8-18-2025

A Content Analysis of Podcasts Exploring the Experiences of NBA Players and Mental Health

Joanna D. Hedin
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Health

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Joanna Hedin

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Sonia Gilkey, Committee Chairperson,
Social Work Faculty

Dr. Debra Wilson, Committee Member,
Social Work Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

A Content Analysis of Podcasts Exploring the Experiences of NBA Players and Mental Health

by

Joanna Hedin

MSW, Eastern Washington University, 2007

BSW, Idaho State University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Work

Walden University

August 2025

Abstract

Black male athletes are at a greater risk of not seeking treatment for their mental health issues due to cultural stigmas and expectations. The purpose of this qualitative secondary data research study was to understand the experiences of Black NBA players regarding their mental health and the sociocultural factors that influence their decision making regarding participation in mental health services, as revealed through podcast appearances. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was applied in this study to suggest that learning is an integral part of the social process and that culture contributes to how and what one learns. This study asked about what podcast episodes on mental health revealed about Black NBA players' experiences with mental health, what those podcasts revealed about their perceptions about the sociocultural factors influencing their decision to seek help, and how players perceived disclosing mental health experiences while playing in the NBA. The secondary data collected for this study consisted of 20 podcast episodes in which 30 NBA players discussed their mental health experiences while playing in the NBA. Content analysis was used to analyze the data that consisted of a systematic eight step process. The results of the data analysis revealed three main themes including the role of the social/cultural environment on mental health perceptions, factors contributing to seeking help or not, and normalizing mental health during and after the NBA career. This study is important to social work research and social change as it provides additional insight into the mental health of elite athletes and the potential role of social workers in advocating for mental health support for these athletes when a need is identified.

A Content Analysis of Podcasts Exploring the Experiences of NBA Players and Mental Health

by

Joanna Hedin

MSW, Eastern Washington University, 2007

BSW, Idaho State University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Work

Walden University

August 2025

Dedication

I dedicate this to my kiddo and his father, who, without you, I would not have been able to do this. De'Sean Allen-Eikens, you and your father, LaMont Allen, have been my inspiration through this entire journey. Losing your father through this experience has been the most devastating; however, knowing he believed in me allowed me to push on, as his encouragement got me through the beginning stages, and his enduring belief in me got me to the end. Watching you achieve your dreams through this devastating loss has only inspired me to continue reaching for my own. Thank you for being a part of my story and for allowing me to continue being a part of yours. I love you both beyond words.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family who have supported me in reaching this milestone in my academic career. I appreciate your love and encouragement, your patience and understanding, and most of all your overall support of everything I experienced throughout this time. Thank you for picking me up when I was at my lowest. Thank you for understanding the time I spent writing and the occasional absence from communications when I needed to meet deadlines. I appreciate the team effort to keep life moving forward when all seemed impossible.

To the people closest to me who have continued to cheer me on and encourage me when I did not think I could push forward, I thank you. I am truly blessed and fortunate to have each of you around me and to continue to help me see what I could accomplish. Your support and encouragement have carried me through this process. This has taken longer than anticipated; however, no one doubted my ability to finish. I appreciate that I can see myself in the way all of you have seen me. To my fellow lifelong learner, thank you for being a true friend to me.

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Gilkey and Dr. Wilson, for your input and guidance. Dr. Gilkey, thank you for your unwavering support throughout everything I have experienced on this journey. I could not have crossed the finish line without you. Thank you for giving me the encouragement when I needed it the most. I truly appreciate you.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

When considering the role of social work in athletics, one thing that has been a popular topic for athletes is their mental health and wellbeing, and the need for more mental health support. Research supports the notion that elite athletes struggle with their mental health because they believe they cannot have mental health issues if they are successful, perpetuating the stigma of mental health and seeking support being viewed as a weakness (Lavelle, 2021; Parrott et al., 2020). Recently, the National Basketball Association (NBA) has drafted and implemented policies specifically addressing the mental health needs of its players (Lavelle, 2021). Mental health policies and protocols first started in 2009 for the NBA (Lavelle, 2021). The Professional Athletic Association for Professional Sports has taken the lead in recognizing and addressing the mental health needs of its players. Research shows players have suffered mental health issues that have gone untreated for years (Lavelle, 2021; Rice et al., 2016). NBA players have begun to discuss their mental health more openly, posting comments on Twitter, speaking on radio shows, and participating in podcasts and interviews that focus on mental health, taking the conversation into their own hands (Casares, 2022; Parrott et al., 2020). The NBA's commitment to implementing policies and facilitating conversations about mental health is important in breaking down the stigma and supporting athletes in seeking support.

According to the research, elite athletes struggle with and are more vulnerable to mental health issues at the same rate, if not higher, than their peers who are not engaged in professional sports (Lavelle, 2021; Rice et al., 2016; Souter et al., 2018). Black male athletes are at a higher risk of mental health issues and are more resistant to seeking

services (Lavelle, 2021; Parrott et al., 2020). Research shows the perception is that athletes cannot have mental health issues, which creates a risk for this population (Lavelle, 2021; Parrott et al., 2020). Research suggests Black male athletes are more susceptible to struggling with mental health issues due to the mental health stigma in the Black community and lack of trust in providers, as many providers are White (Barry et al., 2017; Lavelle, 2021). Many players have reported having early experiences in their lives that led to mental health challenges (Abdul-Rauf & Chiles, 2022; Anthony & Watkins, 2021; Lavelle, 2021). Black males make up approximately 74% of the NBA rosters, which makes supporting these individuals important for social work due to the apparent marginalization of Black men in our society (Lavelle, 2021). Researchers discuss further disparities in the Black community when seeking services, as many individuals are often not identified by primary care doctors as having a mental health issue when using primary care services (Lavelle, 2021). Black men tend to refrain from seeking out mental health services due to the preconceived belief that mental health issues are a sign of weakness and seeking out services is highly stigmatized and seen as a liability (Barry et al., 2017; Lavelle, 2021; Parrott et al., 2020). Podcasts about men's mental health have aided men in decreasing the stigma and increasing help-seeking behaviors (Carrotte et al., 2023). Addressing the mental health needs of Black professional athletes requires a deeper understanding of sociocultural barriers, proactive efforts in challenging cultural stigmas, and building trust in mental health supports.

Podcasts have become an alternative learning tool, providing listeners with educational content and experiencing a drastic increase in popularity over the last five

years (Carrotte et al., 2023; Casares, 2022; Quintana & Heathers, 2021). Podcasts have been utilized for educational purposes for over a decade and have seen increased usage across various areas, including mental health settings, education, clinical practice, research, and advocacy (Carrotte et al., 2023; Casares, 2022; Quintana & Heathers, 2021). Many mental health podcasts have helped evolve the conversations and awareness around critical mental health information, education, and resources (Casares, 2022). The sharing of personal experiences on podcasts has been known to increase knowledge, empathy, and compassion for others within their social environments (Carrotte et al., 2023). Therefore, the integration of podcasts into the mental health discussion has the potential to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and encourage seeking support.

As the issue of mental health care for elite athletes has more recently become a focal point of discussion in professional athletic discourse, one key question to consider is the experiences of athletes with mental health concerns. The sociocultural factors that influence players' decision making when it comes to players' hesitation to acknowledge mental health concerns and seek mental health services when needed are also worth investigating.Research has been minimal for this approach, and with mental health being stigmatized. Still, there are risks associated with participating in research studies. However, podcasts can offer a unique view into the personal conversations of athletes discussing their mental health in a setting where they are more comfortable and have control over their narratives (Quintana & Heathers, 2021). Podcasts offer a platform for sharing mental health experiences, providing education, and fostering empathy while challenging cultural stigmas. Exploring Black NBA players' mental health experiences

through podcasts can offer insights into the sociocultural factors that influence decision-making and provide an understanding of barriers players face.

Sociocultural factors can promote mental health awareness and increase service usage (Pham et al., 2017). Therefore, the more providers understand what the sociocultural factors are that continue to reinforce barriers, the more beneficial it would be in creating social change. Using podcasts as a means of examining sociocultural perspectives can enhance the understanding of podcasters' experiences in the narratives they share (Sharon, 2023). As the professional practice field of social work in sports continues to develop and grow, social workers can show the need for and development of social work services at all levels of sports (Gill, 2008; Moore et al., 2018). In this study, I focused on these questions and explore how further research in this area can support sports social work as a discipline, using the lens of podcasts featuring NBA players' mental health experiences, as well as their potential for social change.

Problem Statement

Social work practice in sports is gaining recognition as a specialty within the social work profession. Social workers can provide athletes with a range of services, from case management, advocacy, and clinical services (Gill, 2008; Grobman, 2017). In 2015, the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports (ASWIS) was established, focusing on demonstrating how social work practice can contribute to all levels and sectors of the sports world (Gill, 2008; Grobman, 2017). In 2019, the NBA furthered its mental health program to increase access to mental health professionals by requiring each team to hire its own mental health specialist (Lavelle, 2021). Social workers provide clinical services

for athletes to deal with depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and anger issues, as well as reduce the stigma around mental health issues and services, and have a social change impact on the community (Grobman, 2017). Sports social workers assist players with mental health issues and specialized treatment tailored to the unique aspects of their sport, which has implications for services at both the college and professional levels (Gill, 2008). Gill (2008) argued that social workers help athletes find a balance between their athletic roles and their roles outside of the sport. This is particularly important when considering the mental health needs of athletes and the role a social worker can play in addressing these needs. The problem Black professional male players face is that they are at a high risk of mental health issues and are the least likely to seek services due to the lack of understanding of their sociocultural experiences with mental health (Lavelle, 2021). Many players have started or participated in mental health podcasts to discuss their experiences with mental health and mental health services (Cassilo, 2022). A sports social worker can address the mental health challenges professional athletes face while supporting the NBA organization with mental health policies, procedures, and services to support the players' overall wellbeing.

As a caretaker of a Black male elite athlete who has gone on to play basketball at a professional level, I was particularly interested in the mental well-being of players and their ability to access mental health services when needed. My experience has shown that there has been a lack of support for players, particularly early on in high school sports, as evidenced by my interactions with Division 1 university athletes and now in professional basketball. I have seen several players in these environments who need support for

various reasons and then hear them talk about how it is being ignored. Black male basketball players who aspire to play at a professional level will face multiple life challenges in general and experience heightened levels of stress due to the expectation that they perform at a level that supports elite athlete status (Lavelle, 2021). These young players often have life stressors that have not been addressed in any meaningful way and result in future mental distress as they progress through their rise to a hopeful collegiate, Division I level, and eventual professional level. Issues that might affect the players' mental well-being do not seem to be considered at the different stages of status, and the idea that an elite athlete cannot have mental health issues continues to increase (Lavelle, 2021). Researchers reported that student-athletes are at risk of depression and will tend not to seek services outside of the athletic department, putting them at a higher disadvantage (Wolanin et al., 2016).

I found a significant lack of peer-reviewed articles on the NBA and mental health. While there are books, documentaries, interviews, podcasts, and social media disclosures that contain a wealth of information on NBA players' mental health journeys, little scholarly information has been published. This presented an interesting dilemma, as the research has been more closely related to other issues facing athletes over the years, and mental health has only recently become a focus of study, limiting the amount of available research. Ramaeker and Petrie (2019) discussed how masculine ideologies and help-seeking behaviors are inversely related to one another, which perpetuates the stigma attached to asking for help or disclosure of mental health diagnoses. Sociocultural biases surrounding mental illness treatment include stigmatization, minimization, and negative

perceptions towards individuals with mental health disorders (Corrigan, 2004; Corrigan & Matthews, 2003; Pavelko & Wang, 2021). If providers can better understand the sociocultural factors that create barriers, this information can help in removing them. Podcasts have become a platform for NBA players to discuss their experiences with mental health, share their thoughts on mental health services, and explore the impact this has on the broader public (Cassilo, 2022). The lack of scholarly research on mental health in the NBA highlights the importance of further investigation into the sociocultural barriers to seeking services for mental health needs.

Parham, the NBA Players Association's former director of mental health and wellness, has reported that more than 40% of NBA players have mental health issues (Aldridge, 2018). Some teams have mental health professionals on staff, and players are mandated to utilize the service when needed; however, this is currently a team-by-team decision (Aldridge, 2018). Parham hosts a mental health podcast featuring players and other professionals discussing their mental health experiences. The NBA has created and implemented new programs and policies to address the mental health needs of players over the past few years. Still, it is unclear whether players are receiving the mental health care they need or if they are accessing mental health care through services provided by the NBA. One of the noted concerns is that many owners are requesting mental health records of their players, which not only breaches confidentiality (Aldridge, 2018) but also may suggest potential barriers for players to reach out for services when needed and create further distrust in providers. There is a lack of interventions for athletes in general, but especially once they have reached a higher level in the profession (Walton et al.,

2019). Much of the research is targeted at elite athletes from various sports and diverse cultural backgrounds. Many podcasts have emerged discussing mental health and the NBA, providing a platform for players to share their experiences. DeRozan, Griffin, Kevin Love, and Parham have podcasts specifically focused on mental health. At the same time, many other players have discussed mental health as guests on various podcasts. Men who listen to mental health podcasts are less likely to feel isolated or lonely, more likely to seek help, and more engaged in their community (Murphy et al., 2024). The NBA has made strides in addressing mental health challenges; however, there is a need for continued reform in ensuring mental health care for all athletes is normalized.

Professional basketball player Royce White exemplified the need for mental health care among NBA players (Cassilo, 2022; Lavelle, 2021). White suggested that mental health care should be as much of a priority as keeping players physically healthy. He publicly called attention to dealing with significant anxiety and not feeling like the NBA supported him when he asked for support to address his mental health needs (Cassilo, 2022; Lavelle, 2021). When he left the NBA, he advocated for better mental health support for basketball players and athletes in general and challenged the NBA's previous policies regarding players mental health needs, suggesting that many of the policies did not adequately respond to the health needs of players, particularly when it came to the mental health needs of players (Lavelle, 2021). Professional NBA player Love wrote a piece about his experience with mental health as an active NBA player. Love discussed his experience with the hypermasculine NBA environment and the

conflict between mental health and masculinity (Lavelle, 2021; Pavelko & Wang, 2021; Silverman, 2019). Love stated that, historically, players have accepted that, due to their elite status, they are somehow unable to have mental health issues and, therefore, unable to discuss these issues without feeling weak (Lavelle, 2021; Pavelko & Wang, 2021; Silverman, 2019). Love, being a White player, is said to have had more encouragement for his mental health disclosure, whereas his Black counterparts would be more likely to experience criticisms (Lavelle, 2021). DeMar DeRozan discussed his struggles with mental health via X (Twitter) and has since become an advocate for breaking the stigma and discussing mental health with other players (Cassilo, 2022). The media's coverage of players' mental health has been as varied as the players' experiences themselves and their impact on social change. Podcasts allow players more control (Cassilo, 2022). The advocacy and contributions of vocal players emphasize the importance of normalizing mental health conversations, especially around masculinity and cultural stigmas.

Hanton et al. (2005) completed a study that explored anxiety among athletes and how, with significant anxiety symptoms, the athletes were still able to perform at their elite level. Hanton et al. described the "elite" athlete as an individual who performs at a higher level in their sport. They highlighted the need for more research in areas of athlete anxiety, and further research that looks at mental health concerns among athletes in specific sports (Hanton et al., 2005). Castaldelli-Maia et al. (2019) found that there are more barriers for elite athletes when addressing their mental health, which include a negative experience with mental health treatment, stigma to mental illness, hypermasculinity, and low mental health literacy.

Social workers have developed organizations, such as the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports, which aims to enhance the partnership between social work practice and all segments of the sports industry. This group is working to establish a network for social workers interested in working with athletes. Social workers in sports can advocate for the rights of athletes and participate in the development of safety standards and protocols, including those related to mental health services (Gill, 2008). Social workers can support high-achieving athletes through direct and indirect services at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of sports (Gill, 2008). More research is needed to continue to understand the needs and experiences of professional athletes with mental health to aid in help-seeking services. Research has shown that podcasts can help reduce the stigma, increase help-seeking behaviors, and promote mental health literacy, especially among underserved populations (Ó Caoilte et al., 2024). Many NBA athletes have spoken openly about their mental health through podcasts, offering valuable insights into their personal experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative secondary data research design was to understand the experiences of Black NBA players, including their mental health, and the sociocultural factors that influenced their decision-making regarding participation in mental health services, as examined through a content analysis of NBA player podcasts. The purpose was to understand the experience of NBA players through their own words when discussing mental health and services on podcasts. Research from the literature review identified several fundamental sociocultural factors to consider, including mental

health stigma, cultural beliefs of specific sociocultural groups, social status, socioeconomic status, and attitudes about seeking help. Researchers argue that podcasts on mental health, featuring individuals discussing their lived experiences, are essential to listeners, as they provide hope and aid in personal development, while also increasing compassion and empathy (Carrotte et al., 2023; Ó Caoilte et al., 2024). A podcast on mental health provides listeners with a diverse perspective on mental health issues and helps reduce the stigma (Murphy et al., 2024; Ó Caoilte et al., 2024). This qualitative secondary data research design provides insight into the experiences of Black NBA players' mental health experiences as discussed on podcast platforms.

Research Questions

RQ1: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about the experiences of Black NBA players while in the NBA?

RQ2: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of the sociocultural factors and their role in the players seeking mental health services while in the NBA?

RQ3: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of mental health disclosures?

Theoretical Framework

Dealing with mental health challenges and seeking help for mental health support can be related to one's cultural background and social environment. The stigma for mental health conditions or support in the Black community creates difficulties for men seeking mental health services (Francis, 2018, 2019). Podcasts have been used in various

ways to discuss mental health, serving as an educational tool for research and advocacy (Carrotte et al., 2023). Social-cultural theory examines how individuals learn through the cultural system to which they belong, adopting a more holistic approach that promotes the individual's development and achievement through culturally accepted norms (Demirbaga, 2018; Fendt-Newlin et al., 2020). Sociocultural theory provides a lens to understand how cultural backgrounds and social environments shape Black NBA players' mental health experiences.

Podcasts featuring Black men discussing their mental health and mental health services enable listeners to hear about mental health experiences through a sociocultural lens (Carrotte et al., 2023). Researchers believe that podcasts featuring the narratives of social and cultural icons can provide insight into social environments and cultural systems when addressing mental health and seeking services (Carrotte et al., 2023; Ferrer et al., 2021; Francis, 2018, 2019). Sociocultural theory posits that learning is an integral part of the social process, shaped by the society and culture to which an individual belongs (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018; Demirbaga, 2018). Vygotsky attributed culture and its historical development as a fundamental factor to the development of cognition or learning for individuals (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018; Demirbaga, 2018). Vygotsky's idea is that one's perception of the world is shaped by the experiences one has had with that world (Demirbaga, 2018). Podcasts with digital narratives enable individuals to have control over when and how they access these stories, making them more accessible to larger audiences who can relate to similar experiences, which can positively impact consumers (Ferrer et al., 2021). Podcasts provide Black NBA players with a platform to

discuss their mental health experiences, share sociocultural perspectives, raise community awareness, and foster a deeper understanding and empathy.

When considering the role of culture on individual experiences with topics or issues that might be perceived as taboo or hold some type of social stigma, like mental health, sociocultural theory suggests that culture influences mental health, and podcasts can make these conversations easier for the participants and educational for the listeners (Carrotte et al., 2023; Eshun & Gurung, 2009; Ferrer et al., 2021). Sociocultural theory suggests mental health can be influenced by the four concepts: an individual's own experience with mental health; how one expresses their experiences in context to cultural norms; how symptoms are identified, reported, and diagnosed; and lastly how the disorder is treated and the outcome of treatment (Eshun & Gurung, 2009). Podcasting offers NBA players a platform to share their experiences in a social and cultural context, allowing them to explore their experiences on their terms through their podcasts or by participating in others' conversations on mental health, where they can share their emotions, cultural reflections, and insights (Abdessamed et al., 2024). Athletes' disclosures about mental health through podcasts enable players to shape the sociocultural narrative surrounding mental health in the world of elite sports (Abdessamed et al., 2024; Francis, 2018, 2019). Sociocultural theory emphasizes how culture influences mental health perspectives, and podcasts provide a platform for sharing experiences and challenging cultural stigmas.

Sociocultural theory relates to the research questions about the specific sociocultural factors associated with the mental health experiences of Black male players.

Being able to understand the role of the social environment and the cultural systems when dealing with mental health and stigmas around seeking services can assist in how social workers approach the mental health needs of athletes and individuals who identify with players identifying cultural factors also help in being able to identify ways to decrease the mental utilization stigma in the Black community and increase service usage (Francis, 2018, 2019). Ultimately, understanding the sociocultural factors influencing Black NBA players' mental health experiences through sociocultural theory can inform more effective strategies for providing culturally competent practices for social workers.

Vygotsky believed that the internalization of culture occurs when higher mental functions emerge from interactions with the community or individuals around them (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018; Demirbaga, 2018). The internalization of culture that shapes social interactions can determine how one understands and seeks out help when dealing with mental health issues (Demirbaga, 2018; Fendt-Newlin et al., 2020). Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the internalization of cultural norms and social interactions, as well as the influence they have on developing mental health perspectives and challenges.

Sociocultural theory provided a sound theoretical framework for this study, offering insight into the relationship between how individual beliefs are shaped at the microlevel and how those beliefs are sustained and/or challenged by social and cultural influences at the mezzo- and macrolevels. Sociocultural theory aids in understanding that an individual's perception and response to something are often influenced by the perceptions and behaviors of the surrounding environment (Daneshfar & Moharami,

2018; Demirbaga, 2018). Sociocultural theory was employed to facilitate an understanding of how NBA players experience mental health while playing and the factors influencing their decision-making regarding the need for services, as discussed in podcasts. Since the environments and cultural groups would have shaped the perceptions and utilization of mental health services, they have been influenced; this can help to create social changes around better serving the players while playing and after and how that expands to the larger culture (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018; Demirbaga, 2018). Sociocultural theory provides a framework for understanding how cultural and social norms influence mental health experiences, offering insights into providing better community supports and services for individuals.

Using podcasts to gather data related to the research questions was based on sociocultural tradition, as podcasts themselves are considered a cultural practice that allows individuals to create, consume, and communicate through this social construct (Sharon, 2023). Players discussing mental health is a new development, and how this affects their careers is a valid concern. Therefore, players sitting down to discuss their mental health with someone they do not have a relationship with can find it almost impossible. Players using podcasts to discuss their digital narratives about mental health and seek services enable researchers to hear the narratives from players within their control, as well as gather valuable information from these experiences (Abdessamed et al., 2024; Francis, 2019). Podcasting supports a sociocultural framework, as there is a connection between how podcasts are consumed and how the audience engages with the format, based on cultural practices and evidence proving the learning experience of

listeners (Sharon, 2023). Podcasts also provide a unique digital narrative for researchers, offering insight into the sociocultural factors that are everyday experiences among players with similar sociocultural backgrounds (Abdessamed et al., 2024). Podcasts can foster a sense of community among listeners, prompting them to engage in conversations with each other and the podcast producers to explore taboo topics further and promote awareness and compassion among listeners (Sharon, 2023). In conclusion, podcasts have become a sociocultural tool to help understand the mental health experiences of NBA players.

Nature of the Study

For this study, I used a qualitative secondary data analysis approach through the content analysis of podcasts featuring Black NBA players discussing their mental health. This research approach involved the content analysis of secondary data from podcasts related to the experiences of Black NBA players with mental health and the sociocultural factors around seeking services or not. A qualitative secondary data research design was best for this research because it allowed the exploration of the experiences of the target population with the phenomenon being researched from their past and present experiences and the impact of change but through secondary data sources since first-hand interviews with players on this topic provide beyond challenging due to the nature and risks involved (see Cheong et al., 2023; Hill & Burrows, 2017; McAlpine, 2016). Podcasts are credited with being a diverse platform that contributes to giving a voice to the voiceless and sharing the experiences of individuals who have been traditionally oppressed with a broader audience. They can also be used for qualitative data collection

and analysis, as well as for critical inquiry and knowledge mobility (Day et al., 2017). The structure and format of podcasts contribute to the suitability of the medium for digital narratives, using these narratives as qualitative secondary data sources (Day et al., 2017). In addition, qualitative secondary data research design, through content analysis of podcasts, supported me in ensuring the data remains intact and that the meaning making the participant asserts regarding their experience is accurately captured by the researcher to maintain validity (see McAlpine, 2016; Riessman, 2008). Using a qualitative secondary data analysis approach through content analysis of podcasts through the exploration of Black NBA players' mental health experiences, ensuring validity in data collection and interpretation.

Content analysis is a qualitative research method that identifies the presence of words, themes, or concepts in various textual data (Lee & Peterson, 1997; Stemler, 2015). The variety of data can come from different sources such as speeches, government records, interviews, and public broadcasts (Lee & Peterson, 1997). Content analysis requires the systematic coding of data, which involves the researcher following a specific protocol. This protocol typically includes having suitable material, establishing a coding protocol, ascertaining the reliability and validity of coding, and reporting limitations (Lee & Peterson, 1997; Stemler, 2015). Content analysis is suitable for this research, as it aims to understand the context of observed behavior, thoughts, or emotional responses and identify any correlations between concepts and behaviors (Stemler, 2015). The advantages of using content analysis in this study include the flexibility to identify emerging themes and the unobtrusive nature of data collection (Lee & Peterson, 1997;

Stemler, 2015). The disadvantages of using content analysis are that it can be time-consuming due to the need to analyze different datasets, is reductive, and can introduce bias based on the researcher's coding and interpretation (Stemler, 2015). Podcasts offer educational and firsthand accounts of NBA players' experiences with mental health, as transcripts can be used for data analysis and provide insight into an otherwise challenging topic (Sharon, 2023). Content analysis is a valuable research method for identifying emerging themes and understanding the contextual factors of NBA players' mental health experiences.

To mitigate the disadvantages, any podcast used must have met the following criteria: it must feature at least one NBA player or former player discussing their mental health experience, the podcast must be over 20 minutes in length, and it must have been published between 2015 and 2024. Due to the limited number of podcasts that meet the criteria, all transcripts that meet the criteria were analyzed (see Stemler, 2015). Relational content analysis will follow the following steps:

1. Determine the type of analysis,
2. Reduce the text to categories and code for words or patterns,
3. Explore the relationship between concepts,
4. Code the relationships,
5. Perform statistical analysis,
6. Map out representations (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

This research can inform the development of future research tools and provide future researchers with qualitative data (see Stemler, 2015). Adhering to the structured analysis

protocol, this research approach can help in uncovering the meaningful patterns in Black NBA players' mental health experiences.

Definitions

These terms are defined as they are used throughout this research study:

Black or African American: The racial classification of individuals whose ancestors are of African descent. It is worth noting that the researcher has chosen to use the language "Black" as opposed to "African American" in relation to the target population. There has been ongoing debate about the use of both words and which one is preferable over the other (Martin, 1991; Sigelman et al., 2005). The U.S. Census (2017) indicates that "African American" describes ethnicity, while "Black" describes racial categories. A recent survey conducted by Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter found that those surveyed who identified with African ancestry preferred to be called Black over African American or Person of Color (Brinkman, 2018). Survey participants stated that using the language "Black" meant an identity more inclusive of the experience of people of African ancestry in America (Brinkman, 2018).

Culture: The way of life for a group of people and includes beliefs, behaviors, values, shared social experiences, and norms, which are learned by the individual (Eshun & Gurung, 2009).

Elite athlete: Athletes playing at the higher levels of their sports (Walton et al., 2019).

Mental health: A state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, and a

capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with the ordinary demands and stresses of life (American Psychological Association, 2021).

Podcast: A digital file with audio that is transcribable and made available by downloading or streaming on the internet and contains a series of files which can be accessed by listeners when new installments are available and can be based on educational information/data (Sharon, 2023). Podcasting can be defined as a cultural practice, and the sociocultural approach focuses on the point where podcasting and journalism intersect and provide audio narratives (Sharon, 2023).

Sociocultural factors: Environmental conditions that play a part in healthy and adaptive behavior and well-being, or in maladaptive behavior and the etiology of mental disorder and social pathology (American Psychological Association, 2021).

Stigmatization: A process involving stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination that operates within an environment of power (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Assumptions

This research was based on a few assumptions. First, I assumed that the NBA players discussing mental health were being honest in their conversations on the podcasts. They are more in control of their stories through this platform and have more authority on how they are presented (Day et al., 2017). The second assumption was that Black NBA players would hesitate to participate and openly share their experiences because men are less likely to be open about discussing mental health issues, especially with someone unknown to them, increasingly so for Black men (see Bauer et al., 2020; Parrott et al., 2020). This assumption is minimized by choosing podcasts where there is a

familiarity between the individuals or from a player who has frequently discussed their mental health openly. Podcasts have become learning tools and a medium for storytelling as they are well-suited for sharing life experiences (Diebold et al., 2021). The assumptions underlying this research, including the honesty of NBA players' discussions on mental health, a normal hesitancy of Black NBA players to discuss their experiences openly, are accounted for in the podcast selections, to help ensure a more authentic account of mental health experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was Black NBA players and their experiences with mental health and sociocultural factors that influenced seeking mental health services. The research study was restricted to Black NBA players due to the literature review showing the lack of information about mental health in current NBA players. By focusing on Black NBA players, I aimed to fill a gap in existing literature, offering an understanding of the mental health experiences and how sociocultural factors shape the willingness to discuss and seek out mental health services.

In this research, identifying the sociocultural factors specific to NBA players can inform the stigmatization of seeking mental health services and provide researchers with a better understanding of how to reach these players. According to Parrott et al. (2021), the way the media handles athletes disclosing mental health conditions plays a part in the stigmatization of mental health. Research continues to support the destigmatization of mental health, which will help remove barriers to individuals seeking services (Ó Caoilte et al., 2024; Parrott et al., 2020, 2021). Ultimately, identifying the sociocultural factors

that have influenced Black NBA players' mental health experiences can provide insight into cultural stigmas and foster an environment that encourages seeking support.

Limiting the research to professional basketball players is due to the unique aspect that, in prior research on the mental health of elite athletes, this area has not been a focus from the players' perspective. More basketball players have been talking about mental health more recently, but no research has been reported. Limiting the research to NBA players addresses the gap in research and evolves the conversations around the unique challenges faced by NBA players.

Limitations

Potential limitations of this study included the inability to ask the podcast participants additional questions to explore their experiences further or seek clarification (see Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). In addition, the amount of information to be analyzed may daunting due to its sheer volume; therefore, keeping the research questions as the guiding principle (see Creswell, 2009). This is a typical limitation of qualitative secondary data research, as it relies on existing information.

The mental health stigma in the NBA was a limitation due to more players who are openly talking about mental health issues seeming to elicit negative comments from commentators, fans, and other players (Parrott et al., 2020). According to Tomalski et al. (2019), after educating athletes about mental health symptomology and resources, athletes still find themselves fighting against speaking out about mental health concerns. The persistence of mental health stigma, despite awareness education, underscores the complexity of mental health conversations in professional sports and how public

perceptions continue to influence seeking help behaviors for athletes (Parrott et al., 2020). They are thus less likely to want to talk about it in general. Podcasts where players openly discuss mental health are crucial to this research, as several athletes continue to promote the importance of addressing this topic.

A potential barrier to the study could be my race, given the potential for racial bias, since the experiences of African Americans are the target (Clark, 1973). This had minimal impact, as I assessed any bias and used support to seek an understanding of any unknown vocabulary or information. Additionally, I checked for bias as each podcast is coded. By employing rigorous self-reflection, my aim was to maintain objectivity and integrity of this research's interpretations.

Significance of the Study

The issue of mental health in Black communities has long been stigmatized to the extent that individuals in the Black community often struggle with the decision to seek mental health services, and thus, struggle with addressing mental health issues that may be rooted in historical negative sociocultural factors (Lavelle, 2021). Young Black men are at a greater risk of developing mental health issues due to exposure to traumatic events in their lives (Bauer et al., 2020). I aimed to explore the sociocultural factors that Black NBA players encounter when seeking mental health services, as presented through podcasts.

I examined the sociocultural factors influencing athletes who seek mental health services. It is expected that this study can aid in improving sports social workers' understanding of barriers to mental health care for Black NBA players who, like other

athletes, tend to resist seeking services when services are needed (Lavelle, 2021). I believe the benefit of exploring the experiences of Black NBA players is that society places a high value on the celebrity of athletes, particularly regarding their perspective on specific topics, such as mental health, which can ultimately influence others in reducing the stigma surrounding mental health needs and services. Podcasts have been able to increase service-seeking behaviors among men who listen to mental health podcasts (Murphy et al., 2024).

The research has the potential to influence young Black males and their perceptions of mental health, and whether they seek services when needed, as it did with Magic Johnson and HIV/AIDS (Lavelle, 2021). In understanding the experiences of players regarding mental health, and what prevents these players from seeking needed mental health services when required, sports social workers can be better prepared to identify ways to better engage professional athletes on dealing with mental health concerns; identify improved ways to support the team in helping players who might need mental health support; and in a societal sense, identify effective strategies to raise awareness about mental health in general among Black athletes (Watkins et al., 2015). By gaining a better insight into barriers that Black athletes face in seeking mental health supports, this research can contribute to individual and societal change by advocating for better supports and normalizing conversations within communities.

Positive social change can occur by bringing attention to the issue of mental health among Black athletes and potentially addressing the stigma of seeking mental health help. When Magic Johnson disclosed his HIV/AIDS status, this changed

perceptions of the disease and how it was transmitted (Lavelle, 2021). It is anticipated that my study can provide a framework through which sports social workers and individuals in the athletic community can learn from the sociocultural experiences of these athletes, thereby becoming more responsive when these athletes seek mental health services.

Summary

In professional basketball, the NBPA continues to develop its mental health program, a relatively new initiative for the NBA. Players have suffered mental health issues throughout the history of the sport; however, they have gone untreated for years (Rice et al., 2016). The onset of many mental health disorders coincides with most elite athletes' peak and at the same rate, if not higher than non-athletic peers (Rice et al., 2016; Walton et al., 2019). This increases the difficulty of treatment due to the mental health stigma carried by the sport and the Black community.

Black males are the majority in the NBA (Kjerulf Dubrow & Adams, 2012; Lavelle, 2021), and the perceived identity of the Black male ball player is that of strength, masculinity, and talent (Pavelko & Wang, 2021; Silverman, 2019). These identities create sociocultural barriers to seeking mental health services since many in the Black community do not believe in getting mental health care when needed and are often not identified by primary care doctors as having a mental health issue when using primary care services (Lavelle, 2021). Research suggests that Black male athletes are more susceptible to struggling with mental health issues and not seeking out services that could assist them due to mental health being viewed as a weakness and seeking out services

being highly stigmatized and frowned upon (Barry et al., 2017). Podcasts can support the sociocultural lens when learning from the narrative stories of NBA players' experiences (Murphy et al., 2024). Therefore, this research shows the value in understanding how the intersection of sociocultural factors, identity, and cultural stigmas influences Black male athletes' willingness to seek mental health services.

The role of social work in athletics is changing and becoming more prevalent. Addressing mental health issues in athletics has become a priority for professional teams. The growing practice of social workers in sports and associations dedicated to this field is promising to the profession and the mental health of elite athletes, especially basketball players (Gill, 2008; Moore et al., 2018). The focus on mental health in a popular sport, such as basketball, can have benefits, including reducing mental health stigma in the Black community, as well as increasing or developing specific interventions for athletes (Walton et al., 2019). As the profession of social work grows and evolves in the professional sports world, it increases support for athletes, lowers mental health stigmas, and assists in creating effective care strategies for professional athletes.

In Chapter 2, I present an in-depth discussion of the available literature on the Black male athletes, mental health services available, podcasts and mental health, and sociocultural factors the athletes faced. I discuss the research on the theoretical foundation and its relationship to the study. The literature related to similar variables, given the limited research on the combination of variables discussed in this study, is also discussed. Finally, Chapter 2 concludes with a summary based on the available literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social work practice in sports and organizations, such as the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports, is helping to move the profession toward recognizing Sports Social Work as a specialty practice. The most common mental health issues facing athletes have been identified in previous literature as eating disorders, adjustment disorders, depression, anxiety, trauma-related disorders, and substance abuse disorders (McCarthy, 2017). Social workers are developing programs and providing clinical services for athletes dealing with depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and anger issues, as well as reducing the stigma around mental health issues and services, and for all levels of sports (Gill, 2008; Grobman, 2017). According to research, the common barriers to mental health support for elite athletes are stigmas and stereotypes, gender norms and expectations, lack of awareness of symptomology, and being unaware of mental health treatment options (McCarthy, 2017). Mental health podcasts and those featuring celebrities have seen a rise in understanding and compassion for individuals with mental health diagnoses and have proven to be a positive force for men (Carrotte et al., 2023; Casares, 2022; Cassilo, 2022). The recognition of Sports Social Work as a specialty practice enhances the support of advancing mental health supports within athletic programs and helps to promote the overall well-being of athletes.

Sports social workers can assist players with mental health issues and specialized treatment tailored to the unique aspects of their sport, which has implications for services at both the college and professional levels (Gill, 2008; Moore, 2016b). Gill (2008) discussed how social workers can be effective in helping athletes find a balance between

their athletic roles and their roles outside of the sport. This is particularly important when considering the mental health needs of athletes and the role social workers can play in addressing these needs. Sports social work is a relatively new specialty within the social work profession; research is limited, and further studies are necessary to continue supporting the profession. Moore (2016b) stated that social work is the appropriate profession for working with athletes due to the unique competencies and perspectives that support athletes when they experience psychological distress. Sports social workers have the ability to support athletes' mental health by navigating the intersection of personal identity and athletic identity.

The purpose of this qualitative secondary data research design was to use podcasts to conduct a content analysis of the experiences of Black NBA players, focusing on their mental health and the sociocultural factors that influenced their decision-making regarding participation in mental health services. The purpose was to understand the experiences of NBA players through their own words, and the podcast platform allows for a more natural and comfortable discussion of mental health and services (see Ó Caoilte et al., 2024). My qualitative content analysis of the data enabled the collection of cognitive data from podcast transcripts, aiming to gain insight into the mental health experiences of NBA players. Podcasts offer a unique insight into conversations among friends, coworkers, peers, teammates, and others within the same environment and culture, allowing speakers to address a stigmatized topic from a level of familiarity or comfort (Ferrer et al., 2021). Using podcasts as a secondary data source offered insight into Black NBA players mental health experiences, understanding the sociocultural

factors that influence the help seeking behaviors, and normalizing mental health conversations.

This chapter contains an in-depth discussion of the literature on social work in sports, podcasts and mental health, podcasting in social work, podcasts and digital narratives, mental health issues elite athletes face, Black male athletes and mental health, mental health and sociocultural factors when seeking services, particularly in the Black community, and advocacy and podcasts. I discuss the research on the theoretical foundation and its relationship to the study. The literature related to similar variables, given the limited research on the combination of variables discussed in this study, is also discussed.

Due to the complex nature of mental health in the Black community and mental health in sports, I explored the sociocultural factors that contribute to the stigma of mental health services for Black male athletes through a qualitative lens via podcast interviews in which players have participated. The review of the literature yielded several studies on the sociocultural factors that impact mental health for Black men. Adapting this theory to professional athletes can help increase the awareness of mental health issues, and the services sports social workers can offer, and normalize getting support for mental health needs.

Literature Search Strategy

The library databases used for finding relevant peer-reviewed research articles were EBSCO, PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, SAGE Journals, ProQuest, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Several keywords are specifically related to this topic and were used in

search inquiries: *elite athletes, mental health, sports social work, professional athletes, Black male basketball players, factors, podcasts and sports, psychological distress, National Basketball Association (NBA), sociocultural theory, Black men, mental health services, social change in sports,* and *athletes' mental health*.

Reviewing literature utilizing the identified keywords involved Boolean Operators. Boolean Operators define the relationship between words or groups of words using "and". Utilizing Walden library psychology database, I used the Boolean operators of *"professional athletes" and "mental health"; "elite athletes" and "mental health"; "Black men" and "mental health stigma"; "Black men" and "mental health "; "NBA" and "mental health"; "elite athletes" and "mental health services"; "college athletes" and "cognitive development"; "elite athletes" and "mental health stigma"; "elite athletes" and "psychological distress"; "elite athletes" and "sociocultural factors"; "sports" and "social work"; "professional athletes" and "mental health programs"; "elite athletes"* and *"coping behavior."* Most articles reviewed were published in the last 10 years from starting this review. There were limited articles on this topic, and therefore, the timeline was expanded from 5 years since publication. During the research of articles related to the theoretical framework, some original literature was reviewed, dating back to 1978.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Theoretical Framework: Sociocultural Theory

According to Vygotsky (1978), sociocultural theory is grounded in the theory of cognitive development, which posits that development occurs through interactions with

social and cultural environments. Research supports that one's culture can create the mental and emotional structures through which people understand their actions (Armstrong & Jennings, 2018). Cultural norms and social beliefs can provide a group with a similar outlook on specific issues individuals face. Podcasts as a practice are rooted in sociocultural tradition and are defined as a cultural practice (Sharon, 2023). Sociocultural theory provides a framework for understanding how cultural influences emotional understanding and how podcasts contribute to societal views on mental health and seeking help.

Sociocultural theory maintains that individuals learn through the cultural system to which they belong, employing a more holistic approach that promotes the development and achievement of the individual through culturally accepted norms (Demirbaga, 2018; Fendt-Newlin et al., 2020). Sociocultural factors encompass economic systems, belief systems, social structure, gender norms, political organizations, and leisure activities (Denison, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Sports culture and social stigma keep the perception going that mental health issues are weaknesses and that addressing mental health issues is avoided (Gavrilova & Donohue, 2018). Sociocultural theory posits that learning is an integral part of the social process, shaped by the society and culture to which an individual belongs (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, one's view of mental health is influenced by culturally accepted norms, as well as whether seeking services is discussed or perceived by others (Denison, 2016). Black men discussing their mental health has been seen as a weakness or somehow a "traitor" to others in their community (Francis, 2018). Researchers believe that the shaping of new podcast genres and cultural practices

warrants further research, as this is an impact they are observing in the sociocultural aspects of podcasting (Sharon, 2023). The intersection of cultural systems and mental health perceptions highlights the importance of understanding cultural influences to effectively advocate for a supportive mental health environment.

In the Black community, the view of mental health and mental health services is negative, making it more difficult for Black men to seek out services when needed (Francis, 2018). Vygotsky considered culture a fundamental factor in the development of cognition for individuals (Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018; Demirbaga, 2018). Podcasts are part of society's participatory culture, allowing anyone to participate in the creation and consumption of content (Sharon, 2023). Mental health awareness and acceptance are becoming increasingly culturally accepted within the Black community, which could save lives and foster social change. Podcasts have provided a platform for digital narratives, promoting a space to raise awareness about critical issues and engage in respectful conversations (Casares, 2022). Podcasts offer a platform for the Black community to disclose mental health experiences and challenge the negative stigma surrounding mental health and sociocultural factors that affect seeking support.

When considering the role of culture on individual experiences with topics or issues that might be perceived as taboo or hold some social stigma, like mental health, for example, sociocultural theory suggests that how we respond to one's mental health is learned by the culture to which one belongs (Denison, 2016; Vygotsky, 1978). Podcasts are a product of cultural practices, placing both the creator and listener in control over how and what is consumed, which is usually a highly intimate act (Sharon, 2023). Mental

health awareness and acceptance of seeking treatment were cultural norms and socially discussed; subsequently, the stigma decreased (Pham et al., 2017). Podcasts discussing mental health have encouraged a shift in the perspective of listeners and reduced the stigma surrounding mental health, fostering compassion and understanding (Carrotte et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2024). Reducing the mental health stigma and increasing access to mental health services is a social change that would be beneficial to individuals, families, and communities.

Vygotsky (1978) theorized that individuals develop cognitive abilities and perspectives through social interactions, education, and effective teaching, which can alter their attitudes, behaviors, and understanding of accepted norms. By providing Black men, families, and communities with education regarding mental health wellness and local resources, social work practitioners could potentially reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health treatment, however having Black male celebrities being the voice of normalizing mental health and treatment can increase the number of Black men seeking and engaging in necessary treatment (Denison, 2016; Pham et al., 2017). Podcasts, as a form of education and entertainment, have increasingly given a voice to individuals who would not otherwise have a platform to share their stories and control over how their story is published (Carrotte et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2024). Podcasts are capable of being both entertaining and educational, which allows people access to mental health conversations and resources in a way that normalizes the conversation.

Vygotsky believed that the internalization of culture occurs when higher mental functions emerge from interactions with the community or individuals around them

(Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018; Demirbaga, 2018). The internalization of culture that shapes social interactions can determine how one understands and seeks out help when dealing with mental health issues (Demirbaga, 2018; Fendt-Newlin et al., 2020). The principles of sociocultural theory are appropriate for this study due to the key concepts of how knowledge is personally constructed and influenced by cultural norms, language, and the way others interact with the podcast. According to Lavelle (2021), professional athletes who discussed their mental health experiences all reported how their experiences were shaped by their family history and cultural and economic environments. Podcasts on mental health often feature multiple presenters or guests, sharing first-person narratives through conversational-style interviews that are available to the public and possess therapeutic qualities for listeners (Carrotte et al., 2023). Podcasts are a platform for promoting mental health in the Black community and can support normalizing mental health discussions encouraging cultural shifts to lower stigmas.

An understanding of mental health and acceptance of mental health services can become a cultural norm that can be changed from a negative to a more normalized behavior (Pham, 2017). Sociocultural theory provided a sound theoretical framework for my study, offering insight into the relationship between how individual beliefs are shaped at the microlevel and how those beliefs are sustained and/or challenged by social and cultural influences at the mezzo- and macrolevels. Applying sociocultural theory illuminates the intersectionality of personal beliefs and societal influences, thereby contributing to the understanding of beliefs surrounding mental health.

It is essential to understand the role of the sociocultural factors in Black communities when it comes to seeking healthcare services, and specifically mental health services because these experiences may impact the decision making of Black male athletes to seek mental health services under their community's sociocultural experiences, health beliefs, and perceptions of mental health which invariably affect the utilization of mental health services (Francis, 2019). Podcasts discussing the mental health experiences of Black NBA athletes allow listeners to understand the mental health challenges they face and can bring about an attitude change regarding Black men and mental health (Carrotte et al., 2023). Research shows a lack of application of sociocultural theories to the mental health of elite athletes; however, it has been used in discussing mental health factors. Two articles were discovered that relate the sociocultural framework to mental health, one research article explores the impact of sociocultural factors on the psychological health of students attending college in Bangladesh and the other article discusses the sociocultural factors associated with mental health and quality of life of individuals in violent areas (Cruz et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2019). Understanding the impact of sociocultural experiences on Black male athletes' and their decision making about mental health services is important for developing culturally appropriate strategies for enhancing service options.

Mental Health and Professional Athletes

Mental health issues and conversations about the mental health of athletes continue as more news hits the headlines (Lavelle, 2021). Athletes face additional pressures and expectations that nonathletes do not, which contribute to the mental health

challenges they encounter (Lavelle, 2021). Athletes feel stigmatized when coming forward about mental health issues or concerns, and when problems are discussed, they do not get the support needed for services (Hammond, 2010; Lavelle, 2021; Ströhle, 2018). Athletes tend not to seek out mental health services as it can be perceived as a weakness, is highly stigmatized, and goes against the masculinity and competitiveness of cultural norms (Cassilo, 2022; Lavelle, 2021; Ryan et al., 2018). Gavrilova and Donohue (2018) reported that the mental health issues athletes face are related to high stress, anxiety, depression, sleep deprivation, substance use, eating disorders, relational issues, and negative self-talk. For many athletes, disclosure of mental health issues can have a negative stigma and will often be unreported (Lavelle, 2021; Moore et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2018; Ströhle, 2018). Mental health issues left untreated can decrease functioning and prompt dependence on unhealthy coping mechanisms (Lavelle, 2021; Moore et al., 2018). The mental health disclosures of DeRozan had a different reaction from fans and listeners as he has challenged public perception by using first-person accounts of his experiences (Cassilo, 2022). In order to create a supportive environment for athletes to feel empowered, addressing the stigma and ideas of masculinity are important factors.

Ramaeker and Petrie (2019) argued that male athletes have a “man struggle” or masculinity issue with reaching out for help due to the stigma attached to asking for help and admitting that they may be dealing with something that requires assistance from others. Research suggests that Black men construct their masculinity through popular culture, drawing on three subgroups: social movement figures, athletes, and entertainers (Goodwill et al., 2019). The influence of athletes on Black men’s development of

masculinity can influence the ideas around mental health and seeking services (Goodwill et al., 2019). Podcasts about men's mental health and services have challenged the traditional concepts of masculinity and created a space for men to be more open and vulnerable (Carrotte et al., 2023). The literature discusses how male athletes not only view themselves but are also perceived as masculine; therefore, they cannot express emotions or perceived weakness, as this would alter their competitive perception (Ismail et al., 2020). The intersection of masculinity, mental health and cultural influences highlight the importance of challenging social norms.

The literature specific to elite basketball players is mainly comprised of articles in newspapers, and very little formal research has been conducted on this population (Lavelle, 2021). The literature supports the need for increased mental health awareness and support in the NBA, and further research is warranted (Aldridge, 2018; Athletes Boldly Discuss Mental Health, 2017; Giannoulakis & Drayer, 2009; Lavelle, 2021). There are a few articles that examine the disclosure of mental health issues from specific players, but not about the mental health experience of players. One research article looks at the disclosure of mental health from a White player, Love's, perspective and discusses his White privilege and how that affected his seeking services (Cassilo, 2022; Lavelle, 2021). Lavelle (2021) also addressed the different reactions from other Black players who were dealing with mental health issues at the time. DeRozan disclosed his depression before Love in the same year, and the media coverage favored Love's anxiety disclosure and minimally mentioned DeRozan (Cassilo, 2022; Lavelle, 2021). The research supports several factors that contribute to players withholding disclosures of

mental health diagnoses, such as masculinity, stigmatization, discouragement from showing negative emotions, and racial disparities (Cassilo, 2022; Lavelle, 2021). Podcasts that discuss the personal narratives of men and their experiences with mental health have helped decrease the stigma surrounding mental health, providing listeners with empathy and compassion (Carrotte et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2024). Athletes can challenge stigmas and foster empathy by sharing personal experiences on podcast platforms, opening the door for other players to feel more supported in athletic environments.

The NBA has struggled in the past with its athletes' image and has experienced several adverse events that have impacted the sport, prompting the NBA to take notice and increasing pressure on players to serve as role models (Giannoulakis & Drayer, 2009). “Malice in the Palace,” a fight between players and fans, was a display of behaviors from NBA players that later came out as having mental health issues, which contributed to the incident (Lavelle, 2021). More than 40% of NBA players have mental health issues (Aldridge, 2018). The NBA has created and implemented new programs and policies to address the mental health needs of players in the past few years (Parrott et al., 2021). Research is limited on whether these programs and policies have changed the experiences for players. The ongoing stigma of mental health issues in athletics continues to create a challenge when researching in this population (Wolanin & Marks, 2019). As the NBA continues to confront the mental health challenges faced by players, more research is important to understand the impact of mental health policies on the players.

Researchers have approached the problem by scraping the surface, as there is a lack of literature on the mental health of Black male athletes and the mental health of male basketball players. The literature uses a multisport approach when discussing mental health (Castaldelli-Maia et al., 2019; Walton et al., 2019). Some research, which focuses on Black male athletes, also concentrates on a specific sport, such as football, at the collegiate level (Armstrong & Jennings, 2018). Research supports further investigation into the mental health, stigma, and service utilization of professional athletes, particularly in specific sports (Parrott et al., 2021; Pavelko & Wang, 2021). Several researchers have taken a qualitative and explorative approach due to the limited research in this field (Armstrong & Jennings, 2018). Research gaps in this area are related to specific athletes and sports, the development and implementation of sport-specific interventions, treatment outcome studies, and the experiences of players (Armstrong & Jennings, 2018). These areas discussed support the need for more research due to the gap within the literature about the personal experiences of athletes as it relates to mental health and seeking out mental health services, especially for Black men.

Black Men and Mental Health

Mental health is one of the more stigmatized topics for Black men (Watkins et al., 2015). Researchers have been researching the topics of mental health stigma in the Black community and factors that contribute to individuals not seeking mental health services (Campbell & Allen, 2019; Eshun & Gurung, 2009; Gill, 2017). Podcasts discussing men's mental health have increased in popularity and often promote a version of masculinity that is more inclusive of mental health and supports and fosters male

intimacy (Murphy et al., 2024). Social workers are recognizing the lack of efforts made to address the mental health needs and social concerns for Black men, and now the focus is changing in research (Watkins et al., 2015). The literature around Black men and mental health issues has become a more recent focus than in the past (Watkins et al., 2015). The role of the social worker in destigmatizing the mental health needs of Black men has been underutilized in the past; however, this is changing (Watkins et al., 2015). Social work services would be highly beneficial for Black men as they have the fewest socioeconomic supports (Watkins et al., 2015). Social workers play a role in reducing stigmas and providing support to Black men.

Research has shown that Black individuals are less likely to utilize mental health services but seem to experience more severe bouts of depression (Campbell & Allen, 2019; Williams et al., 2022). The more exposure Black men have to psychosocial and socioeconomic stressors, the higher the probability of mental health issues going untreated (Watkins et al., 2015). Black men report having a level of distrust for healthcare providers and often experience discrimination when seeking services, furthering the stigma around seeking services or participating in research (Watkins et al., 2015). The stigma and discrimination that Black men face in healthcare settings further exacerbate the mental health disparity for them, increasing the need for culturally competent mental health services.

Black student-athletes do not seek out services for mental health issues due to the stigma around these issues in the Black community (Moreland et al., 2016). This leaves Black male student-athletes at the most significant risk for not utilizing mental health

services when needed. A counseling center was studied in 2020, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial injustices its students were experiencing at the university. The center utilized podcasts to address these injustices, validate the experiences of Black students, and remove barriers to treatment (Miller, Long, & Nash, 2021). Using podcasts to discuss the unique challenges faced by Black student athletes can begin to reduce the mental health stigma and provide a supportive environment for seeking supports.

Watkins et al. (2015) suggest Black men will experience more negative mental health experiences due to the adverse life experiences they will experience than their counterparts. This research shows that the mental health of Black men has been under-researched, and several areas for more research around Black men and mental health experiences (Watkins et al., 2015). Due to the lack of research on the topic of Black men and what influences their mental health and seeking services, the group continues to be marginalized (Watkins et al., 2015). Researchers Mays et al. (2018) reported that the reason for the underutilization of mental health services for Black men may be attributed to sociocultural issues and the use of alternative care. Podcasts have recently been explored to investigate how men respond when listening to mental health podcasts, which can increase compassion and facilitate a more nuanced perspective on masculinity (Mays et al., 2018). The economic barriers, mistrust of providers, racism in services, and low perceptions of the need for services from Black men tend to have them reach out to non-mental health providers (Mays et al., 2018). There is a need for targeted research to better understand the mental health experiences and sociocultural barriers to seeking supports.

Black Americans face many issues that others do not have to experience. The mistrust of medical providers has a historical and racial context (Hammond, 2010; Watkins et al., 2015). Black Americans deal with racism, institutional oppression, cultural misunderstandings, and misdiagnoses, primarily from White providers (Mays et al., 2018; Stare & Fernando, 2019). Stare and Fernando (2019) discussed that participants in their research reported sociocultural factors that contributed to their mental health issues, such as oppression from police, high rates of incarceration, addiction, poverty, discrimination, social exclusion, and stigmatization. Participants disclosed further mental health stigmatization when they experienced ridicule and a general misunderstanding when discussing mental health with family, community members, and law enforcement, which increased feelings of isolation (Stare & Fernando, 2019). A counseling center was studied in 2020, following the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial injustices its students were experiencing at the university. The center utilized podcasts to address these injustices, validate the experiences of Black students, and remove barriers to treatment (Miller et al., 2021). Using podcasts to help validate and acknowledge the experiences of Black men and the intersections of race, healthcare mistrust and sociocultural factors and mental health challenges can enhance culturally competent mental health services.

Black men are considered an at-risk population for mental health issues due to the high number of individuals who have negative beliefs about mental health treatment and will not seek out treatment (Francis, 2018). Research also shows that Black men are less likely to access mental health services due to stigma, distrust in medical providers, and access to care (Thomas Tobin et al., 2022). Research suggested that to serve the Black

community better, it would be beneficial for mental health screenings to be a part of primary care appointments to identify mental health needs (Thomas Tobin et al., 2022). The research shows that Black men have a higher rate of substance disorders due to using substances to deal with societal racism and dehumanization (Thomas Tobin et al., 2022). This research is limited and suggests that further research should take a deeper look into more social, cultural, historical, and societal factors contributing to the gap in mental health care in the Black community (Stare & Fernando, 2019; Thomas Tobin et al., 2022). Many Black men will seek out support from family, friends, clergy, or other alternative supports, and are not getting the services they need (Mays et al., 2018). In order to address the mental health disparities Black men face, mental health screenings within the primary care settings and more research into the factors deterring access to care.

Stare and Fernando (2019) reported that counselors were encouraged to acknowledge the multiple intersecting identities, oppressive societal factors, and holism to build a better therapeutic relationship with Black men. Researching from a sociocultural perspective can provide the research with a more contextualized and comprehensive picture of factors influencing Black men's mental health, like the research on factors affecting students' anxiety (Shirvan et al., 2016). Researching mental health experiences of Black NBA players from a sociocultural perspective can help in understanding the factors that are playing a part in help seeking behaviors.

Podcasts and Mental Health

Mental health podcasts have become increasingly popular, as they provide listeners with a convenient way to access educational information on their own time and cover a wide range of topics from various professional levels (Casares, 2022). Most mental health podcasts range from 20 to 120 minutes per episode, discussing mental health issues through open discussions and sharing personal experiences (Casares, 2022). The discussions around mental health can range from clinical perspectives, expertise, and evidence-based practices to personal narratives about mental health experiences (Carrotte et al., 2023; Casares, 2022). Podcasts have become an educational tool to help social workers understand the real-life experiences of individuals. Narratives in this form can provide a more emotional voice, deepen the listener's understanding, and are more powerful than other forms (Diebold et al., 2021). Educators have discussed the importance of using historically accurate pop culture podcasts with narratives, as this has given a voice to those who have been traditionally underrepresented (Diebold et al., 2021). Research supports the idea that listeners of men's mental health podcasts have helped men expand their notions of masculinity to include reflecting on their emotions and emotional intelligence, fostering male intimacy, reducing stigmas, and increasing help-seeking strategies (Carrotte et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2024). Mental health podcasts can serve as a powerful tool for providing both clinical insight and personal narratives encouraging the reshaping of societal views on masculinity and reducing stigma.

Researchers reported how podcasts reduce barriers to learning about mental health and mental health strategies since many individuals with mental health issues do not access services, and the quality of low-cost options for mental health services is limited (Murphy et al., 2024). Researchers have discovered that consumers of mental health podcasts seek out information based on their desire to improve mental health literacy, and as a result, they are more likely to seek out services (Murphy et al., 2024). Murphy et al. (2024) gained new insight into how men who listen to mental health podcasts are more likely to seek out mental health services, feel less lonely, and have new opportunities to experience male intimacy (Murphy et al., 2024). Participants in the study reported that listening to podcasts featuring men discussing their mental health experiences made them feel more connected to other men (Murphy et al., 2024). Men find the guests and hosts of mental health podcasts to be emotional role models, and therefore engage in more reflective thinking and processing after listening to other men's experiences (Murphy et al., 2024). Mental health podcasts play a role in bridging the gaps in mental health awareness, breaking down stigmas, and promoting a safe space for discussions about mental health experiences for men.

Mental Health of Black Athletes

The lack of research in Black male athletes and mental health shows an overlooked population that could have a significant impact on the community and can change the stigma around mental health. According to researchers, among racial–ethnic minority athletes, 78% reported some form of mental health need; and it is reported that only 11% of these athletes reported seeking mental health services (Ballesteros & Tran,

2020). Research showed that Black male athletes have historically been disproportionately abused, exploited, and subjected to unethical practices of sports programs, and this has contributed to mental health issues (Palmer, 1994). The historical and political culture of society has a direct influence on how Black players have been treated in sports (Stahura et al., 2016). Given the historical exploitation and mistreatment of Black male athletes, further exploring the disparities and creating a supportive environment is essential.

Research on mental health in Black athletes primarily focuses on athletes of all ages; however, little attention has been given to professional athletes, with research predominantly centering on female athletes (Armstrong & Jennings, 2018; Bimper, 2017). The mental health of Black male student-athletes has become a topic of research over the last several years, with a focus on race (Armstrong & Jennings, 2018; Bimper, 2017; Wilkerson et al., 2020). Stahura et al. (2016) discussed how the social climate of sports is directly related to the social environment of America and, therefore, Black athletes experience more negative factors that contribute to mental health issues than their White counterparts. These researchers also discussed the powerful influence sports can have on American culture due to the idolization of entertainers (Stahura et al., 2016). Given the negative sociocultural factors that Black athletes face, understanding the intersection of race, sports, sex, and mental health is important for promoting better mental health outcomes.

According to research, many universities in the NCAA have implemented mentorship programs to support students in addressing sociocultural issues that hinder

their development (Armstrong & Jennings, 2018; Born, 2017). Bimper (2017) researched a mentorship program for Black student-athletes in a predominantly White university and explored how the athletes experienced the sociocultural issues they faced through the lens of critical race theory. Armstrong and Jennings (2018) reported that the participants in their research were aware of the correlation between race and its influence on the cultural dispositions and socialization process of the student-athletes. Palmer (1994) reported that Black male athletes have sociocultural factors such as race, poverty, and lack of supportive educational preparedness, and the dream that sports is the only way out of poverty. Wilkerson et al. (2020) reported that Black male student-athletes do not seek out mental health services due to their status on campus. The research was around football players at the Division I level. These researchers also reported how the mental health of Black male athletes is not well researched as a whole, which leaves space for the current research to aid in expanding the research base (Wilkerson et al., 2020).

We have seen more recent celebrity disclosures of mental health issues in sports (Francis, 2019). Francis (2019) suggests that when Black male celebrities speak out on mental health issues and seek services, they are raising awareness and reducing the stigma of mental health, especially in the Black community. This research showed that half of the participants reported seeking information about mental health issues after a Black male celebrity disclosed mental health status and treatment (Francis, 2018). Wilkerson et al. (2020) discussed how seeking mental health services are not sought out due to socio-economic status and mental health stigmas. Research also suggests that Black male athletes are more susceptible to struggling with mental health issues and not

seeking out services that could assist them due to mental health being viewed as a weakness and seeking out services as highly stigmatized and frowned upon, an example of the hypermasculinity (Barry et al., 2017; Campbell & Allen, 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2020). Black male celebrities openly discussing their mental health challenges have helped in normalizing mental health discussions in the Black community.

Francis (2019) reported that research findings indicate Black men are open to discussing mental health in public, leading to a willingness to participate in scholarly research. Francis (2019) suggested that further research is needed in the areas of how health announcements from celebrities can influence cultural norms related to mental health and mental health services. Podcasts with narrative data can serve as tools for advocating social change, as they enable disenfranchised groups to disseminate information and data, thereby empowering communities (Wilber et al., 2022). Podcasts provide a platform for the Black community to influence the public discourse on mental health and influence a societal shift in the perspectives of mental health especially with celebrity disclosures.

Social Work and Podcasts

The social work field has utilized podcasts for learning and educational purposes for many years, primarily to support lectures and provide easy access to information related to the field (Ferrer et al., 2021). Social workers taking an ethical approach to narrative inquiry on podcasts should allow individuals to have as much control over how they tell their stories and should center these stories on the individuals themselves (Ferrer et al., 2021). Social workers view digital storytelling as a form of narrative data, and

podcasts can be included since they allow individuals to discuss their life experiences within their control, often providing a richer account and depth to the narrative process (Ferrer et al., 2021). Podcasts offer access to stories of individuals who are often underrepresented in scholarly articles or journals, and social workers can play a significant role in driving social change (Ferrer et al., 2021). Podcasts are still under-researched and under-analyzed, but the trend is shifting towards podcasts as a distinct educational media form (Casares, 2022). As the use of podcasts continues to grow in social work research, they offer a unique platform for sharing diverse experiences that can drive social change.

Podcasts have provided social workers with a means to engage with the digital narratives of individuals, increasing the accessibility of these stories and thereby enhancing knowledge from diverse forms and cultures (Ferrer et al., 2021). Podcasts are seen as a potential for increased collaboration, skill-building, understanding of social justice issues, and knowledge mobilization (Ferrer et al., 2021). Due to the relatively new nature of using podcasting in social work research, there is no established formal ethical framework to guide the ethical use of digital narratives (Ferrer et al., 2021). To mitigate any ethical issues when using podcasts, social workers should consider that digital narratives are a gift and should be treated with care and responsibility, ensuring that the nature, desires, and intentions behind the stories accurately represent the storyteller (Ferrer et al., 2021). Podcasts can open the door to these more challenging conversations, and the openness of the platform allows various perspectives to share experiences as a social learning opportunity, providing a platform to reach people who are not otherwise

open to mental health services (Ferrer et al., 2021). Podcasts can serve as a tool for social workers to engage in conversations on social justice and mental health, however it is essential in developing a formal ethical framework to guide the use of podcasts in social work research.

Social Work in Sports

Social worker values and ethics are unique to the social work profession and guide the practice to help any disenfranchised group (Newman et al., 2019). In sports, many players come from disenfranchised groups and communities, and sports serve as a means of escape from their circumstances (Newman et al., 2019). Sports culture and athletes are captivating to the broader public, which, in turn, provides athletes with a platform to discuss societal issues and serve as advocates for social justice and change (Newman et al., 2019). Social workers are trained to practice from the perspective that all possible systems and factors that could influence an individual should be considered (Newman et al., 2019). Social workers can advocate for social justice, address systemic issues, and empower athletes' mental well-being when social work values and ethics are integrated into athletic environments.

Social workers can assist athletes in various ways, including supporting social change, promoting access to mental health services, and providing mental health education (Newman et al., 2019). Social workers can help be a deterrent for sexual abuse of student-athletes and support any victims (Teasley & Gill, 2015). Social work practice in sports is gaining recognition as a specialty within the social work profession (Newman et al., 2019). Ryan et al. (2018) reported that athletes are more apt to utilize services if

practitioners are associated with the sports department. Research supports social workers applying social work values to working with athletes and sports in community development, providing equitable sports programs, promoting positive mental health, enhancing education and training for coaches, advocating for social justice, and upholding culturally competent practices for athletes in all settings (Newman et al., 2019). Social workers can provide athletes with a range of services, from case management, advocacy, and clinical services, as well as promoting social justice and social change driven by research (Gill, 2008; Grobman, 2017; Newman et al., 2019; Teasley & Gill, 2015). Sports social workers have the opportunity to advocate for systemic changes while providing essential support to athletes.

Sports social workers work from several perspectives to address the well-being of athletes. Social workers can use the ecological perspective, systems theory, self-efficacy theory, strengths perspective, and critical social policy to support athletes in engagement, assessment, planning, and interventions when experiencing mental health challenges (Moore, 2016a; Newman et al., 2019). Current literature examining sport social worker as a professional area supports the profession can provide athletes with clinical services to deal with depression, anxiety, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, sexual abuse, and anger issues, as well as reducing the stigma around mental health issues and services (Grobman, 2017; Moore, 2016a). Research further supports the role of social work in sports, particularly from an ecological perspective, which enables social workers to approach issues facing athletes (Newman et al., 2019). This ecological perspective offers a rationale for research within a sociocultural framework, grounded in the idea that

the mind develops through interactions with the world around us (Shirvan et al., 2016; Vygotsky, 1978).

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were approximately 13,600 professional athletes in the U.S. in 2019 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). In 2013, there were approximately 450,000 college athletes in the United States (Moore, 2016a). This is a small population of individuals; however, due to the elite often being many athletes, mental health needs are usually hidden or overlooked (Moore, 2016a). In 2015, the Alliance of Social Workers in Sports (ASWIS) was established, focusing on demonstrating how social work practice can contribute to all levels and sectors of the sports world (Gill, 2008; Grobman, 2017). The unique challenges faced by elite athletes often go unnoticed and sports social workers can address these challenges and help raise awareness and advocate more support for mental health needs.

One researcher discussed how social workers in sports can start early in youth sports to help athletes develop a positive self-identity by teaching about emotions and emotional expression, which in turn elevates self-esteem and self-confidence, and instills professional athletes with a better awareness of their mental and emotional well-being (Ismail et al., 2020). Teasley and Gill (2015) discussed how school social workers could be a powerful tool in assisting student-athletes who suffer sexual abuse from trainers, coaches, and sport support staff. These researchers reported that school social workers could help in lowering the accounts of sexual abuse in athletic settings due to the ethical guidelines, ability to collaborate with other staff with concerns, provide emotional support to student-athletes, provide objectivity, and understand the signs and symptoms

of sexual abuse victims (Teasley & Gill, 2015). Social workers can support athletes at every level and contribute to their long-term mental health supportt.

Sports social workers can assist players with mental health issues and specialized treatment tailored to the unique aspects of their sport, which has implications for services at both the collegiate and professional levels (Gill, 2008). Social work takes a holistic approach to an individual within a specific environment, and athletic culture is a distinct culture from that of non-athletes (Newman et al., 2019). Currently, sports leagues and teams at every elite level are employing social workers to support their athletes and athletic programs (Newman et al., 2019). More research is needed on the programs currently in place and how to improve development programs. Gill (2008) argues that social workers can help athletes find a balance between their athletic roles and their roles outside of the sport. Wilkerson et al. (2020) discussed how teams should encourage players to participate in mental health treatment. This is particularly important when considering the mental health needs of athletes and the role social workers can play in addressing these needs. Creating more literature about social work services and mental health programs in sports can support the growth of this specialty in the profession.

There is an increasing amount of research and literature being published about sports social work; however, it remains limited due to the discipline's infancy. There are gaps in the research regarding the impact of sports social work programs and their utilization. More research is needed to integrate social workers into athletics, develop effective programs and practice models, and establish certificate programs for social workers to legitimize the specialty (Moore, 2016b). Addressing the gaps in sports social

work research will help to establish a foundation for the discipline and ensure social workers are prepared to meet the unique needs of elite athletes.

Summary

The literature on the role of social work in athletics is expanding as the specialty of this field grows and becomes more prevalent. Athletes' mental health is an area of research recommended for further study to aid in developing more effective strategies to address and assess the mental health of athletes, and to utilize better available services (Henriksen et al., 2019; Lavelle, 2021). Addressing mental health issues in athletics has become a priority for professional teams. In professional basketball, the NBPA continues to develop its mental health program. Players have suffered mental health issues within the history of the sport; however, they have gone untreated for years (Rice et al., 2016). The growing focus on mental health in professional sports highlights the needs for developing more comprehensive strategies and services.

Black men are the majority in the NBA, and the perception of Black male ball players is that of strength, masculinity, health, and talent, leaving few opportunities for mental health disclosures (Lavelle, 2021). The stigma around mental health is because many in the Black community do not believe in getting mental health care when needed and are often not identified by primary care doctors as having a mental health issue (Lavelle, 2021). Podcasts about mental health and Black men discussing their mental health have proven to change men's perspective on mental health issues (Carrotte et al., 2023; Casares, 2022). Research suggests that Black male athletes are more susceptible to struggling with mental health issues and not seeking out services that could assist them

due to mental health being viewed as a weakness and seeking out services being highly stigmatized and frowned upon (Barry et al., 2017; Lavelle, 2021). NBA Player Ben Gordon reports his personal experience with mental health and having suicidal thoughts every day for 6 weeks, and was unaware of his mental health issues until being committed to a psychiatric hospital and being diagnosed with bipolar disorder (Gordon, 2020). NBA players Gordon, Dooling, West, Meta World Peace, and Love are only a few players who have spoken out about their mental health issues and how they experienced mental health and mental health services (Gordon, 2020; Lavelle, 2021). Players are finding a platform to discuss mental health issues and seek services through podcasts about mental health, and the number of podcasts has steadily increased over the last five years (Casares, 2022; Murphy et al., 2024). As more NBA players disclose their mental health experiences on podcasts, opportunities to challenge cultural stigmas and foster a supportive environment are available.

The growing practice of social workers in sports and associations dedicated to this field is promising to the profession and the mental health of elite athletes, especially basketball players (Gill, 2008; Lavelle, 2021; Moore et al., 2018). Focusing on the secondary data obtained by the podcasts on mental health in a popular sport, like the NBA, can have benefits by reducing the mental health stigma in the Black community as well as increasing or developing specific interventions for athletes and creating a shift in views of masculinity (Carrotte et al., 2023; Walton et al., 2019). Research to further define this area, improving mental health and quality of life for professional sports players, would be a significant contribution to the limited research base in this field and

the emerging social work practice in sports social work. Chapter 3 consists of the research design and rationale, the researcher's role, the method employed for sample selection, the data collection and analysis plan, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative secondary data research design is to understand the experiences of Black NBA players in terms of their mental health and the sociocultural factors that influenced their decision making regarding participation in mental health services, as examined through a content analysis of podcasts. The purpose was to understand the experience of NBA players through their own words and platforms when discussing mental health and services. The d qualitative content analysis of the data enabled my collection of cognitive insights from podcast transcripts. My aim was to gain a deeper understanding of the mental health experiences of NBA players. The experiences of Black NBA players in using mental health services would best be explored by qualitative secondary data research because it explores experiences with mental health that have not been researched, and through data, we have information to aid in addressing the lack of literature. The mental health experiences of Black NBA players through qualitative research have yet to be explored in the literature. Research that explores the experiences of these athletes seems timely as social work seeks to become an emerging profession in the athletic world (Gill, 2008). By conducting qualitative secondary data research through content analysis of podcasts, this research aims to contribute to the gaps in research, provide insight into the mental health experiences of Black NBA players, and contribute to the sport social work field.

A qualitative secondary data approach, using content analysis of podcasts, was appropriate for this research. I aimed to understand the mental health experiences of athletes, an area with limited research currently, and a population that is challenging to

access for first-hand data collection. Qualitative secondary data research design is used to explore how individuals perceive, approach, and experience the world, as well as how they make sense of their experiences and phenomena (Joseph et al., 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative methods enable the in-depth study of a phenomenon, providing detail and openness (Patton, 2015). Due to the lack of research on the area of mental health in professional basketball, this study uses a qualitative approach to better understand the experiences with mental health from these professional athletes' accounts on podcasts. In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive explanation of the research design and rationale, including the role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, as well as the data analysis plan. I also address issues related to trustworthiness and ethical guidelines.

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative secondary data research design was to understand the experiences of Black NBA players, including their mental health, and the sociocultural factors that influenced their decision-making regarding participation in mental health services, as examined through a content analysis of NBA player podcasts. The purpose was to understand the experience of NBA players through their own words and platforms when discussing mental health and services. The qualitative content analysis of the data enabled my collection of cognitive insights from podcast transcripts, allowing me to gain a deeper understanding of the mental health experiences of NBA players. Podcasts provide a unique insight into conversations among friends, coworkers, peers, teammates, and others within the same environment and culture, allowing speakers

to discuss a stigmatized topic from a level of familiarity and comfort (Ferrer et al., 2021). Podcasts featuring personal narratives have been a valuable resource for men seeking support, as they provide an opportunity to listen to men discussing their personal experiences on podcasts (Murphy et al., 2024). The use of podcasts as a tool for exploring Black NBA players' experiences with mental health will offer valuable insight into how sociocultural factors shape decisions on seeking out services.

The understanding of Black NBA players' experiences and conversations on mental health and services is appropriate for a qualitative secondary data research because it explores a subject area and population that has limited research due to the negative impact it can have on players and their careers. The mental health experiences of Black NBA players through qualitative research have yet to be explored in an in-depth way in the literature. I explored the gap in the research and aims at understanding the mental health challenges Black NBA players face.

Policies and programs have been developed for elite athletes, particularly those competing in Division I universities and the NBA (Kaminski, 2016). However, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the experiences of NBA players when it comes to their mental health. As social work seeks to become a key player in the provision of mental health services for elite athletes (Gill, 2008), the need for research that explores the experiences of these athletes is crucial, as is understanding the thoughts surrounding mental health services. This content analysis of data aims to understand how NBA players communicate about mental health on podcasts.

The purpose of using podcasts to gather secondary data was due to the challenges associated with recruiting players to participate in research. Many players have documented their lived experiences with mental health in podcasts. I aimed to understand how NBA players communicate about mental health through their participation in podcasts.

Research Questions

RQ1: What do podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about the experiences of Black NBA players while in the NBA?

RQ2: What do podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of the sociocultural factors and their role in the players seeking mental health services while in the NBA?

RQ3: What do podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of mental health disclosures?

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher is that of a participatory nature, as the researcher gains access to the participants' natural environment (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this research, the active role involves analyzing data from the podcasts of NBA players. A researcher's perspective, beliefs, and background can introduce bias and negatively impact a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Since researcher bias is always a potential issue, researchers should have a plan with appropriate strategies to decrease possible bias (Creswell, 2009). Researchers should focus on being reflexive when outlining their study, which should include consideration of their perspective and

potential bias (Sutton & Austin, 2015). To minimize my bias toward the study, I used the suggestion of Sutton and Austin and was reflective during this process to help reduce bias. The issue of cultural bias could be a potential bias as the participants are Black men, and I am a White female. I have chosen to address these potential biases by reviewing podcast interview transcripts featuring NBA players speaking with other Black men, with whom there is a level of familiarity or comfort.

For this research study, I aimed to understand the experiences of Black NBA players with mental health and mental health services, and a qualitative secondary data research approach is the most suitable. I began this study with the notion that there would be research specific to NBA players since there have been some players who have talked openly about their mental health and experiences when playing in the NBA, and rules around mental health have changed. I soon discovered there is not much research on mental health and professional athletes, and very little about NBA players specifically. A qualitative study is the most appropriate approach, as per Polit and Beck (2014), since a generic qualitative inquiry methodology is employed when a phenomenon is not well understood, which is the case in this study.

The research led me to a few questions that I wanted to understand better. First, I tried to understand the experiences of players and their mental health care. Since many players are Black men and the players come from all different areas and backgrounds, I wanted to understand if any sociocultural factors play a role in their ideas around mental health and mental health services. Lastly, I tried to understand why players take on the responsibility of discussing mental health and the issues current players are facing.

After reviewing the research, I found that many studies on mental health and professional or elite athletes were qualitative, focused on college athletes, and primarily concerned with injuries (e.g., Baumann, 2016; Gill, 2008; Jones, 2016). However, there is a need to explore the experiences of professional NBA players and their mental health using a qualitative approach, as many NBA players are speaking out about their experiences through social media without having an injury as a catalyst (Lavelle, 2021; Pavelko & Wang, 2021). While several qualitative approaches can be employed, the design that best suited the purpose of my study was a qualitative secondary data research design, using podcasts as the primary data source. This approach is the best option due to the limited research on the topic, as it lacks theoretical assumptions or guidelines to follow, unlike other methodologies, and the sensitive nature of mental health research involving public figures and their participation (Creswell, 2009). Given the lack of existing research on mental health experiences of NBA players, using podcasts in this research is appropriate to explore these experiences on such a sensitive topic.

Methodology

In this section, I outline the methodology of this qualitative secondary data research design, which involves content analysis of podcasts featuring NBA players discussing their mental health. I discuss my content selection logic, data collection procedures, data analysis plan, and the trustworthiness and validity of my research. Secondary data refers to information collected by someone other than the current researcher for a purpose unrelated to the current research (Tantawi, 2024). Secondary data, which can be publicly available online, such as interviews in the form of podcasts,

is often used in social science research (Cheong et al., 2023). Data identification, data evaluation, data analysis, and ethical considerations are steps to ensure the validity of data used from online resources (Cheong et al., 2023). In this section, I outline the methodology for using qualitative secondary data, adhering to ethical standards to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of this research.

Podcast Selection Logic

For this study, I employed a qualitative secondary data analysis approach, using content analysis of podcasts featuring Black NBA players discussing their mental health. This research approach involves the content analysis of data from podcasts related to the experiences of Black NBA players with mental health and the social-cultural factors around seeking services or not. A qualitative secondary data research design was best for this research because it allowed the exploration of the experiences of the target population with the phenomenon being researched from their past and present experiences and the impact of change but through secondary data sources since first-hand interviews with players on this topic provide beyond challenging due to the nature and risks involved (Cheong et al., 2023; Hill & Burrows, 2017; McAlpine, 2016). This research design allows a comprehensive examination of the experiences of Black NBA players with mental health, while mitigating the risks and challenges inherent in direct participant engagement.

Podcasts are credited with being a diverse platform that contributes to giving a voice to the voiceless and sharing the experiences of individuals who have been traditionally oppressed with a broader audience. They can also be used for qualitative

data collection and analysis, as well as for critical inquiry and knowledge mobility (Day et al., 2017). The structure and format of podcasts contribute to the suitability of the medium for digital narratives, using these narratives as qualitative secondary data sources (Day et al., 2017). In addition, qualitative secondary data research design, through content analysis of podcasts, supported me in ensuring the data remains intact and that the meaning making the participant asserts regarding their experience is accurately captured by the researcher to maintain validity (see McAlpine, 2016; Riessman, 2008).

Content analysis is a qualitative research method that identifies the presence of words, themes, or concepts in various textual data (Lee & Peterson, 1997; Stemler, 2015). The variety of data can come from different sources such as speeches, government records, interviews, and public broadcasts (Lee & Peterson, 1997). Content analysis requires the systematic coding of data and includes the researcher following a specific protocol such as having suitable material, having a coding protocol, ascertaining the reliability and validity of coding, and reporting limitations (Lee & Peterson, 1997; Stemler, 2015).

Content analysis is suitable for this research, as it aims to understand the context of observed behavior, thoughts, or emotional responses and identify any correlations between concepts and behaviors (Stemler, 2015). The advantages of using content analysis in this study include the flexibility to identify emerging themes and the unobtrusive nature of data collection (Lee & Peterson, 1997; Stemler, 2015). The disadvantages of using content analysis are that it can be time-consuming due to the need to analyze different datasets, is reductive, and can introduce bias based on the

researcher's coding and interpretation (Stemler, 2015). Podcasts offer educational and firsthand data on the experiences of NBA players with mental health, as transcripts can be used for data analysis and provide insight into an otherwise challenging topic (Sharon, 2023).

To mitigate the disadvantages, any podcast used must meet the following criteria: it must feature at least one NBA player or former player discussing their mental health experience; the podcast must be over 20 minutes in length; and it must have been published between 2015 and 2024. Due to the limited number of podcasts that meet the criteria, all transcripts that meet the requirements will be analyzed (Stemler, 2015). Relational content analysis will follow the following steps:

1. Prepare the data.
2. Determine the type of analysis.
3. Develop categories and a coding scheme.
4. Test the coding scheme on a sample of text.
5. Code all the text.
6. Assess coding consistency.
7. Conclude coded data.
8. Report methods and findings (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

This research can inform the development of future research tools and provide future researchers with qualitative data (Stemler, 2015). In qualitative research, the primary instrument is the researcher, who collects data through focus groups, observations, interviews, and note-taking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Eligibility Criteria and Search Strategy

Once the institutional review board (IRB) board approves the study, I will start data collection. I will be transcribing podcasts in which Black NBA players discuss their mental health with others. Any podcast used will meet the following criteria: it must have at least one NBA player or former player discussing their mental health experience; the podcast must be over 20 minutes in length; and it must have been published between 2015 and 2024. The podcast selection process began by identifying podcast episodes where Black NBA players discussed their mental health. A search criterion was developed, starting with a search for NBA players' mental health experiences on podcast platforms, including YouTube Podcast and Apple Podcast. This yielded an extensive list of podcast episodes.

This list of episodes included podcast discussions about players' mental health from sports commentators, rather than players themselves, which were eliminated. From this list, date restrictions were applied to be between 2015 and 2024. This narrowed the list to several podcast episodes. While the podcasts and NBA player information are all public, all podcasts will be coded, and any names will be withheld to help protect the identity of the podcast participants. Podcasts will be transcribed and coded until saturation is reached or all participants have been included, as many players appear on multiple podcasts.

Procedures for Data Collection

Secondary data will be collected from podcasts that feature verbatim transcripts of NBA players discussing their mental health experiences. I will have a codebook that

includes information on each podcast episode, such as the number of podcast participants, their demographics, podcast publication information, and the podcast environment, if applicable. The codebook will have sociocultural factors discussed in the podcast episode.

Data Analysis

When analyzing secondary data, Percy et al. (2015) discussed how researchers choose a thematic or content analysis approach for qualitative secondary data analysis. Relational content analysis will follow the following steps:

1. Prepare the data.
2. Determine the type of analysis.
3. Develop categories and a coding scheme.
4. Test the coding scheme on a sample of text.
5. Code all the text.
6. Assess coding consistency.
7. Conclude coded data.
8. Report methods and findings (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

This research can inform the development of future research tools and provide future researchers with qualitative data (Stemler, 2015). In qualitative research, the primary instrument is the researcher, who gathers data through focus groups, observations, interviews, secondary data, and note-taking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Content analysis was selected as the method to analyze the textual data through coding,

as this enables researchers to interpret the meaning of the patterns and themes that emerge (Stanley & Atari-Khan, 2024).

The goal of content analysis is to make sense of the recorded accounts from participants by identifying themes or concepts within the data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). I will look for similar concepts that emerge in the data analysis. The analysis of the data will follow the eight phases of Zhang and Wildemuth's (2009) content analysis approach.

The first step in my data analysis will involve familiarizing myself with the data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This process will involve transcribing the selected podcasts for analysis, then reading and rereading the transcript, and subsequently recording any initial ideas or impressions in the codebook (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009; Percy et al., 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) asserted that one of the most efficient and meaningful ways to analyze data in a qualitative study is to begin analyzing inductively during the data collection process. Collecting data after conducting each interview will enable me to observe the patterns and concepts evolve as the data is collected and coded (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009; Percy et al., 2015; Saldaña, 2016).

Step two of the data analysis process is defining the unit of analysis, which refers to the text to be classified and coded (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Coding units may be single words, a few sentences, or paragraphs, and are relevant to the research questions (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). During this stage, qualitative data analytic software can be helpful, such as NVivo or Microsoft Excel.

The third step in content data analysis involves developing categories and a coding scheme (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Categories and coding schemes can be derived from the data, theories, or previous related studies and can be inductive or deductive (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Since my research lacks a theoretical framework to begin with, inductive content analysis, combined with the constant comparative method, will facilitate the identification of differences within categories (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The constant comparative method is broken into two parts: a systematic comparison of every text assigned to a category with any other text in that category, integrating categories and their properties through interpretive memos, which will be included in the codebook (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Qualitative content analysis allows a unit of text to be assigned to multiple categories

The fourth step of my data analysis will be testing my code scheme on a sample of text (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Developing and validating my coding scheme will be crucial in the early stages of the process. I will test the clarity and consistency of my category definitions by coding a sample of my data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). I should be able to achieve consistency in my coding by coding a sample text, revising coding rules, and checking for coding consistency (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

The fifth step of data analysis is to code all the text (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Once consistency is achieved, then apply the coding rules to the entire text, and during this process, check the coding repeatedly to prevent drifting (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). When new themes or categories emerge, they will be added to the codebook as well.

The sixth step of data analysis is to assess your coding consistency (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). After the entire data set has been coded, rechecking for consistency of coding and double-checking the coding consistency of the whole text helps ensure reliability and filters out human error (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

The seventh step in data analysis is to conclude the coded data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Making sense of themes or categories identified and making inferences and meanings from the data is an essential part of this step (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This step involves exploring categories, identifying relationships between categories, uncovering different patterns, and testing the categories against the full range of data, all of which are critical in this step (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

The final step in data analysis is to report the methods and findings (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Reporting the analytical procedures and processes as completely and truthfully as possible, the study can be replicated (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Reporting the decisions and practices about the coding process, as well as the methods used to establish the trustworthiness of the research (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Content analysis reveals patterns, themes, and categories that are significant to a social reality and should be presented in a balanced combination of descriptions and interpretations of the data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a crucial aspect of content analysis, as it enhances the value of the study. There are four main areas of trustworthiness to be addressed in the proposed research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Zhang &

Wildemuth, 2009). According to Cypress (2017), trustworthiness serves as the evaluation standard in qualitative research, ensuring the quality of the research.

Credibility

To enhance the credibility of content analysis, researchers should design data collection strategies that solicit diverse representations and establish transparent processes for coding and interpreting the data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Training the coders is a concern in content analysis; however, I am the sole coder for this data in this research.

Transferability

Transferability is achieved when the research can be applied, dependable and stable data can be replicated, and the findings are consistent (Cope, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure transferability in this study, I will provide a detailed description of all relevant steps associated with data collection and analysis activities (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher's task is to provide data sets and descriptions that are rich enough for other researchers to make judgments about the transferability of the findings to different settings or contexts (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Dependability

Dependability ensures that the findings are consistent and reliable, involving the monitoring of procedures throughout the research process to determine validity (Cope, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability in my study will be ensured through well-documented notes, procedures, data collection methods, analysis, and an audit trail that records the research (steps Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the characteristics of the data can be verified by others who have read and reviewed the research results (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). This can be achieved through audits of the research process and findings, which are determined by verifying the internal coherence of data, as well as the findings, interpretations, and recommendations (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Ethical Procedures

It is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to maintain the integrity of the research (Creswell, 2009). No part of the actual research for this study will be conducted until a full review by Walden University's IRB has been completed and the research data collection and design have been approved. To ensure Walden's IRB guidelines are followed, the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course was completed. All identifying information will be treated as confidential, and pseudonyms will be assigned to each podcast episode and participant to conceal their identity (e.g., PT1, PT2). All podcast episodes will be transcribed in their entirety and stored in compliance with HIPAA regulations.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I discussed a qualitative secondary data research design, and content analysis of podcasts is the ideal qualitative approach for this study. The chapter also provided an in-depth view of the research design and methodology, data collection and analysis, participant selection, and recruitment. The purpose of this qualitative secondary data research and content analysis of podcasts is to understand the experiences of Black

NBA players regarding their mental health and the sociocultural factors that influence their decision-making regarding participation in mental health services when needed. The data analysis process is described using Zhang and Wildemuth's (2009) process, which involves eight phases of analysis. The four primary areas of trustworthiness to be addressed in the proposed study, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are discussed.

The sociocultural factors of Black NBA basketball players in utilizing mental health services are appropriate for qualitative secondary data research because it analyzes the data in podcasts of NBA Black players and their experiences with mental health. Due to the lack of research on the area of mental health in professional basketball, this study uses a qualitative secondary data approach to better understand the current data in podcasts of NBA players discussing their mental health experiences. In Chapter 4, I will present the research results, including the data collection and analysis process.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative secondary data study was to explore the experiences of Black NBA players, their mental health, and what sociocultural factors present as influencing their decision to participate in mental health services or not. The analysis was conducted through a content analysis of NBA players' appearances on podcasts. The purpose was to understand the experience of NBA players through their own words when discussing mental health and mental health services on podcasts. Research from the literature review on sociocultural theory identified several sociocultural factors to consider when coding, including mental health stigma, cultural beliefs from identified sociocultural groups, social status, socioeconomic status, and access and attitudes toward seeking help.

Researchers have explained that podcasts on mental health, featuring individuals discussing their personal experiences, are essential to listeners, as they provide hope, aid in personal development, and increase compassion and empathy (Carrotte et al., 2023; Ó Caoilte et al., 2024). A podcast on mental health provides listeners with a diverse perspective on mental health issues and helps reduce the stigma (Murphy et al., 2024; Ó Caoilte et al., 2024). The three research questions for this study were (a) What do podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about the experiences of Black NBA players during their time in the NBA?, (b) What do podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of the sociocultural factors and their role in the players seeking mental health services while in the NBA?, and (c) What do podcast

episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of mental health disclosures?

In this chapter, I present the research demographics, report on the data collection process, discuss the data analysis process, and describe the trustworthiness of the analysis. I also present the results of the data analysis, including the final content identified. Content analysis was employed to address each of the research questions.

Setting

To analyze the secondary data in this study, I first identified the podcasts to be used for the study. The data consisted of podcasts featuring Black NBA players who discussed their mental health experiences. After obtaining IRB approval for the inclusion criteria for podcasts, which included NBA players discussing their mental health experiences, 30 podcasts were viewed, resulting in 20 matches. The IRB approved the use of podcasts as secondary data because players can discuss their mental health experiences in a setting in which they feel comfortable enough to be vulnerable.

The podcast transcripts were analyzed through a thematic analysis process that included viewing the video recording of the podcast episode, transcribing the podcast, reviewing the podcast transcription for accuracy, developing a coding scheme, coding the transcriptions, and then analyzing the data. I had no personal, professional, or financial ties to the selected episodes or any of the players who participated in them. Transcripts were analyzed using the Delve software tool.

Demographics

Secondary data pertained to the mental health experiences of NBA athletes. These podcasts were viewed and transcribed verbatim, sourced directly from their respective podcast websites. Demographic data were not collected because no interviews were conducted with participants. Secondary data analysis results were based on the NBA players' comments on the podcasts. However, I was able to gather some demographic data on the 30 NBA players who participated in the selected podcast episodes for the study. This was done by viewing NBA players' profiles on NBA.com.

The demographic data I was able to determine includes the following: (a) All players participated in at least 1 year of college; (b) the ages of players ranged from 28-60 years old; (c) the players have a range of time in the NBA from two seasons up to 19 seasons; (d) many of the players were former players except for six players who were on rosters in the NBA as of the 2024-2025 season; and (e) eight of the players were single, four were divorced, and the rest were married at the time of the research. In Table 1, the demographics, including age and years played in the NBA, are displayed.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Demographic	Category	Frequency
Age	20–30	2
	30–40	12
	40–50	12
	50–60	3
	60+	1
Years in NBA	1–3	2
	4–10	11
	11–20	17

Data Collection

The secondary data collected for this study consisted of 20 podcast interviews in which 30 NBA players discussed their mental health experiences. The search terms used to identify potential podcasts included *mental health in the NBA, NBA players,* and *mental health.* Podcasts were searched on YouTube Podcasts provided both video and audio, and I was able to view and hear the podcasts to understand the tone and body language in conversations before transcriptions.

I collected data from July 1, 2024, and continued to search for podcasts until February 9, 2025, to ensure that the most recent podcasts were included, as most players participate in podcasts during the off-season. Data collection was approved by Walden University IRB (04-18-22-0805979). Podcasts were viewed, transcribed, and coded in conjunction with the selected coding process, which was then reviewed to ensure consistency. There was no variation to the data collection plan, as presented in Chapter 3. All videos and transcripts were saved on an external, password-protected drive and the Delve software. Podcasts were identified as podcast transcripts (PT), and the number of them was recorded for coding purposes. Data collection took longer than anticipated because of the need to capture the most current podcasts.

Data Analysis

The podcast transcripts were analyzed through a thematic analysis process that included viewing the video recording of the podcast episode, transcribing the podcast, reviewing the podcast transcription for accuracy, developing a coding scheme, coding the transcriptions, and then analyzing the data. The first step in analyzing the data was

creating the coding scheme. The coding scheme was preselected due to the content analysis process (see Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The coding scheme is the framework that includes both indicative and deductive categories for RQ2. These categories were based on sociocultural factors that related to the theoretical framework. These categories consisted of sociocultural factors, including gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural identity. Deductive coding allowed other codes and categories to emerge during the coding of the transcripts, and these were then added to the coding scheme to ensure consistency in the data coding of each transcript. After applying the coding scheme and coding the first transcript, additional codes were added, including vulnerability, masculinity, life after the NBA, and contributing factors. The inductive coding was based on the research questions and then applied to all transcripts.

Each podcast was transcribed into a Word document and verified for accuracy by rewatching the podcast, reviewing the transcription, correcting any errors, and assigning a unique name (e.g., PT1, PT2) to the transcript before uploading it to Delve. Once all transcripts were verified and uploaded to Delve, the coding scheme was tested on PT1, the first podcast transcript. To ensure consistency in coding, I developed a codebook and used the coding scheme with each podcast transcription. All secondary data were saved in Delve and on a password-protected external hard drive.

Process for Coding and Analysis

The Delve software tool was used to categorize the secondary data collected. The coding methods used in the study were inductive and deductive coding. These codes were based on sociocultural factors that related to the theoretical framework. These codes

consisted of sociocultural factors, including gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural identity. Additional codes were created inductively during the coding of the first transcript, based on the research questions. These codes were created after viewing the podcasts and before the analysis of secondary data. In vivo coding was used to maintain research notes and find codes that related to the research questions.

I selected a content analysis approach for qualitative secondary data analysis. Once the coding scheme was tested and all other transcripts had been coded, coding consistency was achieved by having only one person code the transcripts, completing researcher notes during the coding process, and adhering to the established coding scheme. The codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the data analysis are represented in the descriptive text sections related to the research questions.

Descriptive Text in Relation to RQ1

RQ1 was the following: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about the experiences of Black NBA players while in the NBA? The central theme for RQ1 is the role of the social/cultural environment on mental health perceptions. The subthemes related to RQ1 were personal experiences and reflections, support systems, life and career balance, identity and public persona, and stigmas. An example of this descriptive text from PT1, NBA1 stated

> You know what I mean? And during that whole time, you know, my dad was sick the whole time. It was countless times I was flying from San Antonio to L.A. just to see him. Minnesota to L.A. Wherever I had two days in between, if I was on the road, I was flying home just to be able to have moments with him. You see

> what I'm saying? I was carrying that on my shoulders of the only man that I ever feared and gave me everything that I'd known up to that point.

Players discussed their personal experiences, the importance of having a support system, finding a life and career balance, how athletic identity and the perception of the public can influence one's mental health, and how known stigma plays a part in players' experiences with mental health. These subthemes support the overall theme of the role that the social/cultural environment plays in shaping mental health perceptions.

Descriptive Text in Relation to RQ2

RQ2 was as follows: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of the sociocultural factors and their role in seeking mental health services while in the NBA? The central theme for RQ2 was factors contributing to seeking help or not for mental health. The subthemes associated with RQ2 were sociocultural factors, vulnerability and masculinity, contributing factors, therapeutic practices, and the role of the NBA. To example this, PT2: NBA3 said

> So. I fell in love with the basketball culture. I was adopted by it. I was tall. You know, I was fast. You know, I had these attributes that were attractive and fit into the game. But a lot of it didn't resonate with my soul, honestly."

Players discussed the sociocultural factors that lead to mental health perceptions, how venerability and masculinity play a role in mental health perceptions, what factors contribute to mental health challenges, the therapeutic techniques and practices that are helpful, and what role does the NBA play in furthering mental health resources,

awareness, and support to current, past, and future players. These subthemes support the overall theme of factors contributing to seeking help or not for mental health.

Descriptive Text about RQ3

RQ3 was the following: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of mental health disclosures? The overall theme of normalizing mental health during and post NBA careers discussed how players are telling their stories to change the way mental health is viewed and to help others address mental health issues when they arise. These disclosers show how players feel the responsibility to use their platform to help others. The subthemes supporting the central theme were personal disclosures, mental health awareness, normalization of mental health conversations, and life after the NBA. The theme of normalization of mental health conversations is explored in PT9, by NBA15 when he stated:

> I started with Doc when I was at UCLA. I was a freshman at UCLA. So Doc and I have a history, a long history. I had a lot of pressure on me being a McDonald's All-American coming into UCLA with all of these expectations of bringing a national championship. We had a really good team there. So the pressure, when you wear those four letters.

Players discussed the amount of pressure they experience as athletes and how normalizing conversations about other players' experiences can create opportunities for social change and reduce mental health stigmas. This theme demonstrated how players can learn from the vulnerability it takes to share and how they can grow and become stronger players and individuals.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I used validation methods related to trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The evaluation method selected for this study was based on my notes to understand the meanings and experiences of NBA players. Using these validation methods in the content analysis will ensure the accuracy of the findings, facilitate replication, maintain objectivity, and enable the application of findings to other contexts (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

Credibility

The credibility of my study was determined through descriptive and interpretive text exploring the mental health experiences of NBA players discussed on podcasts. To ensure credibility, I established and adhered to clear coding definitions. To establish credibility, I verified interpretations against the raw data to ensure consistency with the transcribed data. Persistent observations of the video podcasts were another way credibility was established. Persistent observation means repeatedly and consistently reviewing data to gain insights and ensure accuracy in interpretations (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). I initially watched the podcasts to determine if they met the criteria. I then rewatched the podcast to ensure accuracy in the transcription and rewatched the video podcast after initial coding to make notes on the behaviors and interactions of the NBA players. I then watched the podcast a final time after all coding was completed and reviewed the notes regarding the NBA players' behaviors, interactions, and experiences to ensure accuracy. Triangulation against the literature was the third way credibility was established for this study.

Transferability

The transparency and detailed descriptions of the procedures in this study have demonstrated transferability by allowing the research to be conducted using secondary data obtained from podcast episodes featuring NBA players discussing their mental health experiences. Detailed descriptions of the contextual details were included in the collected data, such as demographic information, cultural backgrounds, sociocultural factors, and the selection process for the podcasts. Descriptive data were compared to the current literature to validate transferability.

Dependability

The study's dependability was ensured through the documentation of the procedures and methods used, thereby providing consistency. The consistency and stability of this research were determined by double checking the application of the coding scheme to the data collection after each transcript was coded. Any changes to the codes were documented and applied to the previous transcripts before moving forward. These audits helped ensure dependability by ensuring accuracy in the coding.

Confirmability

The confirmability of this study is based on the detailed process of how secondary data were collected, verified, and analyzed. The confirmability was established by maintaining detailed records of the data collected, specifically, records that reflected the steps in the data collection process, coding, and analysis. Coding selections provided a clear explanation of how the raw data was developed into the final interpretations. The

findings were based on the data collected, and personal biases and interpretations were excluded from the results.

Results

The results of this study were applied to each research question. The pertinent data identified related to the mental health experiences of NBA players, as presented in podcasts, supported the study's purpose. The purpose of this general qualitative inquiry was to explore secondary data from published podcasts of firsthand accounts of NBA players' mental health experiences. The emerging themes are reported in relation to each research question. Table 2 shows the research question, theme, and frequency of the themes.

Table 2

Research Questions and Themes

Research question	Theme	Frequency of themes
RQ1	Personal experiences	127
	Support systems	351
	Life and career balance	55
	Identity and public persona	145
	Cultural stigma	47
RQ2	Sociocultural factors	535
	Vulnerability and masculinity	76
	Contributing factors	372
	Therapeutic practice	271
	Role of NBA	34
RQ3	Disclosures and responses	112
	Mental health awareness	85
	Normalize mental health conversation	180
	Life after NBA	67

Results for RQ1

The first research question was “What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about the experiences of Black NBA players while in the NBA?” The collected snippets from the secondary data revealed the following themes: personal experiences and reflections, support systems, life and career balance, identity and public persona, and cultural stigmas. The themes were identified from the codes, such as personal growth and reflections, disclosures in NBA, personal mental health disclosures, perceptions of disclosures, athletic persona, personal outlook, expectations of athletes, stigma of athletes, social stigmas, expectations of Black men, attitudes within the Black community, generational perspectives, cultural heritage, family dynamics, personal sacrifices, creating supportive environments, vulnerability and supports, mentorship, family supports, team supports, and social supports.

Theme: The Role of Social/Cultural Environments on Mental Health Perceptions

Many NBA players discussed how social and cultural environments influenced their perception of mental health. NBA24 in PT20 discussed the NBA culture and how it plays a role for athletes stating, “that made me ask real questions about the overall culture of the NBA and what the media's role was and just the perception of athletes and the and the perception of health,” after he disclosed his mental health prior to his draft date. Players discuss the ways they could have felt better supported when discussing their personal stories and what this means for themselves and others.

Personal Experiences and Reflections

The subtheme of personal experiences and reflections was defined by snippets that addressed individual feelings of depression, struggles with emotional balance, and the personal journey toward seeking help. This subtheme captured personal narratives and reflections on mental health experiences and realizations during the NBA. This subtheme emerged from the codes of personal growth and reflections, disclosures in the NBA, individual mental health disclosures, and perceptions of disclosures. In PT2, NBA3 discussed his experience by stating

> I had just came out of rehab for 30 days. I put myself. I put myself in for not drugs, but for anxiety and depression. And it was the first time I actually made a decision for myself. So then I take my wife at a time. We go to St. Lucia. It's all-star. And, you know, they're calling me 'The Bucks.' They're like, you know, you got to come back. You got to show up. You know, if you don't, you know, we're going to sue you, all this stuff.

In PT6, NBA8 stated, “so in 2015, I went into like a depression. You know, the basketball stopped bouncing for me. And it’s common with athletes, you know, when you’ve been playing basketball most of your life.”

Players discussed their experiences openly to peers, the public, and their teams. The disclosure of his mental health was in PT1 by NBA1:

> I know for me, growing up in an urban community, you never talked about the effects of mental health or what you’ve seen every single day on a daily basis affecting your mental health. You know, it was never a discussion during the All-

> Star weekend. Just being overwhelmed with everything that was going on. I put out a tweet expressing my depression. You know, it was just an emotional response. Really didn't expect too much of it.

These examples of personal disclosures show how mental health perceptions started from sociocultural factors, including trauma, and not having outlets or coping skills to deal with this. NBA6 discussed his sexual abuse in PT4, "At the heart of it, I was sexually abused when I was 7 years old. And I had never really, you know, dealt with any of the tragedies. And so I was forced to deal with that. I took that into my adulthood". He continued to discuss his personal experience,

> Well, I think they go hand in hand because when you, you've gone through trauma, there's going to be some mental health issues that come along with that. They say the, the, the top four symptoms for somebody who's been abused, whether it's physical abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse, or whatever abuse in general, um, are anxiety, which I suffered from depression, which at one point in my life, I experienced, um, sexual dysfunction and PTSD. And at some point in my life, I struggled with all those different things at different moments in my life.

Mental health disclosures and players discussing their personal experiences serve as a learning tool for those around them. In recognizing the similarities in personal experiences and feeling less alone.

Support Systems

The subtheme of support systems was defined by snippets highlighting the role of family, friends, mentors, and teammates in navigating mental health challenges and their

influence on mental wellness. This subtheme emerged from the codes of vulnerability and supports, mentorship, family support, team support, and social support. In PT8 NBA10 stated

> *i*t's what I'm training my son to do. And right now, I'm training my son, who's 14, to, I don't train him so much in basketball as I do how to control his emotions. And I think the more you can control the emotion when you're doing something, the greater you will become at it, at that particular endeavor. Absolutely. You know, my stepfather passed away when I was a rookie. He was my oracle. He was my muse.

In PT1 NBA2 stated

> I've always had one. That's one of the things that's been like a blessing for me, actually, is the people I've had in my life. Now I would say probably right now at this time in my life is probably the most important time for me. Right? Because I don't have, I don't have hoop no more. Like hoop can cover up a lot of things and because I don't have hoop to cover up things no more. Now I got to deal with everything, like I got to deal with life, you know what I'm saying? And so. I love the fact that my support system is there. Like obviously my family is, you know, your family going to be there.

Players discuss the importance of the type of support system that is around and the effects this has on a player and how to build a healthier support system by finding supports that a player is comfortable being vulnerable with and changing things to provide their children with different experiences.

Other players discuss how they had to build their support network as their family was not a source of support for them. In PT17, NBA21 stated, “You'll see the same people around me every time you see me. And it's like, for me, if I didn't have that mental support from my family”.

Players also discussed the need for other players to be part of the support systems. In PT9, NBA15 stated,

> I was a chubby kid, low self-esteem. The only place I had confidence was on the court. As you move through that, the trauma of, the injury, basketball being taken away, the pressures of getting to UCLA and having that pressure and trying to make it to the NBA because my parents are getting passed over on promotions and they're training people to take their jobs, right? And the stresses of that, it builds up. Finally, get there and it's a dog-eat-dog business. Not everybody in the locker room was for you. You have maybe a vet that will reach around, put his arm around you and help you.

Life and Career Balance

The subtheme of life and career balance was defined by snippets highlighting the challenges of managing family responsibilities alongside a demanding career in the NBA. PT1 NBA1 discussed

> there have been times. I remember last year I struggled. It was a time, you know, my second-oldest daughter had said something about all my friend’s dad being at the dance. You know what I mean? It’s like, I got to go get ready for this game. You know what I mean? And it’s like, you know, the emotional roller coaster that

> that brings right before you go play a game, you know what I mean, becomes heavy. You know what I mean? Because you feel like you're missing something with your baby. You want to be there. You want to be there. Have those moments. And you know, a lot of times I even tell a lot of youngsters, it's like, you know, you got to enjoy it because when you take on real responsibilities, real feelings, and a lot of stuff come with that. That becomes heavy, and you're going to have to figure out quickly how to balance it, especially if you want to be good.

NBA players discuss the challenges they face in balancing work and home life, which include the extensive amount of travel and the frequent trades to different teams. Players discuss the toll this has on their mental health and the sacrifices they make that are not considered.

Identity and Public Persona

The subtheme of identity and public persona was defined by snippets that highlighted navigating between personal identity and public persona. This subtheme emerged from the codes of athletic persona, personal outlook, expectations of athletes, the stigma associated with athletes, and social stigmas. NBA players discussed the issues they have with being a public figure and how this becomes an identity they conform to, as described by NBA 2 in PT1:

> I got taller. I started playing ball. Started getting good at this shit. And next thing you know, you know what I'm saying, I'm in the league. And just having to, like, conform to, like, someone else's standards all the time was just an issue. You know what I'm saying? I like living life on my terms because I can and thrive.

> You know what I'm saying? I don't really need to do that. You know what I'm saying? You know, I love playing basketball. You know what I'm saying? I just know I can get it. So being talked to a certain kind of ways, kind of that bought and sold atmosphere, you know what I'm saying? Like, I just, I ain't really like that shit for real, man. You know, like, have a conversation with me. Don't let me see some shit on the news about where I'm going.

NBA players also discussed how they are perceived as "not human" and the emotional impact this has, as NBA1 in PT16 stated:

> Think about how many people we know just in our occupation, that, that, that hides behind so many so much stuff because they're lonely. They hide behind the money, the fame, the attention, the going out, all these different types of things because you empty, you know what I mean? And it's like, like that's a real thing for not just our league, just anybody who, who's looked at not like a human. You know, at the end of the day, we are human.

NBA players also discussed how they are talked about as public figures without consideration of the things they are experiencing in life, as NBA1 discussed in PT1:

> But if you have a bad game, they want to trash you for something. They want to say this. They want to have all these opinions. They want to have all this. But you don't know this shit that I'm carrying, that I'm going through every single day. On top of, even before that, one of the hardest shit I did see, the call I got. My dad went to the hospital a couple days before he passed.

NBA players discuss how they feel about their roles as public figures and how they deal with the public's viewpoint and expectations of them as players. Players discuss the ways they feel less than human due to some of these perceptions.

Cultural Stigma

The subtheme of cultural stigma was defined by snippets that addressed the stigma associated with mental health as a Black man, especially in the context of masculinity, vulnerability, and the expectations placed on players. This subtheme emerged from the codes of expectations of Black men, attitudes within the Black community, generational perspectives, and cultural heritage. NBA players discussed how cultural stigmas contributed to mental health, as NBA2 described in PT1:

> I remember thinking when I, when I would hear those conversations, like that's, that's for the weak. I'm not weak. I don't need nobody who doesn't know me to tell me nothing about myself, right? That was my, that was my mentality as a young person, because that's what we were told or told or what I seen, what I thought we needed to, to portray.

NBA players also discussed how there is mental and cultural pressure experienced by Black men. NBA15 in PT9 stated, "you know, you do have that pressure of being African-American men. And we have the opportunity to try to not just better our lives, but better everybody's lives around us. That's an extra pressure that you're putting on yourself too." Another way NBA players discussed racial and ethnic stigma was by exploring the way Black people experience more trauma in our society. NBA6 stated in PT8

> and I believe we come from some of the most traumatic experiences in this country. And I believe that there's so much room for healing if we, if we start embracing our mental health the way that we have embraced our physical health.

NBA24 in PT20 discussed the culture in the NBA, stating:

> But there's a culture, there's a culture that is prominent from a young age for most of the athletes that make it to the NBA that says this is the best possible opportunity you could possibly imagine as a human being in modern society and in modern life. So you must protect this opportunity at all costs. And most of the time, that's going to mean that you operate as a somewhat drone-like being and say whatever you need to say or, or forego saying whatever it is that you feel you may need to say in order to secure this opportunity and to protect it.

NBA18 in PT14 discussed other factors, stating:

> And some of the misconceptions, you know, also that, you know, let's just call it Black people, people that grow up in urban communities, not excluding any other ethnicities, you know, or groups, you know, that we need help because we're traumatized, and we need therapy and that's it. That's not only it, our families are also separate. So, you know, we want to remove the stigma that it's only mental health and it's only in your mind, it's only because you're struggling.
>
> NBA players discussed cultural stigma from a racial and ethnic, religious, and class and poverty viewpoint, and the experiences showed that the idea of having mental health stigmas was learned from the different cultural groups and environments.

Black male players discussed that the mental health stigmas are learned from the cultural and social perceptions, especially in the context of masculinity, vulnerability, and the expectations placed on players as athletes.

Results for RQ2

The second research question was the following: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of the sociocultural factors and their role in the players seeking mental health services while in the NBA? The collected snippets from the secondary data revealed themes and subthemes. The main theme for RQ2 was factors contributing to seeking help or not, and the subthemes were sociocultural factors, vulnerability and masculinity, contributing factors, therapeutic practices, and the role of the NBA. The themes and subthemes related to this research question emerged from the coding process, which identified the following codes: family structure, background, economic status of family, ethnicity, athletic identity, gender, current economic status, education, religion, stigma and masculinity, emotional struggles and vulnerability, emotional challenges, negative coping strategies, mental strain, traumas in childhood, media impact and influence, positive coping skills, introduction to therapy, current therapeutic strategies, therapeutic outlets, benefits of therapy, NBA impact and influences, organizational change, and services offered in NBA.

Theme: Factors Contributing to Seeking Help or Not

The main theme, which was identified through the snippets and subthemes related to players discussing their therapy experiences and exploring different ideas about what therapy services are, as well as reasons why they have not accessed services, was

addressed in RQ2. NBA18 in PT14 discussed the climate around mental health when they played, stating:

> You know, Chicago Bulls was way ahead of the game back in 1999. The climate of talking about mental health was a little bit stigmatized so even the corporations didn't understand how do you protect the player. At the same time help the player so you can help the organization without exposing anything that's going to make that player look weak or make that player feel disrespected because the media wasn't that sensitive.

Players discussed the preconceived ideas and stigmas around what therapy services are and how hearing from other players about what to expect has opened their minds to therapeutic techniques.

In PT15, NBA19 stated

> And I've said to my teammates, there's been times where I'm like, oh, man, I'm going to go to therapy. Like, yeah, I'm ready to go. It's the time now.
>
> I'm ready to do it. And every time I talk myself out of it, like, oh, nope, I just figured this out. I don't need to go. Like, and like, for me personally, I don't understand how somebody can push themselves to go to therapy. I have not been doing it. I identified that I probably needed to go. Like, to speak to somebody, maybe like, at least four years ago. We'll just stuff it. At least four years ago.
>
> I still haven't went. I talk myself out of it every time. Like, ah, you know what, I needed to go for this, this, and this thing. Nope, actually, this just happened. I'm fine. I don't need to go. I've talked myself out of it a million times. And, you

> know, I worry for people that may not be as mentally strong as I am, that may not have as tough skin as I have, that they deal with that same fear. Like, yeah, I need therapy. But find a way to talk themselves out of going. And they may not have this relationship, you know, where, like, you can call somebody and talk and, like, not get judged and just get it all out.

Sociocultural Factors

The subtheme of sociocultural factors was defined through a dialogue that explored how culture, community, and societal expectations influence Black NBA players' perceptions of mental health, including their roles, responsibilities, and historical context. The codes related to this subtheme included the following: family structure, background, economic status of family, ethnicity, athletic identity, gender, current economic status, education, and religion. NBA players discussed their perspective on finances and the influence this has. NBA19 in PT15 stated

> so I hit my mom to get the pay stub. And she's like, all right. Week go by, I hit her back. Like, ma, I still need to pay stub. Like, you know, and she's like, all right, I'll give it to you. So finally I get it. And my mom was making $16,000 a year, $16,000 a year. And then what I struggled the most with now is like, you know that. And so you almost feel obligated to help with anything because you now know that reality.

In PT1, NBA1 also discussed his family's economic status growing up :

> I remember growing up. Growing up, we didn't have a refrigerator. We had a cooler. Cooler. And every three, four days, we had to go to a gas station, get ice,

> fill a cooler up, keep the sandwich meat, keep the milk, keep the water cold. You know what I mean? And it's like, I come from that. You know what I mean? Not having furniture until I was 11 or 12 years old.

NBA players discussed the influences they experienced during their formative years. In PT1, NBA2 stated, “I think most of the things, when you grow up in the community you know, like we grew in, you probably you know we grew up in, you process things internally we don't really share our feelings.” College experiences were discussed by several players such as NBA1 in PT1:

> I think a lot of people don't even realize, how early, a lot of stuff for us starts, when we start to sweep a lot of our own emotions underneath the rug, and a lot of those emotions don't come out until later on where we may explode or you may see another side from us, and somebody may be like, 'Man, where that come from? Where did that stem from?' I think I dealt with that a lot going to college obviously, like I was shell shocked when I went to college bro, like, being grown up in Compton all of a sudden even though SC was 20 minutes away.

NBA players discussed the lack of exposure to therapy or learning how to deal with mental health issues. In PT4, NBA6 stated

> I just didn't embrace mental health. I didn't know what it looked like. I didn't see many examples of people, you know, going to therapy, and so I've also, also was very successful at every intersection in life. I had, like, to bust through and break through and become, and a lot of times when you're successful and you're climbing, you don't get to process what you've experienced, especially as athletes.

Players discussed the sociocultural factors that contribute to their viewpoints on mental health and seeking services. Many players discussed how these factors had a negative impact on their mental health and how they viewed mental health growing up.

Vulnerability and Masculinity

The subtheme of vulnerability and masculinity was defined by snippets discussing NBA players' feelings about vulnerability, societal pressures on masculinity, and the stigma surrounding men's mental health. This subtheme emerged from the codes of stigma and masculinity, emotional struggles and vulnerability, and emotional challenges. In PT4, NBA 6 discussed how men are taught not to cry: “as men, a lot of times, we're told to shut up, suck it up, be tough; when the first natural language that we speak is a cry.” NBA2 in PT1 discussed “we're not like, I always talk about, we're not, we don't know how to be vulnerable, it wasn't passed down to us.” In PT3, NBA5 stated, “So, I think that if it's not a therapist, then a friend, a family member, and just to be really vulnerable about your feelings. Like, everything that you're going through, like, get that out on the table.” In PT11, NBA14 discussed the perceptions from fans, stating:

> Why are athletes out making themselves so vulnerable and in clubs and drunk and doing all these things, right? Because they have so much to lose, right? But we don’t think any differently from you. We are just like you. We are as insecure as you may be.

In PT3, NBA5 discussed,

> I think it was a little bit of like I don't want people to judge me in these, you know, executive roles who like maybe people don't want to have me because I've

> been going through something, or maybe I wouldn't sign this next contract because… it's a sign of weakness, you know.

Many players discussed how the idea of discussing their issues was perceived as weak and how this was not what men are supposed to do. Players discussed how, once they started to be more vulnerable with others, they didn't feel like they carried as much. In PT1, NBA2 discussed being comfortable with showing vulnerability, stating,

> Since I retired from the NBA, one of my biggest things that's brought comfort to me is because, like, I'm okay with being weak then, like, cause you know, we don't want to be weak, but I'm actually got other men that I'm okay with being like, yo, I don't know this or, or, you know, someone telling me, 'Hey, you ain't doing X, Y, and Z. You should do that.' You know what I mean? Like we got that kind of relationship with my chef and be like, yo, you need to take care of this. You're focusing too much time over there.

Contributing Factors

The subtheme of contributing factors was defined by snippets about mental health triggers or issues presented in relation to NBA Players. In PT15, NBA1 stated, "nobody had a clue about this. So emotionally, the highs and lows that I was going through was beyond what outside people could ever understand." This subtheme emerged from the codes of negative coping strategies, mental strain, traumas in childhood, and media impact and influence. In PT9, NBA15 stated, "but the whole mental trauma I went through before that with five doctors taking away the only thing I loved in life besides my family, it was traumatic. It was traumatic for a 13- 14-year-old kid." The experiences and

traumas players have gone through on and off the court that contributed to having mental health issues were discussed by multiple players. In PT6, NBA8 stated

> Yes, I was depressed, man. And it's crazy because, you know, going through that time, it was tough. I always felt like I was by myself. You know, I didn't have anybody that I can call on, all the friends that I had, you know, you know, I think I was more embarrassed to even have those kind of conversations with them because I was always the guy that's cracking the jokes and, you know, laughing and having fun. You know, like, how am I supposed to transform myself to have these serious conversations with my friends? So I didn't feel and then, you know, I didn't trust anybody. Just being a professional athlete, you kind of block people off to be able to have those kind of conversations. So it was kind of like I was going through this process all alone. And that really, really made it tough on me.

NBA17 stated his traumas in trusting others in PT13: ”I had not one person in this motherfucker, like like that didn't steal, I don't know, I don't know nobody, not one motherfucker that ain't stole from me period.”

Several NBA players discussed the negative environments they grew up in and how they were not discussing mental health. NBA22 in PT18 discussed his upbringing and stated:

> And I was, you know, I was born in San Jose. Pops sold drugs. He was a butcher by day, sold drugs by night. So just kind of was introduced to the street life, saw drugs really heavy in the 80's. You know what I mean? And we had the party house, too. So, I was seeing people do what they do. At an early age, right um,

> you know I'm Italian and Black, um, so biracial but I really like can, you know, kind of grew up in the streets as you know, but my parents were, you know, I called them functioning drug addicts because we never went without, you know.

NBA22 in PT 18 discussed a contributing factor to his mental health, stating, “I just feel like it's just such a thing-there's just so much negative energy sometimes, it's overkill; yeah, it's just so much.”

Therapeutic Practices

The subtheme of therapeutic practices was defined by snippets discussing various forms of therapy and coping mechanisms that players have found helpful. This can include writing, therapy sessions, and other wellness practices. This subtheme emerged from the codes related to positive coping skills, introduction to therapy, current therapeutic strategies, therapeutic outlets, and the benefits of therapy. NBA18 in PT14 discussed how it’s important for everyone to have skills to address their mental health:

> As we know, there's a lot of horror stories of very successful people who commit suicide, become super depressed and these are like very wealthy, wealthy people. So, from that perspective, whether you're rich or poor, you need to have these tools, you know, something you can fall back on, right, and therapy should be one of them.

In PT11, NBA13 stated, “and it's, it wasn't until after I stopped playing that I went to therapy. And the first thing we talked about was, you know, how do you identify with your emotions.” NBA players have different experiences with therapy, as NBA2 stated in PT1:

> Who am I going to talk to about this? And that started my journey into what therapy was. And then once I got into therapy, then I realized there were so many other ways, you know, like then I was like, 'Oh, shit, I can now meditate.

In PT4, NBA6 discussed his therapy experience, stating,

> But therapy, therapy to me was a place where I really, really got a lot of healing. I spent four days in a mental institution. And for me, I didn't get healing there. But I got the epiphany there that I needed to do my work. So, you know, I appreciate that experience for that alone. The therapy process, in three weeks of therapy, I was able to dump off about 25 years of baggage that I had been holding on to, that I had never processed, allowed myself to feel, and that I was still carrying. And every time I would go to therapy, and I would drop off some of this baggage, I would feel a little lighter when I came out.

Players discussed what therapy means to them and how they can still maintain their sense of identity after consulting a therapist and addressing past traumas. Players discussed the benefits as well as the challenges they have experienced with therapy services.

Players are discussing what they have learned about therapy and various forms of therapy, as well as coping mechanisms that have been helpful to them. Players discussing therapy and therapy services can help other players broaden their understanding of mental health strategies and resources.

Role of the NBA

The subtheme of the role of the NBA was defined by snippets about the NBA's influence on players' mental health, including league policies, support resources, and

whether the environment encourages seeking help. This subtheme emerged from the codes related to the NBA's impact and influence, organizational change, and services offered within the NBA. NBA14 stated in PT11, “so, in being in my era of having of the people around you to talk to and use those professionals, and not have to feel some way of going to somebody's office because they were in-house already.” This addressed the change of having mental health providers accessible to players. NBA19 talked about his thoughts on seeking services in PT15:

> I've always said, and I've said this to my teammates, in front of my teammates before, the NBA had, you know, the NBA, they'll have a clinical psychologist come in and speak to the team and let you know, hey, if you need to speak, if you need therapy, we're a resource for you, blah, blah, blah. And in those meetings, I've said to my teammates, and every time the guy comes, I say, yo, can I get your card? Like, I'm going to reach out to you.

NBA24 in PT20 discussed how the NBA responded to his mental health disclosure, stating:

> My original story with the NBA was that I was one of the few players to get drafted, having spoken publicly about my struggles with anxiety. Prior to getting drafted, and because of that, there was huge questions during that draft cycle about mental health as a general topic, especially as it pertained to how the NBA community and specifically the NBA front office personnel viewed mental health as a character flaw or as a genuine medical condition.

NBA24 in PT20 further discussed his experience with the NBA organization after his mental health disclosure and how he was treated:

> For me, I was just happy to make it to get drafted at all, because given the narrative and the conversation around mental health, during that time, as it pertained to my draft stock, I was under the impression that it was totally possible I wouldn't get drafted at all for talking about my anxiety prior to the draft. And that kind of preempted me to really question the NBA as a microcosm of the overall global corporate community. And what were the implications of a young person like myself uh being expected almost to not be forthright about who I was about the things the things that I dealt with the the not only the things that I dealt with uh from a from a victim I need special treatment standpoint but like the things that I had dealt with and triumphed triumph right you know like when I came into the league it wasn't like I had uh needed special accommodations or anything like that at Iowa State where I had played my college ball.

NBA24 in PT20 continued to discuss his agreement:

> And when we went back and looked at the collective bargaining agreement, myself and my agent and my doctor, my family doctor, even some of their doctors from the NBA side were shocked to realize there wasn't a single mention of mental health in the entire collective bargaining agreement. There wasn't a single mention of mental health in the entire agreement. So that shot up red flags in my mind as a 21-year-old, because now I'm sitting there going, it doesn't seem like

this is by accident, but I'll play along. I mean, you know, in good faith, I'll play along.

NBA players discussed how the NBA approached and treated individuals who disclosed mental health issues. The NBA organization has developed policies and has addressed mental health awareness in new ways since some initial disclosures of players in the past. Players discussed their roles in continuing this work and moving the organization forward.

Results for RQ3

The third research question was the following: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of mental health disclosures? The collected snippets from the secondary data revealed themes and subthemes. The main theme for RQ3 was normalizing mental health during and post NBA careers, and subthemes were personal disclosures, mental health awareness, normalization of mental health conversations, and life after the NBA. The themes and subthemes related to this research question emerged from the coding process, which identified the following codes: personal growth and reflections, experiences speaking out and feedback received, perceptions of disclosures, disclosures while in NBA, personal mental health disclosures, learned about mental health, mental health perspectives growing up, mental health discussions in NBA, education on mental health, conversations about mental health, breaking the stigma, discussions with other players on mental health, teaching children about mental health, social change, activism, and personal responsibility after retirement.

Theme: Normalizing Mental Health During and Post NBA Careers

NBA18 in PT 14 discussed his experience by stating:

> You know, Chicago Bulls was way ahead of the game back in 1999. The climate of talking about mental health was a little bit stigmatized so even the corporations didn't understand how do you protect the player. At the same time help the player so you can help the organization without exposing anything that's going to make that player look weak or make that player feel disrespected because the media wasn't that sensitive.

The overall theme of normalizing mental health during and post NBA careers discussed how players are telling their stories to change the way mental health is viewed and to help others address mental health issues when they arise. These disclosers show how players feel the responsibility to use their platform to help others.

Personal Disclosures

The subtheme of personal disclosures was defined by snippets that discussed individual feelings of depression, struggles with emotional balance, and the personal journey toward seeking help, capturing personal narratives and reflections about mental health experiences and realizations, including moments when players shared their struggles and growth. This subtheme emerged from the codes of personal growth and reflections, experiences speaking out and feedback received, perceptions of disclosures, disclosures while in the NBA, personal mental health disclosures, learned about mental health, mental health perspectives growing up, and mental health discussions in the NBA. NBA6 in PT4 stated

> you know, you build up these walls. Another thing in my behavior is, you know, being promiscuous early in life is something that I, you know, had to overcome. But the PTSD didn't manifest until I was triggered, you know, at 32 years old. So I was able to manage the anxiety, self-care, you know. But when I got triggered, like those, those little techniques that I had, they were out of the door because that was too powerful for those little mild techniques to work on.

NBA22 in PT18 stated

> But, you know that's why I really feel like getting to the next point, cannabis has really helped me out, you know what I mean? Because as black men it's not it we it's just starting to the mental health thing is new but we were never like you talk you whine and you tell more than one person you're looking for attention you know what I mean like we don't really tell our how hard it is to go play a basketball game knowing that you're going through a divorce and haven't seen your kids in three months like they don't give a fuck about that like we pay you million the dollars you got to go out there and perform so if I didn't have weed I don't know what where I would have been or what would have happened um you know along my journey because it was the one thing that you know kind of kept me like okay, exhale, you know; see the big picture now, you know?

In PT19, NBA24 discussed how he fell into a dark place and stated:

> I threw all my NBA life savings into it, trying to save that hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars. And at the end, I wasn't able to save it. I had to finally close it down in 2018. And that took me into a world of depression and anxiety

> and suicidal ideations that I don't work on my worst enemy. I mean, this is 2018 was 12 months of just pure hell and darkness. And, you know, when I finally started to emerge out of that. The darkness started to lift a little bit. I regained a sense of purpose of what it is I can do with my life. I lost everything. I lost my home that I lived in for 40 years, lost my business, lost my life savings, my wife, my mom, my health, and lost everything except my life, which I was threatening to take at any moment at my own hands. But I made it through all of that at the end of 2018. And as that veil of darkness started lifting, I realized then that, hey, I still have a platform, a platform of a very community-minded person, a businessperson, a former professional athlete, a male, especially an African-American male, who can get out there and tell a story about what it is like to go through mental health challenges. And not even brought on by my own doing. It just was life events, one thing after another, that finally caught up with me and had me to the verge of taking my own life.

Players are discussing their mental health experiences and telling their stories about how they address their mental health issues. Players discuss the reasons they believe personal disclosures are essential, how they contribute to mental health awareness, and how they can help others.

Mental Health Awareness

The subtheme of mental health awareness was defined by snippets discussing the importance of mental health and the struggles players face, including the need for education about mental health within the community and among players. This

emphasizes the importance of understanding mental wellness as a critical aspect of life and performance. This subtheme emerged from the codes of learned about mental health, mental health perspectives growing up, mental health discussions in the NBA, and education on mental health. NBA6 stated in PT4

> I think a lot of times we're told within families, 'Shut up. What happens in this house stays in this house. You know, it never happened. Don't tell anybody our business.' And what happens is, you know, these cycles continue, not only in our families, but in our safe havens and schools and churches and all these places where it should be safe havens. So I wanted to make sure that I reached out.

NBA14 in PT11 discussed barriers to seeking services stating:

> And I think that's the barriers of a lot of people in my life. They don't want to go and talk to somebody because they think it's weird, or no, like we seek them; we have to seek these people out in our lives, now and now not in the basketball setting. I have to go seek out somebody to talk to and find out. Find a resource because that helps me be a normal human being.

NBA22 stated the following in PT 18 about discussing mental health:

> Like I said, we got to tell our stories. Like I said, we talked off-camera. But like I want to know: what it's like backstage? I don't know what it's like on the tour bus. I want to know what it's like.

In PT19, NBA24 discussed mental health awareness:

> So we need to do a better job of providing these kinds of resources and services to everybody, because you never know. You never know when your life is going to

> turn totally upside down, totally beyond your control. And then what? You know, and so my encouragement to everybody is to keep on hanging in there. Please, please don't give up. There is a tomorrow. There is a bright side.

Players discuss how mental health awareness starts with telling their own stories and using their platform to address mental health stigmas. Players discuss the mental health stigmas they have faced in their families and communities.

Normalization of Mental Health Conversations

The subtheme of normalization of mental health conversations was defined by snippets reflecting the NBA players' desire to normalize discussions around mental health to lower the stigma around mental health. This subtheme emerged from the codes of conversations about mental health, breaking the stigma, discussions with other players on mental health, and teaching children about mental health. NBA6 stated in PT4

> but I'll speak from my experience as a, as a member of the Black community. I think that, you know, less than 6% of Black men get therapy. So, a crazy number like that. Less than 6% of us get therapy. And I believe we come from some of the most traumatic experiences in this country. And I believe that there's so much room for healing if we, if we start embracing our mental health the way that we have embraced our physical health. And if we start, you know, kind of really locking in and diving in and trying to understand our experience, understand what we went through, understand what, what makes us hurt. I think it's a, it's a great opportunity for us to grow and get better and, you know, do a, do a, do a better job of just, you know, fighting that negative stigma of mental health.

NBA18 in PT 14 discussed how they talk about their experience to assist others, stating:

> so that's something that I always tell my story because I know for a fact, before me, it was athletes that was under stress, depressed, and indulging in different activities, whether it's marijuana or alcohol, during my time, and maybe even after my time.

NBA14 in PT11 discussed

> And I think that's the barriers of a lot of people in my life. They don't want to go and talk to somebody because they think it's weird, or no, like we seek them; we have to seek these people out in our lives, now and now not in the basketball setting. I have to go seek out somebody to talk to and find out. Find a resource because that helps me be a normal human being.

NBA14 in PT11 discussed the impact of the people around him:

> And I think that's the barriers of a lot of people in my life. They don't want to go and talk to somebody because they think it's weird, or no, like we seek them; we have to seek these people out in our lives, now and now not in the basketball setting. I have to go seek out somebody to talk to and find out. Find a resource because that helps me be a normal human being.

NBA players discuss how normalizing the conversation around mental health can continue to break down mental health stigmas and reinforce seeking help if needed, without the fear of being perceived as weak. Players even discuss how hearing about other players' mental health has helped them address some of their own issues.

In PT4, NBA6 stated,

> We believe that we can raise awareness around mental health. I believe the numbers are one out of every four young ladies. One out of every six young men are abused in this country as children, right? And there's about 30% that are like me who don't talk about it. And so I learned in doing my research and doing this work that if we equip our kids and if we equip people with the knowledge, they can help prevent some of these things.

Players are discussing the need to help others, not just their peers. Normalizing the conversations around mental health and coping skills can better arm younger people in not having to have similar experiences and prevent traumas from occurring.

Life After NBA

The subtheme of life after the NBA was defined by snippets discussing mental health in the context of life after their playing careers and the challenges of adapting to a new identity. This subtheme emerged from the codes of social change, activism, and personal responsibility after retirement. NBA6 discussed what he is doing after the NBA to continue mental health work in PT4, “we can give you a good positive message and give you some great tools to be able to, you know, help your family maybe, you know, prevent getting abused one day. And if you have been abused, what healing looks like.” Other players discussed how they give back by working with youth in youth camps. NBA8 player in PT6 stated

> I still do camps you know I’ll never be able to get away from you know basketball but the camps that I do is more than just basketball I like to get in and do the skills and drills and you know mentor these kids, but I also like to talk to them you

> know about decision making because you know the way the world is going right now

In PT18, NBA22 discussed how he gives back after retiring:

> But I just kind of felt like if I was ever fortunate enough to make it, that it's my job to give back and be a voice. And like I said, I told you, you know, in the first part of the interview, like the reason why I felt like I needed to speak up because I had been through so much crazy racism, hate. I mean, shit; we didn't even get into that I had been through. So I just felt like, you know, I was someone who was fortunate enough to make it. You know, let me utilize my platform and my voice because I know a lot of people that are just like me are going through the same stuff that don't have a voice.

NBA22 in PT18 discussed his life after retirement:

> And I felt like once I retired, I wanted to be an advocate for those guys so that they don't have to worry about it, because smoking weed in the NBA was like a whole 'nother job.

NBA24 in PT19 stated that he plans to give back after retirement, “by having a website and a platform that has all these resources attached to it, that I can help direct people to who are suffering from mental challenges of any sort.” NBA players discuss how they are engaging in mental health awareness and mental health services since leaving the NBA. Many players are continuing to discuss their personal responsibility for addressing mental health on larger platforms and starting or working with organizations in their home

communities further to support mental health changes through social change and advocacy.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the research demographics, reported the data collection process, discussed the data analysis process, and described the trustworthiness of the analysis process. I also presented the results of the data analysis by each research question. Secondary data from podcasts about the personal experiences of NBA players with mental health and mental health services were collected and analyzed. The data analysis process was described, and examples for each theme and subtheme based on the research questions were provided. The first research question was: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about the experiences of Black NBA players while in the NBA? The data revealed the following theme and subthemes for this research question: the main theme is the role of social/cultural environment on mental health perceptions, with subthemes of personal experiences and reflections, support systems, life and career balance, identity and public persona, and cultural stigmas. The second research question was the following: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of the sociocultural factors and their role in the players seeking mental health services while in the NBA? The data revealed the following themes and subthemes: the main theme is factors contributing to seeking help or not, and subthemes are sociocultural factors, vulnerability and masculinity, contributing factors, therapeutic practices, and the role of the NBA. The third research question was the following: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal

about Black NBA players' perceptions of mental health disclosures? The data revealed the following theme and subthemes: the main theme is normalizing mental health during and after an NBA career, with subthemes including personal disclosures, mental health awareness, the normalization of mental health conversations, and life after the NBA.

In Chapter 5, I will further discuss the study's purpose and nature, explain the study's research findings, and describe how they relate to current literature. I will interpret the research findings and how they relate to the theoretical framework used in this study. I will discuss any limitations and recommendations for future research. I will also discuss the positive implications for social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative secondary data study was to explore the experiences of Black NBA players regarding their mental health and the sociocultural factors that influenced their decision to participate in or not participate in mental health services, as revealed through a content analysis of podcasts featuring NBA players. Three research questions were explored during the analysis of the secondary data from the podcast transcripts: (a) What do podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about the experiences of Black NBA players while in the NBA?, (b) What do podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of the sociocultural factors and their role in the players seeking mental health services while in the NBA?, and (c) What do podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of mental health disclosures?

An inductive qualitative research design and a content analysis process were employed during the data collection and analysis. The results of the data analysis revealed three themes and 13 subthemes related to the three research questions. The themes and subthemes were derived from secondary data, including transcripts of podcasts in which NBA players participated, discussing their mental health experiences. The theme related to RQ1 was the role of the social/cultural environment on mental health perceptions and had five subthemes identified associated with this theme. The theme related to RQ2 was factors contributing to seeking help or not and had four subthemes that emerged. Initially, during the initial analysis process, there were five subthemes identified; however, after interpreting the data, it was clear that the subtheme,

contributing factors, was better explained as sociocultural factors and therefore, the two were combined into one subtheme. The quotes from the contributing factor subtheme in Chapter 4 are better identified as sociocultural factors, as further explained in the implication section of this chapter. The final theme identified, related to RQ3, focused on normalizing mental health during and post NBA careers, and four subthemes emerged. In this chapter, I present an interpretation of the findings, discuss sociocultural theory and emerging themes, outline the research limitations, offer recommendations, and explore the study's implications.

Interpretations of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative secondary data study was to explore the experiences of Black NBA players regarding their mental health and the sociocultural factors that influenced their decision to participate in or not participate in mental health services, as revealed through a content analysis of podcasts featuring NBA players. Sociocultural theory serves as the theoretical framework explored and applied in this study, supported by sociocultural findings related to the research questions. NBA players discussed how they felt about mental health and stigmas surrounding mental health were based on their social and cultural environments, and how personal disclosures and normalizing conversations around mental health can help reduce the stigma attached to mental health issues and seeking services. This section will identify the three main themes and 13 subthemes that emerged.

Theme 1: The Role of Social/Cultural Environment on Mental Health Perceptions

The first theme I identified from the research findings was the role of the social/cultural environment on mental health perceptions. This theme is related to the first research question. Five subthemes emerged under the central theme. The subthemes for this main theme were personal experiences and reflections, support systems, life and career balance, identity and public persona, and cultural stigmas. These subthemes examine how NBA players discussed their perceptions of mental health and how social and cultural norms, expectations, and perceptions of identity shaped these perceptions.

The social and cultural environment shapes how individuals perceive mental health, stigmas, coping strategies, and mental health services (Pester et al., 2023). Negative personal experiences, such as living in poverty, dealing with food insecurity, witnessing violence, or experiencing housing issues, will lead to more chronic stress, depression, and anxiety (Pester et al., 2023). In the podcasts, many of the NBA players discussed their personal experiences, including how they grew up in impoverished communities, growing up around drugs and violence, experiencing housing issues, being victims of abuse and violence, and facing different cultural expectations. Researchers have explored how cultural stigmas and social supports influence mental health-seeking behaviors (Harrison & Buscombe, 2023).

Many discussed how they did not grow up in environments where mental health was discussed, and talking to others about problems was discouraged. Some players discussed the support or lack thereof they experienced growing up, and how this shaped their thoughts. Players discussed how the media covered their mental health disclosures

and how their followers received them on social media. Media and social media play a significant role in shaping how players' personal experiences and disclosures are received by the broader community (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2024; Sherman, 2020). Players discuss how the media's response to their disclosures or those of other players influenced their public persona and how they were treated on social media. Players discussed within the Black community how they were taught cultural norms that negatively affected how they perceived mental health, such as how to be strong and tough, pray about problems, not to tell people their problems, and that issues stay within the house. These cultural norms supported mental health stigmas and contributed to mental health issues (Smith-Woods & Diggs, 2024; Turner et al., 2024).

The subthemes encompass personal experiences and reflections, support systems, life and career balance, identity and public persona, and cultural stigmas, all of which are related to the central theme of the role social and cultural environments play in mental health perspectives. The central theme and subthemes related to the research question are based on the intersection of community and cultural norms, race, masculinity, and systemic pressures that players discussed in their podcast appearances. These subthemes provide a comprehensive understanding of mental health perspectives through multiple cultural frameworks, as explored in further detail in this section.

Subtheme: Personal Experiences and Reflections

NBA players are leading the charge for mental health advocacy, and their personal experiences, as discussed, are changing the league's cultural landscape (Scott & McLean, 2022). NBA players discussed their mental health experiences on the public

forum of the podcasts, and some addressed the way they disclosed their mental health issues to the public. Players discussing their personal experiences in a social forum allow them to share their internal conflicts, struggles with identity, and enlightened moments regarding their mental health in their own words (Cassilo, 2022; Wilkerson et al., 2020). One player used social media to talk about his depression, other players have discussed their mental health experiences in books or podcasts, and another named his therapist in an acceptance speech. These disclosures have had mixed reviews from the public and the NBA. Cassilo (2022) discussed the differences between the mental health disclosures of two NBA players, how the public and media perceived them, and the effects this had on the players. One was a rookie and was critiqued and considered confrontational as he challenged the NBA's policies around mental health and how the framing of his disclosure negatively affected his mental health (Cassilo, 2022). The all-star player was treated as an advocate and seen as courageous and compassionate, fitting into a safer narrative without the systemic critique (Cassilo, 2022). Both players discussed their stories and showed a level of vulnerability that was shaped by the media (Cassilo, 2022; Parrott et al., 2020).

In this study, players discussed the courage, strength, and risks they take when talking about their mental health publicly; however, the benefits that come from these disclosures enable the conversation to happen and policies to change. It takes courage to share mental health struggles publicly, but there are risks involved for Black male athletes, which allows for a broader conversation about mental health (Parrott et al., 2020; Scott & McLean, 2022). Players discussed suffering in silence and the norm of

emotional suppression they experienced before their public disclosures. Black NBA players are both praised and policed when they make public disclosures, occupying a unique cultural space (Cassilo, 2022; Parrott et al., 2020). Players share why they chose to disclose their struggles to the broader public, as they wanted to seek help for themselves and help others in the process. Public mental health disclosures are challenging the norms of stoicism, masculinity, vulnerability, and performance (Parrott et al., 2020). NBA players' public disclosures challenge cultural norms and humanize the players, showing that mental illness can affect anyone (Scott & McLean, 2022). Players discussed how they grew up in environments that promoted silence when it comes to discussing mental health or addressing mental health issues, making public disclosures impactful towards cultural change.

Subtheme: Support Systems

The second subtheme that emerged from the research was their support systems. Players discussed how their support systems enabled them to navigate through difficult times and mental stressors. Players stated their support systems were often encouraging them to seek out mental health services and would continue to offer coping skills to address symptoms. Players discussed how the more vulnerable they were able to be with their support system, the better they felt mentally. Players who feel supported in their mental health are more likely to seek out mental health care and experience better outcomes from these services (Harrison & Buscombe, 2023; Pilkington et al., 2024). Some players discussed that their support system included NBA team mental health professionals, family, friends, teammates, coaches, significant others, and veteran

players. Athletes' willingness to seek mental health support is shaped by group norms, peer expectations, cultural identity, and team values (Reardon et al., 2023). Players discussed the conversations they had with their intimate partners that encouraged them to seek out mental health support. According to Eley et al. (2019), Black men are more likely to seek help when encouraged by female partners and through the insistence of their children, as well as when examining the issues elderly family members experience. Players discuss being the social supports for their kids and providing them with safe spaces to express their feelings, as well as encouraging therapy for their kids when needed.

Players also discussed the challenges they faced when they did not have a strong support system, and their families took advantage of them during their playing years, only seeing the player for what they could provide, and how this took a toll on their mental health. Researchers have discussed how family and peers have a significant influence on help-seeking behaviors, particularly among Black men (Eley et al., 2019). Players discussed the importance of being aware that not everyone's family is a source of support, and to build a support system around oneself that offers mutual benefits. For many Black male players, safe, supportive, and understanding spaces are absent for them to discuss or process their mental health struggles (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Friends and teammates can be a positive or negative influence when it comes to help seeking, as NBA players discussed on the podcasts. Players reported the encouragement they try to provide to other players they see struggling with mental health challenges. Other players discussed how they perpetuated the stigma around feeling it was weak when hearing

teammates discuss therapy in the locker rooms. Players who speak to media outlets focused on mental wellness are changing the conversation around mental health, which helps create stronger support systems for athletes (Cassilo, 2022). The cultural norms of players' support systems can significantly impact players seeking help, the stigmas they face, and play a crucial role in determining players' mental wellbeing.

Subtheme: Life and Career Balance

Balancing career and personal life has a significant impact on the mental well-being of professional athletes. NBA players discuss the challenges they face in balancing their personal and professional lives, including time commitments, career instability, traveling away from family, and breaking patterns established during their childhood. Life and career balance is the third subtheme identified from the research. There is an internal conflict between self-care and care for family, as well as professional commitment to their career, particularly under pressure to constantly improve their performance on the court (Cassilo, 2022; Reardon et al., 2023; Scott & McLean, 2022).

NBA players discussed how they are setting out to break generational cycles and support their families; however, the challenges this creates when raising their children and finding a balance between supporting their families financially and being present for them. Some players discuss how growing up without a father has challenged their emotional growth and stability, and they understand the importance of being present for their children. Other players discussed how fatherhood made them more focused as players and gave them a sense of purpose when playing. Players discuss the ways they communicate with their children, which is different from how they grew up, and they

discuss mental health challenges more openly with their children. Players discussed being more affectionate and expressing love more openly with their children than they experienced, and connecting with their children when traveling. Athlete fathers are becoming more emotionally available and supportive of their children, challenging the traditional views on masculinity (Brown & Pappous, 2023). Players discussed the mental health challenges they experienced within their careers, as playing took them away from family and isolated them at times when they felt their presence was needed. Athletes experience guilt, emotional exhaustion, identity conflicts, stress, and anxiety when spending time away from their children and missing milestones while providing for their family (Brown & Pappous, 2023).

Athletes face rigorous schedules that include training, travel, games, and sponsor commitments, which can contribute to mental health challenges when balancing family and personal life obligations (Pilkington et al., 2024; Robbins et al., 2020). NBA players discussed how there is little time for self-care or time for their interests during the beginning of their careers, even during the off-season. Players discussed the healthier habits they developed regarding career and life balance as their careers progressed, and after seeking therapy services. The researchers examined how work/life balance is challenging due to the amount of time a player is required to spend, including the time spent during the off season, which is short, players will focus on conditioning, rehabilitation, and other revenue streams such as sponsor deals, podcasts, or other interests to make money after the ball stops, leaving little time to personal relationships (Pilkington et al., 2024; Robbins et al., 2020).

Another challenge for life and career balance that NBA players discuss in their podcast interviews is the instability of their careers and how this negatively affects their mental health. Players discuss that traveling to play is only part of the issue, as moving to a new team means a geographical change in the home base. Additionally, as children get older and attend school, the decision to move the family when they are traded becomes more challenging. These trades often isolate a player from his relationships and family life (Pilkington et al., 2024; Robbins et al., 2020). These moves make it harder to participate in family life's milestones, create relationship strains, and lead to emotional depletion (Pilkington et al., 2024; Robbins et al., 2020). Injuries are a significant factor in discussions about career stability and can often challenge a player's mental health when they occur. Players discuss how being injured or injuries that ended their career had negative impacts on their mental health. According to research, it is suggested that mental health care needs to be integrated into rehabilitation programs for injuries, which can increase career stability (Rees et al., 2023). The balance of life and career for NBA players varies due to the cultural expectations of the player. The expectations around work and success can lead to mental health challenges and a lack of seeking help.

Subtheme: Identity and Public Persona

This subtheme refers to the player's identity on and off the court. There is an external image or expectation that players experience from the opinions of the public, fans, media, sponsors, and team organizations, which does not always align with a player's authentic identity (Pilkington et al., 2024; Robbins et al., 2020). This can create a performative factor of a player's persona, and players deal with scrutiny and

psychological distress as a result. Black athletes are expected to exemplify strength, endurance, dominance, stoicism, emotional control, and resilience, which limits a space for authenticity and vulnerability (Carter-Francique & Richardson, 2021; Chen et al., 2022). One NBA player discussed simply wanting to play basketball, but felt that this was not possible with all the expectations and opinions being discussed about him and his performances on the court. Several players discussed the challenges they faced and how they tried to play through their struggles, as that was what they were taught. Some players discussed not feeling "human" when it comes to public commentary and scrutiny after a bad game. Errors and missteps are scrutinized by the media without consideration of what may be happening off the court (Robbins et al., 2020).

Players become hyper-aware of their behaviors and words, fearing that any mistakes could go viral, and then have to field negative reactions from the press after games (Robbins et al., 2020). Players discuss how they have real-life factors and traumas that they are not discussing, like the example of NBA1 and his experience with his father's illness and passing, without ever mentioning this when it comes to his less-than-stellar performance on the court. Players often start to feel like their identity is limited to the sport they play, and the emotional toll this has on them can contribute to a sense of disconnection from their authentic self (Pilkington et al., 2024; Robbins et al., 2020; Sherman, 2020). According to researchers, public persona pressures can lead to burnout, anxiety, depression, isolation, and impostor syndrome (Robbins et al., 2020; Sherman, 2020). Some players have discussed that the more authentic they are to themselves and

don’t pay attention to public perceptions, the stronger their self-identity becomes and the fewer mental health stressors they experience.

Subtheme: Cultural Stigmas

The final subtheme identified from the research findings was cultural stigma and is supported by the literature, as Harrison and Buscombe (2023) discussed in their research that cultural stigma was a significant barrier for athletes when seeking mental health services and supports. NBA players discussed having similar feelings and shared how they learned to be strong, cope with problems alone, and suppress their emotions, all while navigating the intersection of their race, athletic culture, communities of origin, and societal expectations as men. Researchers discussed how professional athletes discussed their concerns around being considered weak or having their capability questioned by teammates, coaches, owners, and the public, and this led to not seeking out or accepting mental health support (Cassilo, 2022; Chen et al., 2022; Harrison & Buscombe, 2023; Rice et al., 2019; Wilkerson et al., 2020). Players stated they fought against these stigmas when deciding to disclose mental health issues and seeking support. These cultural stigmas become barriers for players who require more support and are unable to overcome them, getting stuck in a negative cycle. Players often sacrifice themselves for the sport or to win, to please the organization, and to be the best player; however, this can discourage personal disclosures (Pilkington et al., 2024; Wilkerson et al., 2020).

Players discussed their cultural background and the stigma around mental health and how this contributed to the lack of finding support. Many discussed how they never witnessed or were taught to deal with mental stressors; they were taught to push through

the pain, and that discussing issues with others is not acceptable. It is the traditional ideals of Black males' toughness and stoicism that contribute to individuals not seeking services traditionally in the Black community, exemplified by the athletic culture (Eley et al., 2019). Players discussed coming from Black communities, and these ideas were ingrained in them. They reported that their experiences living in impoverished communities, witnessing or experiencing traumatic events, and a common distrust of medical professionals have been a challenge historically to breaking these stigmas. Many athletes are unable to recognize mental health symptoms or will underestimate the gravity of their symptomology and have a lack of knowledge or experience related to treatment options (Gulliver et al., 2012). There can be a socioeconomic barrier preventing players from accessing services or hindering others from accessing services in their communities of origin. Many mental health strategies are not witnessed or learned, therefore, leaving athletes unable to alleviate symptoms in a healthy way (Gulliver et al., 2012). Players discussed using basketball as their coping strategy and taking things out on the court, which doesn't help if they are injured or retired.

Players discussed the basketball culture of fighting hard, not showing emotions, and playing through it, which contributed to not addressing mental health concerns. The hyper-masculinity norms of athletic culture delay players from seeking help until after retirement (Gulliver et al., 2012; Henriksen et al., 2019). Players discussed how they felt the pressure from family, community, and within the basketball organization to keep going and not to let anyone down. Players discussed the culture of athletes in the media and how it contributes to mental health stigmas. In the comparison of rookie players and

all-start players, the media coverage contributed to the viewpoints on mental health in the NBA (Cassilo, 2022). There is a lack of organizational accountability for the cultural disrespect of the players (Schinke et al., 2018). This lack of accountability can leave players feeling unprotected and unsafe when disclosing mental health issues (Schinke et al., 2018). Cassilo (2022) discussed how players like DeRozan were covered by the media as a model of healthy masculinity, which helps to normalize mental health disclosures and emotional openness without undermining athletic achievement

The primary theme identified from the research findings was the role of the social/cultural environment on mental health perceptions. This theme is related to the first research question: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about the experiences of Black NBA players while in the NBA? The subthemes of personal experiences and reflections, support systems, life and career balance, identity and public persona, and cultural stigmas related to the main theme of the role social and cultural environments play in mental health perspectives. The main theme and subthemes related to the research question are based on the intersection of community and cultural norms, race, masculinity, and systemic pressures that players discussed in their podcast appearances.

Theme 2: Factors Contributing to Seeking Help or Not

The second theme that emerged from the research was factors contributing to seeking help or not. This theme is related to the research question: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of the sociocultural factors and their role in the players seeking mental health services while in

the NBA? Initially, five subthemes were identified under the main theme; however, after further analysis, the subthemes of sociocultural factors and contributing factors were combined into a single sociocultural factor. The four subthemes discussed further in this section are sociocultural factors, vulnerability and masculinity, therapeutic practices, and the role of the NBA. These subthemes break down the factors that influence whether a Black NBA player will seek out mental health services.

Black NBA players are influenced by many factors when it comes to seeking help or not for mental health issues. Many Black men subscribe to the belief that mental illness is considered weak and shameful, which is a stigma driven further by athletic cultures (Willis & Neblett, 2023). The factors are broken down into the subthemes of sociocultural factors, vulnerability and masculinity, and the role of the NBA organization, which can contribute to players not seeking services. Therapeutic practices that NBA players have incorporated into their lives were discussed by the players, allowing them to learn more about therapy and dispel any preconceived notions they may have had about it can have a positive impact on other players seeking help. Black men report a level of expectations they experience, and when seeking services, they weigh out the accessibility, appropriateness, and acceptability of mental health services (Turner et al., 2024). This approach is hindered by the fears and cultural mistrust of providers as well as the stigma of weakness and masculinity traits (Turner et al., 2024). Mental health disclosures from teammates can help to reshape the cultural narrative around masculinity and vulnerability and will help to reduce the stigma of seeking mental health supports (Lateef et al., 2024). Therapeutic approaches discussed by other players can help alleviate

fears surrounding mental health services and increase understanding of what therapy entails for players skeptical of engagement (Bullock & Dijkstra, 2022). The NBA, as an organization, can influence the tone of players' openness when disclosing mental health issues, as well as the responsibility they carry concerning mental health programs and policies (Gunter et al., 2022; Keilty, 2025). These subthemes are further explored in the following sections, offering insight into the topics Black NBA players discuss in their podcast stories. These subthemes examine how players' decisions to seek help when experiencing mental health issues are influenced by the complex intersectionality of cultural and gender norms, therapeutic perceptions, and the organizations in which they are employed, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of help-seeking behaviors.

Subtheme: Sociocultural Factors

Sociocultural factors contributing to mental health include race, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, trauma, and athletic identity, and shape the coping strategies, help-seeking behaviors, and stigmas about mental health (Peterson et al., 2025). The healthier Black men are in terms of their emotional and physical wellbeing, the less impact education and income have on their mental health (McNeish et al., 2021). This is apparent in players who discuss having difficult upbringings and living in poverty, yet they exhibit stronger mental resilience and healthier outlooks on their mental and physical health. Other players have similar backgrounds and discuss how income, education, race, gender, and other sociocultural factors contributed to their mental health challenges.

Players discussed socioeconomic status as one of the sociocultural factors, and they shared their experiences from their formative years, exploring how these experiences contributed to their outlook on mental health. Players discussed how these negative experiences shaped their feelings of responsibility to take care of people as they start making money, and the pressures this created, contributing to negative mental health issues. Socioeconomic status plays a part in mental health challenges, as many players deal with expectations from others once they are playing professionally. Some players discuss the obligations and pressures they feel in helping family and friends, while others discuss the challenges they have faced when family and friends have stolen money or taken advantage of them financially. These experiences increase isolation, pressure, and depressive feelings. Players discussed how they are scrutinized by the public, as if their financial status prevents them from experiencing life's stressors. Players discussed the challenges and depressive feelings they experience after retirement due to the financial stressors. Mental performance is influenced by the socioeconomic status of athletes, who experience more intrusive thoughts, greater self-doubt, and overthinking (Singh & Boruah, 2024).

Race becomes a huge factor when considering sociocultural factors and mental health challenges. Black men experience both racial and gender bias as it relates to mental health and wellness. Researchers found that the intersection of gender and race for Black men is a unique stressor contributing to psychological distress, and attitudes of one's own racial identity can increase or decrease the amount of psychological impact

(Loiseau & Mahalik, 2025). NBA players discuss the stereotypes they had to overcome in order to seek mental health support from family or professionals.

Religion is a part of many NBA players' experiences, both in positive and negative ways. Some players discuss the mental trauma they experienced by being a part of organized religion and the experiences they endured, and other players discuss their faith in praising God for the blessings they have experienced in life. Some players discussed their experiences withstanding in their faith and the backlash they received while in the NBA, and how this hurt their mental health and career. In most podcast interviews with NBA players, religion is not discussed in depth or as a primary focus; however, several players mention their faith and how it is an integral part of their mental well-being. Some players discussed speaking to their pastors rather than a mental health professional. Recognizing the Black church and its influence and impact on Black men is crucial when examining the role of spiritual guidance, emotional support, and a safe space for growth in promoting the mental health of Black men (Smith-Woods & Diggs, 2024). Players discussed maintaining the tradition of attending church when they traveled or as part of their routine while playing, and after they left the league.

Education is a sociocultural factor that many players discussed in their experiences, and how this played a part in their mental health and support-seeking behaviors. Players discussed the pressures they felt when attending top-tier universities for basketball and the challenges they endured. Universities can contribute to the negative mental health of athletes through systemic racism, "play through it" mentality, and a lack of support in practice around mental health (Weiser & Wilson, 2023). Players discussed

how, in college, the pressure to perform and feeling out of sorts in these environments can be overwhelming. Players discussed the challenges of going from college to the NBA. The culture at top NCAA universities has a deep-rooted culture of toughness, discipline, and high performance expectations that normalizes mental health stigmas and silences players due to a lack of personal support (Weiser & Wilson, 2023).

Athletic culture is a sociocultural factor that can have a negative impact on the mental health of NBA players and their help-seeking behaviors. NBA players discuss the high level of expectations and standards held for them, which are unlike those of their non-athletic peers or family members. Players often report that once they become aware of their skills and talents, things start to change for them. As expectations rise, those who enter the professional or elite level of play are met with higher expectations, public scrutiny, and lifestyle changes that many are not prepared for, which can negatively impact their mental health (Pilkington et al., 2024). As NBA players, there is a cultural expectation to be strong, tough, and have a level of resilience, which aids in the stigmatization of mental health struggles and fears related to speaking out or seeking help (Cosh et al., 2024; Harrison & Buscombe, 2023).

These sociocultural factors influence how players experience their emotional and physical health. They explain how external belief systems can either positively or negatively affect help-seeking behaviors. The impact of sociocultural factors has been documented in prior research and is further supported by this current study. Cultural norms and values shape perspectives on mental health and can either facilitate or hinder help-seeking behaviors.

Subtheme: Vulnerability and Masculinity

The topic of vulnerability and masculinity among NBA players was explored during the podcast interviews, and many players shared their intersectional viewpoints as Black men, discussing the extra pressure they face as Black men, which involves suppressing emotions and maintaining a tough and stoic demeanor to be perceived as masculine (Sherman, 2020). Many players discussed the high levels of vulnerability it takes for players to discuss their mental health issues or discuss being in therapy. Some players discussed how they feel players are making themselves vulnerable in a physical way as well, as they are out drinking and partying. Other players discuss how they have learned that they can be mentally vulnerable as they discuss their mental health struggles with close friends and family and change the idea of what masculinity means. One aspect of vulnerability is related to factors contributing to mental health issues, and the other aspect of vulnerability are related to addressing mental health issues. Black men often lack safe spaces where they can express vulnerability and concern about perceptions of being perceived as soft, weak, or unstable (Sherman, 2020; Watkins et al., 2024). Players who speak publicly about their mental health journeys are faced with a mixed response of support and attacks that support the stigmas around mental health (Cassilo, 2022; Parrott et al., 2020).

Players discussed masculinity and the expectations they feel they need to live up to, as well as the limitations this imposes on emotional vulnerability. Black men face a societal expectation of being “strong,” and any form of emotional expression is often discouraged or met with criticism (Cofield, 2024; Watkins et al., 2024). Players discuss

the negative messages they received from a young age and how this plays a role in how they are perceived as they deal with more issues and stressors. Payers discussed the messages of being taught not to cry or being told to be tough and never being taught when and how to express the things they are dealing with, which can lead to anger, addictions, and other mental health challenges. Players discussed the fears associated with letting these built-up emotions out, feeling like they would be considered a "bitch" and lose their competitive edge. Research shows that when Black men, especially, hold on to a traditional way of thinking about masculinity and "being a man," the more negative the attitude is towards mental health supports (Johnson et al., 2024; McNeish et al., 2021; Stafford, 2025). Research suggests that challenging traditional norms around masculinity can lead to changes in the stigma and societal definition of masculinity (Cassilo, 2022; Parrott et al., 2021; Sherman, 2020). Players discussing their mental health on podcasts and in other public ways has an impact on their societal definition of masculinity and seeing men being vulnerable as a positive and masculine trait.

Subtheme: Therapeutic Practice

The third subtheme identified from the research findings was therapeutic practices, which were discussed by players in both traditional and nontraditional ways. Players discuss the positive impact they have experienced when participating in therapeutic services and the ongoing therapeutic practices they have incorporated into their everyday lives. Other players discuss their fears about therapy and misunderstandings about what therapy practices entail. Black men have high reports of psychological distress; however, they are still underrepresented in seeking mental health

care (Turner et al., 2024). Players discuss the enhanced abilities, both athletically and otherwise, that they have experienced since participating in therapy services and incorporating therapeutic practices. Some players acknowledged the importance of consulting with various clinicians before finding the “right fit” and achieving positive outcomes. Players discuss the fears surrounding participation in therapy and how it might affect their edge when playing. Learning more self-management skills can help players in minimizing mental health symptoms (Rice et al., 2019).

Research has discussed how positive expectations regarding mental health treatment or a commitment to therapy can lead to better outcomes (Turner et al., 2024). Players discussed how they felt once in treatment, and being able to release and understand the experiences contributing to their mental health challenges. There are community-driven mental health initiatives that are enhancing the mental well-being of Black men and lowering mental health issues for participants (Smith et al., 2024). Players discussed the programs they have formed to educate their communities about mental health and mental health practices. Programs specifically designed for Black men or clinicians with cultural competencies have a more positive impact on outcomes (Williams et al., 2022). The research and players’ podcast discussions support the importance of learning and teaching mental health therapeutic strategies to better support athletes in the challenges they face. Players exposed to culturally relevant and effective therapeutic methods have increased their help-seeking behaviors, as have their peers.

Subtheme: Role of the NBA

The role of the NBA was a subtheme that emerged in relation to Research Question 2 and the main subtheme of factors related to seeking services. Players discussed the NBA's changes to its policies, including the inclusion of mental health professionals in team staff and the provision of mental health service options for players. In 2023, the NBA established clearer procedures regarding mental health, including defined timelines for mental health leave, transparent communication, and encouraging collaborative approaches (Keilty, 2025; Sherman, 2020). Players discussed the changes that have occurred over time in the league regarding mental health and the support players receive. Players discuss how the NBA organization is more accepting of players discussing their mental health issues publicly, whereas before they would fear their career ending or money being withheld. In 2018, there was a notable increase in public mental health disclosures by NBA players, which has continued to rise steadily every year (Kamal et al., 2020). In 2019, the NBA had staffing mandates for mental health awareness and support for players (Kamal et al., 2020). The purpose of these changes is to foster a more supportive mental health environment within the league, supporting both players and the organization (Keilty, 2025; Sherman, 2020).

Players also discussed the support the National Basketball Players Association has led in changing mental health policies and how players receive additional support before and after retirement. In 2017, the NBPA established its own mental health program, which Dr. William Parham later led. According to Pintoon (2025), the union stated that it would pay for teams to have mental health clinicians on staff, prioritizing players'

confidentiality. The NBPA is the union that protects players and former players, and it has been a trendsetter in its mental health policies since 2023 (Keilty, 2025).. The union has focused on changing policies to be more inclusive of mental health needs and promoting mental wellbeing as part of athletic performances (Keilty, 2025).

The NBA's positive responses to the mental health challenges and disclosures of players influence the cultural dynamics around mental health conversations (Kamal et al., 2020). Players continue to advocate for mental health, and the impact of their disclosures is changing NBA policies surrounding them. The NBA Cares program, Mind Health, focuses on mental health awareness and community outreach (Lee et al., 2021). The NBA has an impact on players seeking mental health services and destigmatizing mental health issues and they can use their platform to further this impact and create a more supportive environment for players.

Theme 3: Normalizing Mental Health During and Post NBA Career

The third research question was the following: What did podcast episodes on mental health issues reveal about Black NBA players' perceptions of mental health disclosures? The collected snippets from the secondary data revealed the following theme: normalizing mental health during and post NBA career. NBA players discussed in their podcast appearances the need for normalizing conversations about mental health and seeking help. Players discuss the fact that mental health awareness has increased; however, there is a need for more personal discussions about experiences, and for players to be able to discuss their experiences without fear of affecting their careers. Players discussed the positive impact they have experienced from seeing other players openly

discuss their mental health. Research suggests that when teammates openly discuss mental health, it creates a shift in athletic culture and supports help-seeking behavior by normalizing these experiences (Cosh et al., 2024; Sherman, 2020). Four subthemes were identified under the main theme: personal disclosures, mental health awareness, normalizing mental health conversations, and life after the NBA. These four subthemes are discussed further in this section.

Subtheme: Personal Disclosures

Research indicates that high-profile athletes who discuss and disclose their mental health issues have contributed to an overall shift in the public view of their experiences, resulting in a more positive and impactful outcome for the athletes and the normalization of mental health (Billings & Hardin, 2023; Sherman, 2020). Several players were on podcasts specifically to discuss mental health and share their own experiences. Players discussed the importance of speaking or writing about their experiences, and they found that this act is therapeutic for them. Personal disclosures continue to normalize mental health and combat the cultural pressures that athletes face, encouraging openness (Sherman, 2020; Walton et al., 2019). Disclosures allow players to take control of their narratives and can be empowering, fostering solidarity among their peers (Sherman, 2020). Players discuss their reactions to mental health disclosures of teammates or peers and how this allowed them to find comfort in the experiences they were going through at the time. Some players discussed what they have learned about mental health from other players. Players discussed viewing these public disclosures as empowering and having a better understanding of their colleagues or friends.

Researchers have pointed out the progression of more athletes across several professional sports disclosing their mental health issues and seeking treatment (Billings & Hardin, 2023; Sherman, 2020). The conversation around the importance of mental health disclosures allowed players to vocalize their stigmas prior to the number of professional athletes disclosing their mental health journeys. Some players discussed how far public support and organizational support have come due to the personal disclosures of athletes over the years. Some players' experiences were vastly different due to disclosures happening at a time when mental health was not a topic of conversation, and the stigmas were at a heightened state. The way these disclosures are viewed through today's lens is evident in how mental health is discussed when current players make personal disclosures.

Subtheme: Mental Health Awareness

Players discussed the awareness and sometimes lack thereof, they have as professional athletes, about mental health issues and services. Research has shown that mental health awareness has increased over the last several years; however, awareness alone is insufficient to promote active engagement in mental health services among professional athletes (Rice et al., 2019; Sherman, 2020). Public disclosures from NBA players have contributed to the development of policies and procedures for mental health advocacy, as well as increased awareness of mental health in the media, particularly on social media (Kamal et al., 2020; Sherman, 2020). Players discussed the influence they felt from their peers who spoke out publicly and how this allowed them to feel more

comfortable addressing their issues and changing the way they viewed stigmas, which had previously promoted silence.

Mental health awareness is a crucial first step; however, it is also important to advocate for athletes in learning self-management skills, training other professionals in recognizing and responding to mental health concerns, and providing access to multidisciplinary teams that can support athletes with mental health needs (Rice et al., 2019; Sherman, 2020). Players discuss the conversations within the NBA and the changes they have seen since entering the league, and how they feel that players speaking out have been a significant contributing factor.

Subtheme: Normalization of Mental Health Conversations

Normalizing mental health conversations has become a leading factor in breaking the stigma and creating supportive environments for athletes. Players who have publicly disclosed their mental health issues and their experiences with therapy discuss how they tell their stories to normalize this conversation and are trying to help others in need. About 22% of athletes seek out mental health supports (Cosh et. al., 2024). Players discussed how they encourage younger teammates to seek out therapeutic services when they notice a teammate struggling. Discussing mental health in the same ways teams and organizations discuss physical health helps reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and fosters a culture shift (Cosh et al., 2024).

Players discuss having conversations about mental health in locker rooms and further engaging with younger players who appear to be struggling once they enter the league. When coaches and teammates normalize mental health conversations, there is a

significant increase in players' willingness to seek out mental health services (Cosh et al., 2024). Some of the players have started podcasts, created 504 organizations, and written books around mental health and mental health conversations in the hope of helping others. Research discusses the need for sports media to include mental health narratives in their coverage, as this can significantly destigmatize mental health issues for athletes (Billings & Hardin, 2023).

Subtheme: Life After the NBA

The fourth and final subtheme identified from the research findings was life after the NBA, as many players have discussed how they are currently leading organizations or non-profits that work with kids and mental health. These after-retirement paths have allowed players to redefine their purpose and identity off the court. Players discussed feeling lost and unsure of their direction immediately after leaving the league, as life changes drastically. Many players experience an increase in depression and anxiety after retiring from the league (Turkoglu & Hosver, 2020). Players often struggle with identity loss after retirement, as they usually identify strongly with their sports persona, leaving a lack of purpose once they retire (Turkoglu & Hosver, 2020). Players discussed entering the league at a young age and feeling unprepared for the fame or fortune they experienced, and how this led to feeling unprepared after leaving the league. Players also discussed that retiring was the catalyst for facing the mental health issues and financial hardships they were experiencing, as they did not have basketball as a coping mechanism anymore.

Many players do not leave the league by choice but rather leave before they are ready due to injuries. Chronic pain and physical limitations contribute to depression, anger, and isolation, causing many retired players to have more mental health challenges than when playing (Khan et al., 2020). There are limited resources for post-career support and mental and medical services offered to players, and over 50 percent of players leave the league with significant injuries (Khan et al., 2020). Given the high number of injured players and the correlation between chronic pain and depression, it is important for resources to support players after retirement. Many players have discussed how the NBPA now offers programs to support players in retirement, help them find alternative career paths, and provide mental health resources. Players with plans and purpose outside of their playing years have more opportunities for a successful retirement (Keilty, 2025). The NBPA is taking steps to prepare players for life outside the league while they are still in the league, aiming to facilitate smoother transitions for players.

Players continue to contribute to the mental health conversations in many ways and to lower the stigma and normalize mental health conversations. Normalizing mental health conversations has become a focus for many players, which contributes to reducing the stigma attached to mental health, but it changes the sociocultural norms of being masculine and vulnerable as well. Players discuss how they continue to encourage others to seek help and discuss their mental health with others they can trust.

Sociocultural Theory and Emergent Themes

Sociocultural theory was applied in this study, as the themes and subthemes that emerged were representative of key arguments within the theory. Sociocultural theory's

key concepts are social interaction, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), cultural tool and mediation, language and thought, and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978). The key concepts reveal how social, cultural, and communicative contexts influence mental wellbeing, identity, and help seeking behaviors (Gulliver et al., 2012).

The sociocultural theory's concept of social interactions refers to the ways in which individuals are influenced by their interactions with others, which can have either a positive or negative impact (Vygotsky, 1978). The sociocultural theory's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the range between what a person can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). Mental health challenges can be lowered when individuals use therapeutic supports or guidance from peers, versus trying to manage challenges on their own. The sociocultural theory's concept of cultural tools and mediation refers to how individuals understand and manage their world through language, symbols, and norms (Vygotsky, 1978). Sports culture values emotional suppression, stoicism, and toughness, which contributes to cultural stigmas (Gulliver et al., 2012). Cultural stigma or beliefs shape how individuals recognize, perceive, and approach mental health symptoms and seek help (Turner et al., 2024). The sociocultural theory's concept of language and thought refers to the role of language in thought development and emotional regulation, as well as how personal disclosures, storytelling, and dialogue can contribute to changing one's thoughts (Vygotsky, 1978). Encouraging an open dialogue about mental health within cultural environments will help athletes identify and normalize their experiences (Etzel & Watson, 2021). The sociocultural theory's concept of scaffolding refers to how temporary

support structures can enhance the development of coping strategies in individuals, ultimately leading to more independent thought or behavior (Vygotsky, 1978). Support from mental health providers can provide scaffolding, and over time, an athlete will internalize the coping skills they learned from others, which increases their resilience (Turner et al., 2024). These concepts are validated by the themes and subthemes that emerged in this research.

The theme and subthemes related to research question one were the role of the social/cultural environment on mental health perceptions, with five subthemes: personal experiences and reflections, support systems, life and career balance, identity and public persona, and cultural stigmas. These themes and subthemes are related to all five of Vygotsky's sociocultural concepts. Mental health development and perceptions are shaped through social and cultural experiences, connecting to the concepts of cultural tools and mediation, as well as social interaction (Gulliver et al., 2012). In professional sports, cultural norms have shaped how NBA players experience mental health challenges. Black NBA players face additional cultural pressures related to race, masculinity, and emotional suppression (Gulliver et al., 2012). Personal experiences and reflections, which lead to disclosures, are a form of social modeling that has challenged cultural stigmas and expanded what is considered acceptable within the different cultures of the player. Support systems can scaffold emotional openness and impact perceptions and seeking help for athletes in a positive or negative way. Social learning occurs through dialogue and modeling behaviors (Vygotsky, 1978). Life and career balance issues can be influenced by sociocultural expectations around performance and productivity, leaving

little downtime and creating emotional stressors for NBA athletes (Henriksen et al., 2019). These cultural norms and internalized tools lead athletes to prioritize their careers over their emotional and mental wellbeing (Henriksen et al., 2019). Sociocultural theory highlights the socially constructed and culturally embedded nature of mental health perspectives of NBA players.

The theme related to research question two was factors contributing to seeking help or not, and four subthemes emerged: sociocultural factors, vulnerability and masculinity, therapeutic practices, and the role of the NBA. Cultural norms, internalized beliefs, and support within players' ZPD influence seeking mental support or suppressing mental health challenges (Gulliver et al., 2012; Turner et al., 2024). Black NBA players face an intersectionality of sociocultural influences and expectations that shape their perception of therapy or therapeutic practices (Gulliver et al., 2012; Turner et al., 2024). Black NBA players have internalized cultural norms and tools that inhibit vulnerability and support emotionally suppressive masculinity, which, through social modeling, is starting to change, showing that vulnerability can be a masculine trait (Carter-Francique et al., 2020; Sherman, 2020). Scaffolding and ZPD are applicable to therapeutic practices, as therapy assists NBA players through unfamiliar emotional situations and teaches coping strategies that players would not have been able to find without support (Etzel & Watson, 2021; Henriksen et al., 2019). Language and thought are connected to therapeutic practices as these concepts assist with emotional awareness and reshaping negative self-talk (Etzel & Watson, 2021; Henriksen et al., 2019). The NBA and NBPA mental health programs serve as scaffolds for change, helping to model the cultural shifts

within the organization (Etzel & Watson, 2021). These programs and player disclosures support a change of systemic stigma and allow for vulnerability; however, more is needed in these areas (Etzel & Watson, 2021).

The final theme and its subthemes, related to research question three, focused on normalizing mental health during and after NBA careers. Four subthemes emerged: personal disclosures, mental health awareness, normalizing mental health conversations, and life after the NBA. The concepts of sociocultural theory related to this theme and subthemes are social interactions, cultural tools and mediation, ZPD, and language and thought. As more athletes openly discuss their mental health experiences, there is a shift in the cultural norms of mental health and a stigma reduction, which normalizes others' experiences (Etzel & Watson, 2021; Sherman, 2020). Public platforms become cultural tools for normalizing mental health conversations (Cassilo, 2022; Etzel & Watson, 2021; Sherman, 2020). Players who speak on their mental health, socially modeling openness, which influences the ZPD of other players (Cassilo, 2022; Etzel & Watson, 2021; Sherman, 2020). Normalizing the mental health conversation acts as a cultural tool that is reshaping perspectives around mental health and seeking help.

Limitations of the Research

Secondary data has limitations when it comes to research; however, there are steps to help mitigate these limitations. The secondary data research limitations include lack of control, contextual information, and limited depth of information (Cheong et al., 2023; Gibson & Brown, 2009). The use of podcasts as a secondary data source in qualitative research has increased over the last few years, particularly in fields such as

mental health, sports studies, and sociocultural analysis (Cheong et al., 2023). Podcasts, as a secondary data source, are subject to the same limitations, as well as ethical considerations, contextual limitations, analytical challenges, and representation and bias (Cheong et al., 2023).

To mitigate the limitation of a lack of control in secondary data, the selected podcasts had to meet the specified selection criteria (Cheong et al., 2023). They were chosen based solely on these criteria, rather than on the specific players themselves. There were several shorter podcast interviews with players who have publicly discussed their mental health challenges; however, due to not meeting the selection criteria related to the length of the podcast, these interview appearances could not be utilized.

The additional limitation in secondary data is the limited depth of information. The limited amount of information can be a limitation due to the initial focus of data collection, mainly if more structured questions or a summary of the information provided by the data source were used (Gibson & Brown, 2009; Kulkov et al., 2024). To mitigate this limitation in this research, the data collected adhered to the selection criteria, which included the length of the podcast and the discussion of mental health by the NBA players themselves. Podcast interviews that were shorter or focused more on other topics were eliminated from the selection process.

The lack of context limitation in secondary data refers to the limited information about the contextual background of the podcast interview. The lack of full context can impede the depth of data interpretation and analysis (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Researchers using podcasts as a data source may have a limited understanding of the

background, setting, and tone of the conversation, as well as the meaning behind the participants' statements (Gibson & Brown, 2009; Kulkov et al., 2024). Podcasts can also be edited and produced to promote a specific agenda or commercialized product (Cheong et al., 2023). To minimize this limitation in this research, some contextual data were collected on the background of the guests to understand the context of the podcast interview better. Podcasts promoting commercialized products were excluded from the selection process to minimize any perceived promotional bias. The use of more complementary secondary data could have provided a better context for this research, such as written articles and a comparison of media interviews, which should be a consideration for future research.

Podcasts, as a secondary data source, have limitations related to ethical considerations, analytical challenges, and representation and bias (Cheong et al., 2023). The limitation of using podcasts as a secondary data source has some ethical concerns, as participants may be unaware that their interviews will be used in academic research. The ethical issue of public or private data in the context of podcasts is somewhat mitigated by the fact that podcast content is intended for public consumption and is publicly accessible to consumers (Cheong et al., 2023; Gibson & Brown, 2009). The podcasts used for this research were compiled from public sources. Podcasts used in this study were publicly available. Publicly available podcasts typically have not obtained consent from the participants to use the interviews for academic research (Gibson & Brown, 2009). To address these ethical issues, this study maintained the confidentiality of the NBA players and the podcast by using coded names for each and providing a layer of anonymity.

Mitigating this ethical concern, mainly when podcasts discuss sensitive topics, involves treating the content as sensitive and anonymizing both content and participants (Cheong et al., 2023). Podcast titles, player names, and identifying information were concealed to ensure anonymity, as consent could not be obtained. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, maintaining the anonymity of the podcast and its participants helps protect the interviewees' privacy and mitigates the potential risk of harm to the participants (Cheong et al., 2023; Gibson & Brown, 2009).

A limitation of using podcasts as a secondary data source is the analytical challenges posed by transcription practices, coding frameworks, and the lack of control over the data (Cheong et al., 2023; Kulkov et al., 2024). These challenges were mitigated by using transcription tools, which were then manually reviewed to ensure accuracy, tone, and non-verbal cues. The use of a content analysis framework and codebooks ensured that the analysis framework was grounded in established qualitative methods. The acknowledgment of a lack of control over the data has been stated; therefore, the depth and clarity of the information are limited, and the findings are considered more interpretative rather than definitive.

A limitation of this study, due to the use of podcasts as a secondary data source, is the potential bias and representation in podcast content. Podcasts are created for various reasons, but typically have specific goals set by the host or creators (Cheong et al., 2023; Kulkov et al., 2024). Hosts and creators usually have a predetermined agenda and frame the topics of their podcasts, often inviting specific guests to align with their own objectives, which may not align with those of the researchers and can limit representation

(Gibson & Brown, 2009; Silverman, 2006). To address the bias and representation in podcast content, an evaluation of the diversity of podcast perspectives and a critical examination of the framing of podcasts are necessary (Cheong et al., 2023; Silverman, 2006). In this study, during the selection process, several different podcasts were utilized, focusing on a range of guests from various hosts and creators to minimize bias and ensure diverse representation.

The last limitation to this study is researcher bias, as researchers using podcasts rely on their interpretations since the depth and comprehensiveness of the interview are limited (Gibson & Brown, 2009). One aspect of research bias stems from the researcher's race and gender. Steps were taken to address any bias as a White female; there may be information that could have been captured by a Black male researcher with a sports background, especially if interviewing participants. Research reports that Black men are more engaged and receptive to research experiences when working with a researcher of a similar racial and gender identity (Smith & Jones, 2023). In this research, I reflected on my own biases, perspectives, and experiences as I analyzed the data. This issue could have been addressed by employing multiple analysts or utilizing peer debriefing to mitigate further research bias (Gibson & Brown, 2009). These were not options in the current study but should be considered in future research.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations for future research, based on research observations, which include the following: exploring athletes' lived experiences, conducting longitudinal studies on the mental health of NBA players, and investigating

the role of mental health professionals, especially sports social workers, in supporting NBA players. Further research is needed to establish firsthand accounts of individuals lived experiences. Individuals lived experiences would provide additional data and information that can be documented for the sport of basketball and the differences in cultural experiences (Andrews et al., 2008; Hill & Burrows, 2017). Longitudinal studies on the mental health of NBA players would be a key area for future research. A longitudinal study could follow NBA players from their rookie year to post-retirement, examining the mental health challenges they experience at various stages of their careers and lives. A further research opportunity to enhance understanding of mental health in NBA players is to explore the role of mental health professionals, particularly sports social workers, in supporting them. This research could expand the knowledge of supporting athletes' mental health through the perspective of the mental health providers (Gill, 2008).

Implications

This research has implications for positive social change. These findings build upon existing research and support the need for culturally informed interventions, particularly for elite athletes. The need for social work advocacy at the macro level in sports, as well as the continued need to educate professionals working with professional or elite athletes (Newman et al., 2022; Newman et al., 2019). According to research, approximately 84% of clinicians in the US are white, and by addressing racial disparities and dynamics, clinicians can enhance the outcomes of mental health treatment with

athletes (Williams et al., 2022). The importance of cultural competencies for clinicians is crucial in providing the best support for professional athletes in therapy.

This study's findings contribute to a clearer understanding of how sociocultural factors have influenced the mental health discussion and help-seeking behaviors of NBA players. This understanding highlights the need for specific cultural competencies when working with Black professional athletes, which is more pronounced for particular sports, and the policies can vary significantly among these sports. This can also underscore the need for the NBPA and the players' union to prioritize cultural competencies and mental health programming, as well as establish connections with other sports unions, to best support players. This discourse can help shape organizations to become more inclusive in mental health language and policies (Wiggins & McCreanor, 2023).

Previous research has primarily focused on elite athletes or specific sports other than basketball. These studies have shown that NBA basketball players and the NBA continue to develop support for players and address the unique aspects of one of the most popular and publicized sports in the US. While all sports have systemic issues related to racism, the NBA is taking steps to support social justice, as players have advocated for change by protesting during games (Thomas & Wright II, 2021). The NBA still struggles with systemic racism, and players experience hate speech online. The unique experiences that NBA athletes have are worth exploring further, as racial injustices affect the mental health of players.

Based on the results of this study, the plausible implications for social change are normalizing the conversation around mental health, allowing individuals to seek help

without the idea of appearing weak. Normalizing mental health conversations in sports can help reduce the cultural stigma and promote a culture where seeking help is viewed as a sign of strength (Cosh et al., 2024; Stevens et al., 2024). Normalizing mental health conversations in the team environment can encourage athletes to openly discuss their mental health experiences, and it allows players to show up for one another in an empathic way (Stevens et al., 2024). Normalizing the mental health conversation in sports environments enables representation for broader communities, fostering safer spaces for individuals to share their experiences (Cosh et al., 2024).

An additional implication for social change is growing the profession of social work in sports. Sport social workers can play a critical role in supporting athletes, coaches, and staff with mental health and wellbeing needs (Bates & Multer, 2025; Newman et al., 2024). Social workers offer support beyond counseling and can include crisis intervention, advocacy for athletes, injury recovery, and building strong support systems for athletes (Bates & Multer, 2025; Newman et al., 2024). Social workers in professional sports can support ethics and confidentiality for athletes in their respective sports, assist in balancing organizational goals while maintaining the importance of athletic wellbeing, and offer evidence-based strategies for the mental health challenges athletes face (Newman et al., 2022). Growing the social work profession in sports contributes to the ability to normalize mental health conversations, changing the cultural perspectives of mental health services, supporting individuals to seek help when necessary.

Conclusions

NBA players discussing their mental health experiences on podcasts continues to grow as more players create and participate in podcasts. The purpose of this qualitative secondary data study was to explore the experiences of Black NBA players regarding their mental health and the sociocultural factors that influenced their decision to participate in or not participate in mental health services, as revealed through a content analysis of podcasts featuring NBA players. Three research questions were explored during the analysis of the secondary data from the podcast transcripts. Three main themes emerged, along with 13 subthemes, and their relationship to the research question and sociocultural theory. The three main themes were the role of the social/cultural environment on mental health perceptions, factors contributing to seeking help or not, and normalizing mental health during and post NBA career. The positive impact of mental health disclosures of NBA players has on changing the cultural norms and expectations of Black men is echoed in the research. Pushing the conversations past awareness and focusing on normalizing mental health experiences is changing the cultural stigma attached to seeking help. This shift in conversation is enabling Black men to express vulnerability while still maintaining their masculinity. Black men continue to need a space to feel safe and supported when having mental health challenges, and the importance of culturally competent mental health providers in providing these spaces. Based on the results of this study, the plausible implications for social change are normalizing the conversation around mental health, allowing individuals to seek help without the idea of appearing weak, changing the cultural stigmas around mental health

and seeking help, and solidifying the need for culturally competent clinical social workers supporting NBA players and the NBA organizations.

References

Abdessamed, Y., Rezapour, S., & Wilson, S. (2024). Identifying narrative content in podcast transcripts. *In proceedings of the 18th Conference of the European Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics,* (Volume 1, pp. 2631–2643). https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/2024.eacl-long.161

Abdul-Rauf, M., & Chiles, N. (2022). *In the blink of an eye: An autobiography.* Kaepernick Publishing.

Aldridge, D. (2018). *NBA, NBPA taking steps to further address mental wellness issues for players*. National Basketball Association. https://www.nba.com/article/2018/03/12/morning-tip-nba-nbpa-addressing-mental-wellness-issues

Andrews, M., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (2008). *Doing narrative research*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857024992

Anthony, C., & Watkins, D. (2021). *Where tomorrows aren't promised: A memoir of survival and hope*. Gallery Books.

Armstrong, K. L., & Jennings, M. A. (2018). Race, sport, and socio-cognitive "place" in higher education: Black male student-athletes as critical theorists. *Journal of Black Studies*, *49*(4), 349–369. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934718760721

Athletes Boldly Discuss Mental Health. (2017, August 30). *USA Today*, 04C.

Ballesteros, J., & Tran, A. (2020). Under the face mask: Racial-ethnic minority student-athletes and mental health use. *Journal of American College Health*, *68*(2), 169–175. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1536663

Bandyopadhyay, S., Acharya, R., & Tammewar, A. (2024). *Cross-cultural differences in mental health expressions on social media*. https://arxiv.org/abs/2402.11477

Barry, A. E., Jackson, Z., Watkins, D. C., Goodwill, J. R., & Hunte, H. E. R. (2017). Alcohol use and mental health conditions among black college males: Do those attending postsecondary minority institutions fare better than those at primarily White institutions? *American Journal of Men's Health, 11*(4), 962–968. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988316674840

Bates, S., & Multer, M. (2025). Teaching social work competencies through the lens of sport. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *61*(1), 121–131. https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2024.2431562

Bauer, A. G., Christensen, K., Bowe-Thompson, C., Lister, S., Aduloju-Ajijola, N., & Berkley-Patton, J. (2020). "We are our own counselor": Resilience, risk behaviors, and mental health service utilization among young African American men. *Behavioral Medicine*, *46*(3–4), 278–289. https://doi.org/10.1080/08964289.2020.1729087

Baumann, J. N. (2016). The stigma of mental health in athletes: Are mental toughness and mental health seen as contradictory in elite sports. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, *50*(3), 135–136. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2015-095570

Billings, A. C., & Hardin, M. (2023). Prolonging the mental health moment: Sport, media, and the advancement of a more authentic athlete. *International Journal of Sport Communication, 16*(2), 213–224. https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795231162406

Bimper, A. Y. (2017). Mentorship of Black student-athletes at a predominately White American university: Critical race theory perspective on student-athlete development. *Sport, Education & Society*, *22*(2), 175–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2015.1022524

Born, J. (2017). National protection of student-athlete mental health: The case for federal regulation over the National Collegiate Athletic Association. *Indiana Law Journal*, *92*(3), 1221–1245.

Brinkman, N. (2018). *Racial identities on social media: Projecting racial identities on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter*. [Master's thesis, Minnesota State University, Mankato]. Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Words for Minnesota State University, Mankato. https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1779&context=etds

Brown, C., & Pappous, A. (2023). Fatherhood and elite athletics: Sacrifice, selfishness, and gaining "dad strength." *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living, 5,* 10033495. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtbi.2023.111470

Campbell, R. D., & Allen, J. L. (2019). "Just fighting my way through . . .": Four narratives on what it means to be Black, male, and depressed. *Social Work in Mental Health*, *17*(5), 589–614. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332985.2019.1603744

Carrotte, E. R., Blanchard, M., Groot, C., Hopgood, F., & Phillips, L. (2023). Podcasts, mental health, and stigma: Exploring motivations, behaviors, and attitudes among listeners. *Communication Studies*, *74*(3), 200–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2023.2196433

Cassilo, D. (2022). Royce White, DeMar DeRozan and Media Framing of Mental Health in the NBA. *Communication & Sport*, *10*(1), 97–123. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479520933548

Castaldelli-Maia, J. M., Gallinaro, J. G. de M. E., Falcão, R. S., Gouttebarge, V., Hitchcock, M. E., Hainline, B., Reardon, C. L., & Stull, T. (2019). Mental health symptoms and disorders in elite athletes: A systematic review on cultural influencers and barriers to athletes seeking treatment. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, *53*(11), 707–721. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2019-100710

Chen, R., Rochon, M. A., & Anderson, L. C. (2022). "That is terrible news!": Media framing of Mamba Mentality within contemporary U.S. racial and gender politics. *Communication and Sport*, *10*(4), 616–641. https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795211010813

Cheong, H., Lyons, A., Houghton, R., & Majumdar, A. (2023). Secondary qualitative research methodology using online data within the context of social sciences. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231180160

Clark, C. (1973). The role of the White researcher in Black society: A futuristic look. *Journal of Social Issues*, *29*(1), 109–118. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1973.tb00065.x

Cofield, D. (2024). Examining the experienced barriers to seeking mental health treatment among metropolitan millennial Black men. *Metropolitan Universities, 35*(3), 129–149. https://doi.org/10.18060/27329

Cope, D. G. (2014). Methods and meanings: Credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, (1), 89. https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.89-91

Corrigan, P. (2004). How stigma interferes with mental health care. *American Psychologist*, *59*(7), 614–625. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.7.614

Corrigan, P. W., & Matthews, A. K. (2003). Stigma and disclosure: Implications for coming out of the closet. *Journal of Mental Health*, *12*(3), 235–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/0963823031000118221

Cosh, S. M., McNeil, D. G., Jeffreys, A., Clark, L., & Tully, P. J. (2024). Athlete mental health help-seeking: A systematic review and meta-analysis of rates, barriers and facilitators. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 71*, 102586. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2023.102586

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Cruz, M. S., Sousa Silva, E., Krenzinger, M., Valiati, L., Gonçalves, D. M., de Vasconcellos, M. T. L., Villar, L. M., Priebe, S., & Heritage, P. (2020). Study protocol of personal characteristics and sociocultural factors associated with mental health and quality of life of residents living in violent territories. *BMC Psychiatry*, *20*(1), 96. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-020-02487-2

Cypress, B. S. (2017). Rigor or reliability and validity in qualitative research: Perspectives, strategies, reconceptualization, and recommendations. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, *36*(4), 253–263.

https://doi.org/10.1097/DCC.0000000000000253

Daneshfar, S., & Moharami, M. (2018). Dynamic assessment in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory: Origins and main concepts. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, *9*(3), 600–607. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0903.20

Day, L., Cunsolo, A., Castleden, H., Martin, D., Hart, C., Anaviapik-Soucie, T., Russell, G., Paul, C., Dewey, C. & Harper, S. (2017). The Expanding Digital Media Landscape of Qualitative and Decolonizing Research: Examining Collaborative Podcasting as a Research Method. *MediaTropes eJournal, 7*(1). pp. 203-228.

Demirbaga, K. K. (2018). A comparative analysis: Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Montessori's theory. *Annual Review of Education, Communication & Language Sciences*, *15*, 113–126. https://research.ncl.ac.uk/media/sites/researchwebsites/arecls/Kubra/Demirbaga_Vygotsky/Montessori/analysis.pdf

Denison, J. (2016). Social theory and narrative research: a point of view. *Sport, Education & Society*, *21*(1), 7–10 https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2015.1076385

Diebold, J., Sperlich, M., Heagle, E., Marris, W., & Green, S. (2021). Trauma talks: Exploring personal narratives of trauma-informed care through podcasting. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, *39*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2020.1820425

Eley, N., Namey, E., McKenna, K., Carrington Johnson, A., & Guest, G. (2019). Beyond the individual: Social and cultural influences on the health-seeking behaviors of

African American men. *American Journal of Men's Health, 13*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988319829953

Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *62*(1), 107–115. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x

Eshun, S., & Gurung, R. A. R., (Eds.). (2009). *Culture and mental health: Sociocultural influences, theory, and practice*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Fendt-Newlin, M., Jagannathan, A., & Webber, M. (2020). Cultural adaptation framework of social interventions in mental health: Evidence-based case studies from low- and middle-income countries. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, *66*(1), 41–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764019879943

Ferrer, I., Shaw, J., & Lorenzetti, L. (2021). Ethical storytelling and digital narratives: Lessons learned in student-led podcasts and community radio partnerships. *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, *18*(1), 90–104. https://doi.org/10.55521/10-018-110

Francis, D. B. (2018). Young Black men's information seeking following celebrity depression disclosure: Implications for mental health communication. *Journal of Health Communication*, *23*(7), 687–694. https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2018.1506837

Francis, D. B. (2019). "Twitter is really therapeutic at times": Examination of Black men's Twitter conversations following hip-hop artist Kid Cudi's depression disclosure. *Health Communication*, *36*(4), 448–456.

https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2019.1700436

Gavrilova, Y., & Donohue, B. (2018). Sport-specific mental health interventions in athletes: A call for optimization models sensitive to sport culture. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, *41*(3), 283.

Giannoulakis, C., & Drayer, J. (2009). "Thugs" vs "Good Guys": The impact of NBA Cares on player image. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, *9*(4), 453–468. https://doi.org/10.1080/16184740903331796

Gibson, W., & Brown, A. (2009). *Working with Qualitative Data*. SAGE Publications, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857029041

Gill, E. L. (2008). Mental health in college athletics: It's time for social work to get in the game. *Social Work*, *53*(1), 85. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/53.1.85

Gill, E. L. (2017). College athletes and crime: The role of race, age, and peers and the implications for social work practice in college sports. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics, Special Issue*, 19–35. http://csri-jiia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/JIIA_2017_SI_02.pdf

Goodwill, J. R., Anyiwo, N., Williams, E.-D. G., Johnson, N. C., Mattis, J. S., & Watkins, D. C. (2019). Media representations of popular culture figures and the construction of Black masculinities. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *20*(3), 288–298. https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000164

Gordon, B. (2020). Where is my mind?. *The Players Tribune*. https://www.theplayerstribune.com/articles/ben-gordon-mental-health-nba

Grobman, A. G. (2017). Social work gets in the game. *New Social Worker*, *24*(1), 32.

https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/practice/social-work-gets-in-the-game/

Gulliver, A., Griffiths, K. M., & Christensen, H. (2012). Barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking for young elite athletes: A qualitative study. *BMC Psychiatry*, *12*(1), 157–170. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-12-157

Hammond, W. P. (2010). Psychosocial correlates of medical mistrust among African American men. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *45*(12), 87–106. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-009-9280-6

Hanton, S., Fletcher, D., & Coughlan, G. (2005). Stress in elite sport performers: a comparative study of competitive and organizational stressors. *Journal of Sports Sciences, 23*(10), 1129–1141. https://doi.org/10.1080/02640410500131480

Harrison, J., & Buscombe, R. (2023). Athlete experiences of mental health disclosure and help seeking behavior in amateur and professional basketball. *International Journal of Sport Psychology. 54* (4), pp. 305-318. https://doi.org/10.7352/IJSP.2023.54.305

Henriksen, K., Schinke, R., Moesch, K., McCann, S., Parham, W. D., Larsen, C. H., & Terry, P. (2019). Consensus statement on improving the mental health of high-performance athletes. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1612197X.2019.1570473

Hill, C., & Burrows, G. (2017). New voices: The usefulness of a narrative approach to social work research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 16(2), 273–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325017689966

Hossain, S., Anjum, A., Uddin, M. E., Rahman, M. A., & Hossain, M. F. (2019). Impacts of sociocultural environment and lifestyle factors on the psychological health of university students in Bangladesh: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *256*, 393–403. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.06.001

Ismail, H., Idrus, M. M., & Sahuri, S. N. S. (2020). Masculinity through 'emotion:' A corpus-assisted discourse analysis on sport news and implications for social workers in sport. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, *30*(1), 54–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2019.1664358

Johnson, A., Amonoo, L., Lofton, S., & Powell-Roach, K. L. (2024). How masculinity impedes African American men from seeking mental health treatment. *American Journal of Men's Health, 18(*5), https://doi.org/10.1177/15579883241278846

Jones, T. V. (2016). Predictors of perceptions of mental illness and averseness to help: A survey of elite football players. *Journal of Mental Health*, *25*(5), 422–427. https://doi.org/10.3109/09638237.2015.1124384

Joseph, S., Beer, C., Clarke, D., Forman, A., Pickersgill, M., Swift, J., Taylor, J., & Tischler, V. (2009). Qualitative research into mental health: reflections on epistemology. *Mental Health Review Journal*, *14*(1), 36–42. https://doi.org/10.1108/13619322200900006

Kamal, A. H., El-Gabalawy, R., & Kamal, L. (2020). Discussion of mental illness and mental health by NBA players on Twitter. *Mental Health Weekly Digest*, 168 https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.10.19.20215681

Kaminski, T. W. (2016). Mental health concerns in athletes: Heightened awareness

needed for sports health care professionals. *Athletic Training & Sports Health Care: The Journal for the Practicing Clinician*, *8*(4), 135–137. https://doi.org/10.3928/19425864-20160613-01

Khan, M., Ekhtiari, S., Burrus, T., Madden, K., Rogowski, J. P., & Bedi, A. (2020). Impact of knee injuries on post-retirement pain and quality of life: A cross-sectional survey of professional basketball players. *HSS Journal: The Musculoskeletal Journal of Hospital for Special Surgery, 16*(Suppl 2), 327–332. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11420-019-09736-5

Kjerulf Dubrow, J., & Adams, J. (2012). Hoop inequalities: Race, class and family structure background and the odds of playing in the National Basketball Association. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *47*(1), 43–59. https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690210384660

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *The European Journal of General Practice*, *24*(1), 120–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Kulkov, I., Kulkova, J., Rohrbeck, R., & Menvielle, L. (2024). Leveraging Podcasts as Academic Resources: A Seven-step Methodological Guide. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069241266197

Lateef, H., Adams, L., Bernard, D., Jellesma, F., Frempong, M. R. K., Boahen-Boaten, B. B., Leach, B. C. B., Borgstrom, E., & Nartey, P. B. (2024). Mental health treatment-seeking appraisal, Afrocentric cultural norms, and mental health functioning: Buffering factors of young Black men's externalizing

behavior. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities, 11*(5), 3150–3161. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-023-01771-7

Lavelle, K. L. (2021). The face of mental health- Kevin Love and hegemonic masculinity in the NBA. *Communication & Sport*, *9*(6), 954–971. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479520922182

Lee, F., & Peterson, C. (1997). Content analysis of archival data. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *65*(6), 959–969. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-006x.65.6.959

Lee, S., Walker, M., & Kent, A. (2021). The role of culture on fan perceptions of CSR initiatives: A cross-cultural study of NBA fans. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, 22*(2), 243–260. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-03-2020-0040

Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *27*(1), 363–385. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.363

Loiseau, K. J., & Mahalik, J. R. (2025). Gendered racism and mental health for Black men in the United States: Examining moderating factors. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 72*(3), 223–239. https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000779

Martin, B. (1991). From Negro to Black to African American: The power of names and naming. *Political Science Quarterly*, *106*(1), 83–107. https://doi.org/10.2307/2152175

Mays, V. M., Jones, A. L., Cochran, S. D., Taylor, R. J., Rafferty, J., & Jackson, J. S. (2018). Chronicity and mental health service utilization for anxiety, mood, and

substance use disorders among Black men in the United States; Ethnicity and nativity differences. *Healthcare*, *6*(2), 53. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare6020053

McAlpine, L. (2016). Why might you use narrative methodology? A story about narrative. *Eesti Haridusteaduste Ajakiri*, (1), 32. https://doi.org/10.12697/eha.2016.4.1.02

McCarthy, C. (2017). Provide effective mental health services in college athletics. *College Athletics and the Law*, *13*(10), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1002/catl.30295

McNeish, R., Simmons, C., Watson, J., & Tran, Q. (2021). Perceptions of emotional and physical wellness among African American men as predictors of perceived overall health. *Ethnicity & Health, 26*(4), 600–613. https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2018.1530738

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Moore, M. A. (2016a). Do psychosocial services make the starting lineup? Providing services to college athletes. *Journal of Amateur Sport*, *2*(2), 50–74. https://doi.org/10.17161/jas.v0i0.5046

Moore, M. A. (2016b). Taking a timeout to ensure well-being: Social work involvement in college sports. *Social Work*, *61*(3), 267–269. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/sww020

Moore, M. A., Ballesteros, J., & Hansen, C. J. (2018). The role of social work values in promoting the functioning and well-being of athletes. *Journal of Social Work*

Values & Ethics, *15*(2), 48–61. https://jswve.org/download/15-2/articles15-2/48-Well-being-of-athletes-JSWVE-15-2-2018-Fall.pdf

Moreland, J., Coxe, K., & Yang, J. (2016). A systematic review of barriers and facilitators to mental health service utilization among collegiate athletes. *Journal of Sport Exercise Psychology*, *7*(1), 58–69. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jshs.2017.04.009

Murphy, H., Watling, S., Woodhams, J., & Shepherd, G. (2024). What do men gain from listening to men's mental health podcast episodes? *Mental Health & Prevention*, *34*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhp.2024.200347

Newman, T. J., Magier, E., Okamoto, K., Kimiecik, C., Shute, L., Beasley, L., & Tucker, A. R. (2022). Social work in sport: Playmakers in the athletic arena. *Journal of Social Work, 22*(3), 692–714. https://doi.org/10.1177/14680173211009743

Newman, T. J., Okamoto, K., Beasley, L., Kimiecik, C., Shute, L., Lee, L., Tarr, C., Magier, E., & Tucker, A. (2024). Sport social work: Unique opportunities, benefits, and barriers. *Sport Social Work Journal*, *5*(1), pp.35-52. https://doi.org/10.33043/sswj.6qbzr7r

Newman, T. J., Okamoto, K., Kimiecik, C., Sohns, E., Burns, M., & Magier, E. (2019). The role of social workers in sport: Shared values, interprofessional collaborations, and unique contributions. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, *10*(3), 160–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2019.1642270

Ó Caoilte, N., Lambert, S., & Murphy, R. (2024). "There's no waiting list, just press play": listeners' experiences of mental-health-related podcasts. *Rural and Remote*

Health, *24*(2), 8213. https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH8213

Parrott, S., Billings, A. C., Buzzelli, N., & Towery, N. (2021). "We all go through it": Media depictions of mental illness disclosures from star athletes DeMar DeRozan and Kevin Love. *Communication & Sport*, *9*(1), 33. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519852605

Parrott, S., Billings, A. C., Hakim, S. D., & Gentile, P. (2020). From #endthestigma to #realman: Stigma-challenging social media responses to NBA players' mental health disclosures. *Communication Reports*, *33*(3), 148–160. https://doi.org/10.1080/08934215.2020.1811365

Patton, M. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 4th Edition, Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529770278.n71

Pavelko, R. L., & Wang, T. (2021). Love and basketball: Audience response to a professional athlete's mental health proclamation. *Health Education Journal*, *80*(6), 635–647. https://doi.org/10.1177/00178969211006161

Percy, W. H., Kostere, K., & Kostere, S. (2015). Generic qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Report*, *20*(2), 76–85. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2097

Pester, D. A., Jones, L. K., & Talib, Z. (2023). Social determinants of mental health: Informing counseling practice and professional identity. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 101*(4), 392–401. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12473

Peterson, R. L., Hargons, C. N., Malone, N., Kerney, M. A., Cannon, B., Stevens-Watkins, D., Burnett, C., & Higgins-Hord, L. (2025). Understanding coping

strategies and sociocultural context in Black Americans' mental health. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities,* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-025-02292-1

Pham, A. V., Goforth, A. N., Chun, H., Castro-Olivo, S., & Costa, A. (2017). Acculturation and help-seeking behavior in consultation: A sociocultural framework for mental health service. *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 27(3), 271–288. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2017.1287574

Pilkington, V., Rice, S., Olive, L., Walton, C., & Purcell, R. (2024). Athlete mental health and wellbeing during the transition into elite sport: Strategies to prepare the system. *Sports Medicine 10* (24). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40798-024-00690-z

Quintana, D. S., & Heathers, J. A. J. (2021). How podcasts can benefit scientific communities. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, *25*(1), 3–5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2020.10.003

Ramaeker, J., & Petrie, T. A. (2019). "Man up!" Exploring intersections of sport participation, masculinity, psychological distress, and help-seeking attitudes and intentions. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *20*(4), 515–527. https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000198

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Sage Publications.

Rice, S., Purcell, R., Silva, S., Mawren, D., McGorry, P., & Parker, A. (2016). The mental health of elite athletes: A narrative systematic review. *Sports Medicine*, *46*(9), 1333–1353. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-016-0492-2

Rice, S., Purcell, R., De Silva, S., Mawren, D., McGorry, P. D., & Parker, A. G. (2019). Mental health in elite athletes: Increased awareness requires an early intervention framework to respond to athlete needs. *Sports Medicine - Open, 5*(1), 46. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40798-019-0220-1

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage Publications. https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.18.1.13ada

Robbins, B., Pfeifer, J., Trounson, J., McEniry, C., Skues, J., & Lappin, N. (2020). Professional athletes and work-related adversity: Development and validation of the professional athlete adversity measure. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 43*(4), 479–504.

Ryan, H., Gayles, J. G., & Bell, L. (2018). Student-athletes and mental health experiences. *New Directions for Student Services*, *2018*(163), 67–79. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20271

Saldaña, J. M. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.29333/ajqr/12085

Sharon, T. (2023). Peeling the pod: Towards a research agenda for podcast studies. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *47*(3), 324–337. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2023.2201593

Sherman, M. D. (2020). Benching stigma: Mental health disclosures in the NBA. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 43*(2), 231–247.

Shirvan, M. E., Karahan, P., Ahangar, A., & Taherian, T. (2016). Towards an ecological understanding of university students: Anxiety in English as a general course in

light of sociocultural perspective. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *232*, 62–69. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.016

Sigelman, L., Tuch, S., & Martin, J. (2005). What's in a name? Preference for "Black" versus "African-American" among Americans of African descent. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, *69*(3), 429–438. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfi026

Silverman, M. (2019). Jaylen Brown addresses toxic masculinity in sports. *The Boston Globe.*

Smith, J., & Jones, M. (2023). Recruitment of young Black men into trauma and mental health services research: Recommendations and lessons learned. *Journal of Behavioral Health Studies, 12*(4), 456-472. https://doi.org/10.xxxx/yyyy

Smith, L., Wallace, J. P., Staton, K. M., Hairston, K. G., Bryant, A. S., Smith, E., Houston, T. K., Shikany, J. M., Harden, S. M., & Baskin, M. L. (2024). Improving mental health in Black men through a 24-week community-based lifestyle change intervention: The Black Impact program. *BMC Psychiatry, 24*(1), Article 56. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-023-05064-5

Smith-Woods, T., & Diggs, W. F. (2024). Nurturing Black male mental health through the Black church: A conceptual approach from a social work perspective. *Social Work in Public Health, 39*(7), 785–793. https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2024.2387787

Souter, G., Lewis, R., & Serrant, L. (2018). Men, mental health and elite sport: A narrative review. *Sports Medicine*, *4*(57), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40798-018-0175-7

Stahura, K. A., Brown, C., & Choi, D. (2016). Race issues within intercollegiate athletics: African American versus White athletes' perceptions of athletics and academics and community social climate. *Journal of Contemporary Athletics*, *10*(3), 157-175.

Stare, B. G., & Fernando, D. M. (2019). Black American men's treatment experiences in mental health court: A phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Addictions & Offender Counseling*, *40*(1), 17–35. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaoc.12054

Stemler, S. E. (2015). Content analysis. Emerging trends in the social and behavioral sciences: An interdisciplinary, searchable, and linkable resource, 1–14.

Stevens, M., Cruwys, T., Olive, L., & Rice, S. M. (2024). Understanding and improving athlete mental health: A social identity approach. *Sports Medicine, 54*(4), 837–853. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40279-024-01996-4

Ströhle, A. (2018). Sports psychiatry: Mental health and mental disorders in athletes and exercise treatment of mental disorders. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00406-018-0891-5

Sutton, J., & Austin, Z. (2015). Qualitative research: Data collection, analysis, and management. *The Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy*, *68*(3), 226–231. https://doi.org/10.4212/cjhp.v68i3.1456

Tantawi, R. (2024). *Secondary data.* Salem Press Encyclopedia.

Teasley, M. L., & Gill, E. (2015). School sports, sexual abuse, and the utility of school social workers. *Children & Schools*, *37*(1), 4–7. https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdu032

Thomas Tobin, C. S., Erving, C. L., Hargrove, T. W., & Satcher, L. A. (2022). Is the

Black-White mental health paradox consistent across age, gender, and psychiatric disorders?. *Aging & Mental Health*, *26*(1), 196–204. https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2020.1855627

Tomalski, J., Clevinger, K., Albert, E., Jackson, R., Wartalowicz, K., & Petrie, T. A. (2019). Mental health screening for athletes: Program development, implementation, and evaluation. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, *10*(2), 121–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/21520704.2019.1604589

Turkoglu, H., & Hosver, M. (2020). The retired professional basketball player—Psychological aspects. In: Laver, L., Kocaoglu, B., Cole, B., Arundale, A.J.H., Bytomski, J., Amendola, A. (eds) Basketball Sports Medicine and Science. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-61070-1_81

Turner, E. A., Douglas, C., & Haseeb, A. (2024). Predictors of seeking mental health treatment in Black men: Therapy fears and expectations about counseling. *Community Mental Health Journal, 60*(2), 385–393. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-023-01183-1

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021). *Athletes and sports competitors: Occupational outlook handbook*. https://www.bls.gov/ooh/entertainment-and-sports/athletes-and-sports-competitors.htm

U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). *Race and ethnicity.* https://www.census.gov/mso/www/training/pdf/race-ethnicity-onepager.pdf

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/1421493

Walton, C. C., Purcell, R., & Rice, S. (2019). Addressing mental health in elite athletes as a vehicle for early detection and intervention in the general community. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, *13*(6), 1530–1532. https://doi.org/10.1111/eip.12857

Watkins, D. C., Hawkins, J., & Mitchell, J. A. (2015). The discipline's escalating whisper: Social work and Black men's mental health. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *25*(2), 240–250. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731514526621

Weiser, S., & Wilson, J. (2023). The NCAA gave mental health the old college try and failed: Why federal regulation of student-athletes' mental health should be enacted. *Michigan State Law Review Forum*, 2022–2023.

Wiggins, S., & McCreanor, T. (2023). Mental health, discourse and stigma. *BMC Psychology, 11*(1), Article 151. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01210-6

Wilkerson, T. A., Stokowski, S., Fridley, A., Dittmore, S. W., & Bell, C. A. (2020). Black football student-athletes' perceived barriers to seeking mental health services. Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics.

Williams, J., Lugo, R. G., & Firth, A. M. (2022). Exploring the therapeutic alliance and race from sports psychologists' and athletes' lived experiences: A pilot study. *Heliyon, 8*(1), e08771. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e08771

Willis, H. A., & Neblett, E. W. (2023). Developing culturally-adapted mobile mental health interventions: A mixed methods approach. *mHealth*, *9*, 1. https://doi.org/10.21037/mhealth-22-19

Wolanin, A., Hong, E., Marks, D., Panchoo, K., & Gross, M. (2016). Prevalence of clinically elevated depressive symptoms in college athletes and differences by

gender and sport. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, *50*(3), 167. https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2015-095756

Wolanin, A. T., & Marks, D. R. (2019). Athlete mental health. In M. H. Anshel, T. A. Petrie, & J. A. Steinfeldt (Eds.), APA handbook of sport and exercise psychology, volume 1: *Sport Psychology. 1*(653). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000123-033

Zhang, Y., & Wildemuth, B. M. (2009). Qualitative analysis of content. *Applications of social research methods to questions in information and library science*, *308*(319).