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The School Counselor's Role in Anti-Racist College Counseling and Advising

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From the Guest Editors



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The School Counselor's Role in Anti-Racist College Counseling and Advising

At the time of writing the introduction for this special issue, we are on the heels of a national reckoning with the COVID-19 pandemic, racial inequity and violence, and systemic injustice. As the nation prepares to pivot back into in-person schooling, at least partially, conversations regarding mental health and Critical Race Theory have come to the fore. While a growing number of school counselors and other educators have rightfully advocated for the inclusion of anti-racist practices in schools to make sense of the multitude of ways racism pervades education and undermines the mental wellbeing and holistic development of young people, there has been national outcry and political decisions barring its use. While this special issue does not intend to detail the myriad ways Critical Race Theory can/should be drawn from, it does consider the role school counselors play in combating racist systems that disproportionately impact the College Counseling and Advising process for Black youth. This issue also explores the ways in which mental health, and social emotional wellbeing is wedded to the role of college counseling and career development. Emdin (2016) argues for White educators, who work



with Black youth, to become acutely aware of how age-old racist schooling practices force youth to assimilate to ways of knowing and being that are divorced from their authentic selves. The path towards authentic self-actualization, or the celebration of Black youth and their ways of knowing and being, are achieved through the abolishment of the policies and practices that squelch their development (Love, 2019). In this special issue, we introduce a series of articles that explore the role that counselors play in K-12 schooling and on college campuses, to challenge racist systems and structures and to support Black youth.

Racial Inequities in College Counseling & Advising

College and Career Readiness Data in K-12 Schools

From the general to the specific, counseling frameworks lack attunement to the



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intersectional identities that Black youth bring with them into schools (Singh et al., 2020). As school counselors, the vast majority of our counseling theory pulls from White eurocentric values and beliefs which manifest in the harming and isolating of Black and Brown youth (Chen, 2021). School counselors who cling to counseling theories/outcomes that reduce students' developmental potential to a singular phenomena, fail to understand how larger systems of racism/white supremacy produce those phenomena (Hannon & Vareen, 2016). As counseling professionals, we should be attuned to the ways in which the context where one receives schooling impacts their development. For example, schools are too often environments which rely on deficit labels that both overlook the assets that Black youth and their communities hold, and minimize their developmental potential (Emdin, 2021). The deficit lens that many educators and educational systems carry when interacting with Black youth can be seen in teacher referral biases that lead Black boys and girls to receive 2 to 3 times more detentions/suspensions in comparison to White youth (Anderson & Ritter, 2017), to be erroneously overdiagnosed with attention deficit and oppositional defiant disorders and learning disabilities (Ballentine, 2019) and prescribed IEPs and behavioral plans (Shapiro, 2020). These general qualms with counseling can be extended to the specific area of college and career counseling. For example, college and career readiness as a construct is often judged on quantitative measurements of a students

academic performance (SAT, ACT, GPA) - which are really only metrics for college readiness and focus solely on academic development. Exploring these metrics within a recent national dataset, research suggested 53% of Black or African American test takers did not meet any SAT college readiness benchmarks, and only 10% of Black or African American test takers met ACT benchmarks across all four subjects (Espionsa et al., 2019). While there is evidence that college enrollment is increasing for Black youth from prior years (Espinosa et al., 2019), they remain statistically more likely to undermatch, or to attend colleges well below their academic level (Ovink, 2018). There are also noted drops in enrollment amongst Black and Latino youth during COVID-19 (Causey et al., 2020). Beyond COVID, Black youth have statistically lower retention rates once being admitted to college, with researchers citing experiences with racism on campus as a notable factor in decreasing the longevity of their enrollment (Grooms et al., 2020). These datums cannot be examined in a vacuum, meaning, the antecedents to this reality must be understood. Perhaps unsurprisingly inequities persist in areas like appraisal and advisement, where Black boys and girls are significantly less likely to be recommended for advanced placement courses (Mayes & Hines, 2014). Even when Black youth are granted admission into AP classes, they grapple with imposter syndrome (Collins et al., 2020), racist comments from their peers and teachers (Baker-Bell, 2020), and curriculum that fails to capture the realities of

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their lives experiences (Emdin, 2021), all of which stem from an anti-Black school system that fails to communicate to youth that Black lives matter (Love, 2019). Working backwards from disaggregated college and career readiness data, it should be clear that racist and anti-Black ideology inform policy which create barriers to Black youth's holistic development.

Anti-Racist School Counseling

Supporting the development of K-12 students is the cornerstone of the school counseling profession. This includes providing and advocating for students' college and career awareness through exploration and postsecondary planning and decision making, ensuring students' right to choose from the wide array of options after completing secondary education (American School Counselor Association, [ASCA] 2017a). However, this work cannot be done without affirming the intersecting identities of Black youth (e.g., ability and/or disability status, age, gender, gender identity, generation, historical as well as ongoing experiences of marginalization, immigrant status, language, national origin, religion or spirituality, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, among other variables) and recognizing how biases and systemic racism impact postsecondary planning and access. ASCA (2016) ethical standards assert that counselors are responsible for "identifying gaps in college and career access and the implications of such data for addressing both intentional and

unintentional biases related to college and career counseling." In such manner, counselors must engage in anti-racist actions and advocate to change racist policies, procedures, practices, guidelines and laws contributing to inequities in students' academic, career and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2021).

Engaging in anti-racist work does not happen with one article, book, or workshop, rather it is a lifelong long process of learning and unlearning, and action. Counselors should actively reflect on their worldview (beliefs, values, assumptions, and biases) and examine how these views influence their practice, specifically college counseling and advising with Black youth (ASCA, 2021). Examining our own behavior can be difficult and becomes even harder when we realize that we may have caused harm to those we intended to be of service to. We must ask ourselves these tough questions. Are we truly listening to the unique experiences of Black youth and helping them make informed decisions that align with their wants and needs? Are we guiding them to institutions that are physically and emotionally safe environments? To institutions that actively contribute to Black students' personal and professional development? Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably" (attributed to NAC International Perspectives: Women and

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Global Solidarity). Thus, counselors must also think deeply about structures, processes and policies that impact Black students. Cultural competence fails when the structures are racist.

Introducing the Articles

During this pivotal moment, the counseling profession must contend with their role in disrupting racist practices and dismantling systems of oppression that promote inequality in achievement, access and opportunity for Black youth. As counselors return to in-person schooling, they will likely be asked to confront complex racial politics and practices that seek to uphold whiteness and maintain the status quo. Anti-racist college counseling and advising requires a conscious decision to pursue it as a goal and way of being. It is a process that begins from the inside out by first unpacking one's cultural worldview, investigating existing practices and policies, expanding one's knowledge base to identify alternative ways of functioning, and interrupting systems that contribute to racial inequity and creating equitable and inclusive systems. Therefore, this special issue highlights articles that challenge counselors and counselor educators to consider the limits of White-centric theoretical frameworks, develop an awareness of contextual forces that impact Black youth in schools and amidst their post-secondary pursuits, and disrupt racism and inequality at the personal and systemic level. These research and conceptual articles utilize

methodological designs that center Black voices and the Black lived experience and interrogate counseling practices. Hunt and Rhodes (2021) draw from a critical race theory lens to offer a timely and important critique of traditional career development theory steeped in White ways of knowing and being, which struggle to address the experiences of Black youth. This article, titled "Expanding the Life-Span, Life-Space Approach using Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Social Capital", gleans practical strategies for counselors to expand on Super's life-space approach and adequately support Black youth's development across the lifespan. In "Promoting Equitable College Access and Success: Exploring Critical Frameworks in School Counselor Training", Van Mastrigt and Nuñez-Estrada (2021) explore the readiness of school counselors to leverage critical race theory, culturally sustaining, and social justice competencies to effect systemic change. Specifically, through a series of interviews with practicing school counselors, Van Mastrigt and Nuñez-Estrada detail implications for challenging both practicing school counselors and school counselor preparation programs to adopt culturally responsive and anti-racist approaches. Curry and colleagues (2021) offer an article titled "Black Male Collegiate Athletes' Perceptions of Their Career and Academic Preparation", examining academic and career development disparities for Black youth who navigate the collegiate athletics system. Their holistic view of K-12 education as a feeder for athletic


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programs on college campuses offers valuable insights into anti-racist practice for school and college counselors.

In “Black Women’s Perceptions of K-12 Experiences that Influenced their Preparation for College,” Byrd (in press) uses phenomenological inquiry to center the intersectionality of Black women and the experiences that contributed to their college readiness. Her research provides valuable insight into how Black women reflect upon their preparation within their families, communities, and K-12 settings. Through a systematic review of the literature, Tevis, Davis, Perez-Gill, and Amazon (in press) in “Advising Black Students and Anti-Opressive Frameworks: A Systematic Review of the College Access and College Counseling Literature” examine how the extant literature is informed by anti-oppressive frameworks. The authors’ findings bring attention to the underrepresentation of Black students as a unit of analysis in the majority of the literature on college counseling. In “Moving from Racist to Antiracist Practices: Using Lewin’s Field Theory to Examine Career Help-Seeking Behaviors and Intentions of Black First-Generation Students Attending Predominantly White Institutions,” Childs, Sánchez, and Liu (in press) use a hierarchical regression analysis to investigate the predictability of contextual factors on previous career services use and intention to seek counseling among Black first-generation

students attending predominantly White institutions.

In summary, we believe the research and conceptual articles in this special issue add to the literature on college and career counseling of Black youth. It is our hope that the research presented not only stimulates larger conversations about the contextual forces that impact Black youth amidst their post-secondary pursuits, school counseling practices, and the limits of White-centric theoretical frameworks, but also meaningful reform.

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