However, the 3rd Circuit ruled in an en banc decision that the students could not be disciplined. This is because school officials were not able to logically forecast the profiles would create a substantial disruption within the schools (Eckes, 2015).

In the *Layschock* case, a student used his grandmother's computer to produce an Internet profile imitating to be his principal. Within the profile there contained fake answers to numerous questions. The answers included in the fake profile of the principal were deemed derogatory by school administrators when they learned of the profile. The student was ultimately suspended, placed in an alternative education program for the remainder of the school year, banned from attending any extra-curricular events, and prohibited from attending graduation. The 3rd Circuit found no evidence of substantial disruption to the school, affirming the district court's decision to grant summary judgment in favor of the student (Eckes, 2015).

Similarly, in the J.S. case, a student created a profile on the Internet that included her principal using sexually explicit content. While the content did not include either the principal's or school's name, it did contain the principal's picture. The profile had limited access to only the student's friends. Even though there was no undisputed evidence of disruption to school, the student was suspended. The district court granted summary judgment in favor of the school district, but the 3rd Circuit overturned the verdict. The 3rd Circuit reasoned that the student's right to free speech was more sufficient than the fear of a disturbance within the school (Eckes, 2015).

Interestingly, the 2nd Circuit authorized school administrators to discipline students for making derogatory comments that take place online. The 3rd Circuit, meanwhile, sided with the students in both instances. What these cases appear to rely on is whether administrators at schools can point to evidence that a substantial disruption will likely occur at the school (Eckes, 2015).

Off-Campus Speech That Targets Other Students

The court case, *Kowalski v. Berkeley County Schools*, 2011, involved a high school student in West Virginia. The student created a web page using a computer from home that wrote a classmate "had herpes" and "was a slut." The web page included photos of the classmate, and students at the school were invited to comment on the page. The district court granted summary judgment in favor of the school district, and the decision was upheld by the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals. Relying on *Tinker*, the 4th Circuit found that the off-campus speech allowed for school administrators to intervene as the web page did not align with the school's educational interests. In addition, the speech collided with the rights of other students and created a substantial

disorder. It was conceivable that the off-campus would reach the school. Other circuits have also permitted administrators to sanction students for speech taking place online in which classmates were targeted if the speech caused a substantial disruption in the school (Eckes, 2015).

Online Speech That Involves Threats

While school administrators have a justified right to be concerned about preventing violence, including school shootings, it is not always clear as to when they are able to regulate online posts related to violence. If a student posts a true threat, the threat is not protected under the First Amendment. However, administrators may be confused by what constitutes a true threat.

A court case involving a Nevada high school student, *Wynar v. Douglas Cnty. Sch. District.*, 2013, consisted of the student writing about how he would commit a school shooting from his home computer. The writing included the student identifying the school, specifically naming two classmates, and provided the date in which the shooting would take place. The student also explained that he had weapons and ammunition in which he had access to. The school district eventually expelled the student for 90 days. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the district court's decision in granting the school district summary judgment. It was found that there was no First Amendment violation because the student's threat had serious implications to school violence. *Tinker* was also relied on by the 9th Circuit to reason that school leaders were able to reasonably forecast a substantial disruption occurring in the school. The Court of Appeals carefully noted that the decision of this case was limited to the facts in this particular circumstance. Specifically, this case did not address the actions that could take place had the students mocked school officials or harassed other students.

In New York, the court case *Wisniewski v. Bd. Of Educ. Of the Weedsport Central Sch.*, 2008, involved a middle school student sending an instant message. In the message, the student sent an icon to a friend that included a pistol firing bullets at a person's head that included the words "kill Mr. VanderMolen," the student's English teacher. When school officials found out about the message the student was suspended from the school for one semester. The parents of the student challenged the punishment on First Amendment grounds, arguing that the speech of their son was not a true threat. The federal district court's decision of granting summary judgment to the school district was upheld by the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals. The 2nd Circuit agreed that the icon used in the instant message crossed the boundary of protected speech, posing a reasonably foreseeable risk of substantial disruption. The decision by the 2nd Circuit was not based on whether the speech constituted a true threat, but instead applied *Tinker* to determine the appropriate analysis.

The court case *D.J.M exrel. D.M. v. Hannibal Pub. Sch. Dist.*, 2011, took place in Minnesota. The case involved a student that sent an instant message through a home computer to a classmate stating that he planned on getting a gun and would shoot students at school. The student expressed that he had access to weapons, and that he wanted his school "to be known for something." School administrators were notified and contacted the police, who placed the student in a juvenile detention center. The student was later expelled for the remainder of the year by the school district. The 8th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the district court's decision that found the online speech by the student could be reasonably understood as a true threat. The student's speech, therefore, was not protected under the First Amendment. It was also noted by the 8th Circuit that the First Amendment did not require school administration to wait for the

shootings to take place before disciplining this student. Even under a significant analysis, it was found that the school was substantially disrupted due to the student's threats.

School administration is more often than not able to discipline student speech that advocates violence. The speech can either be considered a true threat that is not protected under the First Amendment or considered unprotected using the Tinker analysis. In either case, administrators are given more freedom to curtail speech in cases that involve threats to the school (Eckes, 2015).

Whether it be speech targeting school personnel, other students, or involving threat, off-campus speech often contains a gray area as to what speech is allowed and what is not. When violence is involved, however, school administration often has more protection in disciplining students for their actions. The subsequent section examines some theories that look at why high school student's social media use may need to be regulated by school administration.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Determination Theory

The basis of self-determination theory (SDT) maintains that "an understanding of human motivation requires a consideration of innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness" (Deci). The concept of SDT emphasizes that in order for psychological well-being, integrity, and growth there needs to be conditions specific to an individual's needs. Due to the needs of each individual it is hypothesized that regulatory processes that underly the pursuit of each goal are associated differently with effective well-being and functioning. Along with this each goal has a different relation to the quality of mental health and behavior. Specifically, this is due to different goal contents and different regulatory processes being associated with each

individual's degree of need satisfaction. Intrinsically motivated behavior and integration of extrinsic motivations are natural growth processes which are facilitated through individual differences and social contexts that support satisfaction of humans' basic needs. On the other hand, the individuals that forestall relatedness, competence, or autonomy generate poor well-being, performance, and motivation (Deci, 2000).

Deci and Ryan (2000) reason that the human organism's adaptive design has evolved to pursue connectedness in social groups, to exercise capacities, to engage in interesting activities, and to integrate interpersonal and intrapsychic experiences into a relative unity. In order to act in harmony with one's integrated self and to be the casual mediator of one's own life an individual has a need for autonomy within their innate psychological need. Autonomy is something that all individuals fundamentally desire. They instinctively desire to experience themselves through their own actions as the true cause, to show their true selves through engagement in actions, and to act in accordance with their genuine preferences and desires (Deci, 2000).

Along with autonomy, individuals have an innate psychological need for competence to deal with the environment they find themselves in. One desires competence to feel as though they have personal impact on others, self, and the environment, along with to achieve valued outcomes. The need for competence pushes people to seek opportunities for personal mastery to acquire and maintain knowledge, skills, and competencies, and to seek challenges that are optimum for their capacities. Competence comes as a result of an individual's interactions with their environment and is a feeling of confidence rather than the result of one's skill. Competence is gained through a person's adaptation, learning, and exploration as they take on what they view to be an optimal challenge (Karahanna, 2018).

Similar to autonomy and competence, relatedness is a person's innate psychological need. Relatedness is formed from an individual's need to experience caring for others, to be connected, and to interact. Therefore, one's need to for relatedness involves mutual love and care for those they have a relationship with. Relatedness is experienced when interacting with social partners who express caring, warmth, nurturance, and affection, who are involved and available emotionally, and who love them (Karahanna, 2018).

Self-determination theory guides the fulfillment for individuals to use social media as it reassures psychological needs. Before there was social media, website owners most often created and presented passive content for their users, meaning they were unable to comment or easily add their own content to existing online platforms. Now, with social media, users have the ability to both personalize and create information however they like. Therefore, SDT is viewed as a prominent aspect of social media as individuals are given the authority to act on their environment along with managing their behaviors in a self-determining manner (Karahanna, 2018).

Perceptual Control Theory

Melina Throuvala's (2019) Perceptual Control Theory (PCT) states that "all behaviors are driven by individual's need to control their perceptual experience." Therefore, behavior is organized around the perceptions of one's own control and the reduction of the inconsistency that potentially arises. There may be discrepancy in perception when two competing goals conflict or are mutually exclusive. The conflict that ensues leads to distress and ultimately causes the behavior to continually readjust in an attempt to reduce that discrepancy.

The PCT model, which acts on perception, leads to a continual feedback loop. The comparison and action of this feedback loops leads to the hypothesis that through peer comparison and their perception adolescents are motivated to behave on social media in a way where their actions consistently reorganize their behavior to reduce distress. The need for control in a high urgency and intensity environment may lead to specific maladaptive social media-related behaviors. These behaviors include the fear of missing out (FOMO) a cause of developmental or clinical concern, or compulsive checking. This can lead to problematic use of social networks and has the potential to lead to an addiction to social media use (Throuvala, 2019).

Psychodynamic Perspectives

Validation for the first motivational theme, which includes a symbiotic relationship between smartphone attachment and peers online via social media, may be found in psychodynamic perspectives. There is a psychological need for adolescents for validation from peers, feedback, and personal expression. It has been hypothesized that the family has been displaced by identification models that are continually met by the digital realm, causing this need for adolescents to be amplified. The adolescents of today view smartphones in their own unique way, where the device offers a connection with themselves and the world. The smartphone and social networks are often viewed as a source of power, while becoming a reassuring extension of inner psychological life, personality, and motivations. Previous scholars have regarded object attachment as an instrument for anxiety reduction while recent evidence has supported this. Thus, smartphone use, intertwined with social media use, arguably sustains this symbiotic relationship between the object-device and peers (Throuvala, 2019).

School Administration Policies for Social Media

Social media by younger athletes has become the predominant tool for communication with others and carries both benefits and risks. Social media technologies have also increased exponentially within the sport industry over the past decade. It has become an important tool for intercollegiate athletic departments to market and brand their athletic programs. Additionally, university administrators, along with their athletic programs, are now using social media to recruit potential high school students (Sanderson, 2018). According to Dr. Nora Barnes, Director for the Center of Marketing Research at University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth, the number of colleges and universities that searched social networks of potential students was 20% in the fall of 2007. As of 2013, that number is now up to 68% of colleges and universities who review applicant's social media as a tool in determining prospective student's viability in attending their institution (Miah, 2013). It is important for student-athletes to determine if their social media activity is appropriate when applying for colleges.

The increase in communication by student-athletes via social media has created a complex environment for school administrators. Social networking is difficult to control because student-athletes are able to post content using any devices that has an Internet signal. As a result, schools have less control over messaging than in the past, creating more risk management challenges.

Historically, the most prevalent mechanism in managing and controlling social media use by student-athletes was through policy. These policies range in scope and ubiquity, with some offering casual instruction, while others restrict certain platforms of social media from being used. Although these policies are able to help reduce public relations incidents, they often lack

importance and efficacy. There is also the potential of violating the constitutional rights of student-athletes. In addition, social media is a platform some use to pressure organizations to act. Therefore, when administrators attempt to limit speech on platforms such as social media, these decisions invite critique and complicate policies toward social media.

Social Media's Role in Social Activism

In recent years, social media has become a platform for activism, including by student-athletes. Football players at the University of Missouri in 2015 implied through social media that they would not play for the university again until there was a change in leadership. The student-athletes organized and enacted economic pressure on the university to address its leadership. The major takeaway from this case was that student-athletes are mindful of social justice issues as it was one of the first times they used social media as the main communication source to promote social justice. The athletes at the University of Missouri were willing to take a great risk to stand for what they believed in.

While the university did not take action to punish the players, comments from fans on social media, along with other stakeholders, called for these student-athletes to lose scholarships and receive other forms of punishment. While not all cases are this extreme, they allow student-athletes the opportunity to learn about and participate in discussions centered around social justice issues, such as racism. Additionally, it mobilizes and connect others to bring awareness to these issues (Sanderson, 2018).

Posting of Problematic/ Inappropriate Content

When student-athletes post on social media problematic or inappropriate content (e.g., content that is sexually explicit, documents illegal behavior, or racially or ethically insensitive) it

creates a major talking point and can trigger public relations incidents. It can be difficult to predict the rationale for such posts, but there are multiple reasonings that exist (Sanderson, 2018).

First, as stated before, social media is now a major communication tool for the student-athlete population. This will only increase as a notable proportion of social media users are represented by current children and teenagers. With this being the case, future high school student-athletes may cultivate social media behaviors that do not conform to what the public, administrators and coaches might expect (Sanderson, 2018).

Another reason as to why student-athletes may post content that is inappropriate is due to frustration. There are number of reasons why student-athletes may be frustrated, including coaching styles, playing time, or issues occurring in their personal lives, and choose to vent about it on social media. Going to social media right away to express displeasure can lead to unintended consequences for the student-athlete. The media and fans are likely to react to the post and potentially exaggerate the situation. There is also the possibility that inappropriate post can have long-term negative impacts for the student-athlete. Along with colleges and universities checking on prospective student's social media activity, employers also use social media more often than ever to evaluate job candidates. A post such as complaining about playing time could create questions about the student-athlete for a future employer about how they will handle interpersonal relationships and difficult situations at work (Sanderson, 2018).

Finally, student-athletes may post inappropriate content centering around activism and self-expression. This area can is overly complex and controversial as what the student-athlete believes to be self-expression may be at odds with the school administrators. At the University of

Wisconsin, men's basketball player Nigel Hayes was highly active through social media in critiquing the model of amateurism set in place by the NCAA. Hayes was never disciplined by the university for his commentary, but the posts nonetheless created a significant amount of media attention. All the extra attention by the media introduces alternative viewpoints on collegiate athletics, which leads to questions that administrators and coaches often eschew (Sanderson, 2018).

Student-athletes may also have strong feelings about issues such as gender equality, racism, gun control, and LGBTQ equality, and have the right to express their opinions. It can be difficult to work with student-athletes when expressing their viewpoints on these topics as administrators are bound by protocol and policy set in place by their school district. It is beneficial for administrators to talk to student-athletes about the consequences that may result when posting about one or more of these topics on social media. The administrators can encourage the student-athletes to articulate their position to allow their followers as to who they are and what they represent. This can lead to less negative pushback as it shows the student-athlete has a good understanding of what they are expressing (Sanderson, 2018).

Regulation of Private Information

The use of social media has made it easy for people, including student-athletes, to disseminate private information to the public. This has made it difficult for school administrators to regulate messages on social media in ways similar to with traditional media (Sanderson, 90).

One example is if a coach or administrator did not want the media to talk to an athlete, for whatever reason, that athlete could be made off-limits for interviews. However, in the current

sport media era, student-athletes have the ability to create a news story and public relations incident at any time of the day as long as there is an Internet connection (Sanderson, 2018).

Policy has become a common tool in high school schools to manage social media accounts used by student-athletes. Researchers have found that social media policies tend to be largely ineffective, though. There is also the potential of violating First Amendment rights when policies are used as a means to regulate unwanted, but not illegal, speech. While some coaches argue that the restrictions put in place are often player-driven, and therefore, acceptable, many legal experts' question whether the constraints are egregious. Furthermore, there is speculation from these experts that the restrictions put into place are to prevent student-athletes from posting demeaning or problematic behavior from coaches. The use of social media is also used as a way to promote active learning in classrooms. If a student-athlete is not allowed to use social media they could be put at a disadvantage in the classroom due to those policies (Sanderson, 2018).

There are benefits for student-athletes and athletic programs when policies are in place. For instance, policies are a way to establish boundaries for student-athletes. Inappropriate content being posted can be reduced when student-athletes are aware of what is expected behavior from school administration. By educating student-athletes about expectations, lawmakers have reasoned that defining terms such as "inappropriate" helps student-athletes have a clear explanation to what limits are allowed (Sanderson, 2018).

With benefits, there also comes issues when applying policies. When policies do not reflect the contemporary landscape of social media, the credibility of school administrators is hindered. There are also policies that restrict the use of social media during the season for student-athletes. These restrictions are often viewed as a preventive measure, but they can have

negative relational impacts. The use of social networking is a communicative tool for student-athletes, and if it is cut off, conflict between players and coaches may emerge (Sanderson, 2018).

These issues have driven some administrators to use educational models, rather than monitoring, as their primary focus. Instead of framing social media in negative ways, the educational approach helps student-athletes view the benefits of social media use. There is also the opportunity of student-athletes to seek training and guidance on the proper usage of social media. This leads to student-athletes being more receptive of the school administrators and is a valuable way to promote a more collaborative approach that conducts better awareness of what is being posted, while being aware of the risks (Sanderson, 2018).

Risks of Policy

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valuable way to promote a more collaborative approach that conducts better awareness of what is being posted, while being aware of the risks (Sanderson, 2018).

Regulation of Student-Athletes' Social Media

As stated before, courts have been reluctant to interfere with the regular operations of school systems when a resolving conflict has arisen. The U.S. Supreme Court has long recognized the court case *Tinker* to balance students' free speech rights and the comprehensive authority of school officials. *Tinker* has established that administrators only have the ability to prohibit a student's free speech if they are able to demonstrate that the student's conduct would substantially disrupt the operation of the school. There are several narrow exceptions that have been recognized by the Supreme Court in which the school may restrict speech with no significant fear of disruption within the academic setting (Bemiller, 2012).

In the court case, *Bethel Sch. Dist. v. Fraser*, 1986, the Supreme Court established that school administrators may regulate profane and "plainly offensive" speech on school grounds. During school sponsored activities, such as a school newspaper, student speech may also be restricted (*Hazelwood Sch. Dist. v. Kuhlmeier*, 1988). Most recently, the Supreme Court restricted the advocacy of illegal drug use by students during a school-sponsored and supervised event (*Morse v. Frederick*, 2007). These precedents have divided courtrooms as to applying these guiding cases, however, because they do not directly address the issue of the use of off-campus Internet that explicitly targets school personnel. Along with these narrow exceptions, athletic teams and extracurricular activities have a different standard inside the courtroom (Bemiller, 2012).

Student-Athlete Court Cases

The use of social media by student-athletes regarding school administrators and their coaches is viewed as a different matter in the eyes of the courts. The precedent is that students do not have a general constitutional right to participate in school sports or in extracurricular activities (*Brentwood Academy v. Tennessee Secondary Sch. Athletic Assn.*, 2001). Along with this, student-athletes are subject to greater restrictions than the overall student body (*Vernonia Sch. Dist. v. Acton*, 1995). The U.S. Supreme Court has held that student-athletes do not have the same level of privacy expectations because “by choosing to ‘go out for the team,’ they voluntarily subject themselves to a degree of regulation even high than that imposed on students generally” (Rosenbaum, 2014). Therefore, student-athletes are generally unsuccessful when they claim free speech protection after being suspended or dismissed from their team for criticizing their coach (Bemiller, 2012).

The court case, *Lowery v. Jefferson County Board of Education*, 2007, was referred by the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals to address the balance of a coach’s authority to maintain team discipline and student-athlete’s free speech rights. The case involved a petition by members of the football team that stated they “hated the coach” and “did not want to play for him.” Once the coach was made aware of the petition, the players were questioned by the coaching staff. The players that signed the petition but later chose to apologize to the coach were able to stay on the team. The other players who signed the petition but chose not to apologize were suspended from the team (Bemiller, 2012).

Tinker was applied by the appellate court to balance free speech by the players and administrative authority in the context of scholastic sports teams. The issue in this case was

whether the players who signed the petition to remove the coach had a right to continue participating on the football team. The appellate court reasoned that using Tinker there was a reasonable expectation of a substantial disruption on the team due to the petition undermining the authority of the coach. It was also held by the court that the undermining of the coach's authority would cause a disservice to other members of the team, and the potential discord within the team would invalidate the coach's ability to lead the team effectively. The determination of the court was made by differentiating team participation and suspension from school, and as noted, losing the privilege to play football did not interfere with the education of the student-athletes. It was noted by the court that the students still had the right to continue campaigning to remove the coach. However, they were not permitted to continue playing football as a voluntary, extracurricular activity for the coach as long as they actively oppose the coach's authority (Bemiller, 2012).

In *Seamons v. Snow*, 1998, the U.S. Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals addressed the student-athlete's removal from his high school football team. The player refused to apologize to school administrators and local police for reporting that his teammates assaulted him and reasoned that his First Amendment right to free speech was violated. The Tenth Circuit found that his dismissal from the team violated his right to free speech. A student-athlete may not be punished for the truthful reporting of egregious or illegal behavior from his teammates to administrators of the school (Rosenbaum, 2014).

The court case, *Wildman v. Marshalltown School Dist.*, 2001, was analyzed by the U.S. Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals to determine if a student-athlete's First Amendment right to free speech was violated. The student-athlete had circulated a letter calling for action against the head coach of her basketball team and was later removed from the team. The player alleged that

because she gave an apology to the coach and her team she should have the ability to continue participating, and her right to free speech had been violated due to her subsequent dismissal. It was determined by the Eighth Circuit that there was no violation of the student-athlete's First Amendment right for the dismissal as the letter displayed "insubordination and disrespect." This provided the coach and school the right to maintain an atmosphere free of disruption and one with positive sportsmanship (Rosenbaum, 2014).

Applying Court Cases to Student-Athlete's Social Media Regulation

While there are limitations, high school administrators have a more expansive ability to regulate a student-athlete's social media usage compared to the general student population. In regard to the general student population, administration has the right to regulate student speech only if the speech satisfies the substantial disruption standard. Overall, social media usage is more limited than speech occurring via more traditional means as it is most often used off school grounds, while it is the administration and athletic department's responsibility to maintain a balance between the school's educational environment with the right to free speech for student-athletes (Rosenbaum, 2014).

When it comes to out-of-school speech, student-athletes' social media usage may be regulated by school administrators if the posts contain speech that causes or creates a reasonably foreseeable, substantial disruption to the school environment. This includes on the playing field. Although it seems as though the regulating student-athletes' speech is stricter than the general student population, the actual regulation and punishment may prove more difficult in reality compared to how it would theoretically seem. This is because courts narrowly interpret what conduct is considered substantially disruptive, making it more difficult to limit the student-athletes'

speech. In addition, there are no Supreme Court decisions regarding school administrator's capability to regulate a student-athlete's speech via social media. This further inhibits school administrator's determination as to regulating this speech while also staying within the confines of the First Amendment (Rosenbaum, 2014).

While the use of social media outside of school can be difficult to control, administrators have considerably greater freedom when regulating student-athletes' in-school usage. School administrators are allowed to prohibit and punish social media posts by student-athletes it creates a foreseeable substantial disruption in the school environment. Posts that are vulgar, obscene, lewd, unsportsmanlike, insubordinate, or plainly offensive may also be prohibited. Additionally, the boundaries of the school environment are extended past the physical structure to the playing field, allowing administrators to regulate social media use at interscholastic events to the same degree as within the physical school building. The scope of in-school speech has the possibility to extend to the team's transportation to and from the event based on the regulation during athletic events. With these guidelines in place, administrators have the ability to regulate social media accounts used by their student-athletes while at school-sponsored events (Rosenbaum, 2014).

Social media usage by student-athletes is a trend that likely will not disappear in the near future. As a result, it is imperative that school administrators to keep student-athletes' social media use in check while also ensuring they do not infringe on the players' right to free speech (Rosenbaum, 2014).

Summary

Tinker has long been used as the precedent when dealing with off-campus speech involving both school personnel and students. In order to evaluate the use of social media by student-athletes, it is imperative to understand the court's use of Tinker, along with how courtrooms view speech that takes place via the Internet off-campus. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled in favor of school administration based off Tinker if administrators can point to evidence of a substantial disruption within the school. If there is no substantial disruption caused at the school the courts will side with the students to protect their freedom of speech. On the other hand, when violence is involved in online speech, administration is given more freedom to discipline student speech. The advocacy of violence that is considered a true threat is not protected under the First Amendment. Therefore, the courts often rule in favor of administration in cases involving violence.

The theoretical framework analysis uses theories that have previously been studied and correlates the finding with social media use by student-athletes. Self-determination theory, perceptual control theory, and psychodynamic perspectives are all theories that explain the use of social media by high school students.

School administrators' task of creating policies on communication for student-athletes via social media has become harder in recent years. Their goal is to balance students' right to free speech and create policies that reduce public relations incidents. The different areas that administrators may restrict or regulate speech for include social media's role in social activism, the posting of problematic or inappropriate content, the regulation of private information, and the risks that surround policy.

Finally, the regulation of student-athletes' social media use takes a look at court cases involving student-athletes and how these cases are applied to policing social media usage. Student-athletes are held to a different standard than their classmates because it is not in their constitutional right to participate in extracurricular sports. Therefore, school administrators and coaches have a right to regulate speech via social media outside of the school if it contains speech that may cause a substantial disruption at school. Administration has even more freedom when usage takes place in-school, along with at interscholastic events.

Research Methodology

The purpose of the proposed study was to extract current policies used by North Dakota high school athletic departments, along with athletic directors' views on social media policies. The conclusions are intended to benefit athletic directors in better understanding how to implement and utilize student-athlete social media policies in their own school.

Chapter 3 includes the two proposed parts to the research that look to articulate on the research question. The population of the study, along with the setting will be identified. The instrument utilized in the study will also be described. In addition, the data collection and data analysis procedures will be presented, concluded with a summary of the Chapter.

Research Design

To adequately answer the research question provided in this study, the researcher implemented a two-step process through a survey. The researcher utilized both a deductive qualitative content analysis and a non-experimental qualitative grounded theory research design to sufficiently gain information for the study. The deductive reasoning approach looks at existing material through test hypotheses and principles (Bemiller, 2012). This approach was conducted to establish the landscape of current social media policies in place. The grounded theory research is defined as an "inquiry from sociology in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants" (Ary et al., 2014, p. 33). The ground theory approach was utilized to discern how athletic directors view different policies for social media use by their student-athletes.

Sample

The participants for this study included athletic directors from the North Dakota High School Athletic Association (NDHSAA) schools. The NDHSAA includes all public and private high schools in the state of North Dakota who provide athletics for their students. The member schools contain a total enrollment of 78,499 high school students (North Dakota High Schools, 2018), with 27,212 of those students participating in sports (Fundingsland, 2019). Each NDHSAA school consists of one athletic director, with the Fargo Public School District including a department athletic director as well. In all, there are 174 athletic directors that oversee North Dakota's high school athletics.

To achieve an adequate sample size, the researcher sought to receive as many participants as possible. Therefore, all 174 athletic directors in North Dakota were solicited to participate. Due to the number of participants and the distance being substantial between all individuals the setting of the study took place electronically. The researcher administered all information and surveys via an online survey.

Instrument

To properly gain research using both deductive qualitative content analysis and non-experimental qualitative grounded theory the researcher collected data from willing participants through an online survey. Once approval of the research project was obtained by the Winona State University Internal Review Board, 174 North Dakota high school athletic directors were invited to participate in the study. The invitation was sent through email that contained a link for the online survey. After the link was accessed, participants were able to give their consent and answer the questions for this study.

Data Collection Procedure

To begin collecting data the researcher first had to receive permission from the Winona State University IRB to conduct the study. Once permission was granted the potential participants were solicited through email to inform them about the study and to give their informed consent to participate. The email sent to participants explained the importance of the participant's participation in the study and the goal of the survey. Within the email, there was also a link to the online survey with instructions on how to complete it.

While the research consisted of both a deductive qualitative content analysis and a non-experimental qualitative grounded theory research design there was a single survey conducted. The survey was designed to derive answers from both methods, with the survey being broken into three sections. The first section included questions regarding demographic analysis. The second section inquired about current social media policies within North Dakota high school departments. The final section consisted of questions about athletic director's views on policies for student-athlete social media use.

Maintaining a confidential and secure database is vital to keep an honest and open relationship with those willing to participate in the study. Merriam-Webster defines anonymity as "the quality or state of being unknown to most people: the quality or state of being anonymous" (n.d.). Similarly, Trochim (2006) outlined the basis of anonymity, "which essentially means that the participant will remain anonymous throughout the study – even to the researchers themselves" (para. 4). As a result, the researcher maintained anonymity of the participants by advising them which instruments would be used (i.e., online survey) along with how the data would be collected (i.e., electronically). In addition, the researcher did not use any

identifiable information that would be available to the researcher to further maintain confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Included in the online survey were five questions that asked about current social media policies in place by athletic departments in North Dakota high schools. These questions were designed to indulge in deductive qualitative content analysis. An in-depth examination of the answers to these questions were used to create a coding sheet for this study. The coding sheet focused on a summative form of qualitative content analysis to allow for the collection of content to be probed in several forms within a select policy. In addition, an iterative approach was utilized to allow the researcher the ability to capture the different ways in which policies can include certain context, with the total context of student-athletes' social media use being kept in mind. The information that was obtained by the athletic directors in regards to their athletic departments' policies were examined by the researcher to find the existence of these specific types of content: student-athletes' understanding as to whether or not they are being monitored by school administration; punitive measures, along with what disciplinary actions are set in place; and content/ language that is restricted for student-athletes. Participants also had the opportunity to provide any other insight into their high school's policies at the end of this section. By deriving data from each policy, one of the researcher's goal was to focus on finding a variety of different ways each policy contained the variables listed above. The other goal of the qualitative data analysis was to create descriptive meanings within each school's policy related to the variables of this section, rather than through numbers alone. This allows for the researcher to take a more comprehensive approach at looking at the policies on social media and their ambiguity.

The other facet of the study, based upon qualitative grounded theory, involves a systemic coding process to assist in finding themes and categories to analyze data. The researcher used the data collected from the online survey to find these trends using coding. “In a brief explanation, the analysis process in grounded theory involves concept labeling, categorizing, identifying core categories, finding relations among categories, and generating a theory from such relationship (Cho & Lee, 2014, 7).”

Using grounded theory, the researcher searched to find trends that incorporated seven questions designed to see how athletic directors view policies for social media use. The data collected from the athletic director’s views on policies was sorted, coded, and analyzed. The researcher sought to sort the data into categories, understand the data, and acquire a theory through coding.

This section, aimed to derive athletic director’s views on social media policies, was coded according to these select dimensions: the necessity of student-athlete social media policies; the challenges of creating policies; benefits of using social media; policies as a deterrent for negative social media use; the capacity of monitoring social media use; restriction taking away student-athletes’ right to free speech; and restrictions raising legal issues. The researcher used the dimensions listed above determine if there were any themes or similarities among the athletic director’s views on social media policies.

With the desire to determine which aspects of a student-athlete social media policy athletic directors viewed as beneficial and important, and if athletic department’s current policies are effective, the data was analyzed to determine if there were any reoccurring similarities or

themes within North Dakota high schools. When there were themes present, the researcher attempted to develop a theory according to these findings.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the qualitative methods of research used to perform the study. It includes the research designs, the population and setting used in the research, the instrument used to collect data, the data collection procedure, and the plan to analyze the data.

Results

Introduction

To gain a better understanding on current social media policies used in high school athletic departments and how athletic directors view social media policies for student-athletes, the researcher administered an online survey to current athletic directors throughout the state of North Dakota. The researcher applied both a qualitative content analysis and a grounded theory research design to gather data from the participants.

Chapter IV begins with describing the sample selected to participate in this research. This section provided characteristics that were important for the study. The second section of this chapter analyzes each question employed in the online survey, with 18 separate charts used. The data analysis section was divided into three categories: demographic questions, current social media policies questions, and views on social media policies questions. Each category described the reasoning for the questions used and showed the results for each question.

Description of Sample

Willing participants in this study included athletic directors who are affiliated with the NDHSAA. The athletic directors utilized in this study oversee approximately 27,212 high school student-athletes in the state of North Dakota. In order to ensure absolute anonymity, there was no information gathered or included in the survey that could be considered identifiable to any individuals.

The researcher selected the participants based on their status as high school athletic directors in North Dakota. All 174 NDHSAA athletic directors were solicited via a direct email seeking their participation in the study. The email included the reasoning for the study, an

informed consent form, and a link to the online survey. The survey contained 22 questions in total that gathered information regarding demographics of the participants, current policies athletic directors have in place, and the athletic directors' views on social media policies for their student-athletes. The athletic directors that agreed to participate in this research project were informed that responding to the survey administered consent and all participation was voluntary, with the ability to stop participating at any time.

Data Analysis

In regard to this study, data was analyzed from eight demographic questions, six questions with respect to current social media policies within athletic departments, and seven questions on views concerning social media policies on high school student-athletes. A total of 25 athletic directors agreed to participate in the study.

Demographic Questions

The eight demographic questions used were included to find trends within the athletic director population. The trends that were focused on were whether age, gender, education, number of years served as an athletic director number of years served within a certain school/district, number of students overseen, athletic programs' use of social media, or personal use of social media played a role in whether an athletic department implements policies on social media use. In addition, these select demographics attempted to find trends in regards to the athletic directors' views on social media policy. The results from each demographic question follow.

Demographic Questions Results

For each demographic question, the athletic directors selected the answer that best fit themselves. The two questions inquiring about the social media platforms they use for their athletic programs and personally allowed for multiple answers, resulting in more than one answer per participant.

Figure 1
“What Is Your Age?”

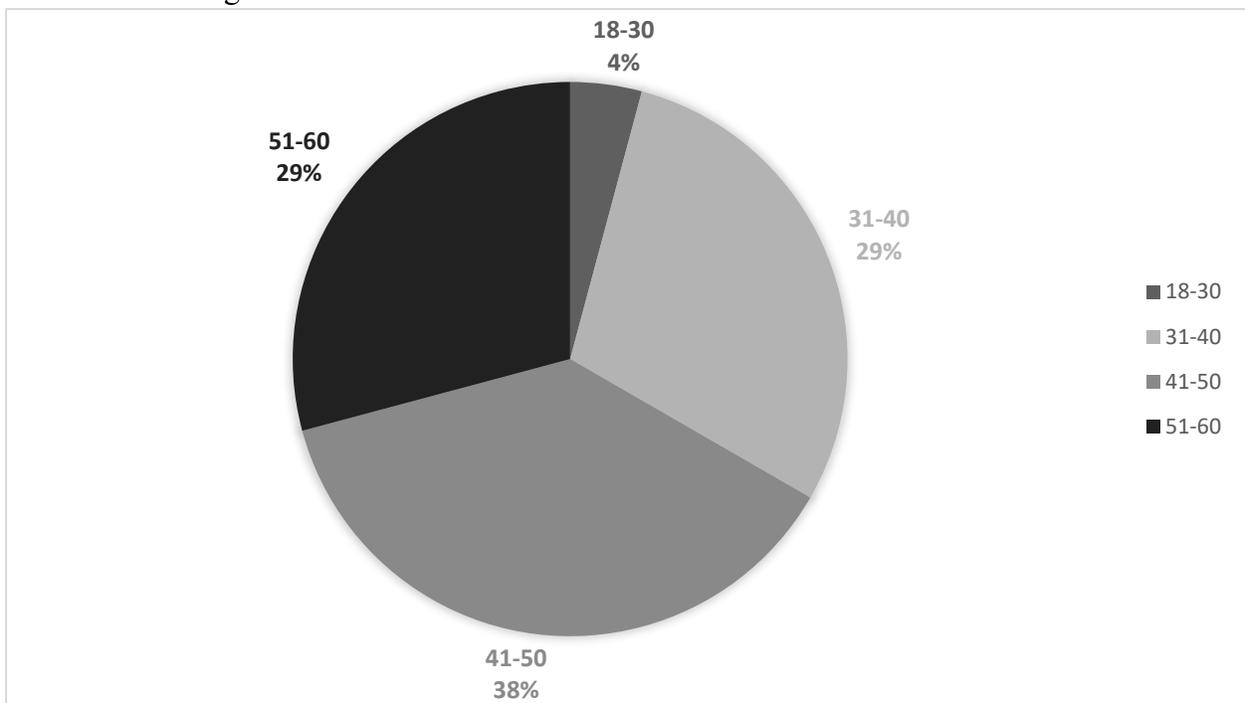


Figure 2
“What Gender Do You Identify As?”

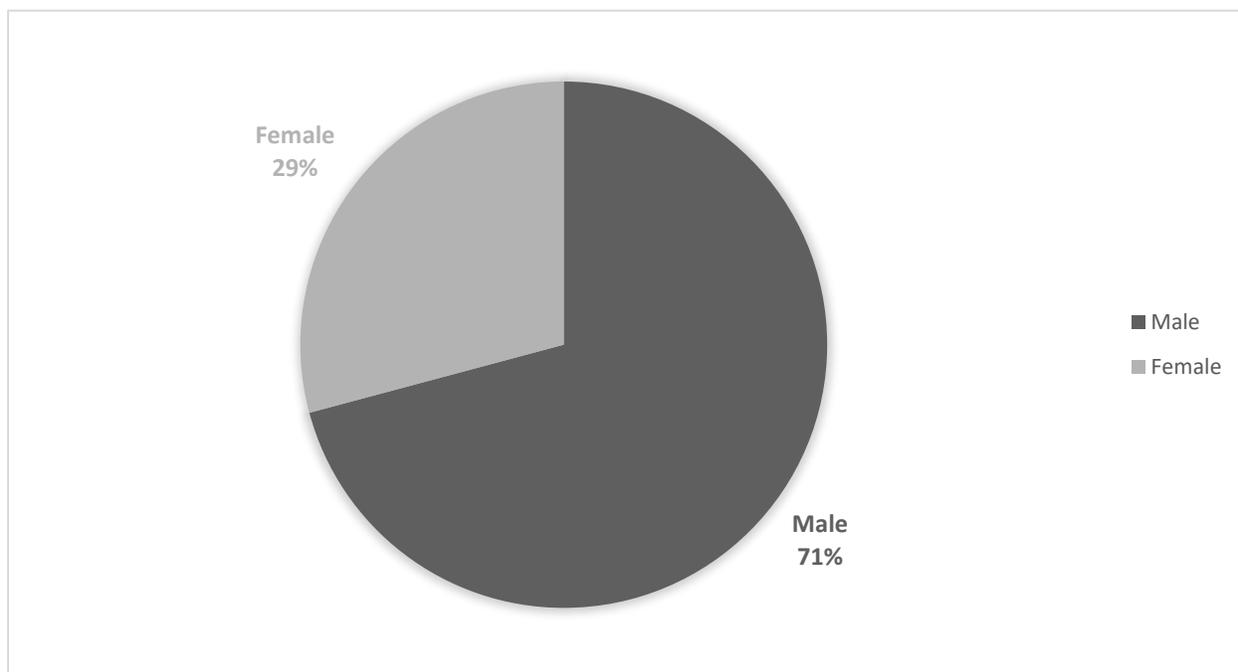


Figure 3
“What Is the Highest Degree, or Level of Education You Have Completed?”

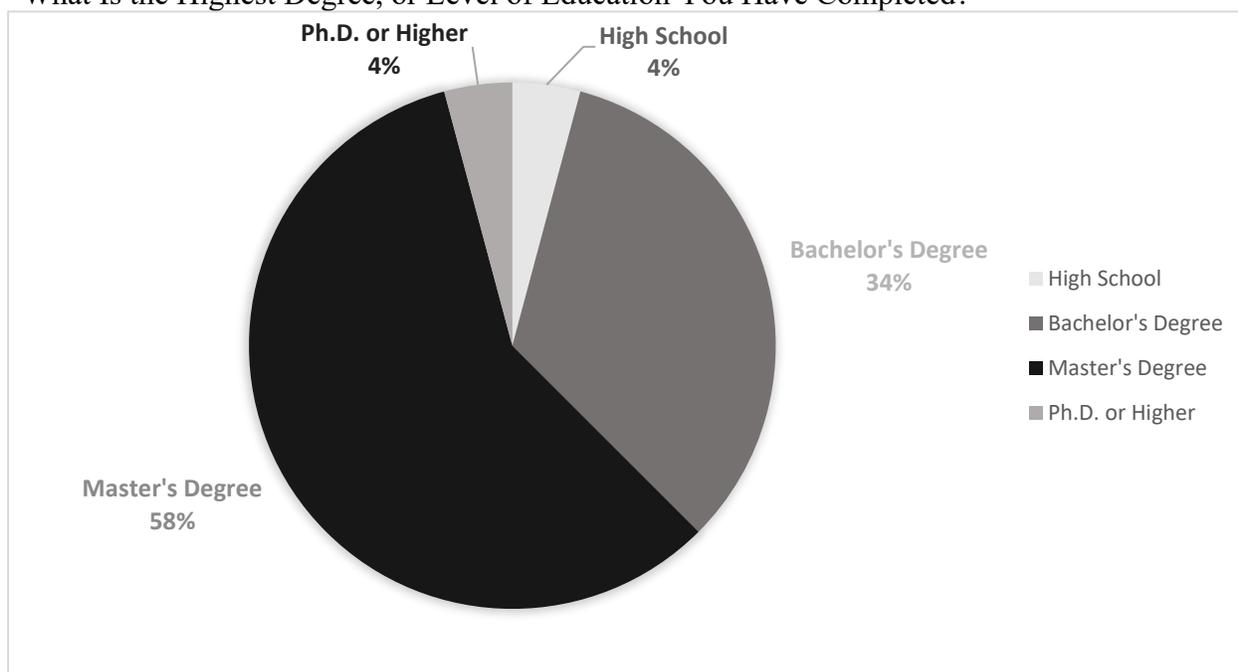


Figure 4
 “How Long Have You Served as an Athletic Director?”

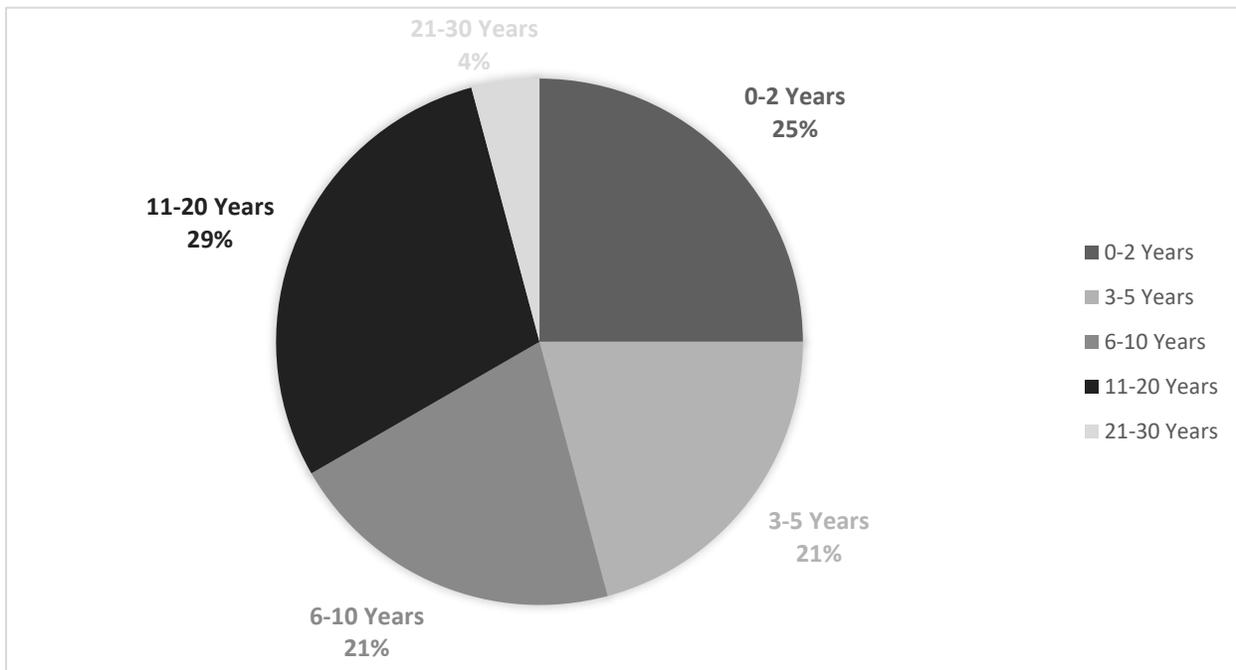


Figure 5
 “How Long Have You Been at Your Current School/District?”

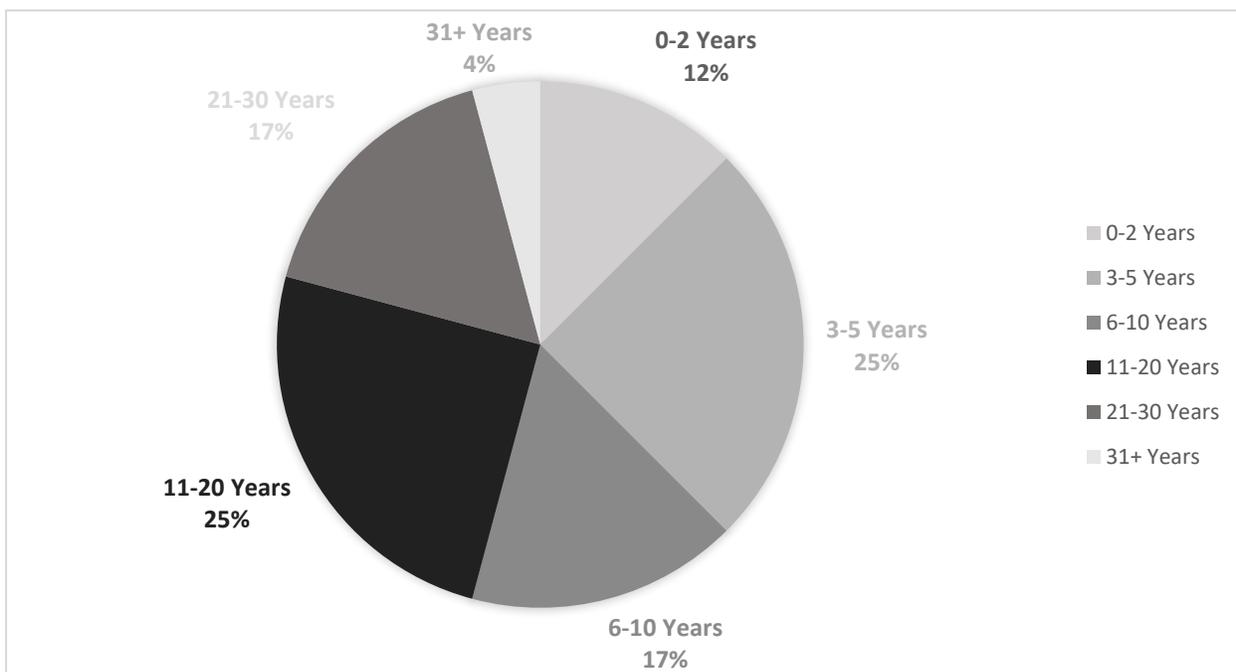


Figure 6
“Select Your School’s Student Population”

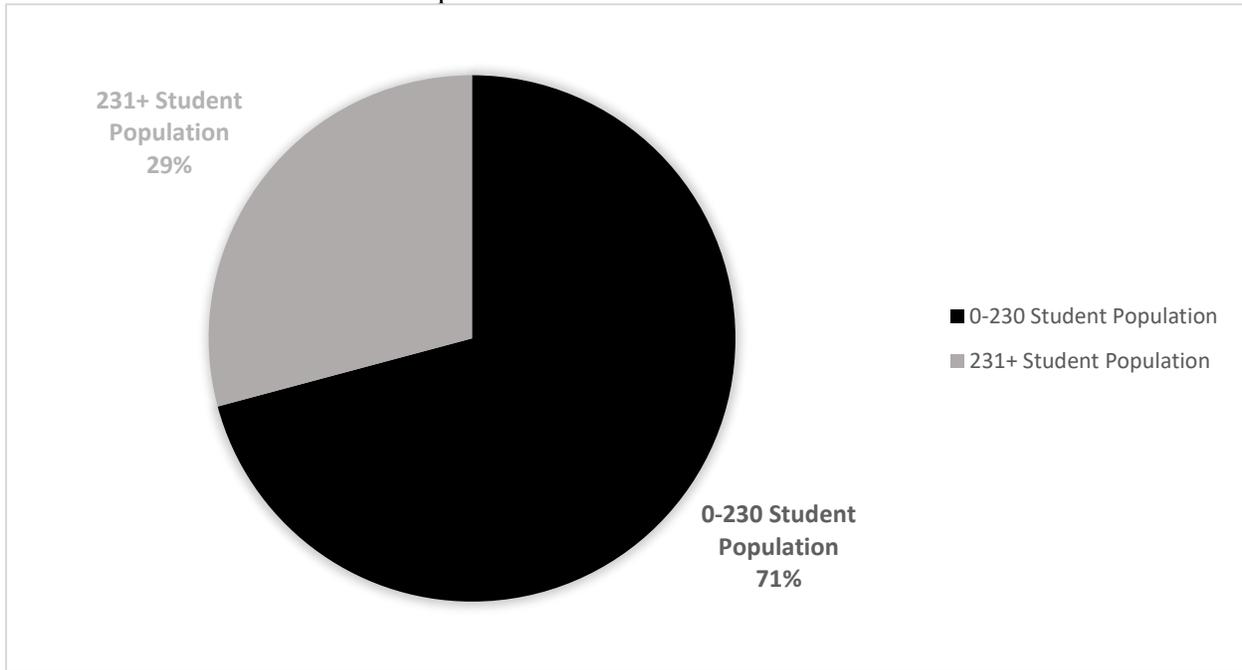


Figure 7
“What Social Media Platforms Do Your Athletic Programs Use?”

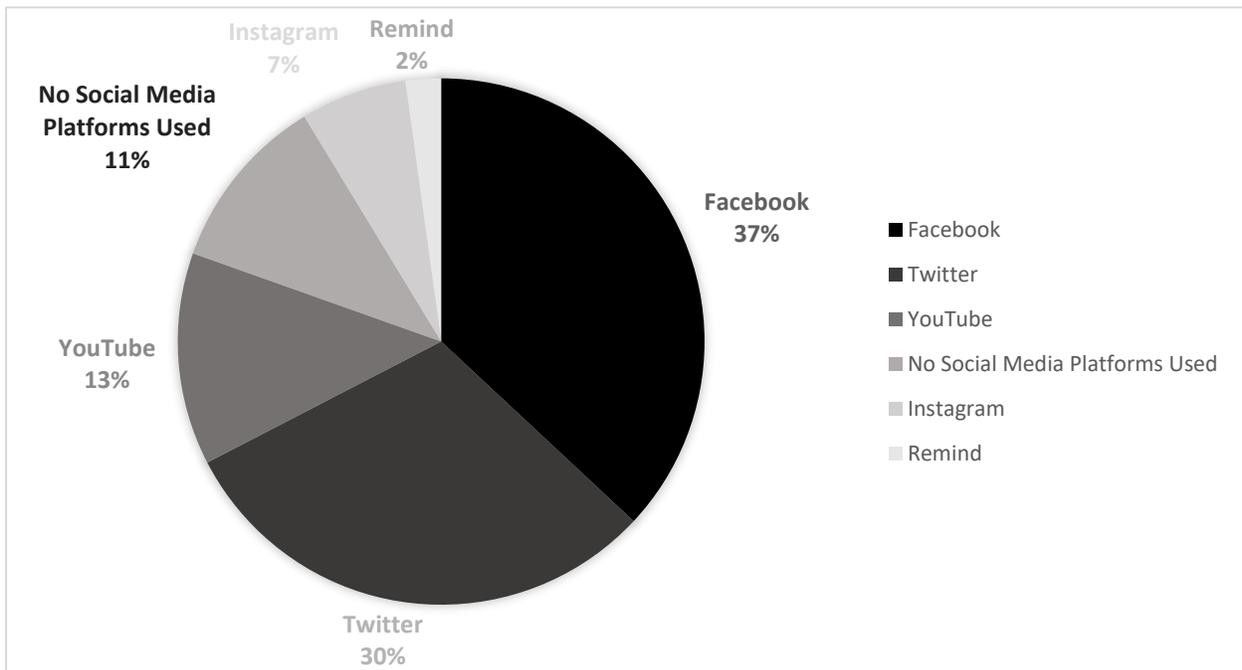
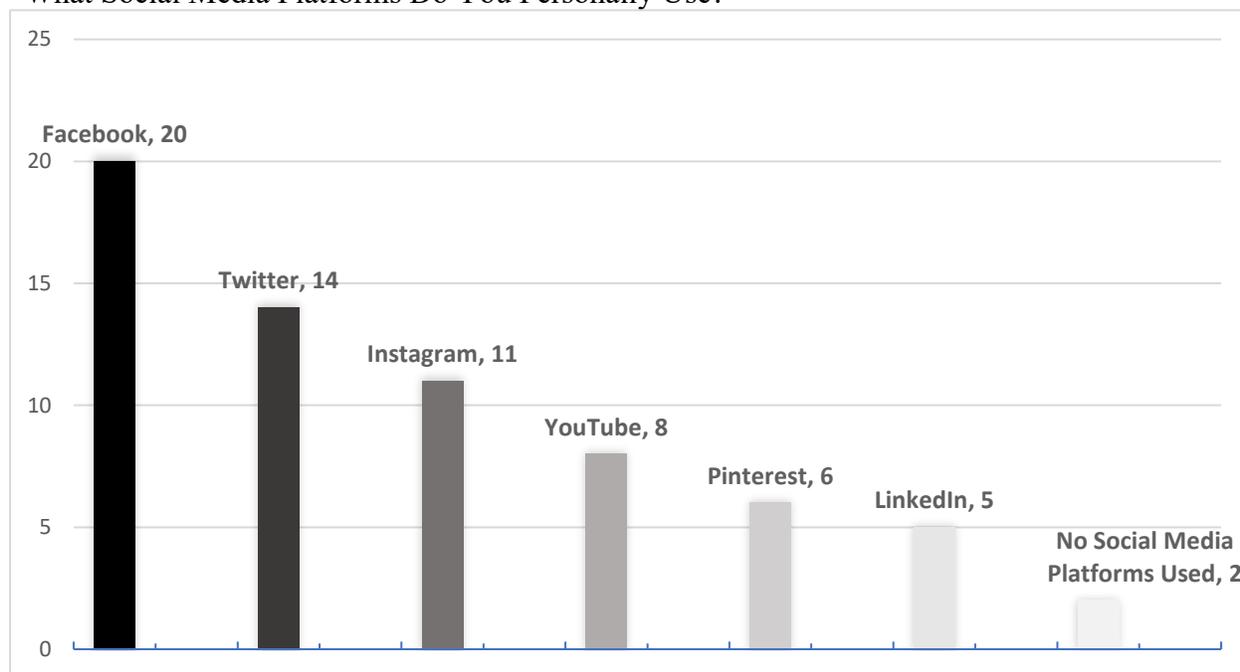


Figure 8
 “What Social Media Platforms Do You Personally Use?”



Current Social Media Policies Questions

The six questions discerning current social media policies in place by athletic departments were included to examine trends within student-athlete social media policies. The trends that were explored were student-athletes’ understanding as to whether or not they are being monitored by school administration, punitive measures, along with what disciplinary actions are set in place, and what, if any, content or language is restricted for student-athletes. The results from each of the social media policies questions follow.

Current Social Media Policies Questions Results

Of the 25 respondents, seven athletic directors have policies in place regarding social media use of their student athletes. If an athletic director selected “No” to having any social media policies in place for social media use by your student-athletes they were directed to the

next section of questions. For those that do have policies in place they selected the answer that best described their school or district's social media policies. The question inquiring about punitive measures included a second part to the question that asked to insert those disciplinary measures they had in place. The question asking what content is restricted for student-athletes allowed for multiple answers, resulting in more than 1 answer per participant. Finally, the two questions requesting for a link to a policy page and for more insight into social media policies did not require a response.

Figure 9

“Does Your School/District Have Any Policies in Place for Social Media Use by Your Student-Athletes?”

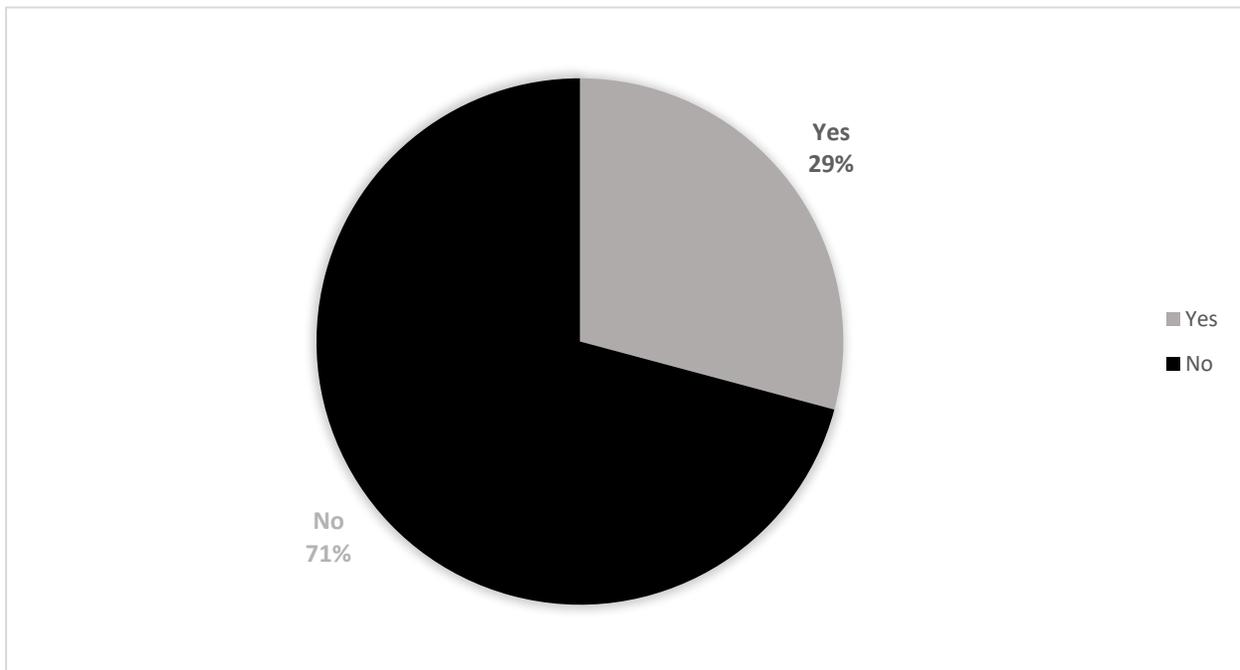
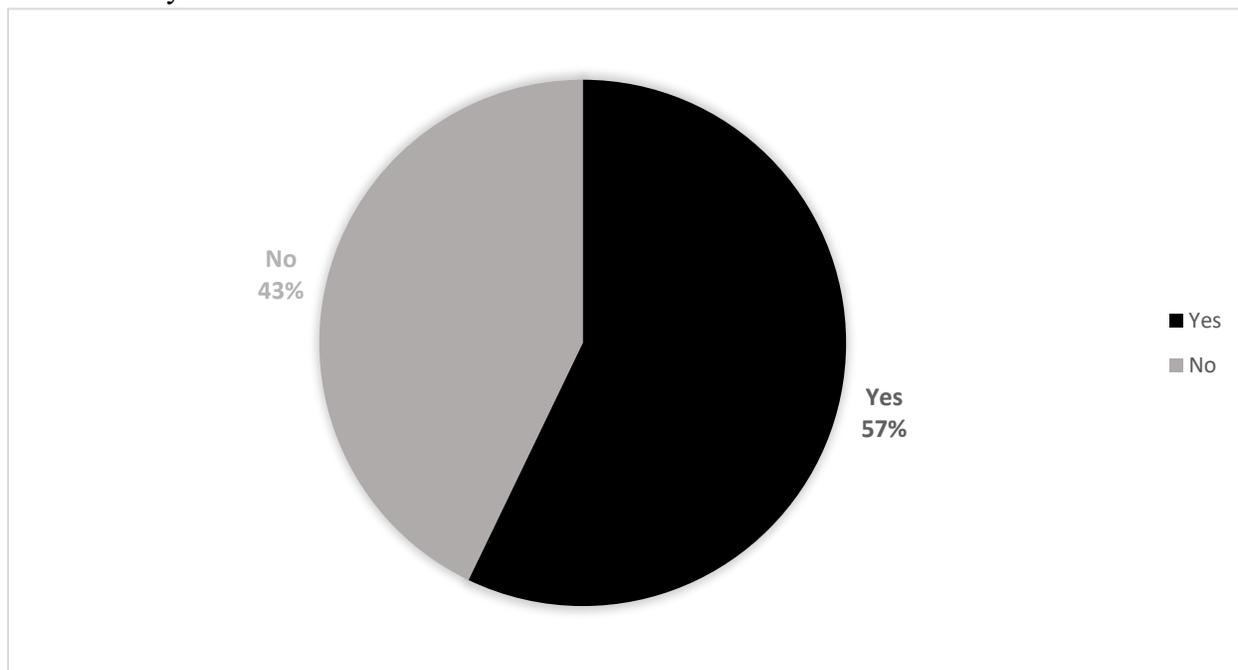


Figure 10

“If Yes to Policies in Place, are Your Student-Athletes Informed as to if They are Being Monitored by School Administration?”



Question three to the current social media policies section asked the respondents that have a policy in place if there are punitive measures. All seven athletic directors indicated that they have punitive measures in place for student-athletes who do not follow their policies.

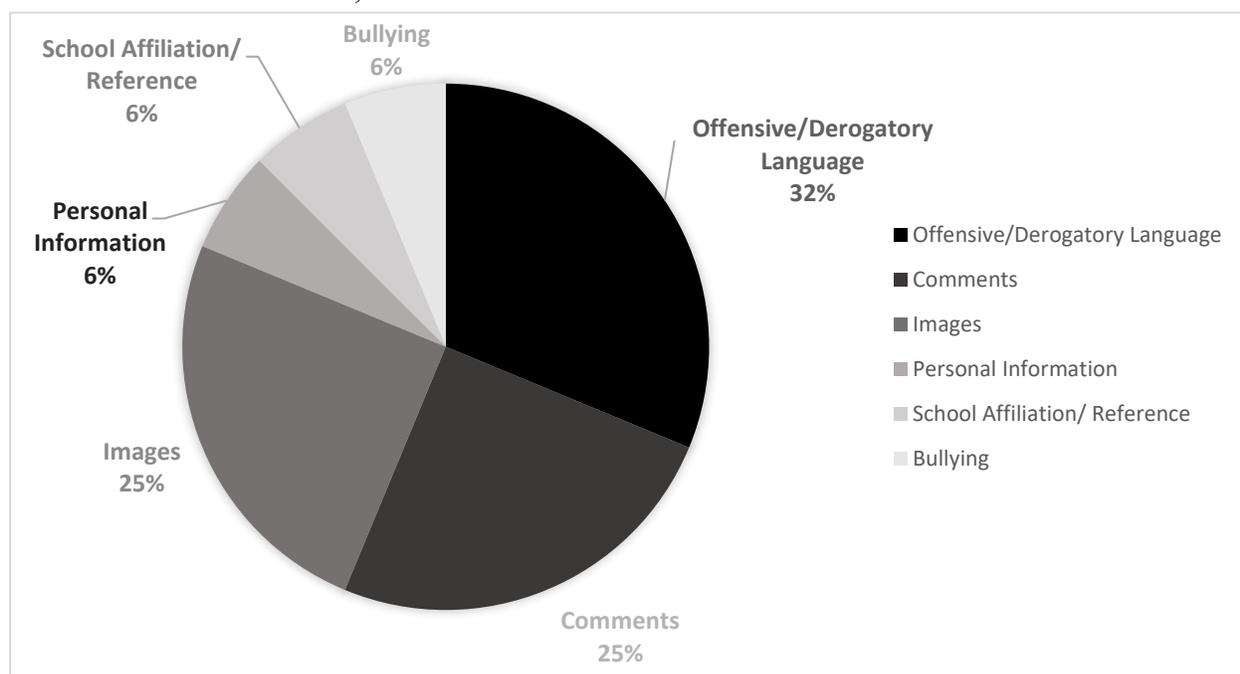
Part two of this question displayed, “If so, what disciplinary measures are in place?” This part was an open-ended discussion and some of the responses as to what disciplinary measures in place included:

- “Write-up that can lead to suspension or dismissal from team.”
- “Suspension from games and/or team.”
- “Depends on the severity of the infraction.”

- “According to our student code of conduct, discipline can range from apology to dismissal from school.”

Figure 11

“If Yes to Policies in Place, What Content is Restricted for the Student-Athletes?”



The final question pertaining to current social media policies used by high school athletic programs was an open-ended question that asked to “Please Provide Any Other Insights into Your Athletic Department’s Social Media Policies.” The following are responses that the researcher received.

- “Coaches monitor their participants and share issues with AD.”
- “We don’t have specific social media policies, but we have other policies that encompass social media, liking bullying, harassment, etc.”
- “We really don’t have a lot. We just occasionally monitor and talk to student-athletes if we think they have posted inappropriate materials.”

Views on Social Media Policies Questions

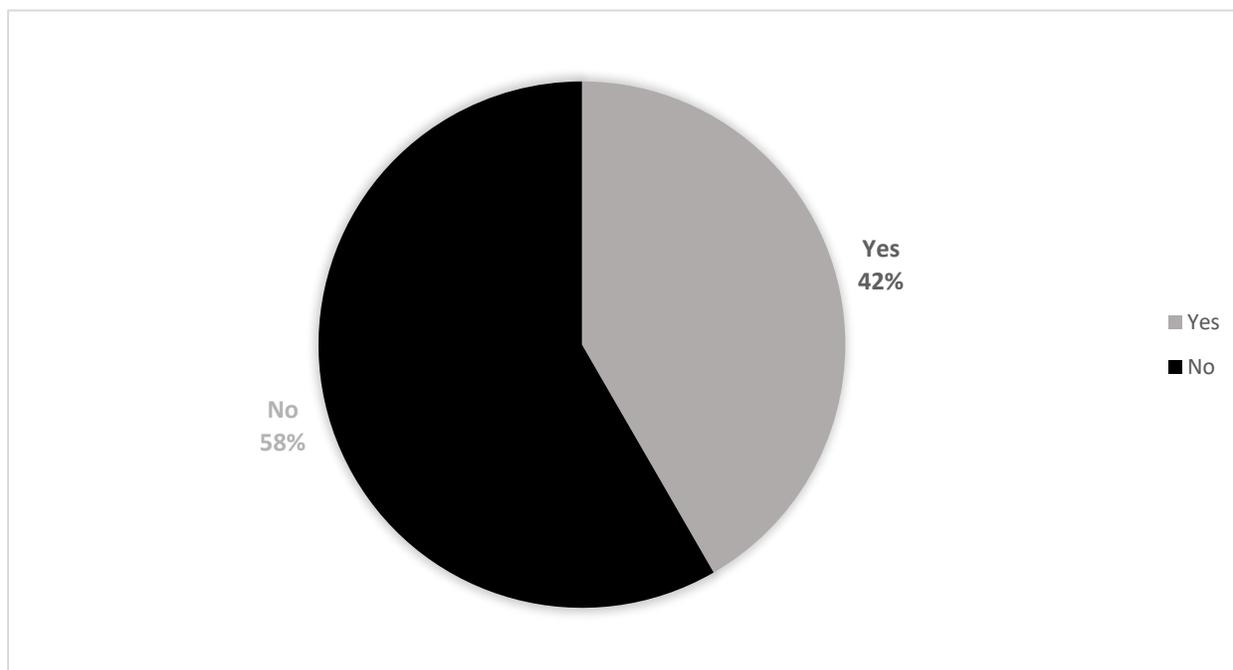
The seven questions regarding the athletic directors' views on social media policies were included to find trends regarding how high school athletic director's viewed social media policies for student-athletes. The trends that were examined in this section were the necessity of student-athlete social media policies, the challenges of creating policies, benefits of using social media, policies as a deterrent for negative social media use, the capacity of monitoring social media use, restriction taking away student-athletes' right to free speech, and restrictions raising legal issues. The results for each of the views on social media policies questions follow.

Views on Social Media Policies Questions Results

For each question in this section, the athletic directors selected the answer that best fit their views on social media policies. For the questions probing about the necessity of social media policies, the benefits of social media use by student-athletes, the monitoring of social media use, and the legal issues of restricting and/or monitor social media accounts there included a part two to the question that asked for a short answer if the participant selected "Yes."

Figure 12

“Do you believe having policies in place for student-athlete social media use is necessary?”



Part two to this question asked those respondents that answered “Yes” to part one to explain why they believe policies for student-athlete’s social media use is necessary. Some responses from those that believe policies are necessary included:

- “Social media policies holds the players accountable for their actions.”
- “We need to teach what we expect.”
- “They (student-athletes) need to know their boundaries and what will happen if they (student-athletes) abuse social media to hurt others or their team.”
- “We have had issues in the past regarding sports, athletes, and the use of social media.”
- “We have social media policies for all our students.”
- “We have to be protected as a district against lawsuits made by parents due to negligence, etc.”

- “One: to save the school from potential issues (safety), Two: to save the students from themselves (personal issues, recruiting, etc.)”

There were also a couple of responses by those who answered “No” to if policies are necessary. The following are their responses as to why they do not believe athletic departments need policies in place:

- “I believe that the school’s policy would cover most of the issues that arise.”
- “Policies regarding personal usage of personal social media accounts are really difficult to monitor and enforce.”
- “It would be difficult to monitor and enforce.”
- “Depends on the number of students you have. We are extremely small – so we can just sit down with each athlete personally and discuss any issues.”
- “Our students are not allowed to use phones in school, so any social media occurs outside of school hours. If they posted something questionable and it was brought to our attention we would take action.”

Question two regarding athletic directors’ views on social media policies asked, “What challenges do you believe may arise when creating policies for social media use by student-athletes?” Responses to this question included:

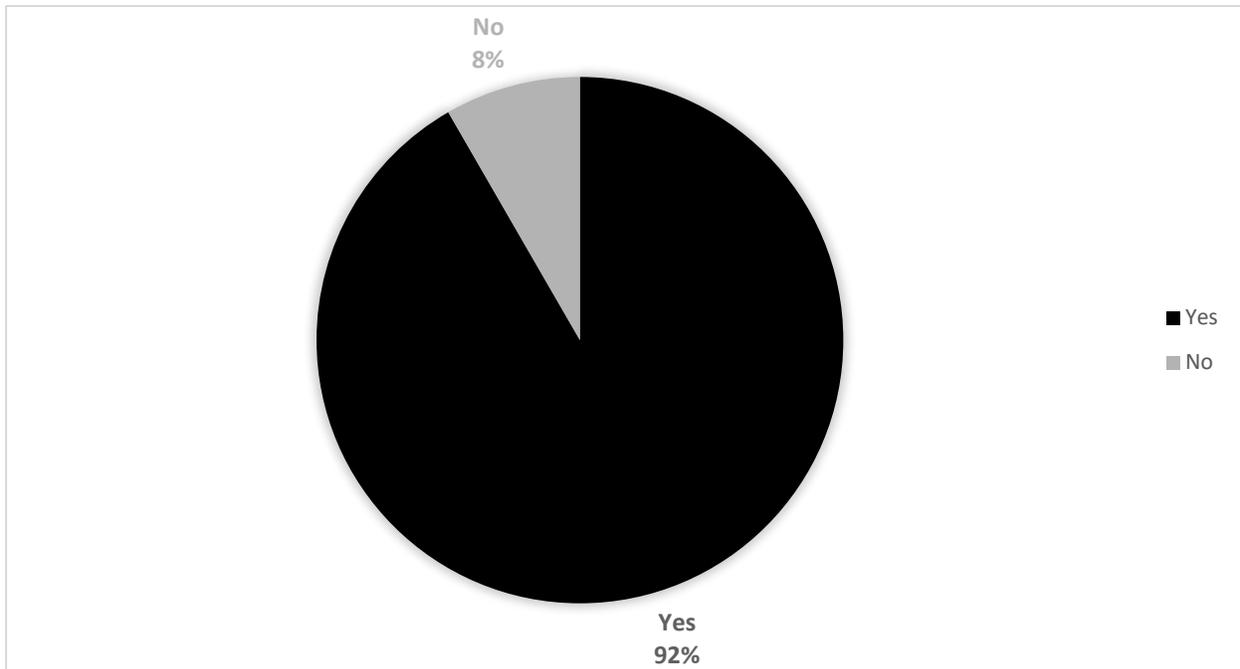
- “I think the biggest challenge would be the monitoring of it. Facebook/Twitter are easier to see, but things like Snapchat, Tiktok, etc., are much harder to monitor from a school perspective.”
- “Legal issues regarding personal usage of personal accounts. The only way you can regulate an athlete's usage of social media is if it causes a substantial

disruption to the educational process, and in that case, you don't need a policy in place in order to address the problem.”

- “(There is) much difficulty ascertaining under what circumstances " illegal" usages take place. Example: on school grounds, accidental vs purposeful, etc.”
- “It's an ever-changing and evolving platform, so it's hard to make blanket statements against something that changes often.”
- Free speech. Right to Privacy issues are the biggest issue when it deals with media portrayals of others.”
- “It's used by them in their personal life, it’s not a school related activity.”
- “Time to monitor, time to collect each account owned by each student athlete. Not enough time in the day. If a social media issue arises it usually falls under our school Bullying or Code of Conduct policy.”
- “How do you get anything comprehensive enough to cover all issues that may arise?”
- “There is so many levels of how you can take things, one person may think what was said was ok and the next might feel hurt by what is said.”
- “Who is going to monitor the policies and enforce discipline?”
- “It’s their own social media account and freedom of speech. If under 18 parents have more control of situations. (A) students’ main source of communication is done through social media.”

Figure 13

“Do You Believe Social Media can be a Benefit to Student-Athletes?”



Part Two to this asked those participants that answered “Yes” to Part One to “Please List All Benefits You Believe Social Media Can Provide.” The following are replies in regards to this question:

- “Exposure to colleges/universities.”
- “Connected with like-minded people, expertise from others, marketing themselves.”
- “It gives them an opportunity to be seen by coaches who may not be in that area at the time of the event.”
- “Interaction with teammates, recruitment, and simply taking advantage of the way that kids communicate now.”
- “Communication with parents/community, spreading positive information about student success.”

- “More exposure for athletes. Ability to send out information at a quicker pace.”
- “It is our students’ primary means of communicating.”

Figure 14

“Do you believe policies for social media use deter student-athletes from using social networks in a negative way?”

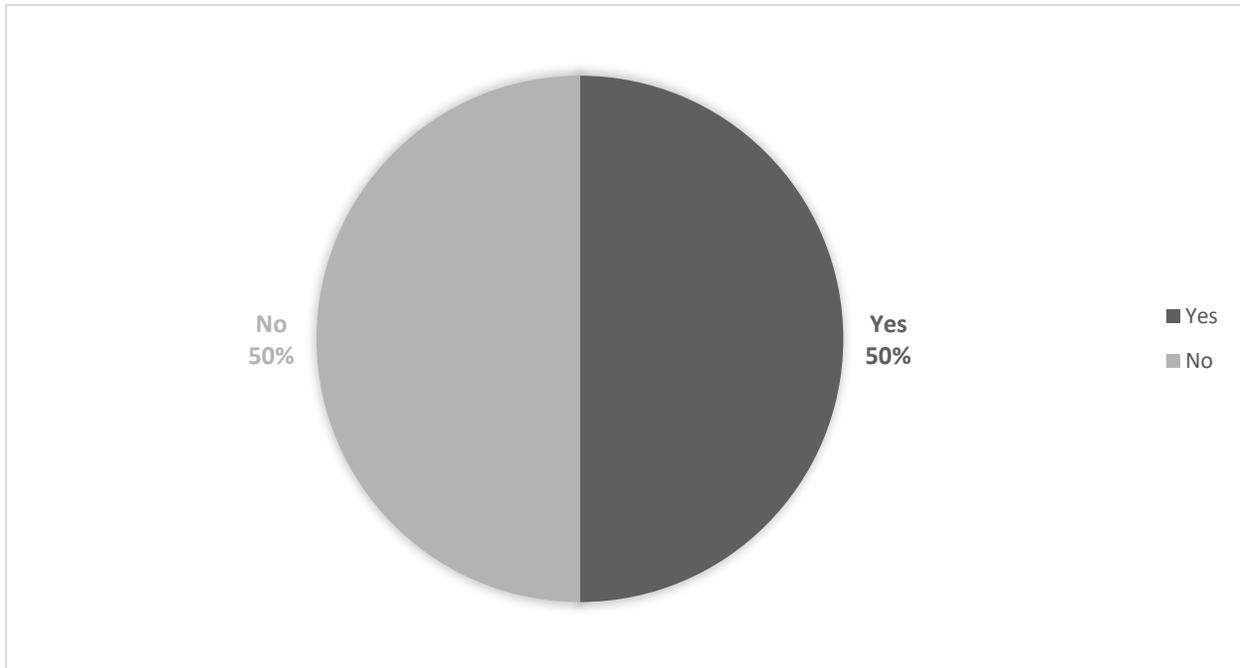
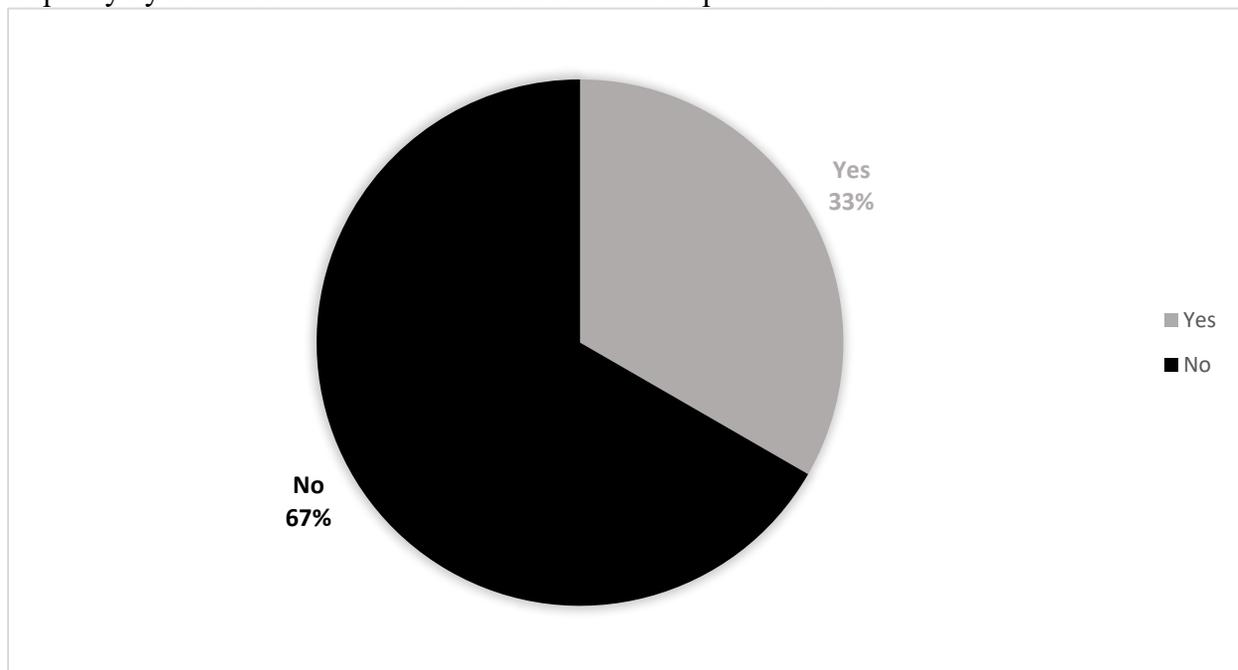


Figure 15

“Do You Believe Social Media Use by Student-Athletes Should be Monitored in Some Sort of Capacity by School Administration and/or Athletic Departments?”



Part Two to this question asked, “By Whom Do You Believe Should Monitor Social Media Use?” Chart 16 tallies the answers as to who the participants believe should monitor social media use.

Figure 16

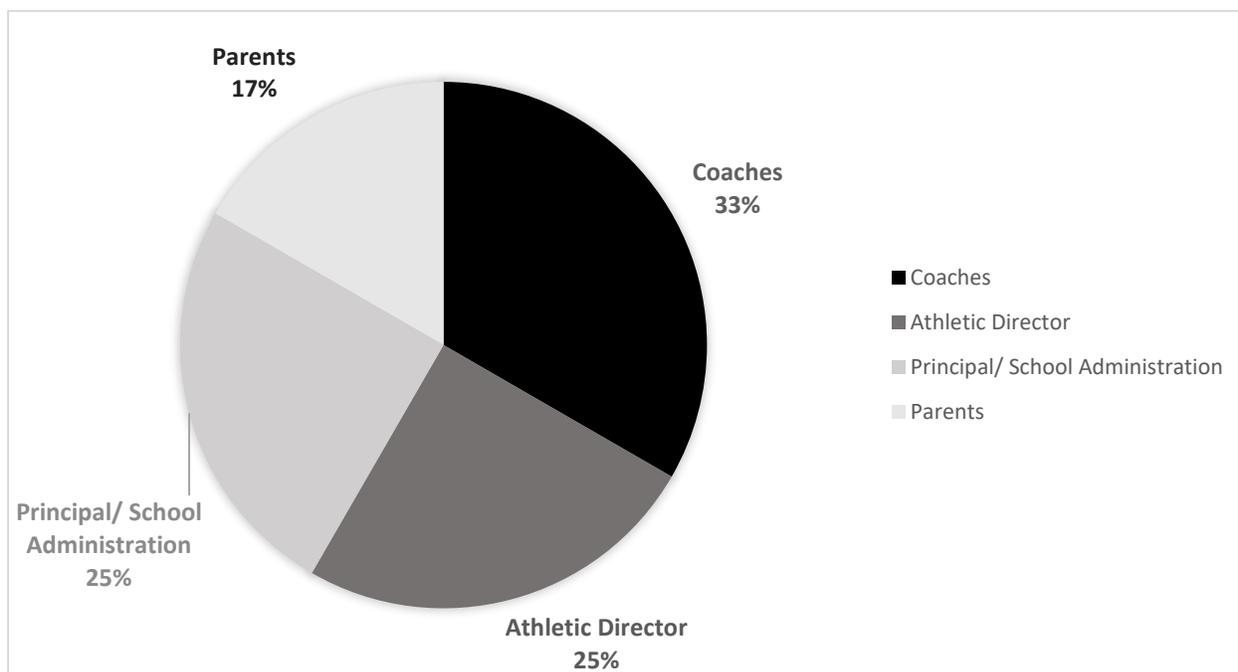


Figure 17

“Do You Believe Restricting and/or Monitoring Student-Athletes’ Social Media Accounts Takes Away Their Right to Free Speech?”

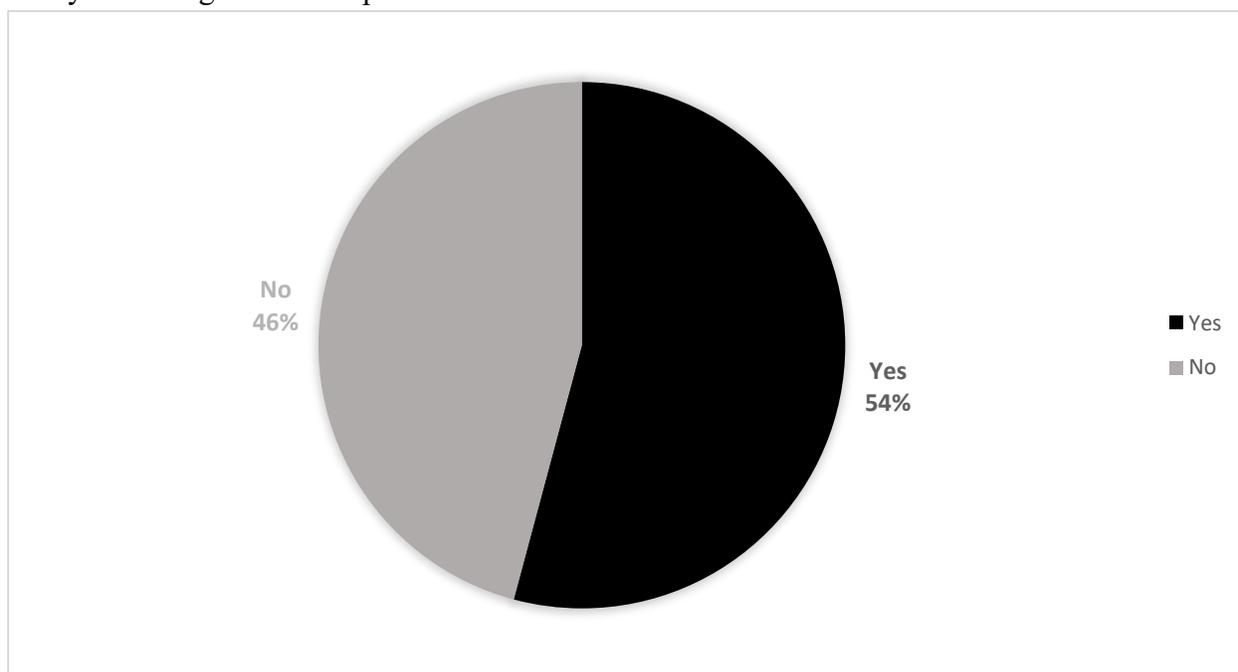
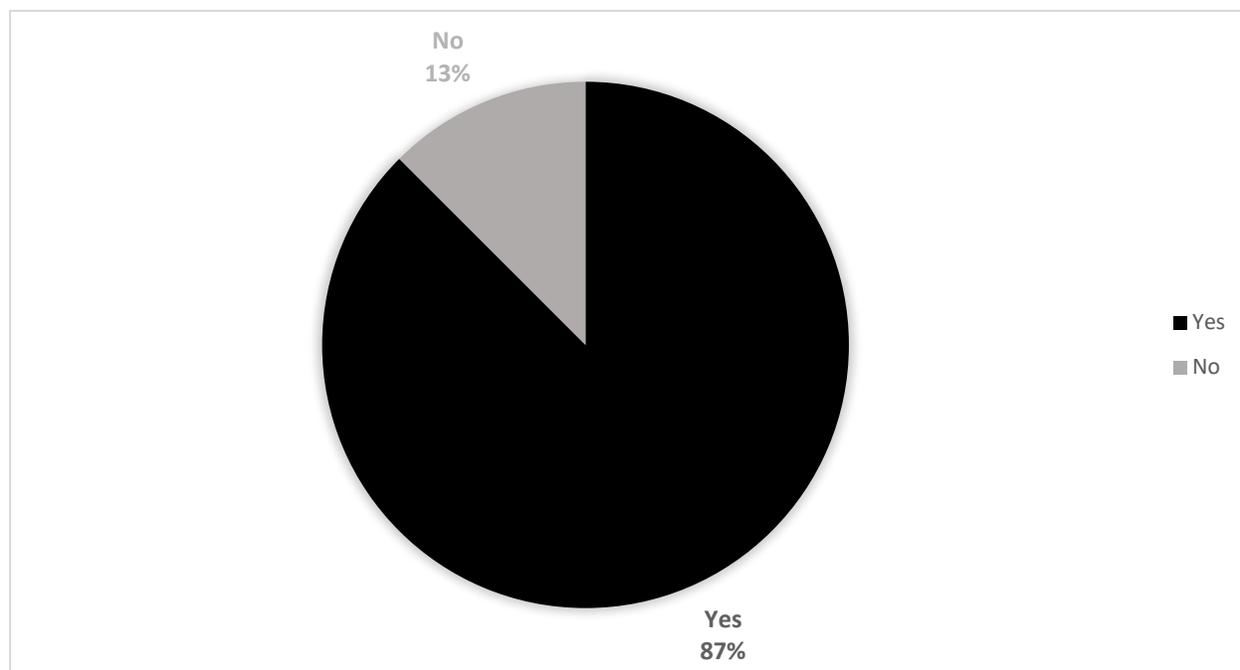


Figure 18

“Do You Believe Restricting and/or Monitoring Student-Athletes’ Social Media Accounts Can Raise Any Legal Issues?”



Part Two to this question asked respondents “If Yes, Explain,” why they believe restricting and/or monitoring social media accounts can raise legal issues. The following are select answers from participants:

- “Restricting use can cause free speech problems if not done correctly.”
- “It (restricting and/or monitoring social media accounts) can if the district doesn't make policies protecting themselves.”
- “If they (student-athletes) use their own device and they are not on school grounds, or during school related functions – it's hard to enforce.”

- “I don't feel we can dictate what they do outside of our building. That being said, I also feel we have the right to take action if students violate certain rules of conduct.”
- “unless they are commenting about school, their teams, coaches or teammates, we really have no business monitoring their private life.”
- “I think it's a slippery slope to be monitoring and limiting things that they put on social media. It can be very subjective as to what one person views as appropriate behavior and comments as opposed to others.”

Summary

This study was designed to find trends in determining what policies are useful regarding social media use and how athletic directors view social media policies. Participants included willing athletic directors affiliated with the NDHSAA, and the researcher utilized both a qualitative content analysis and grounded theory research design. Additionally, some participants shared their thoughts and opinions with regards to social media policies and how effective they can be. The data gathered provided immense insight into how social media policies can be utilized for student-athletes at the high school level.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to develop a theory regarding how much authority athletic directors have when creating social media policies for their student-athletes. In addition, the research deciphered whether athletic directors' views social media policies as necessary for their student-athletes. Participants for this study included willing North Dakota high school athletic directors. The researcher provided an online survey to those administrators that were willing to participate in this study.

Each section of the online survey results were thoroughly examined to find trends and develop a theory from the final results. These findings were simultaneously being scrutinized and compared to past literature and the theoretical framework from Chapter II. Future leadership implications were then discussed based on the conclusions developed, followed by recommendations for succeeding research.

Discussion and Conclusions

The two research questions that guided this study were:

1. Do high school athletic directors have the ability to sanction student-athletes for violating athletic code of conducts for their use of social media?
2. Are high school athletic directors concurrently inclined to create policies that restrict student-athlete social media use?

All responses from the administered survey were carefully analyzed to help develop theories and provide answers to the above research questions.

While much research can be found demonstrating the demographics of high school athletic directors, along with social media policies and the legality of restricting social media use,

the findings from this study, undoubtedly, contributed to the body of literature. Specifically, this research study examined how the demographics of an athletic director affect their views on social media policies. Also examined were trends within social media policies that are already in place.

Social media is an ever-changing medium, but it is important to have guidelines for student-athletes to abide to. These students have the right to social media accounts and will continue to find the newest social media tools. On the other hand, though, if student-athletes have no guidance in regards to use of social media, administrators run the risk of improper and inappropriate use. Therefore, guidelines create a path to help show the proper use of their social media accounts (Mawhinney, 2013).

Demographics

The researcher thoroughly examined the demographics of the participants to determine if there was any correlation between the demographics of an athletic director and the implementation and views on social media policies. Some commonalities emerged when scrutinizing the athletic director's responses. The following depicts the findings as they relate to each demographic reply.

Age

According to the results derived from the online survey, 67% of the participants were between the ages of 41-60, while the remaining 33% were 18-40 years old. Based off the responses given, 57% of the athletic directors with social media policies in place are in the 41-60 age bracket, with the remaining 43% between 18-40 years of age. Interestingly, all the athletic directors in the older age group disclose that they inform their students that their social media use

is monitored by school administration, whereas all the athletic director age 18-40 disclose this information. As shown, it is not mandatory to disclose to the student-athletes that they are being monitored. However, as the 41-60 age group has been doing, it is in the best interest of school administration to notify the athletes that their accounts are monitored so they are more compliant if a problem were to arise.

In regards to the participating athletic directors' views on social media policy, 43.8% of the administrators age 41-60 believe policies can deter student-athletes from using social media in a negative way, compared to 62.5% of the athletic directors within the 18-40 age group who believe the same notion. Lastly of note, of the athletic directors in the 41-60 age bracket, 56.3% do not believe restricting and/or monitoring social media accounts violates the student-athletes' freedom of speech, while only 25% of athletic directors age 18-40 have the same viewpoint.

Gender

Results gathered from individual responses determined that 71% of participants identify as male, with 29% identifying as female. 85.7% of the female participants were 41 years old and above and oversee schools that have a population of 230 students or less. While the vast majority of participants were male, 42.9% of the athletic directors with set policies were females. Of the athletic directors who view social media policies as necessary, 71% of the female population believe policies are important, compared to only 29.4% of the participating males with the same view on social media policies.

Education

Of the respondents to the administered survey, 62.5% have received a master's degree or higher, with one completing their Ph.D. Of the 37.5% who have not received a master's degree,

only 11.1% have policies in place for social media in comparative to 40% of those with at least a master's degree. In response to whether the athletic director views monitoring and/or restricting social media accounts violates the student-athletes' right to free speech, 60% of athletic directors with at least a master's degree do not believe policies violate freedom of speech, compared to 22.2% of athletic directors without a master's degree.

Length as an Athletic Director and Length Served in Current School/District

Due to the noticeable overlap between length as an athletic director and length served in their current school or district the researcher combined these two categories to determine trends. Of note, 50% of the participating athletic directors have served as either an athletic director or have been with their current school or district for 11 years or more, while the other 50% have 10 years or less of experience as an athletic director or with their current school or district.

Results from this researcher study proved that 41.7% of athletic directors with 11 years or more have social media policies in place, compared to 16.7% with 10 years or less. All athletic directors with 11 years or more believe restricting and/or monitoring social media accounts can raise legal issues while 75% of athletic directors with 10 years or less believe the same point.

Current School/District's Student Population

The results from the research study show that 100% of athletic directors that oversee a school or district with 231 students or more have completed their master's degree or higher, with one receiving their Ph.D. 56.3% of athletic directors with 230 students or less have completed their master's degree. Of the athletic directors with a student population of 231 or more only 3 athletic directors believe school administrators should monitor student-athletes' social media accounts, compared to 7 athletic directors with 230 students or less.

Personal and Athletic Program's Social Media Platforms

Due to the glaring overlap between amount of personal social media platforms used and number of social media platforms their athletic programs use the researcher combined these two categories to determine trends. Of note, 54.2% of athletic directors use at least two social media platforms both personally and within their athletic programs, whereas 45.8% of athletic directors use one social media platform or less either personally or within their athletic programs.

Exploring the data received from the participants, 38.5% of athletic directors with at least two social media platforms have social media policies for their student-athletes. Only 18.2% of athletic directors who use one or less platforms have policies for social media. Further, of the athletic directors who have social media policies in place 57.4% personally use four social media platforms or more.

Demographic Conclusions

Based off the results gathered in regards to the demographics of the participating athletic directors, the researcher found certain correlations between the demographics of the athletic directors and the implementation and views on social media policies. These correlations help identify key information relating to social media policies, but the demographics of the participants were not sufficient enough to create theories.

Current Social Media Policies

The researcher thoroughly examined the results from the current social media policies section. The following depicts the findings and provided insight to the researcher's first question:

1. Do high school athletic directors have the ability to sanction student-athletes for violating athletic code of conducts for their use of social media?

Knowledge of Monitoring by School Administration

While it was not conclusive, a majority of the athletic departments with social media policies in place inform the student-athletes that their actions are being monitored on social websites. Monitoring athletes can range anywhere from being vague with student-athletes monitoring their own activity to highly strategic forms, where computer software is implemented to track and flag social media activity. The researcher theorized that by informing student-athletes they are being monitored that they are more likely to comply to regulations and have a better understanding of what is expected of them.

Punitive Measures

The responses gathered from the administered survey proved unanimously that punitive measures are necessary for student athletes who do not follow their specific policies. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), punitive is defined as, “inflicting, involving, or aiming at punishment.” From the research gathered, this punishment can include an apology to the affected individual and/or team, all the way up to dismissal from the school. As a result, the researcher theorized that while punishment is not the desired outcome, administrators need clear punitive measures to hold their student-athletes accountable.

Restricted Content

Evidence from individual responses indicated that all athletic directors with current social media policies believed set restrictions on certain content is needed. However, the administrators differed on what should be limited. 71% of athletic departments restrict content that included offensive and/or derogatory language, followed by 57% policies including restrictions on both comments and images. Bullying, affiliation and/or reference to the school, and personal

information were all restricted by one athletic department as well. Similar to punitive measures, the researcher developed the theory that restriction of content needs to have clear standards, so the student-athlete population understands what content they are allowed to utilize.

Additional Insights

According to additional comments regarding social media policies, guidelines for use are not always especially in-depth, but they allow students to understand administration's expectations. Current policies are centered around bullying and harassment of students outside the schoolground. The researcher theorized that due to the increased use of social media by high school students there will be a pressing need to implement thorough policies to combat unnecessary social media use. As students continue to socialize more through screens instead of face-to-face, instances of bullying and inappropriate conduct via social media will likely continually trend upward.

Also of note in regards to insight received from athletic directors, it is often the coaches of a team that have the responsibility to monitor student-athletes' social media accounts. The coaches are then to report issues to the athletic director. The results from this study reported that a fair number of athletic directors felt as though they do not have enough time to monitor social media accounts. Therefore, by allocating the responsibility to oversee use by student-athletes to their coaches the athletic directors can still monitor accounts while not having to use their own time.

Current Social Media Policies Conclusions

The following summarizes the results gathered from the athletic directors' current social media policies, and the researcher theorized:

- Student-athletes are more likely to comply to restrictions when they are informed that their actions are being monitored. They will also have a better understanding of what is expected of them when using social media. As shown by the research, informing student-athletes of observation of their social media accounts is not necessary, but there is the possibility of students being oblivious to the policies in place if they are unaware they are being monitored. The more information the student-athletes receive in regards to their social media use the more compliant they are likely to be.
- Clear punitive measures need to be in place by school administrators to keep the student-athletes accountable. While punishment is not the desired outcome it is necessary in order to hold the students responsible for their actions. Similar to athletic directors informing student-athletes that they are being monitored, the more information one has on the disciplinary steps the more willing they will be to comply to regulations.
- The social media content that is restricted by school administration needs to be clear and concise for the student-athletes. This allows the athletes to understand what content is appropriate for them to use and post while making them aware of what areas to avoid. As mentioned above, content that includes offensive or derogatory language is restricted by the most participants. To make sure student-athletes understand they cannot post content that includes such language administration needs to address the matter directly. This means that within the social media code of conducts there needs to be clear policies regarding offensive and derogatory speech, such as, “Content consisting of offensive and derogatory

language is strictly prohibited. Any violations by student-athletes may result in denial to participate in co-curricular activities at any time as determined by the administration.”

- The implementation of social media policies will become more pressing as social media use continues to grow. While the athletic directors who have social media policies in place was adequate for this study, there was a surprising number of administrators who do not have regulations for the use of social media. Policies are needed to help protect both the school and the students from violations.

As verified by Rosenbaum (2014), student-athletes’ social media usage may be regulated by school administrators if the post contains speech that causes or creates a reasonably, foreseeable, and substantial disruption to the school environment. Other material that may also be prohibited includes posts that are vulgar, obscene, lewd, unsportsmanlike, insubordinate, or plainly offensive. Therefore, the current social media policies section was administered to determine the number of athletic directors who have social media policies while also establishing what athletic directors have included in policies that have already been developed. The researcher determined that policies include the sanctions that are implemented when a student-athlete violates the athletic code of conduct but was not limited there. Also included in the code of conduct for athletes were athletic administrators informing student-athletes of the monitoring of their social media use and who will be monitoring them, punitive measures for detrimental conduct, restricted content, and the proper use of social media networks.

Views on Social Media Policies

The researcher thoroughly examined results that were received in regards to athletic director's views on social media policies for their student-athletes. The following depicts the findings and provided insight to the researcher's second question:

2. Are high school athletic directors concurrently inclined to create policies that restrict student-athlete social media use?

The Necessity of Social Media Policies

The results from this research study showed that 58.3% of participating athletic directors do not believe social media policies are necessary. Of note, all administrators that currently have policies in place for their athletic departments do believe policies are necessary, while 17.6% of athletic directors who do not have policies in place think policies are necessary for student athletes.

There was a large amount of reasons as to why the athletic directors who do not believe social media policies are needed, but one common theme was that policies are just too difficult to enforce. Another viewpoint taken by multiple participants was the fact it has not been a problem for them and if a problem arose they would then act. While a majority of those who answered "no" to this select question do not see a reason to implement social media policies, some explained having guidelines rather than set policies would be more beneficial to administrators.

The majority of athletic directors that consider policies necessary explained that policies hold the student-athletes accountable for their actions and teach them what the administration expects. Others interpreted policies as a way to protect both the school and students against lawsuits due to negligence.

While a small majority of participating athletic directors voted “no” to the necessity of social media policies, 12.5% of these select participants desired guidelines over policies. Another 8.3% of individuals who chose “no” explained they would take action if a problem arose. Therefore, while there was a higher total of “no” replies, after a deeper look at the responses the researcher developed a theory that having a degree of regulations on social media for student-athletes is necessary for athletic directors. However, having a form of guidelines or policies set by administrators for these athletes to know and understand is important to prevent negligence. As John C. Maxwell (2008) explained, “If you’re proactive, you focus on preparing. If you’re reactive, you end up focusing on repairing.”

Challenges of Creating Social Media Policies

An overwhelming majority of the feedback in response to the challenges that may arise to creating policies for social media use involved the ability to monitor all posts from student-athletes and the legal challenges involving restricted media use. Also included were not wanting to micromanage personal sites and staying current with all new social media sites. The researcher, therefore, theorized that while implementing social media policies is possible, there are gray areas for administrators that need to be addressed and not all schools and districts are equipped to be able to monitor the use of all student-athletes.

Benefits of Social Media

Overall, 91.7% of athletic directors believe that social media can be a benefit to student-athletes. Predominantly, the benefits included were related to exposure of the athlete and/or school, communication with the parents and community, and interaction between teammates. Other responses comprised of increasing team spirit, allowing athletes to connect with other like-

minded people, and creating a team-building platform. The researcher developed the theory that social media is beneficial for athletes, administrators, parents, and the community as it allows for more positive interaction and communication for all parties, while giving student-athletes a better opportunity to gain exposure to universities.

Social Media Policies as a Deterrent

Interestingly, the responses to whether the participants believed policies for social media would deter student-athletes from using social networks in a negative way was split 50/50. As a result, the researcher was unable to develop a conclusive theory in regards to policies being an effective deterrent of unwarranted social media use.

Monitoring Social Media Use

The data developed from this research revealed that 33% of athletic directors believe social media use should be monitored by school administration and/or athletic directors in some capacity. 50% of the athletic directors who answered “yes” believe the athletic director or principle should be in charge of monitoring student-athlete social media use, while 33% deemed the coaches as responsible for overseeing social media accounts. Another 25% of the participants felt the parents of the student-athletes should be responsible for supervising their children’s social networks.

Based off these responses the researcher theorized that the vast majority of athletic directors are not inclined to monitor the use of their student-athletes as they do not have the time in the day to oversee social media accounts. Rather, the athletes, along with their parents, are responsible for following any policies in place from the school’s administration.

Restriction of Right to Free Speech

The results from the administered survey suggest that a slight majority of athletic directors' view restricting and/or monitoring student-athlete social media accounts takes away their right to free speech. This led to the researcher developing the theory that athletic directors often choose not to develop policies for social media because they do not want to risk violating the student-athletes' First Amendment.

Restriction Leading to Legal Issues

According to the responses from this research study, 87% of athletic directors maintain that restricting and/or monitoring social media accounts can raise legal issues. An overwhelming majority of participants explained that restriction and/or monitoring can violate the student-athletes' right to free speech and invasion of privacy. 20% of the participants who believe restrictions and monitoring can raise legal issues do conjecture that if done correctly social media policies are not in violation of freedom of speech, though. Similar to restrictions and/or monitoring taking away student-athletes' right to free speech, the research theorized that athletic directors choose not to implement social media policies because they do not raise legal issues for their respective schools or for themselves.

Views on Social Media Policies Conclusions

The following summarizes the results gathered from the athletic directors' views on social media policies, and the researcher theorized:

- Providing regulations on social media use for student-athletes to some degree appears to be necessary for athletic directors. While not all athletic directors agree on the necessity of policies for social media, there need to be a minimum of guidelines in place to combat negligence. Being proactive toward unnecessary

social media use, rather than reactive, may be less time consuming for athletic directors and possibly protect the school and administration from legal challenges.

To prevent negligence by the school and administrators, having concise guidelines and policies allow athletic directors to be prepared for action if a problem were to arise.

- While there are gray areas involved in drafting clear social media policies, administration needs to address these challenges to proficiently monitor the social media use. The suspected gray areas, as determined by the participating athletic directors, include how to efficiently monitor student-athletes' social media accounts, how to legally limit social media use, and staying up-to-date with all the new social media trends. By addressing these mentioned areas, administration may provide better clarity to all stakeholders affected by social media policies.
- Policies are needed to protect student-athletes and school administration, but social media use should not be completely removed as it can provide benefits. Social media has the ability to benefit student-athletes, administrators, parents, and the community if it is used correctly by allowing for more positive reactions and communication for all parties. In addition, social media may create more opportunities for exposure to universities for student-athletes. Therefore, when used correctly, social media can lead to positive interaction and publicity for those that may not otherwise have the resources.
- Athletic directors may not personally be inclined to monitor the use of social media by their student-athletes due to time constraints. Instead, the responsibility of following social media policies should lie on the student-athletes themselves

and possibly their parents. Delegating responsibility to student-athletes and their family has its risks but it also is the most realistic possibility when maintaining integrity of the social media policies. If problems arise from student-athletes regulating their own social media use administration can step in and handle the situations as needed.

- Student-athletes' right to free speech may hold back certain athletic directors from implementing social media policies. The administrators may fear the risk of violating the student's First Amendment rights by implementing restrictions on their social media use. In addition, athletic directors may choose to not implement social media policies because they do not want to raise legal issues for their schools or themselves. However, it has been determined that student-athletes are subject to greater restrictions than the overall student body because "by choosing to 'go out for the team,' they voluntarily subject themselves to a degree of regulation even high than that imposed on students generally" (Rosenbaum, 2014). Therefore, with proper training and education athletic directors can confidently include athletic code of conducts without having to worry about violating free speech.

While multiple athletic directors find value in utilizing social media policies, the majority of participants do not see the necessity of implementing a social media code of conduct. The researcher found that the challenges of creating guidelines outweigh the benefits of invoking policies. In order for the athletic directors to feel inclined to create a code of conduct restricting student-athletes social media use, the researcher determined one must create explicit details pertaining to the legality of social media policies. Also included in the code of conduct would

need to be the necessary means to stay current with the ever-evolving social media networks and the tools to effectively monitor social media accounts.

Leadership Implications

As reported by the high school athletic directors that participated in this study, being an administrator can be difficult and time-consuming. As a result, being prepared and ready for anything that may happen throughout the day is needed as being proactive is much easier and less time-consuming than being reactive. Social media is not going anywhere anytime soon. Therefore, while social media policies may not be the preferred method for a majority of high school athletic directors it may help make the job easier for them. If a student-athlete were to cause a problem via social media the administrator would be able to provide guidance efficiently and legally on how to handle the occurrence. The policies in place should include clear and concise guidelines on punitive measures for unnecessary conduct, restricted content, the proper use of social media networks, and penalties for the wrongful use of social media. In addition, informing student-athletes about the policies should be mandatory for administration as the athletes need to be aware that their actions are being monitored.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research involved high school athletic directors in the state of North Dakota. State-wide there was a total of 174 athletic directors available for the researcher to recruit; however, participation was limited. Only 25 of the 174 administrators were willing to participate in completing the online survey. While the participation was adequate to complete the research study, the level of contribution might improve in a larger state.

This study focused on the physical social media policies in place and the views on social media policies by athletic directors at the high school level. Future studies could further expand current policies or the views by the athletic directors to the collegiate level and determine how they differ at each level as there are unique differences between the two levels.

Lastly, the current study was limited to only an online survey to gather data. Future studies could examine additional perspectives through both focus groups and interviews that included coaching staffs, athletic and school administrators, and student-athletes.

Summary

This qualitative study was designed to determine if high school athletic directors had the ability to sanction student-athletes for violating social media policies and if the athletic directors were concurrently inclined to create policies that restrict student-athlete social media use. Participants included athletic directors that are members of the North Dakota High School Athletic Association, and the researcher utilized both a qualitative content analysis and a grounded theory research design approach as measurement tools. The data gathered established that athletic directors have the ability to regulate social media use by student-athletes if the post contains speech that causes or creates a reasonably, foreseeable, and substantial disruption to the school environment, or posts that are vulgar, obscene, lewd, unsportsmanlike, insubordinate, or plainly offensive. However, it was determined that high school athletic directors may not find value in utilizing social media policies as the challenges of creating policies outweigh the advantages of having policies in place. In conclusion, high school athletic directors have the ability to implement social media policies for their student-athletes, however, not all athletic directors are inclined to restrict social media accounts of their student-athletes.

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