Counseling and Advising Black Male High School Student Athletes

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Abstract

While sports have historically provided a space for Black males to experience a high sense of self-efficacy, the question about whether or not it transfers to educational endeavors persists. A challenge for practitioners is to ensure that Black males also thrive educationally as well as in their athletic pursuits. The author presents a brief history of Black males’ participation in sport, along with the historical implications of such participation. The utility of empowerment theory is explored within the context of promoting the college and career readiness of Black male student-athletes in high school. High school counselors’ use of empowerment theory is specifically highlighted. Specific indicators of college and career readiness are discussed, and the author posits the use of empowerment theory in counseling and advising can facilitate positive change in this process, assuring that sports remains the positive mobilizing mechanism that it can be for all student-athletes.

Introduction

Sports, which are abundantly woven into the fabric of our society, permeate the lives of many on several different levels. “Sport is now considered one of the social activities most likely to improve quality of life” (Dinc, 2011, p. 1417). Sports participation and the benefits thereof have been researched in relation to numerous factors. However, the debate over which groups benefit the most from sports participation persists (Eitle & Eitle, 2002).
Black males have been engaged in sport throughout American history. Sports have long been a major part of mainstream America, and African American males’ participation pre-dates the Civil War (1860), though not always formally acknowledged (Jenkins, 2006). While many appropriately laud Jack Johnson for being the first Black boxing champion in 1910, for example, Tom Molineaux also competed for the same title 100 years earlier. For both, and many other Black athletes throughout history, sports provided a space within which a sense of self-efficacy could be achieved. Self-efficacy refers to the belief that people have in their capabilities to attain certain results (Bandura, 1997). For many, sports often served as a “way out,” a path to economic mobility that without sports was deemed unachievable (Rhoden, 2006). Some would argue that narrative persists today: “…one of the most compelling themes in sports, one that the black athlete would revisit in various problematic iterations over time [is] the use of athletics as a ways out” (Rhoden, 2006, p. 42-43). Others suggest that questions remain about such mobility being experienced in other areas for Black male student-athletes, particularly education (Harris, 2012; Harper, Williams, & Blackman, 2013). Regarding high school sports participation, Harris (2012) argues Black males’ participation only garners a significant positive effect on their educational experience at the junior varsity level. Such benefits decrease as they progress to the varsity level. This is presumably due to the increased attention given to athletic pursuits that ultimately detract from academic endeavors. Harper et al. (2013) adds collegiate Black male student-athletes at top athletic institutions do not fare nearly as well as both their non-Black athlete and Black non-athlete counterparts. What the author does posit, however, is that counseling and advising driven by the tenets of empowerment theory can enhance the college and career readiness
of Black male student athletes. According to Rappaport (as cited in Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995), empowerment is a construct that links individual strengths, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviors. Shellman (2014) adds that empowerment encompasses one’s motivational disposition (e.g., just because one can, doesn’t mean one will), and a sense of personal control, including the belief that one’s actions will result in a desired outcome. There are many contextual variables that can contribute to this process. Of particular focus in this chapter is the role of the high school counselor, and the ways through which the use of empowerment theory can be effective.

*College and Career Readiness*

It has long been asserted that education is considered to be the most accessible means for achieving social, political, economic and cultural liberation in the United States (e.g., Hopkins, 1997). To this end, understanding the effect of sports on students’ educational success has been a focus of sociological inquiry for the past three decades (Eitle & Eitle, 2002). Jordan (1999) found participation in high school sports has a positive relationship to grade point average (GPA), self-concept, and academic self-confidence for all students. Similarly, Broh (2002) supported the tenet that playing school sports boosts students’ achievement in the classroom. Eide and Ronan (2001) posit that previous research has shown a positive association between students’ varsity sports participation and their grades, school progress, and college attendance. Snyder and Spreitzer (1990) suggested several reasons for why sports may promote academic achievement, including increased interest in school, the need to maintain good grades to stay eligible, heighten one’s self-concept, greater attention from teachers and coaches, membership with others who are academically oriented, and expectations to participate in
Adolescents who consistently participate in school-sponsored sports access a network that affords them interaction that can be useful to their development. The peer group interaction and increased interaction with adults (e.g., coaches, teachers, counselors) helps facilitate the development of a positive self-concept, educational aspirations, and a host of other positive traits. Participation in sports also provides another venue for parents to interact more with their child and the school, as they may attend games, converse about their progress (e.g., academically and athletically), and communicate with the coach and other school officials more frequently. Scholars continue to extol the beneficial effects of sports participation for teaching children life lessons, increasing self-esteem, and building interpersonal and leadership skills (Videon, 2002).

While there has been much research to indicate numerous benefits of participation in sports, there is a debate, however, over which groups of students benefit (Eitle & Eitle, 2002). For instance, early research suggested that participation in sports produces increased educational aspirations for Black student-athletes (Braddock, 1981), although evidence of an effect of participation on grades or achievement is minimal. Other researchers later found while sports participation was positively associated with various educational outcomes for White student-athletes, no such effect was present for Black student-athletes (Sabo, Melnick, & Vanfossen, 1993). Specifically, Sabo et al. (1993) found that White male and female high school athletes were more likely to attend four year institutions than were African American male and female athletes. They point to the tenets of social reproduction theory, which describes how institutions – in this case, high school sports - reproduce the social attitudes and relationships that exist in other
dominant systems that ultimately privilege some and marginalize others. Honora (2003) writes of Black students who are vulnerable to the development of an emotional detachment from school; for students such as these, involvement in sports and other extracurricular activities affords them a way of identifying with their school community. Regarding educational success, it appears that White males experience the greatest social mobility gains through their participation in sports (Sabo et al., 1993). Given that Black males may be disproportionately drawn to sports (Rhoden, 2006), particularly a few sports, they warrant targeted intervention to ensure that sports remains a beneficial extracurricular activity that supports that college and career readiness process. The disproportionate migration of African American male youth into sport is well documented. Historically, they have mostly participated in the revenue-generating sports of basketball and football as well as track and field. Still today, African American males are drawn to a few selected sports (Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Bennett III, 2008; Hodge, Harrison, Burden, & Dixson, 2008). This overwhelming draw to specific sports is due in part to many contemporary African American athletes being the most prominent images that Black youth see and therefore serve as role models (Sailes, 1998). While on the surface this appears mostly beneficial, it can also contribute to the legacy of African American disenfranchisement being passed down from one generation to the next (Jenkins, 2006), as it limits the possible options that African American males envision as paths for a successful future. Sports are often the avenue through which African American males hope to attain the respect, power, and control that often evades them via traditional means (Harris, 2012). Such participation is also often welcomed by groups in society who are not as welcoming the participation of African American males in other
domains. Realizing this, African American families, among other factors, contribute to the increased channeling of African American males into sports (Sailes, 1998). While such participation may occupy time that could otherwise be devoted to less constructive means to gaining mobility, it may also occupy time that could be devoted to educational pursuits.

It is worth noting African American males had the lowest percentage among African Americans and Whites of both sexes in total undergraduate degrees conferred with 54,000 out of 1,347,000 (4%) African American males between the ages of 20 and 24 earning a bachelor’s degree in 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2005 Annual Social and Economic Supplement).

Upon a closer look at the educational experiences of Black male student-athletes, in particular, who do matriculate to college and compete as a student-athlete, the lack of college readiness becomes more apparent. According to Harper et al. (2013), Black male student-athletes, particularly those competing in one of the six major sports conferences – Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, and Southeastern Conference (SEC)- experience less educational benefits than White student-athletes, as well as Black non-student-athletes. Specifically, approximately 50% of collegiate Black male student-athletes graduate within six years, compared to 67% of student-athletes overall, 73% of undergraduate students overall, and 56% of Black undergraduate men overall (Harper et al., 2013). This has incredible implications for a variety of education stakeholders, particularly those who at the K-12 level who are at least partly responsible for the college and career readiness process of all students.
College and career readiness has been a national conversation for years, and particularly in recent years. The U.S. Department of Education (2010) notes that postsecondary education is increasingly becoming a necessity for political, social, and economic mobility. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) references it several times as being a very important priority of the department of education to ensure everyone’s access to postsecondary education. As such, equity in K-12 schools is achieved when all students are being prepared to choose the path that they want to pursue. Conley (2007) defines college readiness as the level of preparation and skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses at a postsecondary institution without the need for remedial coursework. College and career readiness presents a more nuanced perspective than that of stating that all students should go to college. Because it is widely understood that not all students will go to college, saying that all should really translates into “some should.” And the latter reality then leaves this question begging to be answered: who gets to decide? The mantra embraced in recent years by the Department of Education suggests that all students should have the opportunity to pursue a college education should they deem it a good fit for their career goals. This shifts the power of that decision to the student. This power, for Black male student-athletes, is critical to their college and career readiness and overall educational success. Despite the new age of accountability and the various tactics for strengthening school systems, Kirst and Bracco (2004) conclude that almost half of the students who enter higher education and approximately two-thirds of students who attend community college must enroll in remedial courses and programs. Given the disproportionate draw of Black males to sports such as basketball and football, it is further telling, then, that
according to Lucas and Lovaglia (2002), over 20% of football and basketball collegiate student-athletes are admitted under special admission policies. Specifically, NCAA Bylaw 14.1.5.1.1 states, “A student-athlete may be admitted under a special exception to the institution’s normal entrance requirements if the discretionary authority of the president or chancellor (or designated admissions officer or committee) to grant such exceptions is set forth in an official document published by the university (e.g., official catalog) that describes the institution’s admissions requirements” (Teague, 2012). Conley (2012) suggests there are four factors associated with college and career readiness: content knowledge and core academic skills, cognitive strategies, learning skills and techniques, and transition knowledge and skills.

Content knowledge and core academic skills are necessary for attaining college and career readiness (Conley, 2007). Knowing and understanding key terms and terminology, factual information, linking ideas, and organizing concepts are critical to this particular domain of college and career readiness. Students also need to be able to apply academics in the context of situations they may face in their careers. Such core academic skills as writing, research, oral communication, and general logic and analytic thinking are not necessarily subject-specific but are crucial to the success in college and in a wide variety of disciplines. Such skills are especially honed in Advanced Placement courses, where Black students in general essentially feel kept out by school counselors (Ogbu, 2003). Per Hendre (1998), African American males, in particular become far more alienated from academics than other groups as they move through high school. Sports, however, become a focus for African American males because it allows them to define themselves and their masculinities (May, 2004). While Black male student-athletes
may maintain their sense of connection to school through sports, though, it appears to be at a risk to their college and career readiness (Harris, 2012; Harper et al., 2013).

Cognitive strategies such as interpretation, problem solving, and reasoning have also been consistently identified as being critical in the college and career readiness process (Conley, 2007). These are frequently the skills that college professors and students cite as the weakest areas of preparation in high school. Large differences often exist between the amount and type of reading and writing required in high school versus college classes as well as the analytical and thinking skills required, according to Conley (2007). Again, access to rigorous curriculum in high school for Black male student-athletes is particularly important in this regard.

In addition to cognitive strategies and subject-focused content knowledge, learning skills and techniques, otherwise referenced as academic behaviors, are also necessary for academic success. Such behaviors include, but are not limited to, self-awareness, persistence, ownership of learning, and self-control. Additionally, mastery of skills such as study and organization are critical for college success, including mastery of key material and successful completion of academic tasks (Conley, 2007). Researchers report students also need to have an understanding of the complex college admission and selection process, the academic requirements for college work, and the options available to them, such as what institutions accommodate their interests the best and how to pay for postsecondary education (Hooker & Brand, 2010). Although many students aspire to attend a four-year college and understand the opportunities an advanced degree will allow, they have little understanding of the academic and social preparation necessary to actually enter a four-year college and to be successful in such a setting. Black male
student-athletes, in particular, may be of particular concern given the overwhelming attention given to their athletic prowess by K-12 and even collegiate stakeholders. Many students do not receive counseling on the range of postsecondary options or when they do receive counseling are given limited guidance on how their individual academic plan matches their postsecondary aspirations (Hooker & Brand, 2010). These key transition knowledge and skills, or “college knowledge” (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009), includes thorough understanding of college admissions, testing and curricular requirements, application processes, college options and choices, tuition costs and financial aid, college culture and course rigor, and expectations and necessity of increased higher education (Conley, 2007).

**Empowerment Theory**

Empowerment theory is applicable for use with Black male student-athletes because it focuses on maximizing all of the strengths and assets of an individual such that he can increase his academic and career options. Steele (1992) suggests Black males may actually disengage academically due to their perceived intellectual inferiority. Hodge et al. (2008) insist several challenges – such as helping education personnel engage in self-reflection, facilitate positive learning experiences for student-athletes, highlighting the academic successes of Black male student-athletes, and ultimately eliminate racist stereotypic beliefs in schools – must be confronted. Empowerment theory is a framework through which such progress can be made, namely with directly impacting the self-efficacy of Black male student-athletes in high school.

The measure of one’s ability to accomplish a task, whether related to academic or career endeavors, greatly influences whether or not that task will be attempted and
achieved. Further, authentic mastery experiences and positive reinforcement are critical to one’s self-efficacy being high. As such, Black males are disproportionately drawn to sports and are reinforced in a variety of ways for such participation. While there is very little wrong, per se, with such reinforcement, it can detract from a high sense of self-efficacy in other arenas. James Coleman (1969) offered the zero-sum argument as a possible way to partially explain such phenomena. Specifically, if Black males are spending an inordinate amount of time pursuing their athletic endeavors, it is going to detract from their efforts in other domains, namely academic and career. Additionally, if authentic mastery experiences are intentionally and strategically employed in the athletic sphere more than the academic sphere, then academic self-efficacy is likely to not be as high in that domain as it is in the athletic domain. And given the history of African Americans in this country in general, thought must be given to the psychological, emotional, and physical burdens embedded in American culture that has facilitated a legacy of disenfranchisement being passed down from one generation to the next. As such, intentional, strategic, and targeted efforts aimed at increasing the academic self-efficacy of African Americans is warranted. Black male student-athletes, in particular, could benefit from having a concerted effort on the part of all education stakeholders to help them tie their athletic pursuits to a solid educational agenda.

Empowerment theory, which has roots in early feminist theory, is often used when counseling populations who may face oppression from society, such as Black male student-athletes (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007). The driving force behind this theory is to facilitate the empowerment of the client, which Gutierrez (1995) defined as “the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals,
families and communities can take action to improve their situations” (p. 229). The three types of power listed by Gutierrez (1995) represent control of oneself, equity in relationships with others, and the power to make systemic change. One of the most distinguishing features of this theory is the counseling relationship, which is viewed as a partnership, thus, giving the client more control by eliminating power differentials.

**Future Research**

Previous research suggests that as the level of Black males’ participation in sport increases (i.e., junior varsity, varsity, college), their educational performance decreases (Harris, 2012, Harper et al., 2013). To this end, it is critical for research to explore a number of factors related to this phenomenon. Harris (in press), for example, asserts Black males’ participation in team or individual sports does not significantly help or hinder their college attendance. It would be worth exploring further whether or not the educational outcomes of Black males vary by the specific sport they play in high school. Future research should also explore whether or not it matters that Black males are attending a predominately White high school or a more racially diverse school. Similarly, how does a Black male student-athlete’s schooling experience in a suburban, rural, or urban area influence educational outcomes? Answers to such questions will help to clarify whether or not race and gender are the most important factors in how sports participation influences one’s educational trajectory, and specify how other factors are also related. Hodge, Kozub, Robinson, and Hersman (2007) assert from a critical perspective accurately identifying and describing participants is appropriate and relevant.
In order to disseminate best practices to school counselors and other educators working with Black male student-athletes, it is also imperative that interventions continue to be studied regarding their impact on Black male student-athletes. For example, there are numerous researchers (e.g., Prentice & Garcia, 2000; Wyss & Thai, 2012) who support the use of service learning for positively influencing the educational and career development of adolescents. Specifically, personal development (i.e. self-efficacy, identity development, well-being, and career development); higher order reasoning and critical thinking skills; and long-term community involvement are all found to be outcomes of service-learning experiences (Felten & Clayton, 2011). According to Farber (2011), service learning is a tool that facilitates the empowerment of students to address problems in their local and global communities. It is a student driven process that combines academic content with direct service experiences, ultimately strengthening the understanding of curricular content. It is particularly useful for Black youth, who have not been historically served well by the traditional classroom environment (Farber, 2011). Interventions that utilize service learning as a mechanism for change should be evaluated specifically for how they might facilitate the empowerment of Black male student-athletes. Such evaluations would have direct implications for all personnel in a position to facilitate such service learning experiences with Black male student-athletes (e.g., school counselors, coaches, teachers, etc.). To that end, a collaborative effort amongst several education stakeholders would ensure that the connection made between curricular content, social/emotional dynamics, and career concerns would be accurate and aligned with the school’s overall mission as well.
Implication and Recommendations

School counselors and other educators can facilitate help facilitate the empowerment of Black male student-athletes through a variety of means that maximize student success, not the least of which include individual and group counseling, and collaboration. The role of school counselors, in general, is to implement culturally relevant prevention efforts that are a part of a larger comprehensive program (Lee, 2001).

Black male student-athletes who are fully aware of their internal and external assets can begin to create positive change in their circumstances. Therefore, individual counseling is one medium through which school counselors help to unearth those strengths of the students. Open questions and prompts that allow for the student to share his story will allow the counselor to identify those strengths and reflect them back to the student, who may or may not already be aware of how resourceful they and their networks are. There are a variety of ways to solicit such information – postmodern approaches such as narrative and solution focused interventions are just a couple of ways to elicit the stories of Black males who might otherwise be reticent to share them. Such postmodern approaches allow Black male student-athletes to construct the meaning of their lives, releasing any previously internalized messages from dominant cultural narratives, and establishing a new sense of personal agency (Corey, 2013). For example, having a student represent pictorially his world, and then describe it, could yield very powerful data that the counselor can then discuss with the student and from which they can collaboratively extract the positive assets and construct a more desirable world.

Throughout this process, it is critical for school counselors to honor the respective culture of students and provide opportunities for social capital attainment with which to
succeed in postsecondary life. According to Richardson (2012), social capital refers to the social ties between persons that facilitate trust and mutual benefit through the access to information and other resources that promote advancement in life. It is necessary for the school counselor to develop a partnership with students and allow them to have ownership of their growth (Greene, 2006). Given the way student-athletes can have so much prescribed for them (in the form of their practice schedules, course selection, peer group, etc.), this is critical for their healthy development. According to Harper, Terry, and Twiggs (2009), school counselors may even have to reach out to Black male student-athletes in other spaces such as their homes, churches, and other venues, to demonstrate such honor of their reality, and then facilitate the appropriate growth process. In the early stages of career planning, the school counselor should focus on the student’s interests and strengths and help the student plan academic courses or opportunities based on these strengths and interests. Determining the strengths of a student allows for awareness and can be a good opportunity to discuss how the student can use these skills to overcome obstacles and further define them.

According to Steen (2007), small group counseling also has a variety of applications in the school, and working with students through this medium can assist students who are not achieving to their potential as well. A group setting allows for idea sharing for students who are in the same stage of exploring potential career options (Kerr & Sodano, 2003). Through the group counseling format, Black male student-athletes can elicit the support of similar peers, weigh potential career options as a group, and make their way through the goal setting stages of career development by providing feedback to one another (Kerr & Sodano, 2003).
Afterschool groups directed at Black male students have produced positive behaviors related to attendance, discipline referrals, and academics (Martin, Martin, Gibson & Wilkins, 2007; Wyatt, 2009). In particular, high school counselor Shelby Wyatt developed an afterschool group called The Brotherhood which shows very promising results (Wyatt, 2009). The unit is geared towards Black male students who were at risk for dropping out of school and focused on themes such as collaboration, leadership, and student advocacy – all of which serve as the foundations of empowerment. Those participating in the Brotherhood program demonstrated significant improvement in both self-concept and grade point average, ultimately garnering 48%-60% higher grades than those who are nonmembers (Wyatt, 2009). One of the principles that make up Wyatt’s group that pertain to the empowerment of these young men is the opportunity to develop leadership skills. For instance, allowing a different group member to lead a discussion once a week will not only help develop leadership skills and give him a sense of power, it will also help develop those critical thinking skills that are essential in college and career readiness. Also, letting the group members decide what direction they want the group to go in further empowers the members and creates a sense of equity among the group members. The Brotherhood program (Wyatt, 2009) also develops academic, career and personal/social goals with their participants, and feedback from post-program surveys showed that the students found these goals very helpful in their development (Wyatt, 2009). This program led to school counselors’ reevaluation of the four year plan at their school and the creation of a new program designed to improve college readiness (Wyatt, 2009). Such an intervention has incredible relevance for the academic and career success of Black male student-athletes, in particular, a group that
since the 19th century has been depicted as athletically superior while intellectually inferior to Whites (Hodge, Burden, et al., 2008).

Another useful addition to such a group is bringing in speakers of similar backgrounds who are currently in college or are professionals within the community. In this way, the Black male student-athletes will be able to interact with role models across a variety of domains who can explain how they got to where they are and how they overcame related obstacles along the way. This helps students build and understand the worth of networks, as well as give them a sense of new possibilities. Seeing individuals who are successful in a variety of areas is an excellent way for these students to realize that they are not stuck with one path or future and most importantly, that they have the power to change their own lives.

A final form of empowerment is gaining power through systemic change (Gutierrez, 1995). This is a perfect opportunity for the school counselor to help the group brainstorm ways they could achieve change in their environment, whether it is the school or the community. It could also be encouraging Black male student-athletes to begin this dialogue with the school, which could bring about systemic change and more ideal conditions within which these students can thrive. It also allows the students to realize that they have the ability to change their environment, and more importantly, that they can change their response to the environmental conditions that may be beyond their control.

In 2010, Gibbons, Diambra, and Buchanan analyzed school counselors’ perceptions and attitudes on the collaborative nature of their employment. This survey of 268 professional school counselors revealed trends that support the assertion that
“counselors collaborate most closely with teachers” in the day to day curriculum-based aspects of the profession (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2005; Gibbons et al., 2010). They rated the frequency and perceived importance of collaborative encounters, using a seven-point scale, with one being the highest, in each measurement (Gibbons et al., 2010). Collaboration with teachers was the overwhelming priority of time and importance in this study, with 97% of counselors collaborating with teachers on a regular basis and a mean ranking of 2.68 of the overall importance of this interaction (Gibbons et al., 2010). Although teachers were not the only stakeholders represented in this study, their consistently high-ranked value in the process reaffirms the “teacher as a partner” viewpoint held by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005). Through the co-creation of integrated guidance lessons and service as a mentor or advisor to students, the counselor can team with teaching staff to achieve a comprehensive, effective school counseling program (ASCA, 2005). Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, and Bagley (2014) concur that it is critical for education stakeholders to work together to facilitate the educational development of students. Harris et al. (2014) found education stakeholders sharing and collaboratively executing a vision rooted in cultural competence successfully facilitates the academic engagement and success of Black male student-athletes. Cultural competence, according to Sperry (2012), refers to one’s ability to draw upon knowledge, awareness, sensitivity, and skills in order to more effectively work with others from different backgrounds. An individual or organization with a high level of cultural competency demonstrates an acknowledgement of various cultures and their differences and similarities, along with a genuine respect and acceptance of each culture.
Policy

School belonging, academic self-efficacy, and educational aspirations have been documented to be positively correlated with academic achievement for all underrepresented ethnic groups, including Black males (Uwah, McMahon, & Furlow, 2008). To this end, Uwah et al. (2008) suggest school counselors can utilize their unique relationships with all education stakeholders to create a culture of encouragement and participation. Likewise, administrators also influence the success of students, as they can directly influence the structural framework through which education is experienced in schools. For Black males, in particular, administrators are able to create systems that promote equitable learning experiences for all. The master schedule, for example, can be used to promote systemic change in that it is the document that dictates when during the day all courses are taught and when teachers are teaching and planning. It can be orchestrated in such a way that maximizes the involvement of all students in a rigorous curriculum with built in supports (e.g. tutoring, study hall, classroom guidance, group counseling, professional development) throughout the day (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP]). Additionally, principals and assistant principals are ultimately responsible for enforcing discipline, employing equitable policies and, more importantly, intervening in preventive ways can help to decrease the disproportionate numbers of suspensions among groups. And, given that Black males, in general, are disproportionately assigned to special education (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008), it is critical for administrators to appropriately implement systematic identification procedures, such as response-to-intervention (RTI). According to McKinney, Bartholomew, and Gray (2010), RTI has the potential to reduce disproportionality and
improve education outcomes of culturally linguistic and diverse student groups, of which Black male student-athletes are a part. Within such a system, the effective counseling and advising of Black male student-athletes would be facilitated given the consideration being given to the unique experience and needs of this group. Additionally, coaches of student-athletes, while presumably hired to garner success on the athletic field, can also have an impact on the academic achievement of students. Given the nature of Black males’ disproportionate draw to athletics, particularly revenue generating sports like basketball and football, along with track and field (e.g. Eitle & Eitle, 2006; Hodge, Burden, et al., 2008; Rhoden, 2006), coaches can be instrumental in helping to ensure that their participation be a mobilizing mechanism as opposed to an exploitive one. Given that Black males have historically considered sports as a way out of their social condition (Rhoden, 2006), coaches are likely to have the undivided attention of this group and can therefore facilitate development across a number of domains (e.g. personal, academic, career). For example, coaches can implement their own prerequisite for athletic participation, over and above the popular “no-pass, no-play” rule. Such high expectations from coaches in the academic realm can increase the likelihood that student-athletes develop a positive identity in that area as they often do in their athletic endeavors (Harris et al., 2014).

Summary and Conclusion

Sports have long been a major part of mainstream America, and African American males’ participation pre-dates the Civil War (1860), though not always formally acknowledged (Jenkins, 2006). While some scholars continue to extol the
beneficial effects of sports participation such as teaching children life lessons, increasing self-esteem, and building interpersonal and leadership skills (Videon, 2002), others posit that while sports participation is positively associated with various educational outcomes for White student-athletes, no such effect is present for Black student-athletes (Eitle & Eitle., 2002). According to Rhoden (2006, p. 42-43), sports for Black males have long been deemed a “dramatic means of improving one’s station in life, of gaining economic advantage and prestige that would have been impossible to achieve without sports.” The challenge for current education practitioners, then, is to ensure that a solid educational agenda is tied to Black males’ athletic pursuits, ultimately facilitating their college and career readiness. Given the role of school counselors to facilitate the social/emotional, academic, and career development of students in schools (ASCA), they are uniquely positioned and equipped to do so. Specifically, school counselors can, through the lens of empowerment theory, encourage Black male student-athletes to maximize their internal and external assets to ensure their college and career readiness. In this way, Black males can gain better control of their academic and career outcomes.
References


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