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Silent Crisis, Mental Health, Racialized Masculinity and the Death of Kyren Lacy: A Critical Examination of Suicide Risk Factors Among Black Male Athletes

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ABSTRACT

The 2024 suicide of Kyren Lacy, a 24-year-old Louisiana State University football player, represents a profound tragedy that illuminates the complex intersection of racialized masculinity, systemic oppression, and mental health crisis within collegiate athletics. This paper examines Lacy's death as a case study to explore the unique psychological burdens faced by Black male athletes, whose mental health needs are systematically overlooked while their physical performance is commodified. Drawing upon critical race theory, intersectionality frameworks, and extensive literature on athlete mental health, this analysis reveals how historical legacies of scientific racism, contemporary media representations, and institutional exploitation create distinct vulnerability patterns for Black male athletes. The paper argues that conventional mental health interventions fail Black male athletes because they do not account for the racialized nature of their experiences, including hypervisibility in athletic contexts, marginalization in academic settings, and the psychological impact of representing both personal and generational aspirations for upward mobility. Through examining the historical construction of Black masculinity within American sports, contemporary pressures of performance-based identity, and the inadequacy of current mental health support systems, this research advocates for culturally responsive, multidisciplinary approaches to mental health care that recognize Black male athletes as complete human beings rather than commodified entertainers. The analysis demonstrates that Lacy's death was not an isolated incident but symptomatic of broader systemic failures that demand immediate institutional reform and culturally grounded intervention strategies.

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Introduction

To comprehend the contemporary mental health crisis facing Black male athletes, one must first examine the historical foundations upon which American sports culture was constructed and proliferated. The eugenics movement, which gained prominence in the 1880s through misinterpretations of Charles Darwin's and Gregor Mendel's scientific work, established a framework of scientific racism that continues to influence perceptions of Black athletic ability and intellectual capacity [1]. This pseudoscientific ideology operated under the fundamental assumption that behavioral norms, economic disparities, and social differences between racial groups arose from inherited biological distinctions rather than environmental or systemic factors [2].

Within this eugenic framework, Black Americans were systematically characterized as genetically inferior to Whites, portrayed as individuals lacking empathy, intellect, and moral capacity while being predisposed to criminality, indolence, physicality, and mental illness. The violent measures implemented to pursue eugenic ideals—including the forced sterilization of approximately 60,000 women of color by World War II—represent profound violations of human dignity that continue to reverberate through contemporary Black experiences [3,4].

The eugenic movement's impact on Black men was particularly devastating in its intellectual dimensions, as systematic efforts were made to exclude them from academic achievement, research

participation as representatives of humanity, and entrepreneurial success-domains that were deliberately reserved for White participation. This exclusion was accompanied by the construction of Black men as "savage" or "primitive" beings, a characterization that became particularly relevant as Black athletic excellence began to emerge in American sports. Rather than challenging racist assumptions about Black intellectual capacity, the success of Black athletes was reframed to support eugenic ideology by attributing their physical abilities to primitive, animalistic traits while similar abilities in White athletes were credited to intellectual superiority and strategic thinking [5].

This racialized interpretation of athletic ability and hypersexuality served multiple ideological functions within White supremacist frameworks. It simultaneously acknowledged Black physical prowess while reinforcing intellectual inferiority, creating a binary that positioned Black men as naturally suited for physical labor and entertainment while being inherently unsuited for intellectual pursuits. The consequences of this constructed dichotomy were profound, as it effectively funneled Black youth away from academic development and toward sports participation as their primary avenue for social recognition and economic advancement.

The anti-intellectual framework imposed upon Black men through eugenic ideology created what scholars have termed the "athletic identity trap," wherein Black male identities became narrowly defined through physical prowess and athletic achievement [6].

While Black excellence in any form deserves celebration and recognition, the systematic channeling of Black youth into athletics as their primary path to success created enormous psychological pressure by linking individual worth to physical performance while simultaneously limiting alternative avenues for achievement and self-actualization.

This historical construction of Black male identity through athletic performance established patterns that persist in contemporary collegiate sports, where Black athletes often experience intense pressure not only to excel individually but to serve as representatives of their families' hopes for economic mobility and generational advancement. The weight of these expectations transforms athletic achievement from personal accomplishment into moral and generational obligation, creating psychological burdens that are often invisible to coaches, administrators, and mental health professionals who lack understanding of these historical dynamics.

The intersection of race and gender creates particularly complex psychological terrain for Black male athletes, who must navigate both traditional masculine expectations and racialized interpretations of Black masculinity that have been shaped by centuries of stereotyping and oppression. Understanding these dynamics requires careful examination of how masculinity is constructed differently across racial lines and how these constructions influence mental health help-seeking behaviors and emotional expression.

Research in gender studies reveals significant differences between traditional definitions of masculinity and the culturally specific forms of Black masculinity that have emerged in response to racialized oppression. Traditional masculine ideologies emphasize strength, independence, self-affirmation, and social dominance, while Black masculinity incorporates additional elements including pride, emotional control, fulfilling provider roles, family responsibility, and spirituality [7,8]. These culturally-specific dimensions of Black masculinity developed as adaptive responses to systemic racism and economic marginalization, providing psychological resources for survival in hostile environments.

The construction of Black masculinity within athletic contexts creates particular tensions that can become psychologically destructive. Athletic environments reward emotional toughness, physical dominance, and independence—traits that discourage vulnerability and emotional disclosure. For Black male athletes, these athletic masculine ideals intersect with racialized expectations that position them as naturally stoic, physically robust, and emotionally invulnerable. The combination creates what researchers term “double-bind masculinity,” wherein Black male athletes face pressure to embody both traditional masculine traits and racialized stereotypes that deny their emotional complexity [9].

This double-bind has profound implications for mental health help-seeking behaviors among Black male athletes. Research consistently demonstrates that male athletes who more closely align with traditional masculine ideologies express more negative attitudes toward mental health services, regardless of their level of psychological distress [9]. For Black male athletes, these barriers are compounded by cultural stigma within Black communities around mental health services, historical mistrust of medical institutions, and fear that seeking help will be interpreted as weakness or failure to embody masculine ideals.

The tragic irony is that the very traits celebrated in Black males—emotional stoicism, lacking ratiocination, physical toughness, and psychological resilience—become barriers to accessing life-saving mental health resources among Black athletes [10]. Athletes who have been conditioned to view emotional expression as weakness and to cope with personal struggles in silence find themselves psychologically isolated when facing mental health crises. This isolation is particularly dangerous given that isolation and perceived burdensomeness are key risk factors in interpersonal theories of suicide [11].

The case of Kyren Lacy illustrates these dynamics with devastating clarity. Despite facing mounting legal pressures, public scrutiny, and psychological distress over a four-month period, Lacy apparently struggled alone with his mental health challenges rather than seeking professional support. The cultural expectations of Black masculinity, combined with athletic masculine ideals and the hypervisible nature of his public situation, likely created enormous barriers to help-seeking behavior. His death serves as a tragic reminder of how racialized masculine expectations can become fatal when they prevent individuals from accessing mental health resources.

Contemporary collegiate athletics operates as a multi-billion-dollar industry that systematically profits from the athletic abilities of predominantly Black male athletes while denying them economic compensation and often limiting their educational opportunities. This commodification creates unique psychological pressures for Black male athletes, whose identities become inextricably linked to their performance while their value as complete human beings is systematically diminished.

The concept of performance-based identity among athletes refers to the psychological phenomenon wherein individual self-worth becomes dependent upon athletic achievement and recognition. For Black male athletes, this dynamic is intensified by several factors that create particularly toxic psychological environments. First, the historical exclusion of Black men from academic and professional opportunities means that athletics often represents one of the few visible paths to economic mobility and social recognition. Second, the cultural celebration of Black athletic excellence, while positive in many respects, can create enormous pressure to excel as representatives not only of themselves but of their families, communities, and racial group.

Research reveals that Black male athletes often carry the psychological burden of representing generational hopes for economic advancement and social mobility. Many have witnessed firsthand the impact of systemic oppression on their families—poverty, educational limitations, employment discrimination, and residential segregation that can be traced directly to historical and contemporary racism. Athletic success becomes more than personal achievement; it represents the potential to lift entire families out of generational poverty and trauma. This transformation of athletic performance into moral obligation creates psychological pressure that extends far beyond typical competitive stress.

The commodification of Black athletic bodies within collegiate sports intensifies these pressures by reducing Black male athletes to their entertainment value while systematically limiting their opportunities for personal and intellectual development. Black athletes are celebrated and acknowledged when generating revenue for universities through their athletic performance, but they experience marginalization within academic environments

where their intellectual capabilities are often questioned or dismissed [12]. This pattern of celebration and marginalization creates what scholars term “conditional belonging,” wherein Black male athletes are valued only insofar as they continue to perform athletically.

The psychological impact of conditional belonging cannot be overstated. When individual worth is tied primarily to physical performance, any threat to that performance becomes existentially threatening. Injuries, performance declines, or legal troubles that jeopardize athletic careers can trigger profound identity crises for athletes whose sense of self has been constructed around their athletic abilities. For Black male athletes carrying additional burdens of family and community expectations, these threats to athletic identity can feel like failures to overcome centuries of oppression and systematic disadvantage.

Kyren Lacy’s situation exemplifies these dynamics in tragic detail. As a projected NFL draft prospect, his athletic identity was not only central to his personal sense of self but represented the potential fulfillment of family and community dreams for economic advancement. The legal troubles he faced in the months preceding his death directly threatened this identity and the broader hopes it represented. The psychological pressure of potentially disappointing not only himself but also the many people who had invested emotionally and practically in his success likely contributed significantly to his mental health crisis.

The role of media representation in shaping public perceptions of Black male athletes cannot be understated in understanding the psychological pressures they face. Research consistently demonstrates that while Black men are underrepresented in most areas of American media, they are disproportionately overrepresented in coverage related to crime and negative behaviors [13]. This pattern extends directly into sports media, where Black male athletes face significantly harsher treatment than their White counterparts when involved in legal or personal difficulties.

Statistical analysis reveals the stark disparities in how Black and White male athletes are treated within institutional disciplinary systems. Black male athletes are suspended for criminal activity at ten times the rate of their White counterparts, despite similar rates of involvement in problematic behaviors [14]. Furthermore, content analysis of collegiate sports coverage demonstrates that nearly all negative characterizations of athletes reference Black athletes, while positive coverage is more equitably distributed across racial lines [15].

The qualitative dimensions of media coverage reveal even more troubling patterns. Black male athletes are less likely to be shown in professional attire, their coverage often ignores important contextual factors that might explain their behaviors, and the language used systematically strips them of humanity while reinforcing harmful stereotypes of Black aggressiveness and criminality [15]. This differential treatment creates what researchers term “presumptive criminality,” wherein Black male athletes are assumed to be dangerous or problematic regardless of their actual behaviors.

The psychological impact of presumptive criminality extends far beyond media coverage to influence how Black male athletes are treated by law enforcement, university administrators, coaches, and the general public. When legal troubles arise, Black athletes

face not only the immediate consequences of their actions but also the additional burden of confirming racist stereotypes and disappointing communities that have invested in their success. This double burden creates enormous psychological pressure that White athletes simply do not experience.

Corporate sponsorship and endorsement opportunities provide another lens through which to examine the differential treatment of Black and White male athletes. Black athletes face significantly harsher punishment from corporate sponsors when involved in legal difficulties, often losing lucrative contracts while White athletes involved in similar or more serious offenses maintain their endorsement relationships [16]. The well-documented case of Michael Vick, who lost millions in endorsements following his conviction for involvement in dog fighting, contrasts sharply with the treatment of White athletes like Ben Roethlisberger, who faced sexual assault allegations without significant commercial consequences.

In Kyren Lacy’s case, the media treatment of his legal troubles exemplified these problematic patterns. Rather than using standard photographs, many media outlets chose to circulate his mugshot, a deliberate choice that his legal representation publicly denounced as prejudicial. This editorial decision represented the precise moment when athletic identity intersected with presumptive criminality, transforming Lacy from a celebrated athlete into a racialized criminal figure in the public consciousness. The psychological impact of this transformation cannot be understated. For a young man whose identity and future prospects were intimately connected to public perception and athletic reputation, the shift from celebration to criminalization likely created profound psychological distress. The knowledge that millions of people now viewed him primarily through the lens of his legal troubles rather than his athletic achievements represented a fundamental assault on his sense of self and future possibilities.

Systemic Racial Factors

The institutional response to mental health crises among Black male athletes reveals systematic failures that extend far beyond individual cases to encompass broader patterns of neglect and inadequate support. Despite increasing recognition of mental health challenges among collegiate athletes generally, the specific needs of Black male athletes remain largely unaddressed by institutional support systems that were designed primarily for White populations.

Research demonstrates that rates of depression and anxiety among student-athletes are comparable to those found in general student populations, challenging persistent misconceptions that athletic participation provides natural protection against psychological distress [17]. Student-athletes face multiple sources of stress including performance pressure from coaches, conflicts between academic and athletic demands, extended competition seasons, adaptation to new living environments, and the constant threat of career-ending injuries [12]. For Black male athletes, these standard stressors are compounded by experiences of discrimination, racism, marginalization, and exploitation that are rarely acknowledged or addressed by institutional support systems.

The concept of “academic-athletic segregation” helps explain how institutional structures create additional barriers for Black male athletes seeking mental health support. While celebrated within athletic contexts for their revenue-generating abilities, Black athletes often experience isolation and marginalization within

academic environments where their intellectual capabilities are questioned and their educational goals are subordinated to athletic performance demands [18]. This segregation limits their access to campus mental health resources, academic support services, and social connections that might provide protective factors against psychological distress.

Healthcare disparities within athletic medicine further compound these institutional failures. Even after controlling for insurance status, disease severity, income, and education levels, Black patients consistently receive inferior healthcare and experience worse health outcomes than their White counterparts [19]. Within athletic contexts, Black athletes are less likely to receive adequate education about concussion symptoms and, when seeking medical care, are less likely to receive appropriate concussion diagnoses [20]. These patterns of medical neglect create additional barriers to recovery from sports-related injuries, which research identifies as significant risk factors for suicide among athletes.

The historical context of psychiatric abuse within Black communities creates additional barriers to mental health service utilization that institutional support systems rarely acknowledge or address. The legacy of psychiatric racism—including the invention of fictitious mental disorders like “drapetomania” to pathologize resistance to slavery and the systematic misdiagnosis of civil rights protesters as mentally ill—continues to influence contemporary relationships between Black communities and mental health services [21]. Black men with major depressive disorder are more likely to present with somatic symptoms, leading to diagnostic errors by clinicians who lack cultural competency in recognizing depression among Black male patients [22].

The intersection of these institutional failures creates what researchers term “compound barriers” to mental health care for Black male athletes. They face not only the general stigma around mental health service utilization that affects all male athletes but also race-specific barriers including medical mistrust, cultural stigma within Black communities, fear of racist misdiagnosis, and lack of culturally competent mental health providers. These compound barriers often prove insurmountable for athletes experiencing psychological crises, leading to delayed or absent treatment that can have fatal consequences.

In Kyren Lacy’s case, the institutional response to his mounting legal and psychological difficulties appears to have been inadequate to address his specific needs as a Black male athlete facing public scrutiny and identity crisis. While the specific details of institutional support offered to Lacy may never be fully known, his death suggests that whatever resources were available proved insufficient to address the complex intersection of legal pressure, public stigma, and psychological distress he was experiencing.

Interpersonal Factors for Black Athletes

The application of interpersonal theory of suicide provides crucial insights into understanding the specific risk factors that make Black male athletes particularly vulnerable to suicidal ideation and behavior. Developed by Thomas Joiner, the interpersonal theory posits that suicide occurs when three conditions converge: perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness, and acquired capability for suicide [11]. Each of these components takes on distinctive characteristics within the context of Black male athletic experiences.

Perceived burdensomeness among Black male athletes often stems from the enormous expectations placed upon them to succeed

not only individually but as representatives of their families and communities. When legal troubles, injuries, or performance declines threaten their athletic careers, these athletes may experience profound guilt about disappointing the many people who have invested emotionally and financially in their success. The transformation of athletic achievement into moral obligation means that failure becomes not merely personal disappointment but perceived betrayal of generational hopes for advancement.

For Kyren Lacy, the legal troubles he faced likely triggered intense feelings of burdensomeness as he contemplated how his situation might affect his family, teammates, coaches, and the LSU athletic program. The knowledge that his actions had resulted in another person’s death, regardless of legal culpability, probably contributed to overwhelming guilt and self-blame. The additional legal incident involving firearm discharge likely intensified these feelings as he recognized how his behavior was affecting others around him.

Thwarted belongingness represents another crucial component of suicide risk that takes on particular significance for Black male athletes. Despite their visibility and celebration within athletic contexts, these athletes often experience profound isolation due to the conditional nature of their acceptance and the barriers to authentic emotional expression created by masculine expectations. The hypervisibility that comes with athletic success can paradoxically increase feelings of loneliness, as athletes struggle to determine whether relationships are based on genuine connection or their athletic status.

The academic-athletic segregation experienced by many Black male athletes contributes significantly to thwarted belongingness by limiting their opportunities to develop meaningful connections outside of athletic contexts. When their primary identity is constructed around athletic performance, threats to that identity can trigger existential crises about their place in the world and their value as human beings beyond their physical abilities.

Acquired capability for suicide represents perhaps the most concerning aspect of interpersonal theory as it applies to athletic populations. The theory suggests that repeated exposure to physical pain, injury, and violence can reduce natural fear responses to self-harm and increase tolerance for physical pain. Football players, in particular, experience regular physical trauma that may contribute to developing capability for suicide through habituation to pain and fearlessness about death [11].

For Black male athletes, the development of acquired capability may be accelerated by several factors unique to their experiences. The historical dehumanization of Black bodies within American culture may contribute to reduced self-preservation instincts, while the cultural expectations of stoicism and pain tolerance may prevent them from recognizing or addressing psychological distress before it reaches crisis levels. The convergence of these three factors—perceived burdensomeness related to family and community expectations, thwarted belongingness due to conditional acceptance and emotional isolation, and acquired capability developed through athletic participation and cultural factors—creates a particularly dangerous psychological situation for Black male athletes experiencing crises. When legal troubles, injuries, or other stressors threaten their athletic identity and future prospects, they may find themselves at the intersection of all three suicide risk factors simultaneously.

Intervening with Black Athletes

The failure of conventional mental health approaches to adequately serve Black male athletes highlights the urgent need for culturally competent, specialized interventions that acknowledge the unique intersection of racial, gender, and athletic identity factors. Current mental health services within collegiate athletics are typically designed using models developed for predominantly White populations and fail to account for the specific psychological needs and cultural contexts of Black male athletes.

Cultural relevance in mental health care requires deep understanding of how historical trauma, contemporary racism, and cultural values influence the presentation of psychological symptoms and help-seeking behaviors. For Black male athletes, this includes recognition of how slavery, Jim Crow laws, medical experimentation, and ongoing institutional racism have shaped contemporary relationships with healthcare systems. Mental health providers working with this population must understand how these historical experiences influence symptom presentation, treatment engagement, and therapeutic relationships.

The concept of “cultural formulation” provides a framework for developing mental health interventions that incorporate cultural factors into diagnosis and treatment planning. For Black male athletes, cultural formulation must address multiple intersecting identities including racial identity, gender identity, athletic identity, and socioeconomic background. This requires mental health providers who are not only clinically competent but also possess deep knowledge of Black cultural values, communication styles, and coping mechanisms.

Research demonstrates that Black men with depression are more likely to present with somatic symptoms rather than classic emotional symptoms, leading to frequent misdiagnosis by providers who lack cultural competency [22]. Additionally, race-based traumatic stress responses are often misdiagnosed as personality disorders by practitioners who fail to recognize how experiences of racism and discrimination can create symptoms that mimic other psychological conditions [23].

The development of specialized interventions for Black male athletes must also address the stigma surrounding mental health service utilization within both athletic and Black cultural contexts. This requires innovative approaches that respect cultural values around strength and resilience while creating space for vulnerability and emotional expression. Group therapy models that incorporate Black cultural values, mentorship programs that connect current athletes with successful Black male role models, and family-based interventions that address generational trauma may prove more effective than traditional individual therapy approaches.

The importance of representation within mental health and athletic leadership cannot be overstated. Research demonstrates that as the status and prestige of coaching positions increase, minority representation decreases significantly [24]. This systematic exclusion of Black voices from leadership positions perpetuates environments where Black athletes lack role models who can demonstrate healthy approaches to emotional expression and help-seeking behavior.

The NCAA’s Diverse Student-Athlete Mental Health and Well-Being Summit, convened following the 2020 murder of George Floyd, represents an important recognition of the need for specialized approaches to mental health care for athletes of color.

The summit emphasized several key principles including viewing mental health as a collective rather than individual responsibility, developing multidisciplinary support teams, providing anti-racism training for staff, increasing preventative screening efforts, fostering identity development beyond athletics, and creating resources that speak directly to the lived experiences of athletes of color [25].

Reforming Systemic Racism for Black Athletes

Addressing the mental health crisis among Black male athletes requires comprehensive systemic reform that extends far beyond individual interventions to encompass institutional, cultural, and structural changes. The death of Kyren Lacy serves as a tragic reminder that incremental changes are insufficient to address the scope and urgency of this crisis.

Institutions

Athletic departments must implement comprehensive reforms that prioritize the holistic development of Black male athletes rather than viewing them solely as revenue generators. This includes mandatory cultural competency training for all staff members, including coaches, trainers, academic advisors, and administrative personnel. Training must address the historical context of racism in American sports, contemporary manifestations of racial bias, and specific strategies for supporting the mental health needs of Black male athletes.

Academic integration must be prioritized to eliminate the segregation that isolates Black athletes from broader campus communities and educational opportunities. This includes ensuring equal access to academic support services, creating mentorship programs that connect Black athletes with successful professionals in various fields, and developing career preparation programs that extend beyond athletics. Mental health services within athletic departments must be restructured to incorporate culturally responsive care models. This includes hiring mental health professionals with specific expertise in working with Black male populations, developing group therapy programs that incorporate Black cultural values, and creating peer support networks that allow athletes to connect with others who share similar experiences.

Athletic Leadership

Systematic efforts must be made to increase Black representation in coaching, administrative, and leadership positions within collegiate athletics. This includes implementing diversity targets for hiring, creating mentorship and leadership development programs for Black former athletes, and addressing the institutional barriers that limit advancement opportunities for Black professionals in athletics.

The presence of Black leaders in visible positions provides crucial modeling for current athletes about emotional expression, help-seeking behavior, and successful navigation of challenges. When Black male athletes see successful Black men in leadership positions who demonstrate vulnerability and emotional intelligence, it helps normalize these behaviors and reduces stigma around mental health service utilization.

The Community Mental health interventions must extend beyond individual therapy to incorporate family and community support systems that are central to Black cultural values. This includes developing family therapy programs that address generational trauma, creating community education initiatives that reduce

mental health stigma, and establishing partnerships with Black churches and community organizations that can provide additional support networks.

Peer support programs that connect current athletes with former Black male athletes who have successfully navigated similar challenges can provide powerful modeling and mentorship opportunities. These programs must be carefully structured to ensure that former athletes receive appropriate training in peer support techniques and boundary setting.

Public and Health Education

Comprehensive media literacy and public education campaigns must be implemented to address the harmful stereotypes and biased coverage that contribute to the psychological pressure experienced by Black male athletes. This includes working with media organizations to develop reporting guidelines that promote fair and contextual coverage of Black athletes, educating the public about the humanity and complexity of Black male athletes, and challenging narratives that reduce these young men to either criminals or commodities.

Sustained research efforts must be implemented to better understand the specific mental health needs of Black male athletes and evaluate the effectiveness of culturally responsive interventions. This includes longitudinal studies that track mental health outcomes over time, qualitative research that explores the lived experiences of Black male athletes, and intervention studies that test innovative approaches to mental health care.

Research must be conducted with meaningful involvement of Black communities and researchers to ensure that studies are culturally appropriate and that findings are translated into actionable recommendations for policy and practice [26-29].

Conclusions

The death of Kyren Lacy represents a profound tragedy that extends far beyond individual loss to illuminate systematic failures in how American society treats Black male athletes. His death serves as a stark reminder that celebrating Black athletic excellence while ignoring Black emotional complexity is not only hypocritical but potentially fatal. The young man who died was not simply a football player or a criminal defendant but a complete human being struggling with psychological pain that our institutions were inadequately equipped to address.

Our analyses have revealed the complex web of factors that contributed to Lacy's death and continue to threaten the well-being of countless other Black male athletes. Historical legacies of scientific and systemic racism continue to shape contemporary expectations that limit Black men to physical prowess while denying their intellectual and emotional complexity. The construction of racialized masculinity creates double-bind expectations that make vulnerability and help-seeking appear incompatible with both Black racial and gender identity. The commodification of Black athletic bodies within collegiate sports creates performance-based identities that become existentially threatening when athletic careers are jeopardized. Abecedarians to the study of Black men may not understand that media representations that criminalize Black male athletes create additional psychological burdens that White athletes do not face. Institutional failures within healthcare and mental health systems create compound barriers that often prove insurmountable for Black male athletes experiencing psychological crises.

The convergence of these factors creates what can only be described as a perfect storm of psychological vulnerability for Black male athletes. When young men like Kyren Lacy face legal troubles, performance declines, or identity crises, they encounter not only the immediate stressors but also the weight of historical oppression, cultural expectations, institutional neglect, and public scrutiny that their White counterparts simply do not experience.

The path forward requires acknowledging that conventional approaches to athlete mental health are fundamentally inadequate for addressing the racialized experiences of Black male athletes. Culturally responsive care models that incorporate historical context, cultural values, and intersectional identities must be developed and implemented. Institutional reforms that prioritize holistic development over revenue generation must be enacted. Representation in leadership positions must be increased to provide modeling and mentorship opportunities. Community-based approaches that honor Black cultural values around family and collective support must be developed.

Most importantly, this crisis demands that we recognize Black male athletes as complete human beings deserving of support, understanding, and care rather than commodities to be exploited for entertainment value. The young men who grace our athletic fields and generate billions of dollars in revenue are sons, brothers, friends, and community members before they are athletes. They possess the same capacity for joy, fear, hope, and despair as any other human beings, and they deserve mental health support systems that acknowledge and honor their full humanity.

Kyren Lacy's death must not be in vain. His tragedy must serve as an indelible catalyst for the comprehensive reforms that are desperately needed to protect the mental health and well-being of Black male athletes. The time for incremental change has passed; the crisis demands transformative action that addresses root causes rather than merely treating symptoms. As we move forward, we must commit to honoring Kyren's memory by ensuring that no other young Black male athlete faces the isolation, pressure, and inadequate support that contributed to his death. We must build systems of care that recognize Black male athletes as the complete, complex, valuable human beings they have always been. Only through such commitment can we mitigate future tragedies and create systemic environments where Black male athletes can thrive not only as performers but as whole human beings deserving of dignity, support, and care.

The legacy of Kyren Lacy must be transformed from tragedy into survival and transformation, from loss into lasting change that protects and nurtures the mental health of Black male athletes for generations to come.

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