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More than an Athlete: The Impact of Athletic Identity on African American Male NCAA DI Collegiate Student-Athlete Help-Seeking Attitudes

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by

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Abstract

A marginalized racial identity, a male gender identity, and an athletic identity have all been significantly linked to mental health seeking and attitudes. African American male collegiate student-athletes continue to use mental health resources at insufficient rates when compared to their White counterparts, even though they experience mental health impairment at comparative rates. The purpose of this study was to critically examine factors that contribute to the underutilization of mental health resources by African American collegiate NCAA DI student-athletes. At the intersection of race, gender, and athletic identity this study dives into the lived experiences of African American collegiate NCAA DI student-athletes at the systemic and individual level. A semi-structured interview was used to examine how the social construction of gender and race influenced the African American DI collegiate student-athletes' formation of their athletic identity and their consequent understanding of mental health and related resources. A reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify subsequent codes and themes from the interview data. Reoccurring themes across the data suggest that an indivisible relationship between race and gender, an internalized need to dominate, and the internalization of mental health as an individual problem may contribute to the help-seeking attitudes of this sample. Findings support the need for further research examining how athletic identity is formed and how it contributes to the help-seeking attitudes and behaviors of African American collegiate student-athletes.

Keywords: Black masculinity, student-athlete, intersectionality, socialization, double consciousness, help-seeking

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Collegiate student-athletes represent a niche population of young adults that are required to invest their time in multiple high demanding commitments. Effectively managing both academic and athletic responsibilities can be difficult, especially if the student plays a Division I (DI) sport and/or attends an Ivy League institution. In the recent past, the NCAA (2016) has indicated that college student-athletes spend a significant amount of their time, upwards of 30-plus hours a week, on athletic activities. However, the DI college athletes were found to engage in closer to 40 hours per week in sport-related activities. According to student-athletes, DI athletic demands totaled 35.4 hours/weekly, Division II (DII) 33.5 hours/weekly, and Division III (DIII) 30.3 hours/weekly (NCAA, 2017). When coupled with the time spent engaging in academic responsibilities, the NCAA concluded that student-athletes spent more than double the amount of time with academic or sports related activities than on anything else (i.e., sleep, self-care, extracurriculars). Time spent attending to athletic-related activities also heavily increased during in-season by an average of 5-8 hours/weekly. There is a noted distinction between DIII and DI collegiate athletes when it comes to the development of both components of the student-athlete identity, which consists of an athlete identity and student identity. Even the DIII mission statement emphasizes total development and highlights differences in educational experiences in comparison to DI programs (NCAA, 2019).

Functioning in a system for an extensive duration of time can result in the internalization of patterns and messages received through socialization (Stryker, 1980). Each environment has its own set of rules and guidelines unique to that setting. To succeed and perform effectively within the surrounding culture, individuals will abide by the predetermined, and sometimes

unspoken, rules. *Symbolic interactionism* suggests that "humans create their social world through interactions and role taking" (Stryker, 1980, p. 18). Through this socialization, individuals begin to develop a sense of self, attitudes towards themselves, and establish a pattern of meaning to understand and define situations (Stryker, 1980). Collegiate athletes are not only heavily embedded in sport culture during their participation in NCAA competition but have also typically been involved in sport-focused high schools or even in sport teams during their primary education (Ericsson et al., 1993; Bergeson, 2019). Research has indicated that NCAA collegiate athletes tend to hold athlete as their most salient identity (Smith and Hardin, 2020). Beamon and Bell (2006) further detailed that African American collegiate athletes were socialized more towards athletics than academics in comparison to their White counterparts. In this study, parents of African American athletes were more engaged and active in their child's life as it pertained to athletics as opposed to education when compared to other racial groups. The empirical evidence from Beamon and Bell (2006) supported their conclusion that the imbalanced messages from culture and social networks that African American athletes typically experience has contributed to the over-identification with athletic identity. Smith and Hardin (2020) suggested that anything that threatens or results in the loss of this athletic identity can be accompanied by a range of physical consequences and psychosomatic symptoms. These difficulties can be associated with the degree to which the individual identifies with the athletic identity. This overemphasized athlete identity may be more prevalent in high revenue generating DI sports (Beamon, 2012).

Sport culture embodies and validates heteronormative and masculine dominant characteristics. All athletes receive praise when they fulfill traditional masculine qualities such as aggression, force, physical prowess, and violence, whereas athletes who have difficulties executing these traits are perceived as weak, incapable, and even worthless (Heird & Steinfeldt,

2013; Horton & Mack, 2000; O'Neil, 2008). Vulnerability is perceived as a threat to athletic identity in an environment where vulnerability is associated with an inability to perform and thereby generate revenue. Sport culture's fixation on physical ability simultaneously prioritizes the physical condition of the athlete while minimizing and even stigmatizing the mental condition. Martin et al., (2002) found that a significant barrier to help seeking, particularly with a sport psychologist, was the fear associated with being perceived negatively. The stigmatization and negative connotation of sport psychology was found to be the most significant barrier (Martin et al., 2002). Cultural norms and stereotypes were found to be significantly related to attitudes about sport psychology (Ravizza, 1988). In a study exploring attitudes of American, British, and German athletes, American athletes were significantly more likely to stigmatize sport psychology consultation than were British and German athletes (Martin et al., 2004). Moreover, American athletes of color are more likely to be apprehensive in utilizing mental health services, have greater distrust in health care providers, and are more susceptible to mental health-related stigmas (Corrigan & Watson, 2007; Vogel et al., 2011).

Help seeking behaviors are not simply a product of insufficient mental health resources, but alludes to a more complex interaction. In fact, the NCAA has taken several steps to increase mental health resources and supports for student-athletes. In 2013 the NCAA put together a mental health task force comprised of clinicians, policy experts, team physicians, administrators, coaches, and student-athletes to address the growing concern for student-athlete mental health. The task force developed mental health educational programs for coaches, medical providers, and student-athletes to increase awareness and responsiveness (NCAA, 2013). In 2019 the NCAA mandated that all schools make mental health services available via the athletic or counseling department. This mandate does not require access to a licensed mental health

provider and allows the institution to determine the type of professional (e.g., athletic trainer or team physician). Second, institutions are required to provide mental health resources through the athletic department for every student-athlete, which includes mental health educational materials and a guide on available mental health services provided by the institution and how to access them (NCAA, 2019). Research needs to be updated following this recent legislation, but a 2016 survey (n = 127 head athletic trainers at NCAA DI schools) revealed that 39 percent of DI athletic departments had a full-time licensed mental health practitioner on staff directly in the department. Although this represented less than half of the NCAA institutions, this was a 14 percent increase from the last dated survey in 2014 (Sudano & Miles, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

In comparison to the general population, college aged adults experience depression at significantly higher rates than any other age group (Wolanin et al., 2016). Although collegiate-student-athletes are experiencing mental health related issues at a comparable rate to non-athletes (Reardon & Factor, 2010), collegiate student-athletes are significantly less likely to utilize mental health resources and seek help in comparison to their non-athlete peers (Armstrong et al., 2015). This discrepancy is notable because athletes experience demands that are considerably different from traditional students (Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018). Research has shown that the demand of athletic participation is an additional stressor for the student-athlete that traditional students do not experience (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). The stress associated with the unique demands on student-athletes can manifest in physical, emotional, and developmental difficulties (Watson & Kissinger, 2007). The student-athletes' high engagement in sport related activities restricts them from developing outside social and leisure interest that may serve as buffers against distress and exposes them to public criticism, physical fatigue, and physical injury

(Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018; Watson & Kissinger, 2007).

Approximately 24% of college athletes experience moderate to severe levels of depressive symptoms (Wolanin et al., 2016). Despite comparable rates of depression and anxiety among collegiate student-athletes in comparison to non-athlete students, student-athletes are more hesitant to access mental health resources (Whitehead and Senecal, 2019). Student-athletes may avoid addressing their mental health difficulties due to fears about how people (i.e., teammates, coaches, family, and the university) may respond and how it might impact their ability to participate in their sport. This problem only worsens in NCAA DI sports that demand performance excellence, in part, due to high financial consequences (Whitehead & Senecal, 2019). The collegiate student-athlete is at risk because this decreased likelihood to seek help in comparison to nonathletes, even though they are just as likely to experience depression and other mental health issues, may place them at a greater risk for suicide (Sudano, Collins, & Miles, 2017).

To better understand why collegiate athletes may be utilizing mental health resources at an insufficient rate, the formation of the athletic identity in sport culture is important to consider. In comparison to non-athlete students, collegiate student-athletes had relatively higher negative views towards help seeking (Watson, 2005). Examining the unique culture of athletics provides insight into the help seeking differences of collegiate athletes and non-athlete students. Community and cultural context were found to significantly influence the use of mental health services (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Sport culture emphasizes physical prowess while simultaneously diminishing and stigmatizing mental health (Whitehead and Senecal, 2019). This regulation of behaviors within sport culture can indirectly discourage student-athletes from seeking and utilizing mental health supports.

Sport culture is developed within a closed system because collegiate athletic programs typically have a culture that operates independently from the broader affiliated institutional culture, although the institution is responsible for the athletic department's budget and resources, among other things (Watson, 2003). The ideologies and behaviors adopted by student-athletes in this closed system may contribute to negative attitudes about mental health resources and engaging in counseling, especially with an outsider (Ackerman, 2011). In this closed sport dominated system, athletes are processing a triangulation of messages received from their immediate social network. Family, coaches, and teammates help define and establish this athletic social role (Horton & Mack, 2000). The athletic identity, defined as the degree of identification with the role of athlete (Brewer et al., 1993; Horton & Mack, 2000), utilizes a cognitive framework to interpret new information and incorporate new behaviors associated with the athletic role. Horton and Mack (2000) explored how athletic role may impact development in other aspects of life and behavior. The self-report measures in this study assessed degree of athletic identity, commitment to sport, and engagement in other life roles. Findings suggested that college aged athletes, when compared to adult aged athletes, may be more influenced by higher degrees of athletic identity due to having fewer life roles (e.g., professional, parental, personal endeavors) that they regard as important to one's understanding of self.

Steinfeldt and Steinfeldt (2012) connected athletic identity to traditional masculine norms depicted in American culture (i.e., emotional suppression, self-reliance, risk-taking, violence, etc.). Across the sport domain, female athletes, when compared to nonathletes, were found to have significantly higher levels of conformity to masculine norms (e.g., self-reliance, primacy of work, risk-taking, and emotional control; Steinfeldt et a., 2011). Research suggested that participation in athletics further perpetuated the socialization into stereotypically masculine

norms, which includes a decreased engagement in help seeking (Steinfeldt & Steinfeldt, 2012; Steinfeldt et a., 2011). Vogel et al. (2011) found that men with a high degree of masculine dominant beliefs had less favorable attitudes towards seeking psychological help. In addition, self-stigmatization and internal judgment regarding masculine behavior was an important mediator between masculine norms and perceptions towards help seeking. The study proposed that men who have internalized these masculine dominant messages may perceive help seeking as the inability to live up to that masculine standard. African American men in this study endorsed higher levels of dominant masculine norms in comparison to European American men. The finding was attributed to differences in cultural views of masculinity for African American men. Furthermore, the relationship between masculine norms and attitudes toward help seeking was strongest amongst African American men. Although this study highlighted a significant difference that shows a clinical need to understand African American men's help seeking, there is a gap in research regarding the culturally and racially relevant factors that contribute to this difference (Vogel et al., 2011).

Similarly, Weatherhead (2015) concluded that there is a significant relationship between help seeking attitudes and race but highlighted that a main limitation was that the majority of the sample consisted of White identifying participants and that there is a need to examine specific groups. Although there is plenty of research that has identified a relationship between help seeking and masculine role socialization, there is a paucity of research on how race impacts help seeking with specific groups. This is important because broadly gender and race (White vs. Nonwhite) have been found to be significantly linked to help seeking (Nam et al., 2010). African Americans, especially, are more likely to be concerned about the stigmas associated with mental illness when compared to the White majority (Cooper-Patrick et al., 1997). Corrigan and Watson

(2007) found that Nonwhite groups in comparison to White groups were more likely to endorse discrimination against people with psychiatric disorders. Unfortunately, the obvious limitation with this study and other studies that examine mental health stigma and ethnicity is that the research is outdated, and ethnicity is typically categorized as Nonwhite. Nonwhite is extremely complex and is used to describe very different racial groups.

Sport culture, even though it is a closed system, does not take place in a vacuum. African American male student-athletes are not only subjected to the rigid norms of sport culture, but also the dominant cultural norms and ideologies that influence the Black male experience. Black males encounter problems such as institutional racism, negative stereotyping, and must navigate environments that negatively impact identity development (Allen & Bagozzi, 2001; Curtis et al., 2021; Mahalik et al., 2006; Swanson et al., 2003). Thomas and Stevenson (2009) described how African American boys adopted certain behaviors to successfully navigate social interactions. Among them, hypermasculine behaviors are an over-exaggeration of male-specific behaviors used to garner respect from peers and deter antagonism. Enactment of hypermasculinity is a coping strategy used to combat an unaccepting environment (Spencer et al., 2004). Hypermasculine behaviors are defenses that Black boys use to keep them safe and are often perceived by others as outward signs of anger, noncompliance, insubordination, and direct physical aggression. The aforementioned research may provide insight into why African American male collegiate student-athletes (AAMCSAs) are more at-risk for mental health concerns and seek help at a lower rate than their White counterparts. These hypermasculine qualities adopted by African American males may contribute to an increased aversion to help seeking and the overaccentuated need to seem tough and invincible.

In addition, Thomas and Stevenson (2009) also found that Black male teenagers use *role-flexing* – the act of modifying how they present themselves to others to diminish some of the negative stereotypes associated with being a Black male. African American males talk, behave, and dress in direct opposition to existing stereotypes to present as more socially acceptable (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Based on this idea of role flexing, it can be inferred that maladaptive behaviors related to mental health that are learned in sport culture might be exacerbated amongst African American collegiate student-athletes. In a sport culture that already demands conformity, an African American male has a heightened desire to be deemed acceptable by his surroundings, maybe to the detriment of his mental functioning and stability (Abrams & Trusty, 2004). To be perceived as acceptable, African American males may be neglecting their mental health functioning, as seen in the insufficient use of mental health supports (APA, 2017; Motley & Banks, 2018).

There is a clear distinction for athletes when it comes to the maintenance of physical versus mental health. The collegiate student-athlete is already an at-risk population, and when athletic identity is combined with male gender and marginalized racial identity, there is an obvious and serious area of concern regarding help seeking behaviors. Based on the extant literature (Naoi et al., 2011; O'Neil, 2008; Vogel et al., 2011; Wilkerson et al., 2020), which suggested that a minority racial identity and male gender significantly and adversely impact help seeking behaviors, it can be extrapolated that AAMCSAs are more likely than any other group to be averse to help seeking. However, research on African American male student-athletes' experiences has been limited. Despite the fact that research has provided an understanding of how sport culture may be perpetuating the stigmatization of mental health amongst student-athletes, extant research has not drawn a connection between the formation of the athletic

identity within sport culture and how those experiences influence the African American male collegiate DI student-athlete's perceptions of mental health supports at the elite level. There is a need to further understand what aspects of athletic identity formed in the context of sport culture were internalized and now influence how the African American male collegiate DI student-athlete perceives help seeking. This understanding can help point to the specific aspects of athletic identity for African American collegiate DI student-athletes that influence a negative perception of mental health resources.

This study aimed to fill the gap in the sport psychology literature by exploring athletic identity and help seeking of AAMCSAs in a demanding sport culture. This is of considerable importance as recent epidemiological data showed the prevalence of mental disorders amongst current elite athletes ranging from 19 – 34% (Gouttebarge et al., 2019). Unfortunately, the public stigma around mental health issues has influenced all vocational domains including athletic performance. The stereotyped belief that individuals who have a mental illness are violent, incompetent, and are solely responsible for their condition has often resulted in discrimination and the development of negative psychosocial behaviors (Corrigan, 2004). Linder et al. (1991) administered a self-report questionnaire to 87 adult males to assess the underlying perceptions of using sport practitioner professionals. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate how strongly they would recommend drafting a college baseball, basketball, or football player who had worked with a coach, a sport psychologist, or a psychotherapist to improve performance. This study revealed that athletes who consulted with a professional (e.g., sport psychologists or therapist) were ranked significantly lower than athletes who did not utilize the resource. This finding suggests a relationship between public stigma and perceived value of the athlete. However, because the research on perceptions of athletes engaging in psychological services is

somewhat outdated, there remains a need for updated research surrounding mental health and elite athletes (Mertz et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the insufficient use of mental health resources by African American collegiate NCAA DI student-athletes at predominantly White institutions (PWI). Although extant literature has already established that sport culture, especially rigid ideas about masculinity, can be damaging to mental health and that sport culture contributes to hesitation in seeking mental health services, there is little research regarding how African American males' athletic identity is formed, with an attention to the impact of race and gender, and how this identity influences how African American collegiate DI student-athletes utilize mental health resources. Research has already indicated that 10 years of intentional training is required to reach a high level of proficiency within a specialized area. This theory, in turn, heightened the importance of time dedicated to practice and helped foster a year-round training model at an early age (Bergeson, 2019). To reach the elite level in sports requires years of preparation and engagement in said sport. Furthermore, sport culture plays a prominent role in the individual's socialization and the development of morals and values (Coulomb-Cabagno & Rascle, 2006). If the elite athlete is engaging in their sport for years in order to gain mastery, their identity is shaped in both the dominant culture and the sport subculture.

This study aimed to promote a deeper understanding of the effects of gender and race on the development of the athletic identity for African American collegiate DI student-athletes, given that these identities contribute to an aversion to help seeking (Vogel et al., 2011). This qualitative study sought to provide a more in-depth examination of the formation of the athletic identity for African American male DI collegiate student-athletes and what aspects of that

identity might contribute to negative attitudes about engaging in psychological supports. Lastly, the research questions were not designed to conclusively determine how African American male collegiate DI student-athletes are developing an athletic identity that contributes to adverse help seeking behaviors based on their retrospective perspectives. The objective was to provide a preliminary understanding of how their intersecting identities as African American men might impact athletic identity development and help seeking behaviors. Although this study required participants to reflect on their experiences, it's understood that their awareness and understanding may be limited as it pertains to social and culture influences on their identity. To address this potential lack of awareness, this study critically interpreted how this intersection may influence them out of their awareness.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How do African American male collegiate DI student-athletes develop their athletic identity?

a. How does the intersection of race and gender influence the development of their athletic identity?

b. How does sport culture influence the development of their athletic identity?

2. How does the athletic identity of African American male collegiate DI student-athlete's influence their attitude towards help seeking?

a. What role does race and gender play in this process?

Significance of the Study

Unfortunately, a performance-centric perspective has historically dominated sport research. It is understood that in sports, performance and health are constantly battling for primacy. The prioritization of performance in sport culture neglects the existence of a robust

collegiate student-athlete experience. The same problem can be seen in sport psychology and sport medicine, in which treatment is conceptualized and administered with performance as the end goal (Martinkova 2008). This study moved the spotlight off quantified empirical research on performance and towards the mental health concerns afflicting the elite athlete. The findings from this study provided a preliminary understanding of how the intersectionality of race and gender contribute to the development of athletic identity for African American student-athletes, which could lead to future research on salient psychosocial variables, including racial factors, that contribute to the formation of the athletic identity. Second, this study enhanced the existing theoretical understanding of the relationship between athletic identity and help-seeking of student-athletes by providing an understanding of the development of athletic identity for African American DI collegiate athletes and identifying what factors, in addition to masculine dominant characteristics, may contribute to an aversion to help seeking.

Lastly, this study contributed to increased awareness around the negative effects of sport culture and how the American socialization of the athletic identity for African American male student-athletes may influence the over-identification with athletic identity. The in-depth understanding that this study provided can open the door to a contextual understanding of why athletic programs should incorporate culturally and racially relevant mental health education and practices. Regarding practice, the study offered insights into interventions such as education and the incorporation of mental supports that can be implemented to help the African American male elite athlete avoid developing a rigid athletic identity and negative attitudes towards mental health. This study may inform sport related professionals at various levels (i.e., coaches, trainers, and athletic directors) and help them understand what aspects of their program might be influencing this insufficient use of mental health resources by African American male DI

collegiate student-athletes. This study could have implications for the kinds of outreach that sport psychologists and other mental health providers may need to provide to African American student-athletes by offering professionals a nuanced understanding of help seeking within this marginalized subgroup.

Definition of Terms

Sport Culture: sport culture is the collection of values of a social subject (i.e., an individual or social group) comprised of ideals, norms, sanctions, and samples of behavior that regulate human activity within the context of sport (Georgescu & Kharkin, 2017). Participants in this study will be American born and raised, implying that all athletes are socialized in the same western culture.

Athletic Identity: Athletic identity is the degree to which an individual self-identifies with the role of an athlete (Brewer et al., 1993).

Help Seeking Behaviors: Help seeking behaviors are defined as the attempt to seek out formal community resources and professionals to alleviate or improve a perceived problem (Rickwood & Thomas, 2012).

Elite Athlete: Although research shows inconsistencies and a wide range of identifiers for elite athletes, for the purposes of this study, elite athlete is an individual who has been contracted to perform at the national level, which can vary between the amateur and professional level. This implies that, in their country, the athlete is amongst the best in their sport (Swann et al., 2015).

Mental Health Stigma: Mental health stigma is defined as "threats of diminished self-esteem and of public identification when labeled mentally ill" (Corrigan, 2004, p. 614).

Mental Health: Mental health is defined as a state of well-being that includes emotional, psychological, and social functioning. Mental health can determine how an individual copes with

stress, relate to others, and makes healthy choices that contribute to different domains in their life and/or community (Herrman, Saxena, & Moodie, 2005).

Mental Health Support: Mental health support is defined as any support an individual receives to protect or promote their mental health and psychosocial well-being (Herrman, Saxena, & Moodie, 2005).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The formation of identity is critical to the development of the college student (Torres et al.,2009). Erikson (1994) defined identity as a developmental construct that is shaped by how an individual interprets and organizes their experiences. Literature expanded this understanding to incorporate the impact of social groups the individual identifies with (e.g., race, sexual orientation, religion; Torres et al.2009). The understanding of self is developed in relation to these social groups and the level of identification an individual has with each social group. A student's identity develops in the context of multiple social groups. The relationship an individual has with their varying social groups within the dominant social context helps establish and dictate norms. The societal structures in this dominant social context help perpetuate and maintain oppression, and the social dynamics that dictate power and privilege help further shape identity. As a result, the majority ultimately determine socially appropriate and desired behavior. Culture and social norms intertwine to help create and set expectations that are both directly stated and implied. Regardless of the varying research on identity development, a common theoretical understanding is that identity is socially construed. Research on identity development supports the understanding that identity requires the acknowledgment that identities intersect. Each social identity has varying degrees of salience for the individual, which helps determine what norms, values, and expectations are internalized (Torres et al., 2009).

Several intersecting systems contribute to college student-athletes' development of a sense of self (e.g., sport culture, the institutional culture, their own culture, and the dominant societal culture). Athletic identity and academic identity are two prominent areas that impact how a collegiate student-athlete starts to understand themselves in relation to others. In addition

to the athletic and academic identities, the intersection of race and gender also contributes to the formation of these identities. Torres et al. (2009) highlighted that privileged and oppressed identities and the intersection of those identities are important to consider when examining specific groups. Although early identity research failed to consider this distinction and approached identity as if the developmental process was the same across all groups, contemporary research is incorporating context and an intersectionality framework when addressing identity and specific groups.

Although research has explored psychosocial variables that are significant to the outcomes of Black student-athletes (Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Steinfeldt et al., 2010), research still needs to explore the relationship between identities and outcomes for Black elite athletes (Bimper, 2014). The lack of research on African American collegiate student-athlete identity development is a limitation of extant research, which is noteworthy because African American student-athletes may be at greater risk for developing negative attitudes regarding help seeking and insufficient utilization of mental health resources (Naoi et al., 2011; O'Neil, 2008; Vogel et al., 2011; Wilkerson et al., 2020). Collegiate student-athletes are already less likely to seek help when compared to nonathletes (Watson, 2005), and gender and race compound this phenomenon for African American collegiate student-athletes. African American collegiate student-athletes are not only subjected to the regulations dictated by sport culture, but also the dominant American norms that perpetuate and maintain institutionalized racism. This literature review utilizes an intersectionality framework to explore athletic identity and help seeking of NCAA African American collegiate DI student-athletes.

Intersectionality as an Overarching Framework

Beyond just a more complex understanding of gender, intersectionality emphasized the inability to address social identities as mutually exclusive (Crenshaw, 1989; Dess et al., 2018). Intersectionality provided the framework that gender does not develop in a vacuum but intersects with an individual's social identities within the oppressive system in which those identities are developing. "Gender is constructed through race, and race is constructed through gender; they are intersectional and mutually constitutive" (Ferber, 2007, p. 16). In U.S. culture, Black men have been portrayed as "overly physical, out of control, prone to violence, driven by instinct, and hypersexual" (Ferber, 2007, p. 20). They also have been defined as failures, a danger to society, uncivilized, and bad fathers (Ross, 1998). These stereotypes of Black men are the product of White dominant norms that define masculinity, support racial inequalities, and impose limits on the cultural representation of Black men's identities (Ferber, 2007; Ross, 1998). This understanding of intersectionality will help in exploring the development of the athletic identity for African American male student-athletes.

Athletic Identity in Sport Culture

Heird and Steinfeldt (2013) theorized that identity is an assemblage of beliefs and personality that serves as a conduit for determining how people perceive external information and respond both cognitively and behaviorally. An individual who strongly identifies with a particular role will establish a pattern of behaviors in accordance with that role. A strong identification with the athletic role will influence the establishment of specific behaviors that are in alignment with being an athlete (Heird & Steinfeldt, 2013). The development of an athletic identity is socially established by the triangulation of messages received from peers, teammates, family, and coaches (Horton & Mack, 2000). Individuals often internalize these external

messages, more specifically, the messages that designate certain behaviors as favorable to develop an understanding of self (Stryker, 1980).

James (2020) qualitatively studied how college athletes at a DI university view their identity, the impact of their views on their academics, and the influence of teammates and coaches on their perceived identity. The sample of this study was composed of a majority White (4 identified as African American, 1 identified as Asian, 1 identified as Latina, and 3 identified as bi-racial) student-athletes (6 men and 13 women) representing a variety of different sports. The influence of friendships and coaches were among the primary themes identified using a thematic analysis. When asked about relationships, most of the participants indicated that their primary relationships are with teammates. Participants disclosed that "my teammates are my best friends" or "most of my friends are from within the athletic department". Participants even expressed how important it is for individuals with whom they were forming relationships to understand the student-athlete experience. Although understanding what is required of a student-athlete was important for participants when developing relationships, it was also suggested that forming relationships with non-athletes was important as well. Participants highlighted that sometimes they felt the need to form relationships outside of athletics to prevent sports from consuming their everyday life. One participant stated that "I'm just enjoying not being around athletes as much, but it's really because I don't want to have a conversation about soccer right now." Second, coaches were a vital influence on the student-athlete's development of the athletic identity and academic identity. The more a participant perceived that their coaches prioritized and stressed the importance of academics, the more they valued that aspect of their identity. Findings from this study suggested that the athletic and academic identities of student-athletes

highly depend on the information and support they receive from different stakeholders, such as family, coaches, and teammates.

Van Raalte and Hays (1998) incorporated several case studies to examine an athlete's early involvement in sport and reliance on sport specific norms to provide relevant information and support psychologists entering sport culture. The authors emphasized how an athlete's social network is integral to helping establish norms in sport culture. Coaches monitor schedules, diet, involvement in activities outside of the sport, and even regulate social interactions. Control and power are very prevalent in sports and can become very damaging, especially when a coach's job depends on the performance of their players. The culture of the athletic program, more specifically the coach, plays an integral role in establishing norms within the system. Coaches will provide explicit and implicit feedback on the actions of their players, defining desirable and undesirable behaviors. This can be detrimental depending on the coaches' priorities and expectations for the team and players. Moreover, the quality of interpersonal relationships in sports is essential to an athletes' development and overall well-being (Van Raalte & Hays, 1998).

Zourbanos et al. (2010) investigated the relationship between coaches' perceived behaviors and athletes' inherent self-talk. The study assessed two different samples of wrestlers actively competing at different levels (i.e., national level, regional level, and international level). Sample 1 (N = 112, mean age = 20.71) used a trait approach, in which traits were presumed to determine behavior, and sample 2 (N = 60, mean age 18.95) used a state approach, by comparing athlete scores of perceived coaches' behaviors to a third sample of coaches at the competition (N = 42) who rated their own behavior. Instruments completed by both samples of wrestlers were the validated Coaching Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) and the Automatic Self-Talk Questionnaire. Participants in sample 1 were asked to think about recent competitions, and

participants in sample 2 were asked to answer the questions regarding their just completed match. The study tested simple correlations to determine the strength between coaching behavior and athlete self-talk. Sample 1 findings concluded that perceptions of negative coaching behavior were positively correlated with disengagement, somatic fatigue, worry, and was negatively correlated with positive self-talk. In sample 2, although the relationship between the athletes' perception of coaching and the coaches' perceptions of their own behavior was moderate, both had strong relationships with athlete self-talk. Overall, the results from the study showed correlational evidence linking athlete perceptions of coaching behaviors and their self-talk. This finding supports how important an athletes' social network is to their development because coaching behaviors perceived as non-supportive were related to athletes' negative self-talk and psychological impairment. The authors proposed that having a healthy and supportive social network, in a closed and competitive sport culture, is essential because it can influence how an athlete perceives themselves, emotional functioning, and physical ability. Fry et al. (2012) administered a questionnaire to 467 NCAA DI student-athletes across several sports (n = 291 females and 171 males; 17 teams from two Midwest/Southern universities) to examine the relationship between perceived climate and the use of psychological coping skills. Climate was evaluated by using a Caring Climate Scale and a Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire. First, the 13-item Caring Climate Scale assessed the athletes' perceptions of care on their respective teams including feeling welcome, valued, and being treated with kindness and respect by their teammates and coaches. Second, the 21-item Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire was used to assess the perceived climate that the participants coach had created, items include options such as "each player's improvement is important" or "coaches pay most attention to the best players". Perceptions of a supportive social climate (e.g., coaches and

teammates) was significantly associated with a player's use of healthy psychological coping skills and players who perceived an encouraging and supportive social climate were more likely to engage in healthy coping skills when met with adversity or stress (Fry et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, the social networks that American athletes are establishing are developed within a culture that idealizes the athlete. American culture has idealized sports careers as emblematic of success and achievement. Winning and attaining accomplishments can supersede anything else in an athlete's life (Van Raalte & Hays, 1998). The competitive and rigorous nature of sports can severely diminish contact with experiences, networks, and support systems outside of sports. The norms associated with sport environments are fostered in rigorous, demanding, and isolated situations. "A more is better" approach or "just get it done" mentality is very prevalent across sport culture. Weakness is amplified as an inability to achieve, failure, or lack of ability in a system that requires constant output (Van Raalte & Hays, 1998). The construction of this flawed perception in sport culture prioritizes the development of athletic identity. In this context, athletic identity can become an individual's leading identification while simultaneously excluding other possible roles (i.e., academic identity).

Beamon (2012) found that the overidentification with an athletic identity may be more prevalent for African American athletes in high revenue-generating DI sports. This study examined identity foreclosure in 20 former DI basketball or football African American athletes through ethnographic interviews. The open-ended interview protocol asked the following questions: "How do you define yourself" and "How do you think others define you". Major themes across the narratives included an exclusive athletic identity or identity foreclosure. The study defined *identity foreclosure* as "a commitment to an identity before one has meaningfully explored other options or engaged in exploratory behavior, such as career exploration, talent

development, or joining social clubs or interest groups" (Beamon, 2012, p. 196). Results showed that 12 respondents believed sports made up 75% of what they came to understand as self. Respondents also indicated that the socialization of this athletic identity started from childhood. This was categorized as identity foreclosure because this early socialization of the athletic identity influenced neglect of other roles and identities. A participant stated the following regarding his athletic identity: "It was definitely cemented by the time I was twelve, when I got to junior high school... I could see that there was those people and there was us (athletes)" (Beamon, 2012, p. 200). Moreover 17 respondents perceived that people in their social network primarily viewed them as an athlete. Regarding social identity, a respondent disclosed "that's all people really know me as; even my family, friends, women" (Beamon, 2012, p. 202). Findings from this study suggested that when an athlete's social network primarily identifies them as an athlete and relates to them in their role as an athlete, this can lead to the development of athletic identity foreclosure.

Johnson and Migliaccio (2009) explored the over socialization of athlete in African American boys. In-depth individual interviews were conducted for 17 African American boys (mean age = 8.5) with their parents/guardians in attendance. The study purposefully selected this early age to get information during the onset of sport socialization rather than relying on the remembrance of past experiences. A grounded theory approach was used to analyze narratives that found patterns between African American boys and sport, sport socialization's impact on their identities, the importance of this athletic identity, and how the athletic identity was developed for the participants. Media, the African American community, and family were all found to continually encourage engagement in sport related activities. For the African American community, the professional athlete symbolized success, which generated the need to

intentionally create more athletes in the community. A common theme amongst the interviews was this early socialization, which can be expressed by a father who stated “We [mother and father] rolled the ball to him from the time he was able to sit up” (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009, p. 103). This early socialization does not imply that engaging in sports was the guaranteed outcome but supports the fact that early introduction into sports is important for developing an athletic identity, and children who do not experience this early socialization are less likely to participate in sports as they get older (MacPhail & Kirk, 2006). The constant messages from the macrosystem (e.g., media and entertainment) and mesosystem (e.g., family and immediate environment) created social meaning around the word athlete and soon began to influence role-taking by the participants to gain a level of desirability within their community. *Social recognition*, or the acknowledgment of the athletic role by the family and community, played a pivotal role in the development of the athletic identity for the respondents. Parental recognition regarding their son’s sport related interest or aptitude was always accompanied by a sense of pride. Expressions of pride displayed by family members regarding sport participation were consistent across interviews. Another consistency across interviews was the time their son spent engaging in sport related activities as opposed to other endeavors. Several parents indicated that their son missed or did not participate in other activities because of sport related schedule conflicts. There was even a distinction between the importance placed on school versus athletics. One parent even went on to say that "quick money does not come through years of schooling for a doctor or a lawyer. You can't captivate people with that.” (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009, p. 106). These findings suggested a distinction between the “American Dream” and the “African American Dream,” and the athletic identity is perceived as instrumental in attaining the “African American Dream” (Johnson & Migliaccio, 2009).

Additionally, the overrepresentation of African American males in sport is due to the concentrated socialization of this subgroup of athletes. Research has suggested that African American athletes have the highest expectation of a future in professional sports than any other race (Lapchick, 1996). Bimper and Harrison (2011) theorized that Black athletes are socialized into not only their racial identity but also their athletic role. Beamon and Bell (2006) found, in their case study, that African American athletes tended to overidentify with an athletic identity more than White athletes. This case study looked at the socialization process of an entire NCAA DI football team and the degree of attention placed on athletics in comparison to academics. To analyze socialization, the study used measures for parental influence on aspirations and motivation (e.g., the extent to which education was prioritized by parents), academic performance, and social adaption in college. Data yielded interesting findings for the African American participants in the study. African American football players were less likely to emphasize education in comparison to White players. This was attributed to academics also being less emphasized than athletics throughout their socialization process. In comparison to White respondents, Black players were more negatively affected academically the more sports were emphasized during their socialization (Beamon & Bell, 2006).

Miller (2019) highlighted racism and discrimination as primary issues in intercollegiate sports, with African American student-athletes being the most affected. African American college football players are portrayed as superhuman regarding strength and resilience, making their pain, vulnerability, and humanity invisible (Haslerig et al., 2019). Miller (2019) conceptually posited the NCAA as a microcosm of American society, in which Black athletes are exploited. Miller (2019) highlighted how DI teams show interest in African American athletes from poor backgrounds who only have sports-related skills. These Black athletes saw sports as

their best chance to enhance their family's economic status and, thus, are likely to be grateful for the chance, are unlikely to challenge the status quo, and are likely to conform to established norms. The valuing of Blacks more as athletes rather than learners negatively influences African American student-athletes' academic performance (Miller, 2019).

Racial Identity

To gain insight into why African American athletes may be overidentifying with an athletic identity requires a conceptual understanding of racial identity for this population. The social construction of race is important to consider when exploring the racial identity of African Americans given the historical implications. Cross (1978) facilitated a comprehensive review of two important racial identity development models that set the framework for conceptualizing Black racial identity development. Thomas (1970) theorized the first model that centers around the concept *negromachy*, which is a form of mental illness experienced by Black Americans that is perpetuated by a history of racism and White supremacy. Thomas (1970) indicated that this mental affliction is at the core of racial identity development for Afro-Americans. Afro-Americans who experience this affliction have higher attributes of compliance, subservience, repressed rage, and an oversensitivity to racial issues. To overcome this affliction and obtain an understanding of self without the standards and parameters established by dominant groups, an individual must seek out what will be defined as their racial identity. To discover this racial identity, a Black person must suspend contact with other groups to define their own ethnic boundaries and internal role models. Control of self through voluntary withdrawal, which can foster a source of power, is necessary to enter the five stages that describe the psychological metamorphosis of Black Americans. Stage one is a period of confusion for the individual, in which, they are attempting to understand their affliction. Stage two involves two components, the

gained awareness of all the pain endured, which has contributed to the undeveloped self-concept and the acknowledgement of all the psychological anxieties that come with being Black. Stage three involves information gathering about not only their African origin, but also the Black contribution to America. Stage four transfers that newly obtained knowledge to action and active engagement in the larger Black experience. Once each stage is successfully navigated, stage five represents a transcendence that decreases self-consciousness about one's Blackness, removes the psychological restrictions on race and social class, and helps one begin to view themselves as part of humanity.

The second model "The Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience," or Nigrescence, was developed by Cross (1971). This model was empirically supported by Hall, Cross, and Freedle (1972) and also consisted of five stages: (1) Pre-encounter, (2) Encounter, (3) Immersion-Emersion, (4) Internalization, and (5) Internalization-Commitment. The Pre-Encounter stage refers to the stage in which individuals behave in a way that devalues their minority status; the Encounter stage is when an individual begins to validate their minority identity; the Immersion-Emersion stage is when an individual is fully immersed in their minority culture; the Internalized stage is when an individual is secure in their minority identity; and the Internalization-Commitment stage is the incorporation of this minority identity into social activities (e.g., social activism). Each stage represents a progressive transition from the internalization of dominant European-American worldviews to a discontinued involvement in self-defeating ideologies and the internalization of a minority identity. These two models provide the framework for understanding Black racial identity within an American context and helped propel further research examining the African American experience.

Neville and Roderick (2000) explored the relationship between racial identity and psychological distress among African American undergraduate college students. Two self-report measures were completed by 182 participants (123 women, 59 men; mean age = 19.46) attending one of two predominantly White universities. The Racial Identity Attitudes measure (RIAS; Helms & Parham, 1990) was used to assess each participant's level of racial identity attitudes from Pre-Encounter (conformity of pro-White and anti-Black attitudes) to Internalization (a positive Black identity). Helms and Parham (1990) adopted the five stages from Cross (1971), but introduced the more presently accepted position that these stages are not fixed and linear, but statuses that highlight a more oscillatory developmental experience. Second, participants completed The Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) to assess psychological distress in nine domains: Somatization, Obsessive-Compulsiveness, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Depression, Anxiety, Hostility, Phobia, Anxiety, Paranoid Ideation, and Psychoticism. Data was collected over a 3-year period to investigate the psychological and academic adjustment of the participants. Consistent with Black racial identity literature, results from this study found a significant relationship between the Internalization stage and lower levels of psychological distress. Racial dissonance, which emerges in the Encounter stage and involves racial confusion, was found to contribute to more reports of psychological symptoms.

Nghe and Mahalik (2001) further supported the finding that racial identity impacts psychological functioning. This study looked at racial identity as a predictor of psychological defenses in African American undergraduate college students. 80 participants (44 women, 36 men; age range = 18 – 22 years) completed the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS) and defense mechanisms were operationalized using the Defense Mechanism Inventory (DMI) and the Defense Style Questionnaire – 40 (DSQ – 40). Results found a significant relationship

between Black racial identity and psychological defenses, which confirmed that Black racial identity statuses predict the use of psychological defenses for African Americans in this sample. Furthermore, participants who were higher in pre-counter and encounter racial identities were more likely to use principalization, reversal, and neurotic defenses. Specifically, the relationship between neurotic defenses and encounter attitudes represented one of the strongest correlations. This suggested that individuals in the earlier stages of racial identity development were more likely to rationalize and intellectualize conflict. Also, the use of neurotic defenses was associated with acute adult distress, which supports the experience of racial conflict and confusion in the encounter stage.

Abrams and Trusty (2004) studied the relationship between racial identity development and socially desirable responding of African American undergraduate college students. 196 participants (75 men, 121 women; mean age = 19.81 years) completed the following instruments: Racial Identity Attitude Scale-Long Form (RIAS – L; Helms & Parham, 1996) and the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR; Paulhus, 1991), which quantified social desirability by looking at two domains – self-deception and impression management. *Self-deception* is defined as "a positive, fundamental, adaptive, psychological defensiveness aimed at protecting the psyche" (Abrams and Trusty, 2004, p. 366) and is associated with maturity, openness to experience, self-actualization, hardiness, and the healthy development of racial identity. *Impression management* is defined as "when people consciously adapt responses to gain the approval of an audience" (Abrams and Trusty, 2004, p. 366). Based on the results, it was evident that there is a relationship between the BIDR measures (self-deception positivity and impression management) and the different racial identity statuses. Participants who endorsed the internalization stage of racial identity also had higher levels of self-deceptive positivity, which

showed a positively skewed relationship. The comparatively strongest correlation was the negatively skewed relationship between the encounter racial identity stage and self-deception. These findings suggested that individuals who internalized their racial identity and did not have a pro-White and anti-Black worldview had more positive and healthy psychological defenses and were less likely to conform to social standards to gain approval from others.

Racial identity is likely related to help seeking attitudes and mental health stigma in the African American community. Conner et al. (2009) examined racial differences in attitudes toward mental health treatment. Adult participants from Pittsburg, Pennsylvania (Black = 48 [male = 16, female = 32]; White = 51 [female = 34, male = 17]) completed a 12-item Perceived Devaluation and Discrimination Scale, a 29 Likert item Internalized Stigma of Mental Illness Scale, and a 20-item Attitudes Toward Mental Health Treatment Scale (ATMHT). Results showed that African American participants were more likely to have negative attitudes toward mental health treatment utilization and reported more public and *internalized stigma*, or the internalization of negative messages or stereotypes about mental illness (e.g., "I would feel out of place in the world if I had a mental illness."). The relationship between help seeking attitudes and race was found to be mediated by internalized stigma. Findings were consistent with previous research that identified an inverse relationship between experiences of mental health stigma and treatment-related behaviors (Cooper et al., 2003; Fischer & Farina, 1995), and that African Americans are more concerned with mental health stigma (Cooper-Patrick et al., 1997) and more likely to experience stigma about mental health in their community (Rush, 1998). Conner et al. (2009) theorized that lack of representative providers was a significant contributor, especially when questions in the modified ATMHT asked about racial and ethnic match and comfort when seeking a therapist. Additionally, the results indicated no significant racial

differences in the prevalence of a self-reported mental health condition, which is notable when considering the stark racial differences in help-seeking behaviors. The author suggested that negative attitudes toward mental health utilization create a significant barrier to help seeking behaviors in the African American community.

Masuda et al. (2012) examined the relationship between mental health stigma and *self-concealment*, "a behavioral tendency to withhold distressing and potentially embarrassing personal information from others" (Masuda et al., 2012, p. 775), and help seeking attitudes of African American college students. One hundred and sixty-three self-identified African Americans (Female = 127; mean age = 21.85) completed a web-based survey that included three self-report measures. Measures included the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help 29-item questionnaire, The Stigmatizing Attitudes-Believability 8-item questionnaire that specifically looked at attitudes toward psychological disorders, and The Self Concealment Scale a 10-item report that used a 5-point Likert-type scale. Results showed that mental health stigma and self-concealment were both negatively associated with help seeking attitudes and were found to be strong predictors of help seeking attitudes in this sample. Ultimately, what the research in this study suggests is that mental health stigma is a prevalent and major obstacle in seeking professional help among African American college students. Moreover, based on the findings, one can assume that African American male athletes who have a Eurocentric pre-encounter racial identity and internalized traditional masculine norms, are more likely to conform to social standards (Abrams and Trusty, 2004), stigmatize mental health (O'Neil, 2008; Steinfeldt et al., 2009), and are more likely to adopt negative help seeking attitudes.

Du Bois (1903) introduced a term called double consciousness to help understand the African American experience. This consciousness was split between being a Negro and an American. The Black person's development of self revealed a conflict between the socially dominant negative views of Black people and their own self-concept. Moreover, African American athletes experience a similar double consciousness that is split between identifying as an African American and an athlete. Identifying with these two salient self-concepts exposes the African American athlete to a culture that recognizes athletic participation and celebrates athletic accomplishments under an umbrella of negative racial ideologies and stereotypes. The African American may struggle to negotiate and apply meaning to these socially opposing identities. (Bimper and Harrison, 2011). The intersectionality between racial identity and athletic identity is interesting for a population that represents 47-77% of participating athletes in professional leagues such as the NBA, NFL, and NCAA, especially considering that African Americans represent only around 13% of the American population (Bimper & Harrison, 2011).

Bimper and Harrison (2011) theorized that racial identity was an important factor in understanding other salient identities for African American athletes. Racial centrality and racial regard were two concepts that may be associated with the individual's interpretation of the athletic role. *Racial centrality* is defined as the degree to which an individual considers their race to be imperative to their definition of self. *Racial regard* is defined as the degree of positivity that an individual perceives their race. This is important because the social environment for an African American athlete can provide mixed messages. As an athlete, African American collegiate student-athletes are subjected to American sport culture, which consists of social validation (e.g., adulation from fans), institutional support, and positive media attention (when they perform well). Alternatively, African American athletes can also experience negative

stereotyping of academic competencies, athletic abilities, and are more likely to experience academic related negative consequences in comparison to White student-athletes (Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Miller, 2019). Howard (2013) theorized that in the American education system, Black males are pathologized as uneducable, academically inferior, and problems to be fixed.

Beamon and Bell (2006) also found racial differences in documented disciplinary actions during their examination of an entire NCAA DI football team. Black collegiate football players were found to have relatively more suspensions, sport ineligibility, and were placed on academic probation more frequently when compared to White players, even though grade point averages were similar between groups. Beamon and Bell (2006) partially attribute this difference to the lower expectations that academic institutions have of the academic abilities of Black student-athletes given the minimal differences in academic performance between White and Black players. An athlete's platform and position contribute to shaping a unique experience in society, where they are continually socialized as an athlete. Unintentionally, throughout the process of developing a strong athletic identity, African American athletes may develop negative perceptions of their race due to sport related norms (Bimper & Harrison, 2011). Franklin (2000) described the impacts on Black males who face repeated counts of perceived prejudice, indicating that they develop what he termed an *invisibility syndrome*, which includes internal feelings of worthlessness and the belief that one's abilities are not recognized. Allen (2017) noted that African American students encounter dominant ideologies about race and gender that influence their practices and behaviors; they either resist or accept the dominant ideology through their individual actions as well as their relationship to one another. On one hand, African American athletes can be constantly validated when it pertains to their role of athlete, but face discrimination when their race is socially more prominent in that moment. A major gap that

persists in the literature is a minimal understanding of the relationship between racial identity and sport for African American athletes.

Gender and Traditional Masculinity

In addition to race, the formation of traditional masculine gender norms is important to understanding Black masculinity. Theories on gender performance describe the culturally dominant expressions of masculinity traits associated with being a man (Wedgwood, 2009). Gender boundaries and norms are facilitated through social observation, but crossing these boundaries threatens the discriminatory ideology that these boundaries uphold. Social institutions help maintain these norms by creating divisions of labor, power, structure, rules, and values (Messner, 2000). Gender role conflict was conceptualized to help better understand men's gender roles, the restrictiveness of that role, and how it influenced male psychological problems. The theory on masculine gender roles identified patterns that fall under six domains: restrictive emotionality; health care problems; obsession with achievement and success; restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior; socialized control, power, and competition issues; homophobia. *Gender role conflict* (GRC) is defined as "a psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative consequences for the person or others. GRC occurs when rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles result in restriction, devaluation, or violation of others or self" (O'Neil, 2008, p. 362). GRC studies looked at the interaction between environmental and biological factors that promote masculinity and discourage femininity. GRC has been found to be positively related to identification as an athlete for American male football players. The higher a participant was in GRC, the more likely they were to endorse stereotypically masculine norms (O'Neil, 2008). GRC has been empirically linked to increased mental health related issues, negative attitudes towards help seeking, and interpersonal difficulties (O'Neil, 2008; Steinfeldt et al.,

2009). Racial identity was another area explored in relation to GRC. Black males, for example, who reported high self-esteem and cultural identity had lower levels of GRC. Furthermore, higher levels of GRC contributed to lower self-esteem and increased anxiety or depression for African American male college students. GRC also significantly correlates with the pre-encounter stage of racial identity for African American men (O'Neil, 2008). Ultimately, the more an African American male conformed to White norms and criticized Black culture, the higher they were in GRC. This finding propelled further research that found a relationship between internalized racism, GRC, and psychological stress for Black men.

Black Masculinity

Evidence above spotlights cultural and racial differences in masculinity ideology that contribute to social and psychological well-being. Research supports that there is a variability in perspectives on masculinity that develop across different racial and ethnic groups (Curtis et al., 2021). Intersectionality provides a lens that helps explore the relationship between gender and race and propelled the development of Black masculinity. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) used the term intersectionality to showcase how important it is to acknowledge that identities are not isolated factors but interact with one another to contribute to the marginalization of certain groups. When examining the intersectionality of gender and race, it is important to consider the setting and culture in which the identities are operating (Fine & Kuriloff, 2006). The history of forced African migration to America is an experience unlike most other experiences of migration. Blacks were treated as subhuman and dehumanized to uphold slavery and maintain a distinct social power dynamic between Whites and Blacks. Although current African American student-athletes have not experienced slavery directly, this experience still has severe psychological and social impacts for African Americans today (Allen & Bagozzi, 2001). The

history of racism born out of slavery has had a direct impact on how society views darker skin and other physical characteristics embodied by African Americans. The idea that Blacks are inferior to Whites is a concept still very much ingrained in the makeup of American culture. Racial conflicts and differences have continued to influence the categorization of racial identities and is a prominent component that helps shape culture, media, and even politics (Allen & Bagozzi, 2001). Immediately after a Black person is born in America, they are subjected to a multitude of messages that demoralize and criminalize a group of people solely based on skin color. The negative depiction of Blacks has an impact on racial identity development and a willingness to connect with their own racial group.

Black men in America construct race and masculinity in a White hegemonic culture. Buckley (2018) explored the intersecting relationship between gender role identity and racial identity to better understand self-concept of adolescent Black males. Participants consisted of 70 Black adolescent males (mean age = 16) from New York City public high schools. The study included three instruments to explore the relationship between these intersecting identities and self-concept. The racial identity development model developed by Cross (1971) explored the five racial domains: (1) Pre-encounter, (2) Encounter, (3) Immersion-Emersion, (4) Internalization, and (5) Internalization-Commitment. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) Short-Form, a 30-item self-report questionnaire on gender roles and the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (PHCSCS), an 80-item self-report questionnaire that explored six dimensions of self-concept. The Black male adolescents in this study who adopted externally defined White or Eurocentric racial identity attitudes (pre-encounter) were more likely to have lower levels of self-efficacy. Moreover, Black males who reported having more of a flexible gender role that included both masculine and feminine characteristics was positively correlated with higher levels

of positive self-concept.

Mahalik et al., (2006) examined the multi-layered racial and masculine identities of Black males and the impact that interconnected identity has on self-esteem and psychological stress. Findings from this study support an existing relationship between racial identity and psychological distress in Black men. Black men in this study who endorsed a pre-encounter attitude (prioritized White standards of merit) showed higher levels of psychological distress and conformity to traditional White masculine norms in comparison to Black males who endorsed the other racial identity stages. Self-esteem was also positively related to participants who endorsed internalization attitudes and negatively related to conformity to White traditional masculine norms. The more a participant devalued their own race and internalized White standards, the more they experienced psychological distress, lower levels of self-esteem, and higher levels of conformity to White masculine norms. The authors attributed this finding to the construction of the Black male identity, which is influenced by both their racial group and the dominant culture's ideology and norms pertaining to masculinity. Black men who primarily attend to White reference groups and prioritize White standards are more likely to conform to dominant cultural messages, which can lead to internal conflict and psychological dysregulation (Mahalik et al., 2006). Moreover, studies have suggested that Black men, in particular, may endorse hypermasculine norms (Curtis et al., 2021; Swanson et al., 2003).

Curtis et al. (2021) explored the contextual factors (e.g., childhood adversity and socioeconomic instability) that contribute to the understanding of masculinity for Black men during emerging adulthood. This study included 504 self-identified Black American men (mean age = 20.29) from low SES, poverty-stricken areas in rural Georgia. Participants completed the instruments in three waves with an 18-month interval in between each completion. Study

instruments included The Masculine Attributes Questionnaire, an 18-item self-report that measures men's masculinity ideology; a Childhood Adversity measure that assessed six domains: childhood family poverty, childhood emotional neglect, childhood physical neglect, childhood physical abuse, childhood emotional abuse, and childhood sexual abuse; a Socioeconomic Instability measure that the researchers in this study developed to assess employment status, unstable living arrangements, and vocational engagement. The study's goal was to examine the factors associated with changes in participants' endorsement of reputation-based masculinity and respect-based masculinity. *Reputation-based masculinity* was defined as the use of violence and/or aggressive behaviors to achieve a sense of masculine self-esteem, and was measured by test items such as "can handle himself in a fight," and "has sex with a lot of different women." *Respect-based masculinity* was defined as the engagement in academic endeavors, economic independence, lawful behavior, and vocational training or progress, and was measured by test items such as "has a good-paying job" and "works to get a good education." Results showed that the prevalence of Childhood Adversity was associated with elevated Socioeconomic Instability, and both were associated with an increase in reputation-based masculinity and decrease in respect-based masculinity. Childhood Adversity was also indirectly associated with changes in masculinity ideology when you accounted for Socioeconomic Instability. Furthermore, the Black men who were high in reputation-based masculinity were more likely to engage in hypermasculine behaviors, an over-exaggeration of dominance, independence, and aggression to appear less vulnerable and navigate harsh neighborhood structural conditions. Lastly, findings from this study were attributed to historical experiences that influence Black American men's endorsement of certain types of masculinity, including negative life experiences that are frequent in low SES conditions that can begin in

childhood and persist throughout emerging adulthood, and the lack of early role models that display respect-based masculinity. This study provided support for the influence of contextual experiences on the development of masculine ideology for Black American men (Curtis et al., 2021).

Swanson et al. (2003) looked at the effect of African American male developmental transitions and milestones on achievement outcomes and academic associated processes. This study extrapolated data from a Promotion of Academic Competence (PAC) cross-sectional longitudinal study on the developmental effects of persistent poverty among African American youth. Data was collected from 219 males that met the criteria and helped predict outcomes from this study. The variables taken from the PAC and of interest to this study included a Black Male Experiences Measure (BMEM), which explored the experiences of Black males in public spaces; a machismo measure derived from Mosher and Sirkin (1984) used to assess stereotypical ideas of male attitudes and behaviors; a Teacher Expectations of Black Males (STEBM) measure used to determine how participants perceived their teachers' expectations of their potential academic successes or failures. Findings from this study found a positive correlational relationship between Black males adopting reactive masculine coping attitudes and Black male perceptions of negative social and educational experiences in the STEBM or BMEM. Hypermasculinity, or over exaggerated masculine behaviors, was deployed by African American adolescents as a coping strategy to survive the unstable and provoking social and urban environments they were exposed to (Swanson et al., 2003).

Goodwill et al. (2019) examined the role of popular culture and media in the construction of masculinity among young Black men. The study utilized data from a previous study aimed at understanding the intersectionality between manhood, mental health, and social support for

young Black men called Young Black Men, Masculinities, and Mental Health (YBMen). The YBMen Project was a 5-week psychoeducational intervention designed to facilitate social support and encourage mental wellness among young Black men. Prompts were used to direct group discussion about a multitude of topics related to manhood, mental health, and social supports. Data from the YBmen Project helped guide the construction of the semi-structured interview protocol in Goodwill et al. (2019). 11 participants (age range = 18 – 26 years) completed interviews that lasted between 30 and 90 minutes that involved questions related to the main research question proposed by the study, "How do young Black men use media and popular culture figures to conceptualize and construct their ideas, perceptions, and beliefs about masculinity" (Goodwill et al., 2019, p. 291). The study utilized a thematic data reduction method for interpreting qualitative data, which facilitated the generation of themes and subthemes reflecting the participants' perception of manhood and masculinity. Three major themes generated from the data analysis involved distinct groups of people, which included "(a) social movement leaders (i.e., influential members or leaders of important historical events of both the past and present), (b) athletes (i.e., persons who engage in competitive sports at the professional level), and (c) entertainers (i.e., actors, comedians, and musicians)" (Goodwill et al., 2019, p. 291). The social movement figures theme, which included four subthemes titled leadership, power, injustice, and death, focused on the acknowledgement and reflection of Black men who had negative sociopolitical experiences within mainstream U.S. context. This theme uncovered a relationship between the social marginalization Black males and how young Black men conceptualize their masculinity. In this theme participants talked about prominent civil rights leaders, political leaders, and men who have been victimized by police. Participant reflections on these figures centered on the perceived disposability of Black lives, and the devaluing of Black

men, in particular, was found to influence how these young Black men perceived themselves. The second theme regarding professional athletes was tied to a media portrayal that associated these figures with domestic abuse, infidelity, and sexual violence. Participants utilized these examples to help recognize what behaviors are not socially acceptable for Black men to engage in. The participants in this study "recognized that engaging in hypermasculine behaviors could negatively impact their interactions with the people in their lives (e.g., women and children)" (Goodwill et al., 2019, p. 295). The final theme pertaining to entertainers (e.g., musicians, comedians, and actors) revealed associations with promiscuity or conceiving children with multiple women. Ultimately, findings from this study showed a relationship between the portrayal of Black male popular culture figures within mainstream media and the formation of what it means to be a man for young Black men. The study attributed this relationship to an impressionable emerging adulthood stage (18 – 25 years), a critical developmental period characterized by identity exploration and cognitive shifts in worldviews, when an individual is attempting to develop their own beliefs and value system. The emerging adulthood developmental period combined with a media culture that perpetuates Black stereotypes and disseminates an anti-Black rhetoric contributes to the formation of Black masculinities.

Implications from the aforementioned findings suggests that examining the athletic identity of African American college student-athletes requires an intersectional approach. Research highlights that culture and context are extremely important and contribute to the intersectional identity development of African American student-athletes. The African American student-athlete develops their athletic identity in an American context that celebrates their athletic ability while simultaneously marginalizing their race (Allen, 2015; Beamon, 2006; Bimper & Harrison, 2011; Howard, 2013; Miller, 2019). Furthermore, how these identities

intersect (i.e., race and gender) have helped establish Black masculinities, which has been constructed in a White hegemonic culture and influences self-esteem, psychological stress and dysregulation, experiences of internal conflict, and participation in hypermasculine behaviors (Buckley, 2018; Curtis et al., 2021; Goodwill et al., 2019; Mahalik et al., 2006; Swanson et al., 2003). Black masculinity is influenced by stereotyped messages received from American media and culture about Black men (Goodwill et al., 2019), which suggests that it is critical for African American student-athletes to develop a positive identity to counter negative racial stereotypes. The racial identity of African American students influences psychological distress and socially desirable responding (Abrams & Trusty, 2004; Neville & Roderick, 2000; Nghe & Mahalik, 2001), which may contribute to both the mental functioning of African American student-athletes, but also the insufficient use of mental health resources in attempts to conform to advantageous social and cultural norms. After controlling for gender, research suggests that African American males who adopt more rigid traditional masculine norms experience a decrease in self-esteem, an increase in negative attitudes towards help-seeking, and increases in mental health disorders (O'Neil, 2008; Steinfeldt et al., 2009). Gender, in addition to race, is an important identity to consider when examining the relationship between athletic identity and help seeking for African American males because gender influences psychological functioning and help-seeking for this population, which is important to understand to combat the formation of rigid masculine norms for African American male student-athletes. Research proposes that the formation of athletic identity and how it contributes to help-seeking must include the examination of how race and gender influence the development of that athletic identity with attention to culture and context.

Collegiate Student-Athletes' Mental Health

An understanding of how important intersecting identities are for the development of the African American student-athlete helps to contextualize the mental health concerns for Black male collegiate student-athletes. Student-athletes are already a unique population of young adults, who are required to operate effectively in two domains. In addition to simultaneously balancing academic and athletic rigor, individuals, during this period, are attempting to manage interpersonal networks and personal life. Although this life balance would be difficult at any point, student-athletes are thrust into this dynamic during an important developmental transition into adulthood. The strenuous dual management of academic obligations alongside efforts to perform and advance physically, in conjunction with a multitude of other responsibilities, increases mental health risk (Sudano, Collins, & Miles, 2017). The collegiate demands for a student-athlete are different from those of a non-athlete student. Athletes are forced to sacrifice much of the holistic collegiate experience because of the time and schedule constraints of their sport. Athletes have to manage practice commitments, physical fatigue during in-season travel across the country, peak performance, and injuries. Simultaneously, these primary responsibilities restrict social interactions or engagement in extracurricular activities and occupational opportunities (Birky, 2007). Collegiate sports employ a dynamic that requires the student-athlete to navigate a physically and mentally taxing commitment while minimizing access to other opportunities. These conditions can induce high stress levels that can influence the deterioration of relationships, mental health, and academic performance (The American Institute of Stress, 2016).

From 2008 to 2012, according to the National College Health Assessment surveys, an estimated 48% of female and 31% of male NCAA student-athletes reported experiencing depression or anxiety-related symptoms (Brown et al., 2014). Student-athletes are exposed to

many issues that make them vulnerable to mental health problems. According to Wilkerson et al. (2020), simultaneously transitioning to college and collegiate sports is a significant source of stress for student-athletes. Studies, competition, family life, engagement on campus, practice, and associations with coaches and college staff affect the mental well-being of student-athletes. Although all students experience stressors, student-athletes experience more stressors, especially due to participating in athletics. Injuries, conflicts with coaches, pressure to win, and extensive time demands are stressors unique to student-athletes (Pritchard & Wilson, 2005). These stressors, along with high academic expectations in college, adversely affect the well-being of student-athletes. Sport-related stress has been found to considerably influence the mental and emotional health of collegiate student-athletes (Pritchard & Wilson, 2005). Suicide is fourth amongst the major causes of death for student-athletes. Athletes in DI programs have a higher likelihood of committing suicide than athletes in other NCAA divisions, with the likelihood being higher among male student-athletes (Wilkerson et al., 2020).

As previously stated, Black student-athletes not only experience stress induced from the role of athlete, but also the stress of navigating American culture, which primarily consists of predominantly White institutions. Sadberry and Mobley (2013) utilized a latent profile analysis, which is a categorical approach that controls for specific variables to help identify experiences of subpopulations, to explore adjustment for African American DI and DII student-athletes. A sample of 98 self-identified African American athletes (male = 63; attended PWIs = 69) completed the College Adjustment Scale, Life Events Survey for Collegiate Athletes, Minority Stress Scale, Perceived Social Supports Scale-Revised, and a Group Environment Questionnaire. This study strengthened extant research (Neville & Roderick, 2000; Nghe & Mahalik, 2001; Abrams & Trusty, 2004), which has shown that African American collegiate student-athletes

have more difficulties adjusting and experience more race-related stress at PWIs in comparison to HBCUs. Within-group differences were revealed based on campus setting. Participants at PWIs were more likely to show high minority stress and perceptions of low social supports relative to participants at HBCUs. Participants who reported the perception of low social support had a significantly higher prevalence of anxiety symptoms, depressive symptoms, and interpersonal problems when compared to the high social support profile. High minority stress, which was not evident in participants from HBCUs, was also significantly related to a higher prevalence of depressive symptoms and interpersonal problems. This study supported the idea that culture and setting contribute to psychological stress and adjustment for African American collegiate student-athletes. Differences between adjustment at PWIs versus HBCUs were attributed to racism and discrimination.

Help Seeking

Given the prevalence of mental health issues among collegiate student-athletes, it is important to examine their help seeking attitudes and behaviors. Wilkerson et al. (2020) reported that community and cultural context influences the use of mental health services, and weakness is identified by student-athletes as one of the primary barriers to seeking mental health care. Sports culture associates mental health problems with a form of weakness, which in turn decreases the likelihood that athletes seek support (Etzel & Watson, 2007). The desire to conform to sports norms, which is sustained by extrinsic validation, strengthens the underutilization of mental health services by athletes (Beauchemin, 2014; Watson, 2005). The stigma around mental health is prevalent in sport culture and can impact help-seeking behaviors. While student-athletes did not differ in their willingness to seek support in comparison to non-athlete students, student-athletes were less likely to report engagement or utilization of mental

health resources (Brown et al., 2014). The subtle difference in reporting the use of services highlights the perceived social judgment that may result from reporting mental health service utilization. Although resources that support athlete mental health exist, athletes are not aware of the benefit and are not utilizing them. Roughly 25% of NCAA DI student-athletes reportedly did not have a clear understanding of how to gain access to mental health support services (Cox et al., 2017).

Being potentially perceived as weak is detrimental to the role of athlete. Male student-athletes often want to be viewed as strong, an image that may be compromised if they pursue mental health treatment. Moreland et al. (2018) used a socio-ecological framework to review current literature on collegiate athlete utilization of mental health services and associated barriers. The proposed framework was used to help consider the unique context in which collegiate athletes engage in both athletics and academic requirements. One major limitation in the review was the high variability around what is mental health services utilization (MHSU). Research not only shows a lot of variability around the operationalization of MHSU but that collegiate athletes have a minimal awareness of what MHSU is and related professional positions. Research has consistently found a significant relationship between strong adherence to masculine norms and the decreased likelihood of seeking sports psychology services. Gender and gender role or identity were not only significant predictors of help seeking behaviors but also the facilitation of mental healthcare referrals. Females in athletic professional positions (e.g., coaches and trainers) were more likely to refer the athlete to mental health services. Consequently, stakeholders in an athlete's life (e.g., parents, coaches, teammates, athletic trainers, administrators, and the collegiate sporting environment) significantly helped either facilitate or inhibit an athlete's attitudes and behaviors towards MHSU.

Moreover, the intersection of race and gender can influence an aversion to help seeking. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau described by APA (2017) reported that African Americans experience mental illnesses at similar rates, are less likely to be referred to psychotherapy, and have lower utilization rates of prescription medications and outpatient services when compared to non-Hispanic Whites. African Americans received a poorer quality of care and lacked access to culturally competent care in relation to the general population. Moreover, African Americans were less likely to be included in medical research, receive guideline-consistent care, and patient centered education and consultation. Barriers to care were attributed to stigmas associated with mental illness, distrust of the health care system, lack of representative providers, and a lack of resources (APA, 2017). Bauer et al. (2020) looked at young African American men (avg age = 23 years old) and why despite poor health outcomes they are less likely to use mental health resources than any other group. In a focus group of young African American men, participants reported that they prefer to handle things on their own rather than work with a mental health care provider. This position was reportedly influenced by how they characterized resilience and stigma. Unfortunately, while they understood self-reliance was not a long-term option given their experiences with trauma, it was still preferred. In addition, feelings of shame and embarrassment were brought up because using mental health resources was perceived to threaten their manhood and ability to achieve personal success. Motley and Banks (2018) offered a systematic review of the utilization of mental health services by Black males who have self-reportedly experienced trauma (i.e., sexual abuse, physical assault, emotional abuse, serious injury, and death of a loved one) between March 2016 and April 2016. Gender, race, and education were found to be significantly associated with the nonuse of mental health services. Perceived social support was also a significant predictor of mental health service use. Lack of time, lack of faith in treatment,

and lack of knowledge about treatment benefits were some of the significant individual barriers. Lack of resources, financial assistance, and quality insurance were identified as significant institutional barriers to service use.

Wilkerson et al. (2020) used a phenomenological methodology to explore barriers to help seeking amongst Black male DI football players. A semi-structured interview was administered to 9 participants (mean age = 20.2) to gain a more robust understanding of their experiences, perspectives, and attitudes towards help seeking. This study found that participants felt as if they were obligated to always play regardless of the status of their mental or emotional health, a behavior defined as "mental toughness." Many male student-athletes aim to comply with societal expectations of men, preventing them from considering mental health services. Toughness was a major theme in the study that can be captured by a participant's statement that "men are never supposed to let nobody see them crying. Not supposed to be down and stuff like that. So, that's why they view it as weak" (Wilkerson et al., 2020, p. 65). Silence was also a unique theme generated for this population of athletes. Black culture was a prominent component that influenced the inhibited disclosure of mental health concerns with anyone outside of the family. More specifically, cultural context was a subtheme that revealed a connection between help seeking and cultural norms. The lack of African American cultural understanding and acceptance of mental health services influenced who participants in the study felt they could and could not talk to about mental health (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Similarly, Naoi et al. (2011) explored the influence nationality, race, and gender has on the collegiate student-athletes' access, exposure, and interest in sport psychology consultation. Participants were American (n = 271; 143 males, 127 female, 1 unknown; White = 177, Black = 63, Hispanic = 18, Asian = 7, Native American = 2, other = 3) and Japanese (n = 302; 169 male, 133 female) from both DI (n = 471) and DII (n =

100) collegiate sport teams. Participants completed an English and translated version of a survey entitled “Multicultural Issues in Sport Psychology and Consultation” (completion time = 10 minutes), which involved 30-items split into 5 parts addressing social relationships, interest, exposure, and access to sport psychology services, background preferences for a sport psychologist, preferences for help-seeking, and respondent demographic questions. Results showed that while Americans reported greater exposure to sport psychology services, Japanese athletes reported higher interest in engaging in said services. Females also showed higher interest in receiving sport consultation when compared to male athletes. This suggests that American male athletes are more likely to stigmatize the use of sport psychology services than any other subgroup. While male athletes in general were less likely to seek out sport psychologists, males who identified with a minority race were more likely to associate sport psychologists with negative stigmas. Unfortunately, a glaring limitation in this study was that the racial variability in the American sample was operationalized as White American vs. minority American so findings cannot be associated with a specific minority group.

Conclusion

Identity formation requires the acknowledgement of intersectionality and the cultural context in which the identity is developed. Examining the relationship between athletic identity and help-seeking for African American male student-athletes must include racial identity development and the construction of Black masculine identity because these intersecting identities influence psychological functioning, well-being, conformity to dominant cultural norms, and the adoption of negative attitudes toward mental health resources. African American male student-athletes experience a culture that devalues their racial identity, has rigid masculine norms guided by a White framework, and celebrates athletic behaviors that meet traditional

masculine standards. American men are the least likely to use and refer others to mental health resources, minority populations in America are more likely to stigmatize mental health, and African American men are more likely to over-identify with an athletic role that emphasizes mental and physical toughness. The construction of these identities in a dominant, oppressive, and marginalizing culture positions this population of athletes for mental health related risk and the unwillingness to use available resources to mitigate that risk. There is a clear need to understand how race and gender influence the development of athletic identity for African American male student-athletes and how that athletic identity influences help-seeking.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This study was exploratory and aimed to understand how the social construction of gender and race influence African American DI collegiate student-athletes' formation of their athletic identity. In particular, this study focused on how athletic identity influenced help-seeking attitudes; it was assumed that gender and race were salient dimensions that compound hesitancy to seek help for African American collegiate student-athletes.

Paradigm and Research Design

This study utilized a critical research paradigm. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, how they constructed meaning of their reality, and facilitated the researcher's ability to interpret what was also outside of their awareness by attending to potential influences of systemic oppression related to their intersecting identities. A critical paradigm examines a reality that is fundamentally mediated by power relations constructed within a social-historical context (Ponterotto, 2005). Qualitative research methods are best suited to explore the influence of broader systemic factors and to identify the cultural and social norms that shape face-to-face interactions in everyday life. Qualitative research emphasizes direct social inquiry that includes the examination of action, experience, and conditions. The study used a qualitative analytic method that involved the collection and analysis of interview data using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). A reflexive thematic analysis was the appropriate method because this study attended to not only the participants' understanding of their athletic identity (i.e., semantic coding) and its impact on help-seeking but the social/cultural influences that impacted the development of their intersecting identities, which may be outside of their awareness (i.e., latent coding). Reflexive thematic analysis extends

qualitative research beyond the subjective experience of social processes to include the social construction of meaning. Reflexive thematic analysis is concerned with critically examining the "truths" of participants' contextualized experiences that may lay outside of their awareness. "Truths" are not inherently in the data from the individual interviews waiting to be discovered but are constructed by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Participants

Participants were 10 National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I (NCAA DI) student-athletes from predominantly White U.S. institutions. Participants played a DI applicable sport between 2019 to 2022, which was the year the study was approved by the institutional review board (IRB). The NCAA unanimously voted that by August 1, 2019, all teams were required to provide athletes guaranteed access to mental health services and resources (NCAA, 2019). To increase sample homogeneity, recruited participants grew up in the United States during childhood and adolescence and therefore, were assumed to have similar levels of exposure to U.S. social and cultural norms. Specially, participants had either been born in the United States or immigrated to the United States before the age of five. Age five is the typical age that children in the United States begin formal schooling, which is the context in which they receive greater exposure to societal messages outside of the family. Participants were at least 18 years of age and were able to read and speak English proficiently. This study focused on basketball and football NCAA DI recognized teams, as there is empirical evidence to suggest that student-athletes' athletic identity may be stronger in higher revenue generating DI sports (Beamon, 2012). Eligible study participants played in their sport for at least one full athletic session to meet criteria as an NCAA DI athlete. All participants self-identified as African American cisgender male student-athletes. Although research suggests that transgender children

engage in similar gender specific norms than cisgender children do, regardless of how long they have actually lived as a member of that gender, they can be subject to a culture that rejects their male identity, which may contribute to a different socialization experience (Gülgöz et al., 2019).

Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 27, with an average age of 22.5 (*SD* = 2.55). Six participants played basketball, and four played football. Years of participation in their sport ranged from 1 to 4, with an average of 2.2 (*SD* = 0.84). Eight participants were U.S.-born and two were born outside of the United States. Nine participants identified as heterosexual, and one participant identified as asexual. Three participants identified as Christian, one as Catholic, one as spiritual, one as agnostic, and four participants indicated no preference for religious orientation. See Table 1 for participant characteristics.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Sample

Sociodemographic Characteristics	*Birth. Country*	*Sexual Orientation*	*Religious Orientation*	*Sport*	*Years of Participation*
Participant 1	Haiti	Heterosexual	Christian	Basketball	3
Participant 2	United States	Heterosexual	Catholic	Football	2
Participant 3	United States	Heterosexual	None	Basketball	2
Participant 4	United States	Heterosexual	None	Football	4
Participant 5	United States	Heterosexual	Christian	Basketball	2
Participant 6	United States	Asexual	Spiritual	Basketball	1
Participant 7	United States	Heterosexual	Agnostic	Basketball	1
Participant 8	United States	Heterosexual	None	Basketball	2

Participant 9	Jamaica	Heterosexual	Christian	Football	3
Participant 10	United States	Heterosexual	None	Football	2

It was determined that the 10 participants provided sufficient depth of data to answer the research questions (Saunders et al, 2018), and as such, I stopped further recruitment, partly for pragmatic reasons (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The conceptual underpinning of data saturation is incompatible with reflexive thematic analysis, which posits that there is always the potential for new understandings and developments if the researcher continues to engage with the data. Reflexive thematic analysis conceptualizes the research process as the construction of knowledge rather than a process of discovery (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) for this study collected background information on participants. Demographic questions included participant age, state of current residence, country or state of birth, sexual orientation, religious preference, years of participation in a NCAA recognized DI football or basketball program, employment status, household income, and type of parental/guardian employment (if applicable). To support the qualitative approach for this study the demographic questions provided context for the collected interview data, which allowed the principal investigator to describe participants and offer a more in-depth conceptualization of the data.

Individual Interviews

The interview used a semi-structured format and a question guide that was created to elicit the kind of data needed to answer the research questions. The protocol included lead-off questions and possible follow-up questions designed to help the participants address the phenomenon of interest. Interview length ranged from 20 to 50 minutes, with an average of 38

minutes. The critical paradigm views individuals as complex and postulates that their socially construed experiences are impacted by their intersecting social identities and contextual factors (Ponterotto, 2005). With that in mind, the semi-structured format provided the participant ample flexibility to expand or discuss areas they considered to be relevant. The interview guide (Appendix B) was developed to help the researcher understand the lived experiences of AAMCSAs, critically examine systems that can potentially impact how AAMCSAs' develop their athletic identity, and assess potential barriers to help-seeking behaviors.

Procedure

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, a letter of solicitation was sent to NCAA DI athletic directors, whose contact information was publicly accessible, requesting that they forward the flyer and introductory email to the applicable athletes in their program. In addition, participants were recruited via snowball sampling. Snowball sampling allowed for interviewed participants to advertise the study and help recruit other potential participants. If interested, individuals were encouraged to email the primary researcher to proceed. I then contacted interested parties via email to confirm study eligibility using a brief screening tool. Brief screening questions included self-identified race and gender, participation in a NCAA DI certified sport for at least one full athletic season, if your NCAA program is at predominantly White institution, are you 18 years or older, and can you read, write, and speak English. For the purposes of this study, eligible male participants identified as a cisgender male. Once screened for inclusion, I emailed them the informed consent form and demographic questionnaire. Once these completed forms were signed and received, I scheduled the interview.

Interviews were conducted on Seton Hall University's application of Microsoft Teams, which is HIPAA compliant. All interviews were video and audio recorded and stored on a

password-protected OneDrive for Business folder. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were de-identified to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Although Microsoft Teams provided a rough transcription of the interview, I reviewed each transcription to confirm accuracy. When transcribing the interview data, I used pseudonyms in lieu of names. I also used generic terms such as "city" or "high school" to refer to specific geographical locations mentioned during the interview. After transcription was completed, participants had the opportunity to review, correct, or elaborate on the transcribed responses from the semi-structured interview.

Data Analysis

I used the analysis procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyze the interview data. Specifically, thematic analyses were used to interpret the participants' narratives, focusing on how participants understood the influence of their identities on help-seeking and how their identities and the influence of these identities were socially constructed. The social constructionist epistemology, which takes the position that an individual's reality and their understanding of the "truth" is primarily dependent on the social relationships of which they are a part, grounded the reflexive thematic analysis used in this study. Participants had a range of realities and experiences that are socially construed while operating in a society. The self, under a social constructionist umbrella, is the collection and expression of social and cultural presuppositions (Gergen, 2015). A critical realist framework was used to interpret the participants' descriptions of their experiences. This framework acknowledges that while reality exists apart from the constructions of individuals and society, this reality cannot be accessed except via social constructions that are mediated by the intersection of social identities and cultural context (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Thematic analysis requires the researcher to engage in six phases during the collection and analysis of the data. First, I became familiar with the data by reading, re-reading, and recording initial impressions of the transcripts. Second, giving equal attention to each data item I generated initial semantic codes that were close to participant words by using a theoretical thematic analysis. This form of analysis focused on providing a detailed analysis of the relevant data, which was guided by the specified research questions. Codes were modified throughout the entire coding process to account for differences in participant experiences. Third, I searched for higher order themes by looking for patterns in the data that captured something relevant to the research questions. Codes were organized into broad themes, which helped categorize descriptive patterns that each code was associated with. The analysis involved identifying possible latent meanings that the participants communicated in the stories they told. These possible meanings were categorized to further articulate the participants' experience. Fourth, preliminary themes were reviewed by confirming that data associated with each theme supported the interpretation. A theme needed to work within the single interview and across the entire data set or "a majority of participants" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Fifth, final refinement of themes involved the creation of a thematic concept map that detailed how the themes related to one another. Lastly, phase six involved writing and reporting the thematic analysis. Throughout step one, during initial review of transcripts, and step five, final refinement of themes, participants had the opportunity to provide feedback. Seven participants confirmed accuracy of their reviewed transcript and three participants declined this option due to pragmatic reasons (i.e., schedule conflict). Eight participants responded to my request for feedback on the final selected themes in this study. Participants did not note any disagreements, but explicitly noted agreement with some themes vs. others. Seven participants expressed that they resonated with

and confirmed experiencing a difficulty separating their racial identity from their athletic identity. Six participants confirmed an internal need to dominate due to their racial background and relevant social experiences. All eight participants confirmed a cognitive definition of mental health as an individual problem to be solved.

I used peer debriefers to discuss the choice of codes and verify their level of abstraction. Debriefers reviewed deidentified segments of the interview transcripts to evaluate the choice of codes. The peer debriefers were two current Seton Hall University Counseling Psychology doctoral students. I used peer debriefing to establish the validity of the initial codes and higher-level codes generated. Validity was defined by standards (i.e., attention to subjectivity and reflexivity, adequacy of data, and issues related to interpretation and presentation) this study applied to show trustworthiness. I gave peer debriefers selected de-identified segments of the transcripts along with the analyses and asked the peer debriefers to attend to my interpretation of the data. The peer debriefers were directed to question me about my analyses of the themes. The goal of the three peer debrief meetings were to deepen reflexivity and analysis. Additionally, the dissertation advisor, who served as internal auditor, reviewed the transcripts and provided feedback on initial codes, preliminary themes, and final themes selected. The researcher's subjectivity is the primary tool in reflexive thematic analysis and requires reflexive interrogation of researcher assumptions and practice. The subjective underpinnings that guide these assumptions were acknowledged and reflected on. Obtaining consensus or objectivity is incompatible with this method and instead the goal was to move the underdeveloped or unconvincing to the compelling, complex, and insightful (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Upon completion of the peer review process, participants were provided the results and had the opportunity to offer feedback.

Researcher Reflexivity

Qualitative research guided by critical theory emphasizes the researcher's active role and the inevitable subjectivity of data coding and analysis, and as such, it is important to acknowledge the influence of the researcher's positionality and experiences on the research process (i.e., communication with participants, interviews, interpretation and analyses). I am a 30-year-old heterosexual, cisgender male who identifies as African American. My research interest pertains to exploring the lived experiences of professional and elite athletes. I briefly participated in collegiate sports as a practice player for a NCAA DI basketball program at a private university. Throughout this experience, I perceived a sport culture that prioritized performance above all else and witnessed several DI players deal with mental health by engaging in avoidant behaviors when topics like stress, anxiety, or depression entered the conversation, which rarely occurred. My experience informed my decision to research what may have attributed to these behaviors.

Moreover, my intersectional identities as an African American male influenced my experience of my athletic identity while I participated in organized athletics. I engaged in Black hypermasculine behaviors as an athlete, which took the shape of a macho aggressive bravado, with the intent to display an invincible facade I thought was necessary to gain respect from peers and receive validation from my coaches. I did not openly talk about mental health with my peers or team staff because I thought it might jeopardize my position (e.g., amount of playing time) and trust my teammates had in my ability to perform. My athletic identity was highly influenced by my gender and race, which ultimately led to a reluctance to engage in mental health resources. Social messages of acceptable male behavior directly influenced an aversion to communicate with others openly about my emotions or periods of mental instability. Growing up in a

predominantly Black urban community, I was not exposed to mental health education or professionals until college and by that time, I had internalized a negative perception that it was unnecessary given my ability to function without proactively attending to my mental health. I was taught that mental health related issues were either managed internally or religion was an acceptable outlet. I experienced social stigmas that were associated with engaging in mental health resources as an athlete, which created a lot of skepticism and increased my unwillingness to use the resources. As the primary researcher, my positionality required constant attention during each study-related procedure, especially analyses of data, because my sociocultural identities in relation to participants in this study may result in a bias that misattributes findings to cultural, social, and systemic issues that are similar to my experiences. With that being said, I attended to these potential biases by recording my interview experiences in a memo and acknowledged any strong emotional reactions to data and addressed these reactions, in the context of the study, with peer debriefers.

Credibility

The critical research paradigm embraces research subjectivity because it assumes that data is interpreted by the researcher and the interpretation is significantly impacted by the researcher's own background and experiences. To establish a criterion for trustworthiness, Morrow (2005) described meaningful ways that might constitute trustworthy research. Trustworthiness was obtained through multiple components to ensure research quality and validity. First, *researcher reflexivity,* embraces the idea that the researcher is a co-constructor of meaning and facilitates the opportunity to examine how the researcher's experiences and subjective understanding of the world influence the research procedure and interpretation of interview data. This was enacted by a memo kept by me, which was used to record reactions to

participants and data during interviews. Memos helped examine my position and challenged whose perspective was actually being described in the findings. In addition, *dialogue* among different perspectives was achieved using peer debriefers, who analyzed my codes and final themes. The goal was to facilitate a deeper examination of my interpretation of data since all the data was constructed by my subjective reality.

Also, in regard to validity, adequacy of data was important to consider. Adequacy was determined by sampling procedures such as quality, length, depth of interview data, and variety of evidence (Morrow, 2005). Sampling was done purposefully, and selected participant criterion was based on the specified research questions. Snowball sampling, which was used in this study, was a purposeful sampling strategy and was used to identify participants who meet participant criteria. Second, the interview was semi-structured, allowing for flexibility to account for subjectivity and the uniqueness of the participants' perspective. Third, participants had the opportunity after the creation of the transcript and after the analysis to offer feedback to confirm accuracy (Morrow, 2005). Additionally, the semi-structured interview, was the primary tool that helped facilitate the construct of fairness. This study promoted *ontological authenticity*, which is the degree of awareness a participant gains regarding the complexities of their social environment. The semi-structured interview protocol required participants to critically examine aspects of their intersecting identity within an American system. Second, this study aimed to facilitate *educative authenticity*, increase awareness of other viewpoints, by helping the participant critically examine their negative views on mental health resources if applicable (Morrow, 2005).

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The higher order themes selected in this study were identified as consistent and prominent patterns across the 10 participant interviews. Three primary themes linking participants' responses were identified: (a) *Racial identity intertwined with athletic identity*; (b) *Reenactment of domination*; (c) *Internalized definition of mental health as an individual problem*. Themes are categorized to answer the proposed research questions. Themes (a) and (b) address how a Black racial identity might influence the development of athletic identity for African American male collegiate DI student-athletes. Theme (c) connects historical, cultural, and social factors to explore how athletic identity of African American male collegiate DI student-athletes may influence their attitude towards help-seeking. This section will delineate the three primary themes as they relate to how participants understood their intersecting identifies and how this understanding influenced help-seeking attitudes and behaviors.

Racial Identity Intertwined with Athletic Identity

Eight out of ten participants in this study reported the inability to separate their racial identity and athletic identity or perceived them as overlapping when describing their experience as a Black athlete. The following participant responses offer a comprehensive reflection of this experience. Participant 3, a 20-year-old, U.S.-born, heterosexual, basketball player reported a compounded experience between his racial and athletic identity: "I don't know if it's different, but I feel like there's pressure being an athlete that just kind of adds to the pressures that come with being Black." Participant 7, a 22-year-old, U.S.-born, heterosexual, Agnostic, basketball player reported that he never viewed his athletic identity and racial identity as two separate things:

> To be honest, for me, I don't think it has, to be honest. I don't think in terms of being an athlete, I've never had to, to think about that as two things or the color of my skin, now that I think about it. Um, I was just more focused on the craft, um, and working with my team. I think I was influenced more in like, the swag aspect of it. Like how Allen Iverson put the fit together, you know, or how they would play ball, you know, focusing on the crossover, stuff like that. Um, you know, I think, like I said, Black culture's beautiful. I think Black people are the, the swaggiest, most trendsetter people on the planet. Um, so I think that that's the only way I can see myself being influenced in terms of being an athlete. Funny enough, the type of sports I gravitated to were dominated by Black male athletes. But I was kind of just doing what I felt like I needed to do to survive and be successful as an athlete.

It seemed that for Participant 7, the "swag" of sport felt connected to the "swag" of Black culture, and Black athlete role models reinforced the pride he felt in his culture. Participant 1, a 25-year-old, heterosexual, Christian, basketball player, born in Haiti, expressed a similar difficulty when it came to separating his racial identity from his athletic identity:

> For a long time, I couldn't separate those two. Those two are hard to separate. 'Cause being, I mean, being a Black male athlete, you hear that being one word all the time. So you don't separate that. So to me, what it means to be a Black man and an athlete is I have to shoulder my name. My name, my likeness. That is all I got. Because no matter what I do outside of being an athlete, nobody's gonna care about that stuff. They're just gonna think about me being an athlete.

It seemed that it was clear to Participant 1 that he was valued as a Black man only inasmuch as he was valued as an athlete, that as a Black man, he could only make his name as an athlete. Based on participant responses, their racial identity and their athletic identity was interpreted as overlapping experiences that were difficult to disentangle.

Du Bois (1903) examined the concept of double consciousness, which he stated was a unique experience for Black-identifying individuals primarily socialized in American culture. Double consciousness was explained as the division of self or the split of seemingly one identity

into two, which can lead to internal conflict. For African Americans, this internal conflict may develop as a result of the dynamic between socially unfavorable depictions of Black people maintained and perpetuated by American culture versus their own self-concept.

Du Bois (1903) described this experience of double consciousness as "looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (p. 351). Double consciousness is a conflict between two warring self-constructions: how Black Americans perceive themselves and how the world views them. Within an American context, the world view represents a history of disenfranchisement, a collection of stereotypes, and a rigid depiction of Blacks through mainstream media. This internal strife is simply the wish to be both Black and American without being mistreated and oppressed by their compatriot. In attempts to satisfy two unreconciled ideas, the Black American may begin to prioritize a White dominant standard and confront feelings of shame, self-doubt, and a damaged self-image.

Du Bois (1903) cited that "by the poverty and ignorance of his people, the Negro minister or doctor was tempted toward quackery and demagogy; and by the criticism of the other world, toward ideals that made him ashamed of his lowly tasks" (p. 352). Du Bois (1903) suggested that even though the Black doctor may find value in their work, they are pulled to conform to the dominant ideals due to criticisms of the other world view. Confusion emerges for the Black doctor because what they see as beautiful is despised by the larger audience. Participant 7's quote can be understood through this lens as he completely disregards what he values and is seemingly forced to abide by a standard determined by the world view.

Double consciousness can provide a framework for understanding why AAMCSAs might struggle to separate their athletic identity from their racial identity. African American male athletes may face challenges due to their racial identity, such as the perceived responsibility and

pressure to elevate a community or social scrutiny for their actions in and out of sport.

Participant 4, a 27-year-old, heterosexual, football player born in the United States speaks to his experience of having more responsibility as an athlete due to a history of racial oppression:

> Just knowing what my ancestors have been through is something I carry with me, you know, that it, it's not going to be an easy road for me. There's some things I'm going to have to circumvent to overcome, but, uh, it helps me stay aware. It helps me stay focused. It helps me stay alert. Um, and it just, just remembering what everything, everything that everyone else has gone through for me to even be in this position… It was more than just playing football, um, I had people who rely on me, and I felt a responsibility.

Participant 4 highlighted a heightened awareness of racial oppression due to his Black identity that fostered a set of characteristics that impacted his role as an athlete and added pressures to be successful as an athlete. Participant 4 seemingly describes this relationship between experiences of racial discrimination and his athletic role as an intertwined experience.

Participant 8, a 20-year-old, U.S.-born, heterosexual, basketball player reflected his perceived need to carry himself a certain way as a Black male athlete:

> There's a certain way you're expected to carry yourself, um, because if you don't carry yourself in that way, you are labeled. Now that I'm thinking about this, I never wanted to show certain emotions on the court because I didn't want to be looked at as weak or out of control, you know?

Du Bois (1903) used the example of the Black artisan, which may help understand participant 8's quote:

> Struggle of the black artisan—on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and

> dig for a poverty-stricken horde—could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either cause (p. 352).

Du Bois (1903) suggested that the Black artisan must decide whether to create based on his own perspective, which is undervalued, or create what is more accepted or desired by the dominant White culture. Participant 8 describes a decision he also had to make between behaving authentically or showing a version of himself that was perceived as more acceptable. The artisan creates a product, whereas the Black athlete is the product.

Responses from participants 4 and 8 represent a common experience amongst all the participants and an added layer of challenges related to their racial background and identity, which influenced their athletic identity and role. Participants are referencing a response to double consciousness and how specifically this influenced an invincible persona, heightened sense of responsibility, and increased pressure as an athlete. Both participants referenced experiences that may contribute to an elevated sense of integration between one's racial and athletic identities. Du Bois (1903) suggested that double consciousness may lead to an experience of internal strife, as individuals try to understand and synthesize social expectations, norms, and values from the hegemonic culture and the community in which they are raised. This internal strife is intensified for Black male athletes as they navigate a sport culture that has its own set of norms and values, that may conflict with trying to maintain a sense of racial authenticity. The perceived pressure to conform to these norms and values in sport culture may lead to the reinforcement and prioritization of athletic identity for Black male athletes.

Dominant social messages in American culture continue to depict Black men as physically capable and intellectually inept. This depiction is reinforced by mainstream media, which tends to pigeonhole Black male athletes as physically strong and hyperaggressive.

Professional sport in the United States is an arena that offers upward social and financial mobility whereby Black men are celebrated and admired (Allen & Bagozzi, 2001; Bimper and Harrison, 2011; Howard, 2013; Miller, 2019). Participant 9, a 24-year-old, heterosexual, Christian, football player born in Jamaica. talked about his experience growing up in America and learning what it means to be an athlete:

> Um, I really liked football growing up a lot. And so, um, it was like really important to me to like join a football team, start lifting weights and, you know, try to be part of that space because I thought I had to. Um, and that was all, you know, was birthed because of a desire to fit in since it was the popular thing to do or what I saw people who looked like me doing…I think I just remember always being picked first in sports and like seeing all the other, you know, like in middle school, all the other kids that were like not as athletic, or as confident. In the beginning it was nice, but I think over time I felt like being Black came with higher expectations as an athlete because people kind of expect it of you.

The pressures to conform to a certain standard or persona in sport culture may inhibit the AAMCSA's ability to express themselves authentically. This perceived pressure to conform is important to consider when exploring how African American male athletes are developing their athletic identity because it speaks to a core need to survive. Furthermore, participants are conforming to a limited and somewhat detrimental image of the African American male professional athlete. All participants explicitly reported that professional Black male athletes were prominent figures that informed decision making during their early experiences as an athlete. The following quotes are a few responses from participants that speak to this experience. Participant 5 talked about early experiences that influenced the types of sports he was interested in: "I gravitated to sports that were dominated by Black males… so I leaned in those directions when deciding what sports I tried." Participant 10, a 24-year-old, U.S.-born, heterosexual, football player stated the following when discussing why Black men from low socioeconomic communities might pursue athletics: "I think being a Black male, you see for a lot of Black males, being an athlete is a way to escape, um, poverty in the hood you know." Participant 4

talked about the lack of representation and limited professional options for Black men he saw growing up in America: “The only way to make it as a Black man is to be an athlete…because that's all I ever saw.” Participants in this study are modeling the behaviors of professional Black male athletes well known in popular media. Unfortunately, the media portrayal of the African American male athlete lacks depth and variation, which creates a rigid understanding of what characteristics are expected from Black boys who aspire to be a professional athlete.

This first theme highlighted a unique experience of double consciousness, which can influence how African American athletes develop, understand, and place value on their athletic identity. All participants expressed an internalized pressure to succeed and increased responsibility due to their racial and cultural background. Unfortunately, social messaging and a lack of representation normalized that sports were one of the few available methods to achieve that success. This dynamic is bolstered by the discriminatory experiences participants reported as a result of their racial appearance and social validation contingent on fulfilling expectations associated with their athletic role. Through implicit and explicit social messaging, participants experienced a socialization that consistently placed a disproportionate value on their athletic identity by virtue of their racial identity.

Reenactment of Domination

Whereas the first theme highlighted the internal conflict that might ensue from differentiating social messages that minimize a Black racial identity and validate an athletic identity, the second theme is a potential consequence of this internal conflict and a subconscious need to obtain something in one area that was lost in another. This theme focused on the participants’ perceivable need to obtain a sense of dominance in their sport in response to feeling dominated and helpless at the broader social level. Van Raalte and Hays (1998) argued that even

though athletics can foster the ability for Black men to establish a positive self-concept and oppose negative stereotypes, their racial identity is also being shaped in the social contexts of sport. In other words, despite the existence of racial discrimination, athletics offers a space where Black men can prove they are capable and valuable.

All participants minimized aspects of their racial identity that were perceived as unacceptable in White spaces. Participant 5, a 23-year-old, U.S.-born, heterosexual, Christian, basketball player reported on his experience in college and the impact of stereotype threat, which is representative of all participant responses about attending predominately White institutions:

> Walking on eggshells constantly in school, like like, you know, I can't raise my voice too loud, too quick, you know, like it might make people nervous, you know, I can't move too quick, right? Things like that. I didn't want to do anything that might mess up this opportunity. How can I best enter spaces for people to digest me knowing that I'm coming in with all of these preconceived notions, you know? Like especially as a Black athlete at a White school, I didn't want to be looked at as dumb or someone who didn't care about school.

This quote speaks to a common participant experience with stereotype threat and engaging in role flexing to effectively navigate predominantly White spaces. A sense of powerlessness comes through in his hypervigilance, need to make the right decision, and please his White counterparts. This shows that participants are aware of the negative stereotypes associated with their racial identity and social messages in the United States regarding race, which places more value on Whiteness. Furthermore, negative first experiences with their racial identity, negative interactions with law enforcement, and being told that your Blackness is a disadvantage were

common experiences amongst all participants. Multiple and ongoing experiences with racial discrimination and prejudice may influence feelings of self-worth and perceived social value.

Six participants referenced this need to dominate in their sport. Participant 10 talked about how his experiences as a Black male influenced his competitive nature as an athlete:

> That that's strength, that resilience, I'm like, there is, there's no other race, and I shouldn't say this, but essentially, there's no other race that's going to compete with me, that's going to be up to par with me. Like, I'll dominate whoever and I'll, beat whoever.

Participant 10's response is similar to the other participant responses when they talked about this perceived need to dominate. When the theme of domination emerged in the interviews it was generally associated with experiences of oppression and needing to overcome. Participants talked with a sense of pride when expressing their need to be dominant any time they stepped on the field or court. In the United States, Black men have historically been denied access to education, employment, and political power, leading to a sense of powerlessness and disenfranchisement. Sports, however, may provide a unique opportunity for Black men to assert their power and demonstrate their worth.

Additionally, Black male athletes may feel pressure to conform to certain stereotypes or expectations about Black masculinity. All participants discussed dealing with pressures and social expectations as a result of their male identity. Some of the participant responses touched on the impact of their male identity on their athletic identity. Participant 2 talked about what he believes is needed to be successful as a male athlete: "Um, yeah, I mean, being, being an athlete, especially a male athlete, it involves, uh, sacrifice. Um, if you want to get good at, if you want to get good at the sport, it involves a lot of sacrifice." Participant 4 explained how masculine norms

in sport culture facilitated his ability to better and his perceived need to apply them in order to be an athlete:

> I, I think it's something that has pushed me to, to strive to be even better. I think I learned to work hard, and push pass my limits. I had to work through pain, and I think that just comes with being an athlete.

Participant 8 expounded on how his experiences growing up as a male impacted his attitude and behaviors toward help-seeking: “Um, you know, just providing and, and being that stable force, uh, within a group. So as a man it became a lot harder for me to ask for help.” These masculine social expectations may include pushing through pain, sacrifice, and projecting a stable facade. By dominating in sports, participants may feel that they are fulfilling these expectations and proving their worth as men.

This theme acknowledged an overcompensation of dominance in a space where participants hold power as a response to feeling powerless in White hegemonic spaces. After participants discussed experiences of racial discrimination, a solemn and defeated emotionality was displayed, but when they expressed this need to dominate in sports it coincided with a euthymic state and a sense of pride. This perceived need to dominate exceeded just being better than the opposition and was seemingly influenced by more than the competitive nature of sports. The unique experience of double consciousness fosters a pattern of behavior for African American athletes to look for self-worth and value through their athletic identity and role. If their athletic identity and racial identity are synonymous, then the value stripped from their racial identity can be found through their athletic identity. As power is taken from African American athletes due to their race, power is reobtained through sports.

Internalized Definition of Mental Health as an Individual Problem

The third theme is the culmination of historical, cultural, and social factors that impact the attitudes and help-seeking behaviors of African American male D1 collegiate athletes. How participants understood their intersecting identities, a history of systemic racism in the medical field, and cultural experiences all contributed to how participants conceptualized mental health. All participants defined mental health as an individual problem that is resolved at the individual level. The following participant responses capture this emergent theme. Participant 5 explained mental health as the inability to cope with difficult information or situations: "You know, mental health isn't an issue for people who are always happy, you know what I mean? Mental health is an issue for people who can't deal with bad news." Participant 8 interpreted mental health as this internal experience that is alleviated by taking care of yourself and giving your mind what it needs:

> Um, I think mental health is just taking care of the mind, feeding the mind what it needs and, and, um, giving it that, uh, um, that r and r that love, that attention that it needs…I really just think mental health is, um, is just taking care of yourself. How someone's feeling inwardly, you know, a lot of people put up a facade every day to be strong or to portray a certain image, but just getting an understanding of how people are actually doing inside.

Participant 10 explained what someone needs to do day-to-day to care for their mental health: "The upkeep, um, care, um, attention, um, and devotion to, um, your mental capacity, your mental sanity, your mental state, your mental happiness, um, and just how you carry yourself, um, mentally in day-to-day life."

Participant responses resoundingly place the responsibility for mental health on the individual, who is assumed to have the access, power, and privilege to attend to their mental

health effectively. This position is disheartening because it places the work and burden back on to marginalized participants that continue to navigate a systemically oppressive country that impacts their mental wellbeing. Systems not only negatively contribute to mental health, but impact access to resources and how participants are defining mental health. Several participants referenced media as the source of their definition of mental health. In addition to the impact of social messaging associated with different social identities, the overarching messaging around mental health further contributes to the underutilization of resources.

Stigma was a reoccurring experience reported by participants on what shaped how they viewed mental health. A permeating stigma surrounds mental health in the Black community, and weakness is often associated with seeking help for related concerns. Several participants talked about cultural and family norms that stigmatized or minimized the use of mental health resources. Participant 8 stated that "Mental health was not a thing growing up, that was not something I was even comfortable talking to my family about. Um, there was not issues that I discussed. There was no such thing as mental health." Participant 2, a 21-year-old, U.S.-born, heterosexual, Catholic, football player reported "Um, you know, my mom isn't big on mental health or she's coming around, but she wasn't, you know, and I think that's just stigma that exists within the Black community, unfortunately." Participant 4 reported a similar experience with his family, "They don't allow you to feel sorry for yourself. They don't really provide a space to, to share your emotions. Um, you know, that's something that you're supposed to internalize and get over it."

Black men are already subjected to stigma and shame around mental health and the intersection of an athletic identity only further contributes to this experience. Moreover, if seeking or using mental health resources is associated with weakness, then it impedes the ability

to display dominance in their sport. Participant 9's response clearly articulates how racial identity, gender identity, and athletic identity all negatively contribute to a willingness to use mental health services. Participant 9 highlighted a compounded experience in the following response:

> Two of those things (race and gender) are diametrically opposed to mental health services. Like, Black people are not allowed to have mental health issues…you'll get shot by cops or like you, you're not given the same excuses that other people are. A Black person has a mental health crisis, it's like they might end up in a body bag. They don't have the same compassion given to them. Males are not, um, are also not supposed to have mental health issues. Like, we're supposed to be like tough and like just grind it out…you know, to play a sport, you have to be mentally tough, it kind of just goes with the territory. We're supposed to be emotionless and, um, not seek those types of services. You're, you're weak, you're pathetic. You are, you know, you're not supposed to seek that out… Um, so all three of those things combined are a rejection, total rejection of seeking mental health services. We see in the media what happens when a Black athlete, um, you know, expresses atypical behavior. It's not, it's not like, oh, we, we should help this person. Instead, you know, this person has lost their mind and they, they should be banned from the sport and should be arrested and what not. It makes me scared knowing what could happen to someone who looks like me and is asking for help. So, I really do think that, um, being a Black male athlete prevents you from seeking mental health services.

Social messages directed towards individuals who identify with a Black race, male gender, and athletic role invalidated the use of mental health resources and asking for help. Unfortunately, associating mental health help-seeking with weakness can create a dynamic that triggers feelings of shame or embarrassment, which may impede the use of these resources, especially for Black males (Naoi et al., 2011; Wilkerson et al., 2020).

Additionally, there is the learned prioritization of self-reliance out of necessity within the Black community, which may contribute to a belief that mental health is the sole responsibility of individual (Bauer et al., 2020). Participant 2 expressed an internalized need to be self-reliant due to limited resources:

> And, you know, I kind of just, uh, the competitive nature of sports made me feel like I got to get over this myself. Like in the same way that I figured out a lot of other things myself in terms of lack of resources and, you know, um, getting, getting good at a sport without having traditional training and resources.

Self-reliance is a normalized expectation for this participant given his experiences that have consistently required this mentality in order to be successful.

Lastly, a history of systemic racism and discrimination may contribute to why Black men view mental health as a problem that they need to solve on their own. Barriers continue to limit access to culturally responsive and competent treatment within healthcare settings, which is essential given the distrust in medical institutions by Black communities (APA, 2017; Motley & Banks, 2018). The lack of representation amongst clinicians was reported by 6 participants as to what impeded their access or willingness to use services. Participant 5 talked about his first experience using mental health resources while in college: “I tried to use the therapists they had on campus you could talk to. So, I tried it twice. My first experience wasn't that great. It was like an older White guy I didn't really connect with.” Participant 2 talked about difficulties finding a Black therapist: “I think the biggest, the biggest problem for me when I was on the hunt for a therapist before I had one was not being able find someone with a similar lived experience as me, aka a Black person.” The inadequate representation of professionals in counseling and clinical psychology continues to be a problem nationwide. Participants are consistently communicating experiences of oppression in White systems, which may impact their willingness to not only seek services but also engage authentically with a White clinician.

This theme reflected the disconnect between the impact of systemic racism and oppression on mental health and social messages that normalizes mental health care as an

individual responsibility. While participants acknowledged the systemic impact on mental health, self-reliance was often the preferred or learned method of mental health care. Social messages associated with the participants' male identity, racial identity, and athletic identity all perpetuated this idea that impaired mental health is a sign of individual weakness. This messaging incorrectly implies that mental health impairment is the result of the individual's incapability. Even though there is clear evidence on the relationship between systemic oppression and its impact on mental health, positioning the responsibility on the individual only places more burden on the oppressed to do the physical and emotional labor necessary for healing. A community that has justified distrust in the medical field, a history of oppression that contributes to current functioning, and have been socialized to rely on self out of necessity will ultimately reject and diminish the use of mental health care.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to extend research on the insufficient use of mental health resources by African American collegiate NCAA DI student-athletes. Research questions were developed to understand how the social construction of gender and race influenced the African American DI collegiate student-athletes' formation of their athletic identity and their consequent understanding of mental health and related resources. The two research questions used to examine this experience were (a) How do African American male collegiate DI student-athletes develop their athletic identity? (b) How does the athletic identity of African American male collegiate DI student-athlete's influence their attitude towards help-seeking? Using a semi-structured interview protocol guided by the research questions, 10 participants provided a window into this complex experience. This study's results reflected the participants' lived experiences and prioritized participant voices as they recalled the development of their racial identity, male identity, and athletic identity within both the U.S. context and the sport system and how it influenced help-seeking attitudes.

Summary of Findings

Pressure to represent their race and community, a heightened sense of responsibility, the conflict between maintaining their cultural authenticity and conforming to mainstream athletic norms, and the immense weight of expectations to excel athletically are a few manifestations of double consciousness for the African American male athlete (Allen & Bagozzi, 2001; Du Bois, 1903). AAMCSAs in this study provided responses that directly point to this experience and how it influenced their self-perception, social expectations, and athletic-related decision making. AAMCSAs require an environment that embraces their racial identity while appreciating their

athletic accomplishments and pursuits. This is beyond evident, as all the participants in this study speak to an experience of being both celebrated and devalued. Empirical evidence highlights a history of this experience that AAMCSAs are subjected to on a consistent basis (Bimper and Harrison, 2011; Howard, 2013; Miller, 2019). Athletic prowess is often celebrated, and African American athletes, especially in notable sports like football and basketball, contribute to the economic success of American sports while the overall well-being, the exploitative nature of sports, and commodification of African American athletes is continually disregarded (Bimper and Harrison, 2011). Miller (2019) expounds on this exploitative experience African American college athletes have historically been subjected to. The devaluing of African American athletes is perpetuated through lack of compensation, racial bias, and limited agency.

AAMCSAs are developing their identities and the understanding of self in four intersecting systems (i.e., sport culture, the institutional culture, their own culture, and the dominant social cultural), which come with varying norms and socially desired behaviors (Torres et al., 2009). Each system places a different social value on AAMCSAs' racial identity and athletic identity. AAMCSAs are internalizing messages that define behaviors as favorable and unfavorable to develop how they understand self (Stryker, 1980). This intersection of systems that AAMCSAs are experiencing designates their racial identity as unfavorable and their athletic identity as favorable. Furthermore, this experience takes place in a closed sport culture or fishbowl, and athletes who do not perform to expected levels are often subjected to public criticism (e.g., sports message boards). Johnson and Migliaccio (2009) suggests that Black boys in America are experiencing an over socialization as athlete, which is supported by most of the participants in this study. Participants in this study referenced the lack of representation of Black males in different professional spaces outside of sports and mainstream media's tendency to

celebrate Black men primarily in athletic roles, which ultimately lead Black boys and men to feel pressure to uplift their community through sports.

The connection between race and sports can have negative consequences for AAMCSAs. Armstrong and Oomen-Early (2009) examined the relationship between perceived levels of social connectedness, self-esteem, and depression among collegiate athletes and nonathletes. Results showed that self-esteem was one of the strongest predictors of depression. This is noteworthy, especially when looking at the African American male athlete population because research suggests that African American male athletes tend to overidentify with an athletic identity (Beamon, 2012). Athletes may feel that their worth as a person is tied to their success in sports, which can lead to depression if they experience failure or injury as an athlete. Furthermore, the perceived need to dominate may manifest as a result of double consciousness and the perceived lack of social power and experiences of discrimination.

Experiences of social powerlessness are perpetuated at predominantly White institutions (PWI), which is where all the participants played their sport. Participant responses suggested an increased experience of discrimination and decreased social connectedness at PWIs, which is aligned with extant research that shows increased difficulties adjusting and race-related stress at PWIs in comparison to HBCUs (Neville & Roderick, 2000; Nghe & Mahalik, 2001; Abrams & Trusty, 2004). Research has also suggested that Black men in White masculine hegemonic cultures tend to overcompensate to prove manhood (Wesley, 2015). If AAMCSAs perceive an experience in which they are constantly stripped of their power and social value, then the resulting attempt to reobtain power in a space where they are valued is comprehensible.

Lastly, if experiences of racial discrimination are prevalent amongst AAMCSAs, then the resultant mental health toll would necessitate the use of mental health resources among collegiate

athletics. Unfortunately, the underutilization of these resources by AAMCSAs is an ongoing concern. The findings from this study suggest that a factor that may be contributing to help-seeking attitudes and behaviors is how AAMCSAs are defining mental health. Participants in this study commonly defined mental health as a problem they need to individually solve, which is consistent with the individualistic values of White U.S. culture. This definition inappropriately places the blame and responsibility onto the suffering party. This mentality aligns with a self-reliance that emerges as a result of historical discrimination and a devaluing of Black racial identity in a White supremacist context. This finding is also in line with previous research. For example, Bauer et al. (2020) explored the help-seeking behaviors of young African American men and recorded similar responses from their participants. Feelings of shame, embarrassment, stigma, and a preference for self-reliance were common positions amongst the participants when discussing if they prefer to handle things on their own or work with a mental health care provider. Also, participants talked about family experiences and messaging that minimized mental health entirely. Wilkerson et al. (2020) supports this experience and suggested that help-seeking attitudes are directly influenced by the cultural understanding and acceptance of mental health in Black communities. This experience is only compounded by barriers to accessing mental health resources that reinforce the belief that mental health is an individual problem. In this study, participant experiences are aligned with current research on barriers, which include mental health stigma, lack of representative providers, and the lack of education or awareness (APA, 2017; Motley & Banks, 2018). However, the findings from this study extend the existing literature by highlighting how the internalization of mental health as an individual problem is part and parcel with the self-reliance that necessarily develops as a function of racial oppression experienced by the Black community, and specifically Black men. Thus, there is a clearer

throughway between the oppression of Black men, who seek to uplift themselves through sport, as that is one of the very limited pathways to success highlighted for Black men, and the internalization of the need for self-reliance to uplift themselves out of mental health challenges.

Addressing these themes in practice will require a comprehensive approach that includes destigmatizing mental health within sport culture, properly educating student-athlete facing staff, and improving access to culturally competent mental health services in athletics. Psychological research can play an important role in understanding these issues and developing effective interventions to promote mental health among African American men.

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

This study contributes to theoretical understandings and enhances how psychological research understands the relationship between athletic identity and help-seeking for AAMCSAs. The development of athletic identity does not happen in a vacuum for AAMCSAs as their intersecting identities are cultivated in a racially oppressive and discriminatory culture. In particular, this study shines a light on how a Black racial identity and related experiences might contribute to how athletic identity is developed. White supremacy, specifically anti-Black racism, and capitalism intersect to oppress Black boys and men, such that they are offered very few pathways for success. So, it makes sense that Black boys may latch onto sport, as it is clearly a pathway for them that is highlighted by media, etc. Sport then provides a space where they get to dominate in ways that they are dominated in a White supremist society. Unfortunately, a part of dominating is internalizing a self-reliance that has been learned and perpetuated by dominant social messages and barriers to mental health. This theoretical understanding helps critically examine the bigger, systemic picture.

Examining the intersectionality between racial identity and athletic identity for AAMCSAs should include or consider the unique experience of double consciousness and the split between identifying as an African American and an athlete. Abrams and Trusty (2004) suggested that African American undergrad college students who positively internalized their racial identity were less likely to conform to social standards and expectations. This experience may help provide a framework for exploring the relationship between racial identity and the overidentification with an athletic identity. Explicitly, this framework can help explore the connection between experiences of Black racial oppression and discrimination in a White dominant culture, attitude/perception of their Black racial identity, and the level of identification with an athlete identity and role of current AAMCSAs.

Further research is needed on how the historical racial experience of Blacks in the United States might contribute to the development of athletic identity of AAMCSAs. All participants referenced experiences with racial discrimination and feelings of inferiority during their childhood. This study suggests that there is a relationship between racial identity and athletic identity development, which can be instrumental to the psychological well-being and help-seeking attitudes of AAMCSAs. Moreover, the relationship between racial discrimination and the perceived need to dominate in athletics should be further explored amongst AAMCSAs.

Findings from the current study have valuable practical implications at the institutional level (the NCAA) and individual level (i.e., coaches, athletic trainers, players). All participant responses provided a clear and comprehensible impact of social messages learned in sport culture on decision making and behaviors. Coaches and athletic trainers are primary touch points for players that if trained from a structural competency lens and provided the necessary mental health resources can stand a better change at identifying detrimental aspects of a culture they

help maintain, signs of mental health impairment, and how to get their players connected to resources. Coaches are a vital influence on their players athletic identity development and what coaches prioritize influences what players value (James, 2020). If Black male athletes represent a majority of collegiate and professional basketball and football players, then training athletic staff on the impact of historical oppression and the unique experience of Black athletes in the United States is more than appropriate. Trainings may facilitate an increased understanding and awareness that ideally negates the perpetuation of these experiences in athletics. Coaches, in particular, play a primary role in establishing and maintaining a team culture through social messaging and as role models (Van Raalte and Hays, 1998). Player perceptions of a supportive social climate significantly increases a player's use of healthy psychological coping skills (Fry et al., 2021). Coaches equipped with the necessary information can create safe trauma-informed environments for their players and connect them to reliable emotional supports if they are unable. An informed coach is not just aware of mental health resources but can also identify how the resources can be beneficial. This distinction is important because coaches have a significant impact on what their players deem as important.

Sport psychologists are also important to consider as policies are being created to determine the necessary credentials and responsibilities of this role at the collegiate and professional level. Areas of continued education and training should address specific populations of athletes that consider the intersection of identities and roles. As males who identified with a minority race may be more likely to associate sport psychologists with negative stigmas (Naoi et al., 2011). Mandated or offered trainings on specific populations from an intersectional lens may lead to the humanization of athletes and the consideration of contextual factors.

There should be a genuine investment in educating players on how their identities might influence their attitudes and decision making as it pertains to mental health. Teams already incorporate personal and professional developmental trainings, which should incorporate a mental health component beyond just identifying resources and performance. Education geared towards specific populations of athletes may help normalize experiences that are rarely discussed. Normalizing these experiences is extremely important given that most of the participants in this study perceived mental health as afterthoughts in their household, community, and athletic programs/teams.

Limitations

Despite the strengths of this study, there are several limitations. First, this study does not explore the ways in which other identities (e.g., sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, etc.) may intersect with race and gender to influence African American collegiate student-athletes' experiences. Exploration in this area might uncover significant distinctions impacting the results of the study. Although the study showed how race, gender, and athletic identity contribute to help-seeking by AAMCSAs, other potentially meaningful identities are not included. Secondly, although participants included those who immigrated to the United States before the age of five, as socialization into U.S. culture begins mostly around this age as they enter school, it is still possible that their experiences may significantly differ from American born children, especially if they were born in cultures that value Black individuals more highly. I did not notice significant variation according to this difference, but it is possible that the limited sample did not capture variation that might exist in the phenomenon. Thirdly, while the interview method provided rich and detailed responses from the 10 participants, the accuracy and specifics of the events may be limited because participants may not fully recall them during the interview. Most of the

participants acknowledged difficulties thinking of early childhood experiences and connecting them to current decision making and attitudes. The study shines a light on a unique social and developmental experience that needs to be explored at an earlier age, especially if these experiences are reportedly happening before high school. Also, regardless of the several attempts used to minimize bias and increase reliability and validity, interview data can still lead to biased and incomplete results. The data collected is subjective and dependent on the participant's and my interpretation. The reflexive thematic method is an interpretive method that sees themes as being constructed by the researcher and not something that inherently reside in the data. My identities as a Black male athlete and subjectivity as the interviewer may have influenced participant responses, leading to these specific results. As such, the intersubjective nature of interviews and the limitations to replicability of interview data locate these findings to the specific interview interactions that occurred for this study.

Conclusion

This study examined how the intersection of race, gender, and athletic identity for AAMCSAs influenced help-seeking attitudes. This research was imperative due to the paucity of research on AAMCSAs and a tendency to look at identities independently when exploring influences on help-seeking and attitudes about mental health. The results showed a clear relationship between the intersection of racial identity and athletic identity and its influence on help-seeking attitudes and beliefs of the participants. Participants displayed the inability to fully articulate how their racial identity influenced their athletic identity even though they all experienced racial discrimination and oppression, which affected how they perceived themselves. Participants repeatedly disclosed experiences of microaggressions, discrimination, and stereotype threat when it pertained to their racial identity and social validation, support, and

positive acknowledgement regarding their athletic identity. This experience was overtly supported by the literature and the unique African American experience of double consciousness. The internal conflict that emerged as a result of how participants experienced their racial and athletic identities was conducive to creating this need to dominate and search for a sense of power, self-worth, and social value in athletics. This experience influenced how participants understood themselves and helped shape attitudes towards help-seeking. Using and seeking mental health supports as an athlete can be perceived as a weakness or an incapability, which directly opposes the AAMCSAs perceived need to show an invincibility needed to dominate.

In conclusion, the findings suggest AAMCSAs experience a unique relationship between their identities that contribute to help-seeking attitudes. AAMCSAs in this study experience an internal conflict of what it means to be Black, what it means to be male, what it means to be an athlete, and what it means to be a Black male athlete. The most disheartening, but liberating responses from the interviews were at the end when more than half of the participants expressed an appreciation and relief after reflecting on their identities and experiences. This suggests that AAMCSAs are not considering these questions, but are impacted by their experiences and value the opportunity to further understand themselves. Collegiate institutions need to provide a safer space that values and validates the experiences of AAMCSAs. Future researchers must make it their duty to ensure that AAMCSAs' experiences will be heard, specifically through qualitative research, which gives power to their voices.

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Appendix A

Demographics Questionnaire

1. Age: _____

2. State of current residence: _____

3. Country/State of birth: _____

4. Sexual orientation: _____

5. Religious background: _____

6. Years of participation in a NCAA recognized DI football or basketball program: _____

7. Employment status.
a. Working part-time
b. Working full-time
c. Unemployed and not looking for work
d. Unemployed and looking for work

8. Income: What is your current total combined household income? If you don't know your exact income, please estimate.
a. Less than $9,999
b. $10,000 - $19,999
c. $20,000 - $49,999
d. $50,000 - $99,999
e. $100,000 - $149,999
f. More than $150,000
g. Don't know
h. Chose not to answer

9. Below please indicate type of employment for parent/ legal guardian.
Parent/Legal Guardian #1:
Parent/Legal Guardian #2:

Appendix B

Interview Guide

"In answering these questions, take your time. Please describe your experiences in as much detail as possible and feel free to add anything you think is important. I want YOUR story...and as a reminder, all of your information will be de-identified to protect your privacy."

1. Tell me what it means to you to be Black. You can start with the first time you realized this meant something and include any other experiences you had that influenced your experience of what it means to be Black.

a. (If participant talks in generalities) Can you give me an example/tell a story of a time that you realized what this means?

2. Tell me what it means to you to be male. You can start with the first time you realized this meant something and include any other experiences you had that influenced your experience of what it means to be male.

a. (If participant talks in generalities) Can you give me an example/tell a story of a time that you realized what this means?

3. Tell me your story about what it means to be a Black male in America? You could start with the first time these two identities together had some meaning and include any experiences you had that gave meaning to what it means to be a Black male.

a. (If participant talks in generalities) Can you give me an example/tell a story of a time that you realized what this means?

4. Tell me your story about what it means to be an athlete. You can start with the first time you realized this meant something and include any other experiences you had that influenced your experience of what it means to be an athlete.

a. Tell me how being a Black male influenced your development or understanding of your athletic role/identity.

5. Tell me how you understand what mental health is

a. How would you define mental health?

b. How did you develop this understanding/definition?

6. Tell me how you understand what mental health supports or resources are.

a. What kinds of mental health supports or resources can you think of and where would you find them if you were asked to identify them?

7. Tell me a story that might illustrate your experience with using or not using mental health related resources.

8. Tell me how your athletic role/identity, and specifically how being a Black male (or African American male) athlete, might have influenced your experiences with using or not using mental health resources, if at all.

    a. (If they have negative attitudes towards help seeking) What aspects of your race and gender might be contributing to some of your negative views on mental health resources?

    b. (If they have positive attitudes towards help seeking) What aspects of your race and gender might be influencing some of your positive views on mental health resources, if at all?

9. Is there anything that I didn't ask or we didn't cover today that you would like to share or elaborate on?

Appendix C

Seton Hall University IRB Approval

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
1 8 5 6

7/18/2022

Pattric Davis

Re: Study ID# 2022-351

Dear Mr. Davis,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled "More Than an Athlete: The Impact of Athletic Identity on African American male NCAA DI Collegiate Student-Athlete Help Seeking Attitudes" as resubmitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval as exempt. Enclosed for your records are the stamped original Consent Form. You can make copies of these forms for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Phyllis Hansell, EdD, RN, DNAP, FAAN
Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Office of the Institutional Review Board
Presidents Hall · 400 South Orange Avenue · South Orange, New Jersey 07079 · Tel: 973.275.4654 · Fax 973.275.2978 ·
www.shu.edu

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Title of Research Study: *"More than an Athlete: The Impact of Athletic Identity on African American male NCAA DI Collegiate Student-Athlete Help Seeking Attitudes."*.

Principal Investigator: *Pattric Davis* (Counseling Psychology Doctoral Student)

Department Affiliation: *Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy at Seton Hall University*

Sponsor: *This research is supported by the department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy at Seton Hall University*

Brief summary about this research study:
The following summary of this research study is to help you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study. You have the right to ask questions at any time.

The purpose of this study is to promote a deeper understanding of the effects of gender and race on the development of the athletic identity for African American collegiate DI student-athletes at predominantly White institutions, given that these identities contribute to an aversion to help seeking.

You will be asked to answer 9 questions from a demographic questionnaire to confirm participant criteria and a 60-minute interview. We expect that you will be in this research study for approximately 90 minutes.

The primary risk of participation is the breach of privacy because all interviews are audio recorded and saved.

The main benefit of participation is personal satisfaction that this study will lead to findings that can be used to promote the development of culturally and racially relevant mental health education and practices for this population of collegiate student-athletes.

Purpose of the research study:
You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are at least 18 years old; identify as African American and male cisgender; are born in the United States or raised in the United States since the age of 5 years old; are a current NCAA DI student-athletes who has formally participated in at least 1 full athletic season of a NCAA DI certified basketball or football team after 2019; attend a predominantly White institution (PWI); read, understand and speak English fluently.

Your participation in this research study is expected to be for approximately 90 minutes.

You will be one of 10 – 15 people who are expected to participate in this research study.

What you will be asked to do:
Your participation in this research study will include:
Completing the demographic questionnaire, which consists of 9 questions. Questions include basic demographic information such as age, sexual orientation, religious background, household income, state of current residence, country/state of birth, and years of collegiate participation.

Signing and returning this informed consent form.

Participating in one interview with the primary researcher. The 60-minute interview will take place online and will occur on an agreed upon date/time between the primary researcher and participant. The researcher will use Microsoft Teams, a virtual meeting platform that is HIPPA compliant. The PI will email the participants a link that will give them access to the secure interview platform. During the interview, the researcher will ask 9 questions. Questions are about participants' race, gender, experiences as an athlete, and experiences with using or not using mental health resources.

Reviewing the interview transcript and resulting themes of the study are optional.

Your rights to participate, say no or withdraw:
Participation in research is voluntary. You can decide to participate or not to participate. You can choose to participate in the research study now and then decide to leave the research at any time. Your choice will not be held against you.

The person in charge of the research study can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include missing study interview or non-compliance with the study procedures.

Potential benefits:
There may be no direct benefit to you from this study. You may obtain personal satisfaction from knowing that you are participating in a project that contributes to new information regarding collegiate student-athletes and the use of mental health supports.

Potential risks:
The risks associated with this study are minimal in nature. Your risks to participation in this research will include:

- Participants may feel uncomfortable after the individual interview based on the content of what is discussed, considering that conversations will include experiences of race, gender, and mental health.

- Interviews will be audio recorded, which means that there is a risk to privacy regardless of the efforts made to appropriately store and maintain recordings.

If you experience significant distress, please inform the research team immediately. If this happens, possible options will include taking a break, postponing the interview, or ending the interview.

If you experience distress as a result of the interview, you may use the American Psychological Association's psychologist locator at https://locator.apa.org/ to find a helping professional that is able to assist you. You may also call the National Crisis Hotline at 1-800-273-8255

Confidentiality and privacy:
Efforts will be made to limit the use or disclosure of your personal information. This information may include the research study documents or other source documents used for the purpose of conducting the study. These documents may include your demographic questionnaire. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that oversee research safety may inspect and copy your information. This includes the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board who oversees the safe and ethical conduct of research at this institution.

This interview is conducted on Microsoft Teams and involves a secure connection. Terms of service, addressing confidentiality, may be viewed at https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-US/privacystatement and https://www.microsoft.com/enus/servicesagreement. Your email address, which will be used to contact you to provide the pre-screener, demographic questionnaire, informed consent form, schedule the interview date/time, and conduct a follow-up will be stored separately from your de-identifiable interview data. All identifiable information will be kept on separate OneDrive folder only accessible by the primary investigator. The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifiable information will not be used.

Data sharing:
De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance knowledge. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Cost and compensation:
You will not be responsible for any of the costs or expenses associated with your participation in this study.

There is no payment for your time to participate in this study.

Conflict of interest disclosure:
The principal investigator and members of the study team have no financial conflicts of interest to report.

Contact information:
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research project, you can contact the principal investigator (Pattric Davis) at (pattric.davis@shu.edu email address), the dissertation advisor (Dr. Minsun Lee) at minsun.lee@shu.edu or (973) 761-9451 or the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") at (973) 761-9334 or irb@shu.edu

Audio and/or video recordings will be performed as part of the research study. Please indicate your permission to participate in these activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

I agree	I disagree	
_____	_____	The researcher may record my [audio or video] interview. In understand this is done to help with data collection and analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the study team.

I hereby consent to participate in this research study.

Signature of participant	Date
Printed name of participant	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	