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The Lived Experiences of Academic Advisors with Counseling Degrees in Addressing Wellness with College Student-Athletes

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This study examined the lived experiences of 10 academic advisors with counseling degrees, or currently enrolled in graduate-level counselor education programs, to see if and how they address wellness with college student-athletes through semi-structured individual interviews. Results yielded four themes and seven sub-themes: Academic Skills and Planning, Counselor Practice and Knowledge (emphasis on fostering relationships, counseling skills and theory, and athletic empathy), Barriers to Seeking Support Services, and Cultivating Holistic Wellness in Student-Athletes (career and life skill development, psychological support, coach-advisor relationship, and case management). The findings suggest that academic advisors with counseling degrees are addressing wellness with their college student-athletes. Moreover, the results provide specific insights as to how academic advisors utilize their counseling skills when providing wellness services and provide recommendations for academic advisors of athletes and athletic departments.

Keywords: college student-athletes, wellness, academic advising, counselor education, counseling

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Compared to non-athletes in college, student-athletes often experience a multitude of stressors due to participation in sport despite the misconception of privilege and glory (Osborne, 2014). There is extensive research documenting various academic, career, physical, mental health, and personal challenges that student-athletes face, yet there are few interventions to mitigate all of these challenges. Of current research interventions with student-athletes, few attempt to tackle all of these challenges (Beauchemin, 2014; Dubuc-Charbonneau & Durand-Bush, 2015; Harris, Altekruse, & Engels, 2003; Van Raalte, Cornelius, Andrews, Diehl, & Brewer, 2015).

Holistic wellness is a construct that has the potential to address all of the challenges student-athletes face and is defined as "a way of life oriented toward optimal health and wellbeing, in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated" (Myers et al., 2000, p. 252). Because student-athletes have frequent contact with their academic advisors and work with them on a multitude of issues (Vaughn & Smith, 2018), the authors surmised that academic advisors may play a role in both preventative and reactive strategies concerning student-athlete wellness. However, to date, there is limited research exploring the role of academic advisors in addressing wellness needs of student-athletes. As such, the authors considered academic advisors specifically with counseling degrees because wellness is central to the counseling profession (Myers, 1992). Though Vaughn and Smith (2018) identified 510 academic advisors to serve 170,000 Division I student-athletes (National Collegiate Athletic Assocation [NCAA], 2019), there are no statistics available regarding the number of academic advisors with counseling backgrounds. The authors theorized that academic advisors with counseling training were more likely to have knowledge of wellness and apply it with student-athletes than academic advisors who have no counseling training.

To note, the authors acknowledge there are often various job titles (e.g., student support specialists) that encompass academic advising responsibilities. For continuity and consistency, we use the term *academic advisor* in this article and recruited participants based off of their academic advising responsibilities, not job titles. As such, the authors sought to fill the gap in research by investigating the experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees who work with student-athletes and explore the advisors' role in meeting student-athlete wellness needs. The authors review extant research on student-athletes, academic advisors, and counseling before providing the details and results of their phenomenological inquiry. Recommendations for advising and athletic departments are provided.

Literature Review

Student-Athlete Experience

Literature on the college student-athlete experience extensively details the many obstacles student-athletes encounter due to their athlete status. They commonly endure academic challenges (Ayers Pazmino-Cervallos, & Dobose, 2012), face career adjustment issues (Houle & Kluck, 2015), partake in at-risk behaviors (Anderson & Petrie, 2012; Yusko et al., 2008), and are more likely to experience discrimination and bias than non-athletes (Parsons, 2013). Injuries are also common and the psychological response to injury can be devastating for a student-athlete (Putukian, 2016). Further, the quality of the student-athlete's relationship to the coach

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can be linked to burnout , which includes physical and emotional exhaustion (Barcza-Renner, Eklund, Morin, Habeeb, & Morin, 2016; Lu et al., 2016; Raedeke & Smith, 2001). Each of these issues separately could potentially jeopardize their academic and athletic careers, yet the student-athlete experience is often compounded by many of these challenges.

Participation in athletics and the subsequent stressors can hinder student-athletes' mental health and wellbeing. They experience lower levels of wellness and more psychological difficulties that merit professional intervention (Watson & Kissinger, 2007). Specifically, researchers noted that anywhere from 10-20% of student-athletes need intervention (Watson & Kissinger, 2007; Wolanin et al., 2016). Athletic trainers also report high numbers of depression and other mental health issues including anxiety, suicidality, and bipolar disorder (Sudano & Miles, 2017). Due to stigma and availability of services that are conducive to their schedules (Lopez & Levy, 2013; Moore, 2016, 2017; Wahto, Swift, & Whipple, 2016), student-athletes are less likely to seek much-needed support, which perfectly positions academic advisors to fill that gap.

Additionally, the NCAA has identified student-athlete wellness as a priority by releasing two publications related to understanding student-athlete wellness and the best practices for facilitating student-athlete wellness (NCAA, 2014; NCAA, 2016). The NCAA acknowledges that student-athletes could be "at greater risk for mental health concerns because they have the same risk factors as non-athletes, while also dealing with the pressures related to sport participation" (NCAA, 2014, p. 96). Further, they recommend a collaborative approach of a variety of campus services to help support student-athletes (NCAA, 2016), which makes academic advisors perfectly positioned to support them.

Academic Advising

Though time and stigma hinder student-athletes seeking help (Lopez & Levy, 2013; Wahto et al., 2016), they may open up to their academic advisors. The National Academic Advising Association ([NACADA]; 2016) website uses a definition from (Kuhn, 2008) that says that advisors should provide guidance to students on academic, personal, or social concerns. Further, their advising handbook specifically identifies student-athletes as a high-needs population and directs advisors to not only address academic eligibility with them, but to also help assist with challenges that interfere with their academic, career, and personal aspirations (Harding, 2008).

Though guided by NACADA, the academic advising field has struggled with finding a professional identity, which is partly due to a lack of standardized education and training (Aiken-Wisniewski, Johnson, Larson, & Barkemeyer, 2015). Challenges faced in advising sessions include poor multicultural awareness, inadequate listening and interpersonal skills, and discomfort when dealing with psychological issues (Hughey, 2011; Preece et al., 2007; Zhang, 2016). For psychological issues, it is imperative to know signs of serious issues like suicide or self-harm (Granello, 2010) and be able to confront these issues with care before making the appropriate referral (Ivey, 2013).

In a recent study, Vaughn and Smith (2018) surveyed 115 Division I academic advisors of student-athletes to explore about their education and training, job responsibilities, and challenges when working with student-athlees. They found that the majority of participants had master's degrees (83%), were female (67%), held degrees in either education (35%) or sport management (31%), and had large caseloads of over 100+ student-athletes (67%). In terms of

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preparation, only 19% of respondents shared that their education or degree helped them. Due to the inconsistency in education for advisors as well as some of the deficiencies in skill set (Aiken-Wisniewski et al., 2007; Hughey, 2011; Preece et al., 2007; Vaughn & Smith, 2018; Zhang, 2016), this study chose participants with counseling degrees because of the uniform education requirements and skill set that can meet student-athlete needs.

Counseling

It is important to acknowledge that are misconceptions about the counseling profession and the duties and responsibilities of counselors. However, the American Counseling Association defines counseling as "a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, and career goals" (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014). Counseling can occur in a variety of settings and do not always need to be centered on severe mental illness. Training can be guided by accrediting bodies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). CACREP is the highest accreditation for counseling programs and mandates student learning outcomes in eight master's level concentrations, one of which is college counseling and student affairs (2016). CACREP requires that all counseling programs, regardless of concentration, receive the same training in eight common core areas which include 1) professional orientation and ethical practice, 2) social and cultural diversity, 3) human growth and development, 4) career development, 5) counseling and helping relationships, 6) group counseling and group work, 7) assessment and testing, and 8) research and program evaluation. In addition to these eight common areas, each counseling concentration has its own specialized training. For the college counseling and student affairs track, CACREP (2016) mandates graduate counseling students receive training for students with unique needs and student-athletes are specifically identified as one of those populations. With wellness as a cornerstone to the counseling profession (Myers, 1992), this makes academic advisors with counseling training the ideal population to address wellness.

Holistic Wellness Model

Wellness has a variety of constructs, definitions, and models (Roscoe, 2009). While there is not a universal definition, it is agreed upon by various disciplines that wellness is not solely the absence of illness, nor just a focus on physical and mental health (Myers & Sweeney, 2004; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Roscoe, 2009). The emphasis on wellness distinguishes counseling from other helping professions (Myers, 1992) and the holistic wellness model centers on an individual's optimal physical, psychological, and spiritual functioning (Myers et al., 2000).

The Indivisible Self (IS-WEL) is empirically based and the most current version of the holistic wellness model (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). The IS-WEL consists of three tiers of factors starting with the highest order factor of the Indivisible Self which represents overall total wellness. There are five second-order factors (Creative, Coping, Social, Essential, and Physical), which are comprised of 17 third-order factors. Each third-order factor impacts the holism of the second-order factors, and each second-order factor impacts the holism of the Indivisible Self. Various contextual variables are also included as they interact with the individual factors to comprise a person's total wellness and healthy functioning (Myers & Sweeney, 2004).

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Additionally, the IS-WEL has an accompanying assessment tool called the Five Factor Wel (5F-Wel; Myers, Luecht, & Sweeney, 2004).

The holistic model was chosen as the theoretical basis for this study because it is the primary wellness model in counseling. Further, it encompasses on total wellness functioning rather than other wellness models that target isolated aspects like psychological wellness or physical wellness. The participants of this study are academic advisors with counseling degrees, so this model makes the most sense as counseling students are more likely to have been educated on this model and its constructs. Though used to examine wellness with a variety of undergraduate populations including military cadets or minority students (Gibson & Myers, 2006; Spurgeon & Myers, 2010), the holistic model fits well with the student-athlete population because of the developmental and lifespan approach that attends to the whole person, not just the student or the athlete, and can address all of their obstacles.

Method

An interpretative phenomenological analysis, which involves the participants communicating their lived experience and then the researchers attempt to understand it (Creswell & Poth, 2018), was best suited for this inquiry because it examined a phenomenon of wellness as addressed by academic advisors in their sessions with student-athletes. Several constructs help define wellness and there are multiple wellness models (Roscoe, 2009). The combination of these two phenomena makes for a very individualistic, diverse academic advising environment. Because of this variability, a qualitative methodology using in-depth, individual interviews are best to capture the essence of each participant's experience.

Participants

The participants were recruited using purposeful sampling and snowball sampling (Hays & Singh, 2012) via athletic and counseling listservs. The call for participants provided inclusion criteria (master's degree in counseling or current enrollment in a counselor education graduate training program, current employment at a university as an academic advisor, and work directly with student-athletes), IRB approval information, and a demographic questionnaire. These parameters were chosen because the researchers wanted to glean how advisors with counseling degrees address wellness, which is a foundational component of the counseling profession and a well-documented deficiency for student-athletes. Over 40 participants completed the online demographic questionnaire, but many were excluded due to incomplete questionnaires or did not meet inclusion criteria due to educational training. Twelve met the criteria, but two did not return phone calls or emails to participate in the interview.

Extant literature supports that sample size in qualitative research varies as needed for data saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and 10 is the approximate number needed for phenomenology (Hays & Singh, 2012). The authors recruited 10 participants with nine of them from the National Association of Academic Advisors of Athletes (N4A) listserv and the remaining participant was recruited through snowball sampling. Divisional breakdown of the participants is as follows: NCAA Division I Football Bowl Series (FBS) schools ($n = 4$), NCAA Division I Football Championship Series (FCS) schools ($n = 2$), NCAA Division I schools with no football team ($n = 2$), and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) schools ($n = 2$). There were seven females and three males with an average 5.81 years of experience as

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an academic advisor to student-athletes. The ethnic breakdown of participants included two African-American participants and eight Caucasian participants. Participants were also identified by a pseudonym assigned by the researcher to maintain anonymity. To note, the researchers were aware of the vast differences between available resources at Division I schools compared to other divisions (Moore, 2016). However, the goal was to gain an understanding of the lived experience of the participants, regardless of athletic association. The commonalities among participants are discussed in the results section.

Role of the Researchers

In qualitative research, the researcher often serves as the primary instrument of data collection (Hays & Singh, 2012). Though there are biases present, the purpose is not to eliminate bias, but rather understand the lens through which data is collected and analyzed. The first researcher identified as a former Division I FBS student-athlete who had a career-ending injury, a former high school counselor, and a beginning counselor educator. The second author identified as a counselor and counselor educator of 17 years and has studied wellness with college students. Neither author had any pre-study interactions with any of the participants.

Procedure

Participant demographics were collected in the recruitment stage via a secure online survey system. Detailed informed consent was provided and demographics were verified before each interview to ensure accurate participant inclusion. Twelve interview questions were designed by the first author and derived from a thorough review of the student-athlete and counseling literature. The questions were then piloted (Turner, 2010) with two academic advisors who had master's degrees in counseling. The questions were open-ended and specifically focused on the advisor-athlete relationship, how the advisor defines wellness, if and how wellness was addressed in the sessions, and the advisors' job responsibilities and roles. Sample questions included: What are your primary job responsibilities? What stressors do you see with your student-athletes? What counseling skills do you use in your job? How do you define wellness? What wellness activities do you incorporate with your athletes?

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted via face-to-face and telephone so the first author could address specific topics of the participants' experience while also allowing room for follow-up questions (Hays & Singh, 2012). Telephone interviews were utilized over video conferencing due to convenience (i.e., not requiring internet connection) for both researcher and participants. Semi-structured intereviews were best suited for this methodology because it helps elicit details of the participants' experience. Each interview was approximately 60 minutes, recorded with the participant's permission, and kept safely in a password-secured electronic location only accessible by the first author to ensure confidentiality.

The researchers took several measures of quality and rigor to determine the trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2012). Verbatim transcripts were sent to the participants to check for accuracy as a form of member checking. Additionally, a triangulation of investigators during the analysis process (Hays & Singh, 2012), which was comprised of the first author and two peers with experience in qualitative research and allowed for multiple perspectives and interpretations of the data. Each research team member read the first transcript independently and looked for salient statements of meaning regarding how the participants experienced the

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phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The team developed an initial set of codes based on the identified statements. The remaining transcripts were independently read using the initial codes, but also allowed room for the codes to evolve. The research team met several times to discuss various codes and collapse similar experiences into broader themes. A peer debriefer, who was not involved in the data collection or analysis, reviewed the conclusions of the research team and provided feedback. Additional measures of trustworthiness included an audit trail of all research activities, interview protocol, detailed research team meeting notes, reflexive journals, and the evolution of the codebook (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Results

The analysis of the data yielded several themes and subthemes that reflected the experience of the participants in addressing wellness with their student-athletes. Four major themes and seven subthemes emerged. The themes are Academic Planning and Skills, Counselor Practice and Knowledge (emphasis on fostering relationships, counseling skills and theory, and athletic empathy), Barriers to Seeking Support, and Cultivating Holistic Wellness in Student-Athletes (career and life skill development, psychological support, coach-advisor relationship, and case management). Pseudonyms are used to report results. Table 1 also includes a more thorough demographic portrait of each participant's experience and illustrates the variability of job title, number of teams currently advising, experience, counseling degree concentration, and previous collegiate athletic experience.

Table 1.
Participant Demographics

Participant Name	Job Title	Experience	Counseling Degree Concentration(s)	Sport Caseload	College Athletic Experience
Stewart	Learning Assistant	2 years	Addictions; Clinical Mental Health	8 teams	No
Katherine	Assistant Director, Student-Athlete Support Services	10 years	Higher Education	4 teams	Yes
Mark	Assistant Athletic Director for Academics	13 years	Mental Health	13 teams	No
Jana	Academic Advisor	4 years	School Counseling	4 teams	Yes
Shannon	Associate Professor, Counselor-Student-Athlete Support Programs Coordinator	13 years	Marriage and Family Therapy	11 teams	Yes

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Darcy	Athletic Academic Counselor	4 years	School Counseling	4 teams	Yes
Patrick	Student Success Coach	6 years	Student Affairs	8 teams	No
Laura	Student-Athlete Development Specialist	2 years	College Student Personnel	3 teams	Yes
Ashley	Associate Director of Student-Athlete Academic Services	2 months	Higher Education	8 teams	Yes
Elizabeth	Senior Athletic Academic Advisor	4 years	Higher Education	3 teams	No

Academic Skills and Planning

This theme is comprised of major job responsibilities that each academic advisor must address with the student-athletes on their caseload. Participants shared various duties including grade monitoring for eligibility and progress toward graduation, as well as scheduling classes. Mark stated, “A major part of my job is advising. Helping them to pick classes, helping them to do degree plans.” Jana, like other participants, schedules weekly meetings with student-athletes to "check in, kind of catch up on grades.” Shannon, a junior college advisor, stated that her priority was to create and monitor her student-athletes’ plan to identify “what they want to do with life after sports to really make sure that when they do transfer, they can stick to their true major due to APR [academic progress rate] and requirements like that. ”

Participants expressed that their student-athletes are often ill-prepared for college and they must assist them with organization and time management strategies. Laura shared, “They don’t understand time management… [or] study skills.” Ashley expressed that her student-athletes “do not even have the basic skills to really succeed past our most basic courses.” To help build academic skills, Patrick has them use their cell phones to “show me how they would put something on a daily calendar.” Similarly, Katherine has them create “a checklist of everything they have to remember when they leave my office.” Laura also “break[s] down every syllabus for my students…and I know when their tests are before they do.”

Counselor Practice and Knowledge

A large responsibility of the participants involved academic eligibility, but their duties entail much more than that. This theme describes how they utilize their counseling training in other job responsibilities. It is divided into three subthemes of emphasis on fostering relationships, counseling skills and theory, and athletic empathy.

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Emphasis on fostering relationships. Participants consistently expressed the importance of building relationships with their student-athletes and often used words like "mentor" and "rapport" when conveying their interactions with them. Additionally, many used the phrase "open door policy" to describe the environment they created for their student-athletes. Jana shared that "the biggest part of the job is building relationships and getting to know students as individuals because that's the foundation for everything else that you're going to do." Others discussed the importance of being a role model by "trying to kind of be that adult figure in their lives that they can look [to]" or "making sure that I'm a good example for them."

To facilitate the relationship, participants described different strategies to show they were genuinely invested in their student-athletes. They shared that they attended student-athletes' games and competitions or maintained contact with their student-athletes even after they graduated. Many also discussed confidentiality to help build trust. Though participants are required to report if an athlete becomes academically ineligible or if an NCAA violation occurs, many used the word "confidential" to describe their personal policy when not required to report. Katherine stated, "I would say confidential and they are trusting in that what they tell me is between us." Shannon added, "If it's not something that I'm mandated to report, I keep it confidential". Stewart, hesitant to use *confidential*, stated, "I would tell students there's no level of confidentiality here [but] I could be judicious about what I share and how much I share."

Counseling skills and theory. The participants described employing the strategies and skills they learned in their counseling programs. Mark uses "first-semester counseling skills" like active listening daily with his students. Darcy shared that "everyday counseling [skills are] definitely is used." Similarly, Jana expressed, "I empathize and I reflect and I do all the basic skills that they teach you in graduate school." Other basic counseling skills the participants used included summarizing, clarifying for understanding, and interpreting body language and tone.

Other advisors were more intentional and used more advanced counseling with their student-athletes. When needing to seek out a resource or talk with someone unfamiliar, Elizabeth often role-played various scenarios with her student-athletes to "make [them] feel a little more comfortable with the situation." Darcy employed intentional silence and stated, "I don't even have to be silent for long because the student-athletes will just start spewing because they either feel uncomfortable or they know that it would be beneficial for them to talk." Patrick shared that he "take[s] cultural factors into consideration" especially with his international student-athletes. Similarly, Katherine expressed that "their background of what college is, is different than an international student or even a student whose parents were in college to ones that didn't [attend college]. So, you have to really understand the differences and each student as individual."

Athletic empathy. This is a term coined by the research team to describe how the participants expressed a deeper understanding of what student-athletes experience at the collegiate level. Only six of ten participants played a collegiate sport, yet all of the participants were able to empathize and understand that their student-athletes have unique challenges that set them apart from non-athlete students. Patrick, who did not play sports in college, expressed:

> If you told a non-student athlete that they could only go to class at a certain time, that they couldn't choose a major based on obligations that they had to adhere to be able to keep their scholarship…they have to go to practice, they have to go to film, that they had

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> to give up their Saturdays, that they couldn't go home, that they couldn't go to the movies, they wouldn't do it. They wouldn't give up that freedom. But student-athletes do.

He continued by saying that there are misconceptions about student-athletes and "definitely a lack of sensitivity" about the athlete experience and added that the misconception held by some faculty members who discriminate against student-athletes is "disheartening."

Some advisors spoke about how student-athletes are overworked and time management is a big stressor. This stressor lends itself to the academic skill building that advisors often do with helping organize schedules for student-athletes. Katherine shared, "They're exhausted because they're staying up late to get assignments done and then getting up early to get to practice. So, it's a constant battle with them on figuring out how are you using your time the best." Shannon noted similar issues due to practice, class, mandatory study hall, but also stated, "For our community, college athletes, on top of all that, most of them also work."

Some advisors also expressed frustration with some of the NCAA rules because they can unnecessarily burden some of their student-athletes. Elizabeth shared that some of her gifted freshmen student-athletes, who arrive with many college credits, have complications with their schedule and major. She stated, "I had a physics major that had to add a math major because he was so far ahead…[and] that just makes his life so much more difficult." Katherine expressed similar frustration with NCAA rules, but for her student-athletes who want to change their major. Her institution's structure made it difficult to change majors and sometimes left students to choose between career and sport. She said they "realize sometimes late, after a year of taking classes, I actually want to do engineering… [but] now I'm not going to be able to do that and my sport."

Barriers to Seeking Support

Though student-athletes are provided with different support services to assist with challenges (Osborne, 2014), many participants noticed barriers that prevent student-athletes from taking advantage of these services. Time is one of the biggest challenges of seeking additional services. Katherine stated that due to classes and multiple practices per day, resources are not always open when student-athletes have available time. She shared, "I would ideally see a staff of everybody being open to work with students at 10 p.m., at 11 p.m. at night because that's when our students are free." Ashley expressed that many of their student-athletes do not see the immediate value in receiving help and elaborated, "They're too busy. They probably don't see the need right now until something happens." Mark shared that, mathematically, student-athletes have enough time during a week, but stated, "Do I have to keep filling it with other people's stuff? …I wish there was time I could help these guys have a break [relax]."

The stigma associated with seeking help is another common barrier shared by participants. Jana shared, "I think there maybe is a little bit of a stigma…because [for example] if I'm trying to gain or lose weight, I don't want people to know my business and that I'm meeting with a nutritionist." Ashley stated, "They are shy and uncomfortable asking for help. Even just asking for help like in basic things." Patrick also sees stigma as an issue and uses athletic metaphors to help. He shared, "I'll say, you play football. You play the ultimate team sport. You know, but you're not afraid to ask for help in practice, you know what I mean?"

Barriers to Seeking Support Services described time and stigma as two main challenges that prevent student-athletes from taking advantage of available resources. Participants

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expressed recognition of barriers, which supports their awareness of the unique challenges student-athlete experience. This awareness, combined with their previous counseling training, allowed the participants to convey how they used their skills and knowledge to facilitate the holistic wellness of their student-athletes.

Cultivating Holistic Wellness in Student-Athletes

Cultivating Holistic Wellness in Student-Athletes discusses how the participants work on total wellness by helping student-athletes find fulfillment outside of their athletic identity. While none of the participants identified or referenced the name *holistic wellness model* (Myers & Sweeney, 2004), many participants described wellness as having multiple components. Patrick said it is “a holistic congruence between the physical, the emotional, the spiritual, the transpersonal, all those elements.” Laura noted that wellness is “overall being holistically satisfied with who you are as a person.” Shannon also added that wellness is a “lifelong process” and a “balancing act”.

When asked directly about wellness interventions they used in their sessions, Shannon was the only participant to share any formalized interventions and stated, “I have them do this wellness wheel so they can visually see where they’re struggling.” Other participants described the importance of self-care. Darcy emphasized to “leave time for yourself. Don’t fill up your schedule with just academics and athletics.” Elizabeth shared her student-athletes sometimes “need permission” to care for themselves.

The participants seemed to understand that their student-athletes needed assistance with holistic development and finding life satisfaction in areas outside of athletics. The majority did not use structured wellness activities, but their sessions and job responsibilities described meeting the needs of the whole person, not just the student or athlete identities. Thus, the resulting subthemes are career and life development, psychological support, coach-advisor relationship, and case management.

Career and life skill development. In addition to academics, many participants were responsible for integrating career and life skill development with their student-athletes. Mark intentionally urges his student-athletes to see themselves “outside of the athletic bubble” and geared his conversations and programmatic interventions towards transitioning to life after sport. Like Mark, Stewart encourages “a holistic appreciation for who they are as people.” Katherine shared career development activities like organizing job fairs for student-athletes or “doing resumes, cover letter workshops, talking to them about the application process.” Darcy also does “various interviews and utilizes career interest inventories to facilitate career development.

For life skills, Jana sees it as a fundamental responsibility of her job to educate her student-athletes on various life skills. She has seen advisors in other universities “almost rely solely on that one life skills person or that life skills department instead of taking advantage of that opportunity to do that on their own.” Laura and Patrick both shared about teaching student-athletes how to act professionally especially when interacting with professors. Shannon spoke about helping coordinate workshops for student-athletes to attend “whether it’s sexual assault or drug and alcohol abuse, just to raise awareness for issues that student-athletes deal with.”

Psychological support. Participants found that they were often addressing issues in their offices that were not related to academics. Some issues were related to developmental or

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transitional difficulties related to being homesick or having relationship issues with teammates or coaches. However, some participants described more severe cases in which they needed to provide psychological or emotional support to their student-athletes. Elizabeth has seen numerous issues including alcohol and drug use, depression, "boyfriend abuse; physical and verbal, emotional." Laura stated, "I did have a student-athlete who lost a sibling in the fall. It was kind of a very intense situation. She would come in to see me quite a bit about it." Darcy described having an athlete disclose a drug addiction and "one of the most severe cases" was an athlete who cut herself as a coping mechanism. Stewart shared many issues he encountered including undiagnosed learning disabilities, "definitely ADHD, OCD, general anxiety disorders." He also detailed gender identity issues where some student-athletes grapple with "com[ing] out of the closet." Shannon, who works at a community college without housing, has seen the psychological distress that homelessness has created for her student-athletes. She shared, "There's a lot of different things that I deal with in terms of personal and crisis intervention" and has been involved in several psychiatric detentions of student-athletes who were at risk for self-harm.

Coach-advisor relationship. The participants all had varied experiences with the student-athlete coaches, but there was a general feeling of collaboration and positivity. Many coaches requested that participants meet with the student-athletes a certain number of times per week or asked the participants to mandate a minimum number of study hall hours per week. Other times, the coaching staff and participants collaborated about addressing personal issues for the student-athletes. Stewart shared that the coaches were willing to "work with people to try to figure out what's the best path forward." Thus, the coach-advisor relationship subtheme best fits with Cultivating Holistic Wellness in Student-Athletes because this collaborative relationship works to benefit the whole person, not just the athlete identity.

Regarding the student identity, some advisors met with the coaches regularly to discuss academics. Laura meets with the coaches each semester to determine study hall hours based on academic performance from previous semesters. Mark's relationship with the coaches is primarily academic and they say "hey, can you call this professor and see if this kid's been going to class." Ashley, who works primarily with academically at-risk student-athletes, sends "an academic report every week to my coaches" so they are always aware.

Additionally, the coach-advisor collaboration also revolved around student-athlete personal issues. For example, Darcy noticed one of her student-athletes was shutting down and talked to the coaching staff who "revealed to me [that] his parents are going through a divorce." Elizabeth similarly said, "[when] something feels off, I'm going to call coach and see if they have any more insight on it." She also advised that she is careful what she discloses to a coach and always asks herself, "Is this going to benefit the kid? Is this going to help? Do they need to know this?"

Case management. Each participant described case management as a primary job responsibility. For this study, case management is described as knowing various campus and community resources and providing that information to the student-athletes. Assessment, consultation, and referral were common methods of case management the participants employed. Some participants viewed themselves as a coordinator of case management services. Stewart described himself as "the first line of defense" when it came to student-athlete issues and that he had to "kind of be like 'heads up' to the rest of the team." Jana described herself as the "the

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middle man" operating between various entities, different departments on campus, and the student-athletes.

Referral and consultation are vital responsibilities of the participants, so they must know various campus resources available and how to refer. Many participants describe walking their student-athletes to the counseling center if in need of counseling. Mark expressed, "I try to assess the student and then send them to where they can get help on campus." When working with financial aid or registrar issues, Patrick shared that he tries to "answer those questions before referring them" to the appropriate resource and describes it as some of the "little things that go along with the primary duties of being an academic advisor."

The analysis of the four major themes and seven subthemes were presented. Direct quotes from the participants supported each theme. A discussion of the themes along with implications and recommendations is provided in the next section.

Discussion

The Academic Planning and Skills theme emerged as the primary job responsibility of the participants and supports extant literature about the duties of an academic advisor (Harding, 2008). Beyond degree planning, participants used many different organizational and time management strategies to keep student-athletes academically eligible. Meeting often with student-athletes supports extant research that they are in need of additional support (Gayston-Gayles, 2003) and serves as a preventative strategy to crisis situations (Glennen, 1976).

Counselor Practice and Knowledge was comprised of three subthemes and detailed if and how participants used their counseling skills in their roles as academic advisors. Though directly asked about their skills and techniques, participants consistently emphasized that developing a relationship with their student-athletes was central to their jobs. Athletic empathy emerged because participants expressed understanding the many obstacles student-athletes encountered.

The consensus among the participants was that establishing a positive rapport and a safe environment for their student-athletes was extremely important to them. The connections they built helped their student-athletes open up about various issues, which subsequently allowed the participants to find various support resources. Confidentiality, though ambiguous in the advisor-athlete relationship (Thompson, 2013), was a strategy identified to help build rapport. Despite reporting to the athletic department and the university, it is possible that the participants' counseling training influenced their decisions to keep information confidential (American Counseling Association, ACA, 2016).

Regarding counseling training, most participants were not able to articulate their counseling theoretical orientation. However, they were able to express various counseling skills learned in their graduate programs. They identified basic counseling skills such as listening, paraphrasing, and interpreting both verbal and nonverbal communication, all of which are critical in establishing trust (Hughey, 2011). More advanced skills like silence, role-playing, and being culturally aware were also integrated into their sessions. Some research posits that academic advisors lack multicultural awareness (Zhang, 2016), yet these participants were attentive to cultural issues, which is also underscored in the counseling profession (ACA, 2016). Lastly, participants described fostering autonomy so that their student-athletes could formulate their own solutions, which is foundational to the counseling profession (ACA, 2016).

Athletic empathy describes the participants' deeper understanding of their student-athlete experience, which makes them a high-needs population in need of additional support (Gayston-

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Gayles, 2003). Some academic advisors exhibit a negative view of student-athletes (Stokowski, Rode, & Hardin, 2016), yet these participants empathized with their student-athletes. Empathy is essential to the counseling relationship (Ivey, 2013), so these findings suggest that having a counseling degree or some type of counseling training is beneficial to the student-athlete.

Barriers to Seeking Support Services is the third theme to emerge and participants shared that both time and stigma hindered student-athletes from seeking support, which is consistent with extant literature (Lopez & Levy, 2013; Wahto et al., 2016). However, some participants noted that the stigma was also associated with other interventions such as tutoring or academic support. Some participants reported that counseling skills, like appropriate self-disclosure and role-playing, helped mitigate some of these barriers.

Cultivating Holistic Wellness in Student-Athletes distinguishes itself from the Academic Skills and Planning theme because it describes the multitude of non-academic responsibilities of the participants. Career and life development, psychological support, coach-advisor relationship, and case management were the four subthemes. Notably, none of the participants identified the holistic wellness model as a model with which they were familiar. None of the participants discussed using any sort of wellness assessment like the 5F-Wel (Myers et al., 2004), and only one participant described any concrete activity involving wellness. This could indicate that counselor training programs need to provide emphasis on the holistic wellness model.

The most obvious connection to the academic responsibilities of the participants' job is career development, which is prudent because less than 2% of student-athletes play professional sports after college (NCAA, 2019). Participants described individual and programmatic interventions but were also responsible for teaching life skills (Lance, 2009). Career and life skills development are congruent with several third-order factors in the IS-WEL and show the importance of holistic wellness interventions in life and career planning (Lawson & Myers, 2011). Third-order factors participants addressed were work, control, realistic beliefs, self-worth, friendship, and love.

Work and control, as components of the Creative Self, are essential to the human experience and can impact life satisfaction (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). Control is the belief that one can change or influence one's own life events. Realistic beliefs, as one component of the Coping Self, describe the absence of irrational thoughts and prepares individuals for life stressors without causing undue anxiety. Participants addressed these components through an emphasis on career development and relating the academic components of college to a future career. Student-athletes' lives are often controlled by others, so it was critical for participants to convey that the student-athletes do have choices in major, career, and other areas of life.

Adding to career and life skills, participants facilitated the holistic wellness development of their student-athletes by providing psychological support. The psychological issues the participants reported are supported in both student-athlete literature and advising literature (Ryan, Gayles, & Bell, 2018; Preece et al., 2007; Wolanin et al., 2016). Though there are overlaps between counseling and academic advising and academic advisors need to know when to make an outside referral (Kuhn, Gordon, & Webber, 2006), they must first possess the knowledge of recognizing the subtleties of mental health symptoms. Counselors are educated on these mental health issues, trained to evaluate and assess crisis situations, and can safely deescalate clients with sensitivity (ACA, 2016; CACREP 2016). They described relying on their counseling training to provide proper support and crisis intervention if needed. They also reported no feelings of discomfort when encountering these situations were reported, which is contrary to advising literature (Preece et al., 2007).

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Managing psychological issues is directly reflected in all of the second-order factors within the IS-WEL except the Physical Self (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). However, the interplay of thoughts and emotions, as two components in the Creative Self, can manifest physically in the body (i.e., physically feeling stress). Friendship and love, components of the Social Self, exist on a continuum and serve as social supports. They are attributed to increased quality of life whereas the absence of love and friendship can be associated with poorer quality of life. Gender identity, cultural identity, and self-care are factors of the Essential Self and encompass a sense of purpose or meaning in life. Gender and cultural identity are characterized as lenses through which life is experienced and interpreted by self and others whereas self-care is described as a proactive habit that promotes living well and fully. The Coping Self, which includes leisure, stress management, and self-worth, is the ability to successfully manage life events stressors.

Of the three third-tier factors in the Essential Self, self-care was most consistently emphasized by the participants as many intentionally built in self-care into their student-athletes' schedules. Though self-care was often discussed, participants shared that coping strategies to balance the student and athlete roles dominated many of the conversations and interventions. They spoke of strategies to avoid burnout, leisure time to disengage from both the student and athlete roles, stress management activities, and consistently affirmed their student-athletes' self-worth as many often saw themselves as one-dimensional and confined to their athlete identity.

Participants described a collaborative relationship with the coaching staff and stated overall satisfaction with this relationship. Though the athlete-coach relationship can impact athlete performance and motivation (Riley & Smith, 2011), participants spoke generally of athlete-coach relationships, so their experiences cannot confirm or refute the literature. This subtheme fits best under the Cultivating Holistic Wellness in Student-Athletes because the participants shared in the coaches' genuine desire to help their student-athletes develop holistically.

Case management connects distressed students or staff to appropriate resources by "arranging, coordinating, monitoring, evaluating, and advocating for individuals" (Adams, Hazelwood, & Hayden, 2014, p. 49). This was a time-consuming responsibility, and participants often used their counseling skills to assess or evaluate issues, were well informed of various resources to make the appropriate referral, and often consulted with others to help advocate for their student-athletes. Lastly, the participants followed-up with their student-athletes to provide continual support and encouragement of seeking assistance.

The case management role does not fit specifically with any second-order factors in the IS-WEL, but rather helps address many of the third-order factors (Myers & Sweeney, 2004) as participants made referrals for tutoring, counseling, and nutritionist for support. Referrals to outside services help student-athletes with third-order factors like work, control, realistic beliefs, and others. Though not specifically aligned with the IS-WEL, it is a critical responsibility and skill needed to address holistic wellness with their student-athletes.

A distinguishing feature of the IS-WEL is the four contextual factors (Local, Institutional, Global, and Chronometrical) and 16 sub-factors that impact healthy human functioning (Myers & Sweeny, 2004). These environmental components interact and influence one another and the Indivisible Self. It was apparent that the participants maintained awareness of many contextual variables that impacted the lives and functioning of their student-athletes. They were cognizant of team dynamics (i.e., Local – family and community) which can hinder or help with an athlete's transition to college. Participants were conscientious of the university and NCAA rules that dictated what their student-athletes could and could not do (i.e., Institutional –education and

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business/industry). Further, they often fought the misconception of privilege associated with student-athletes and confronted the culture of collegiate sports by demonstrating athletic empathy (i.e., Global – culture, environment, and community). Lastly, they challenged student-athletes to view themselves from a lifespan perspective and to find a life purpose beyond athletics (i.e., Chronometrical).

Limitations

The results of this study provided insight into the experiences of academic advisors with counseling degrees and the phenomenon of addressing wellness with college student-athletes. However, limitations are inherent in any study and must be addressed. Despite the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness, bias was present in qualitative research as the researcher is often the primary instrument of data collection (Hays & Singh, 2012). Sampling method and size are limitations because nine of the 10 participants came were recruited using the N4A listserv. Though the small sample size was sufficient for a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012), it is difficult to generalize the participant's experiences to the broader advising population. Also, the sample did not include advisors from Division II or Division III schools. During data collection, the researchers primarily used telephone interviews instead of in-person or video conference calls, and one of the participants had not completed his counseling degree. In the data analysis process, transcripts were reduced to quotes that seemed relevant to the research question and later assigned codes and themes. Through this data reduction, is possible that the research team incorrectly inferred the saliency of the participants' responses.

Recommendations

The results gleaned from this study yield recommendations for academic advisors, athletic departments, and counselor educators. NACADA (2005) encourages a holistic view and says advisors should collaborate with student-athletes on academic, personal, and career aspirations (Harding, 2008). However, no standardized curriculum and limited skills-based professional development (Robbins, 2012) make it challenging to meet these directives. Having a master's degree in counseling was helpful to many of the experiences participants shared. Thus, it is encouraged for advisors of student-athletes to receive professional development on interpersonal skills and employ more intentional wellness strategies in their advising sessions, both of which lends itself to a partnership with counseling departments.

Recommendations made for athletic departments are similar to those made for the advising profession. Considering the difficulties with student-athletes seeking help (Wahto et al., 2016), it is critical for advisors of student-athletes to be skilled to deal with a variety of issues. This study provides preliminary support that academic advisors with counseling degrees were skilled to handle the challenges, psychological concerns, and personal crises that student-athletes face.. Furthermore, they demonstrated athletic empathy unlike other advisors of student-athletes (Stokowski et al., 2015). Thus, it is recommended that athletic departments employ academic advisors with counseling degrees, provide training for existing advisors that emphasizes skill development, or increase the accessibility of mental health services. Athletic departments should also continue to emphasize the holistic development of student-athletes. The

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IS-WEL provides an appropriate framework for meeting wellness needs and can be assessed throughout their athletic tenure (Myers et al., 2000).

For counselor education programs, it is recommended to include more theory-based skills with an emphasis on the connection of theory to practice as many participants could not identify their personal theoretical orientation. This includes wellness development and interventions. A second recommendation is to highlight student-athlete issues in school counseling programs because they are responsible for postsecondary transitions to college.

This study provided insight into the phenomenon of how academic advisors with counseling degrees address wellness with college student-athletes. Emergent data found that these participants were addressing the wellness needs of their student-athletes albeit in ways that were not so overt. Additionally, it underscored the obstacles student-athletes encounter and how participants mitigated those challenges. Specifically, the results reflected the importance of counseling skills and knowledge in addressing wellness with college student-athletes.

There are also several opportuntities for future research with student-athletes and wellness. While this study explored how advisors with counseling degrees incorporate wellness, a future step would be to see how advisors from various backgrounds address wellness with their athletes. Futher, it would be prudent to investigate the relationship from the student-athlete perspective.

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