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This chapter highlights issues of racism and neoliberal capitalism that exist within the market-like structure of intercollegiate athletics on college campuses, as well as some of the consequences for student-athletes. We discuss the importance of using critical frameworks to better understand and shift the culture and structure of athletic programs to be more inclusive and supportive of the needs and interests of college athletes.

Neoliberal Capitalism and Racism in College Athletics: Critical Approaches for Supporting Student-Athletes

Joy Gaston Gayles, Eddie Comeaux, Ezinne Ofoegbu, Sara Grummert

Colleges and universities with highly commercialized intercollegiate athletics programs receive a great deal of attention in the media not only concerning wins and losses, but often because of abuses, scandals, exploitation, and gross misconduct. Every year around the time of the wildly popular "March Madness" tournament, the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) national championship for men's and women's basketball, reporters use this occasion to highlight some of the major issues confronting college sports. In 2017, Eddie Pells, an award winning writer for the Associated Press, wrote an article entitled *Busted: Teams at top of brackets find themselves in trouble* (Pells, 2017). In the article, Pells noted that several of the top seeded men's basketball teams were from universities under investigation for gross academic misconduct, sexual harassment, and other legal issues.

A major concern for many scholars is that African Americans make up the overwhelming majority of student-athletes in sports that generate large sums of revenue for the NCAA, academic institutions, and athletics departments (Harper, 2018; Hawkins, 2010). Yet, student-athletes are not permitted to be directly compensated under the guise of amateurism, a philosophical principle suggesting that college athletes participate for the love of the sport and not for pay. This chapter considers racism and academic and athletic capitalism using critical theories and perspectives to illuminate the need for resolution and reform. The chapter concludes with a discussion of

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a critical framework for creating a more inclusive environment that holds institutions responsible for creating policies and implementing programs that better support student-athletes.

Racism in College Sports

Race remains a salient and divisive issue in twenty-first century athletics. A large and growing body of research on the Division I Black male college athlete experience has documented this ongoing social, political, and economic phenomenon (Hawkins, 2010; Nocera & Strauss, 2015). In particular, the commodification and economic exploitation of young Black men, who are largely represented in football and men's basketball, has been a perpetual theme of controversy within academic arenas, public discourse, and athletics enterprises for many decades. The stakes, no doubt, are higher today—and the severe treatment of racialized athletic bodies remains prominent. The impressive (albeit questionable) commercial success of the nonprofit NCAA and its member institutions has enabled disproportionally (privileged) White athletics power brokers (e.g., coaches, athletic directors, conference commissioners, and externalities such as sponsors) to reap the material benefits from this athletics enterprise, enriching themselves on the sweat and undercompensated athletic labor of often-disadvantaged and predominantly Black male athletes (Branch, 2011).

During the 2014–2015 season, Black men comprised 56.3% of the NCAA Division I football teams and 60.8% of basketball teams, representing the largest racial group in both sports (Harper, 2016). These same Black athletes in big-time programs generate lucrative profits for their college or university and help to subsidize non-revenue or Olympic sports such as soccer, swimming, gymnastics, and softball. There is in fact a correlation between the percentage of Black male athletes in football and basketball and the revenue generated by these sports. For example, in 2016–2017, the University of Kentucky's football and men's basketball teams (which were 59% and 57% Black, respectively, compared to the 6.8% Black student population of the institution as a whole) generated $36 million and $28 million in revenue, respectively, which comprised 52% of the school's athletic revenue for the year (Gaines, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). It also has been reported that Division I football and men's basketball players generate about $12 billion in yearly revenue primarily through television contracts and ticket sales, making Division I athletics more profitable than professional sports leagues (McArdle, 2014).

To further highlight this racist and exploitive arrangement in perpetuity, Huma and Staurowsky (2012) co-authored a report on the market value of Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) football and men's basketball players. They discovered that players in big-time sports programs would be denied at least $6.2 billion between 2011 and 2015 under NCAA rules that prohibit them from being fairly compensated or receiving endorsement deals from

sponsors. They also reported that if big-time college athletes had access to the same fair market as professional athletes, the average FBS player would be worth $137,357 per year, while the average basketball player would be worth $289,031. Today, these projected numbers are likely higher considering the NCAA's revenue increase through their multimedia rights contract with CBS Sports and Turner. As mentioned earlier, the most highly publicized and disproportionately Black players are denied their fair market value, all under the NCAA's pretense of amateurism: a pretense that is defended by the NCAA in court with arguments that invoke the 13th amendment, thus equating college athletes' athletic pursuits with prison labor (King, 2018).

NCAA amateurism ideals, where athletics are supposed to be viewed as an *avocation*, create and promote the illusion of protecting athletes from economic exploitation and providing valuable educational opportunities. Yet, there is growing evidence to suggest that intercollegiate athletics practices are *not* consistent with the fundamental values and mission of American higher education (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010). For instance, despite the unique opportunities and experiences that NCAA institutions provide to more than 460,000 college athletes each year, it is painfully clear that Black college athletes are profitable. However, they are not fairly compensated for their athletic labor, as athletic departments have morphed into big businesses and entertainment centers. The racialized bodies of Black male college athletes have become hypervisible commodities (Hawkins, 2010). Under the current structure and conditions, Black "amateur" athletes are turned into godlike figures—and serve as walking billboards for apparel deals, which ultimately support the deep pockets of companies and schools (Branch, 2011; Hawkins, 2010).

Further, even as Black male athletes are financially exploited, critical questions have been raised about graduation rates and whether the most highly publicized and disproportionately Black athletes in revenue-sports are educationally reimbursed for their athletic labor and adequately prepared for life after sport or school-to-career transitions (Comeaux, 2013; Gayles, 2015). Harper (2016) reported that only 53.6% of Black athletes graduated within 6 years, compared to 68.5% of athletes overall—perhaps in part because the increasing commercialism of athletics resembles a business model that tends to trump academic goals and obligations (Comeaux, 2015a).

Despite the ongoing scrutiny of NCAA institutions, the plight of Black male athletes continues to be glossed over in national discussions on athletics. However, a handful of critical race scholars, educators, activists, and NCAA watchdogs expose and respond to the realities of contemporary racial inequalities and power structures inherent in college athletics. Black college athletes, after all, deserve fair treatment and compensation—and an inclusive and welcoming environment and access to opportunities to fully develop their academic talents.

Critical Approaches to Examining Current Issues in College Sports

Using critical perspectives to examine intercollegiate athletics as a form of academic and athletic capitalism in a liberal society is useful for better understanding how various groups and subpopulations are disenfranchised by policies, practices, and structures designed to maintain a system of producing and controlling revenue and resources (Oseguera & Goldstein, 2015; Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). The involvement of academic institutions and its constituents in producing and selling goods is considered market-like behavior and represents the foundation of academic capitalism (Slaughter, Rhoades, & Fainholc, 2005). Critical perspectives are necessary to deconstruct academic and athletic capitalism because these systems and structures are rooted in power and privilege and are oppressive to vulnerable populations, in part because generating revenue is prioritized over the educational mission of teaching and learning. Critical perspectives and frameworks allow scholars to highlight, analyze, and transform cultures and structures that are oppressive and inequitable for marginalized populations (Oseguera & Goldstein, 2015).

Scholars have used critical perspectives and frameworks to raise questions about intercollegiate athletics and to examine systems of power and dominance. In particular, theories of hegemony (Hern, 2004), feminist theory (Bruening, Armstrong, & Pastore, 2005), and critical race theory (CRT)(Comeaux, 2010; Donnor, 2005) have been used to critically examine college sports and challenge issues of racism, sexism, classism, and more recently liberalism that exists within the culture of intercollegiate athletics. Throughout the chapters in this volume, many of these critical frameworks and perspectives are used to bring to light policies and practices that go unnoticed; yet, are oppressive for marginalized groups of student-athletes. In particular, this chapter highlights neoliberalism as a way to frame not only racism in college sports, but many of the issues that are discussed in this volume.

Athletic capitalism is rooted in a larger system of liberalism that operates in society and on college campuses. Further, it is a philosophy that promotes notions of equal opportunity and individualism under the pretense of meritocracy (Bell, 1992; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). The problem with meritocracy is that it assumes that all things are equal for everyone and if individuals work hard they will be successful (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Kennedy & Power, 2010). Further, meritocracy creates a smoke screen that allows those with privilege and power to ignore real inequities that exist across economic, political, and social systems, including intercollegiate athletics. Meritocracy also allows those with privilege and power to be color-blind and ignore how race, class, and other marginalized social identities influence equity and access. In essence, issues of race and class are not recognized; yet, race and class are suppressed in any consideration

of creating more equitable and just policies and practices (Gotanda, 1991). With color blindness, policies and practices exist in ways that allow those with privilege and power to separate themselves from real racial realities in America. In sum, there is an assumption of assimilation into White culture that perpetuates a disconnect between race and cultural context within society.

Critical inquiry represents a methodological orientation or way to approach research and scholarship that puts critical theories to work, allowing us to disrupt and question dominant structures, and in this case educational practices, using a critical lens (Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, & Carducci, 2010). It goes beyond using a critical theory framework as a shared value orientation to incorporating a set of critical assumptions to guide inquiry and transform reality (Oseguera & Goldstein, 2015). Assumptions of critical inquiry include recognizing that traditional research and scholarship has historically silenced the voices of oppressed and marginalized groups and that the voices and experiences across race, class, gender, and other marginalized social identities are important for a more complete understanding of reality (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Another assumption of critical inquiry is the understanding that research is rooted in power and privilege that is not as transparent. The reality is that research is produced by raced, gendered, classed, and politically oriented individuals (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Neoliberal Capitalism as a Critical Lens

Today, concerns about the quality of educational experiences for college athletes and the big money that flows into athletics programs seem to ring hollow, even as the money arguably detracts from the public and democratic mission and fundamental values of American higher education (Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2010). The NCAA and member conferences hide behind their non-profit status while increasingly depending on commercialism to expand their product—despite the "amateurized" college athlete (see Hawkins, Baker, & Brackebusch, 2015). As such, intercollegiate athletics have been governed by market-driven values in which capital is distributed upward and major stakeholders in the affairs of athletics benefit financially from this arrangement (Schroeder, 2010).

For the fiscal year ending in 2015, the total revenue received by the NCAA was roughly $996 million (Berkowitz, 2017). A significant portion of the organization's revenue is the result of a 14-year, $10.8-billion agreement with CBS and Turner Sports for the television and marketing rights to the Division I Men's Basketball Championship (Wolverton, 2010). Within the next 3 years, the NCAA's revenue will likely exceed $1 billion, and the average pay for a head coach in big-time football or men's basketball already exceeds $1 million (Ridpath, 2017). This emphasis on and drive for profit making, or "corporate culture," as described by Giroux and Giroux

(2004), tends to take precedence over democratic values such as the pursuit of knowledge, fairness, and intellectual freedom in higher education.

Self-interest among athletics stakeholders and the quest for lucrative profits and power reinforce neoliberal values of entrepreneurialism, power, individualism, hard work, racial color blindness, and competition. As such, the concept of neoliberalism can be used to understand and help explain this logic and apparent celebration of free market capitalism in athletics. Harvey (2005) defined this culture of neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). This adoption of a free market approach often comes at the expense of academic integrity as well as the personal and academic well-being of athletes—namely Black male athletes in revenue-generating sports, who are some of the most vulnerable institutional actors (see Solomon, 2016).

National reports from NCAA watchdogs have emerged, calling for greater accountability and leadership from athletics stakeholders and for financial reforms in college sports. For example, the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (2010) released a report revealing that per student spending on athletics between 2005 and 2008 increased at a rate four to eleven times faster than per student spending on academics. More recently, Desrochers (2013) found that at public colleges and universities in the six major football conferences (i.e., Southeastern, Big 12, Pacific-10, Atlantic Coast, Big Ten, and Big East), 2010 median annual athletics spending was more than $100,000 per athlete—six to twelve times the amount spent per student on academics. Indeed, athletics spending and commercial interests seem to be spiraling out of control and the investment in and legitimacy of the student role has been reduced.

Neoliberal practices place greater value on athletes' athletic skills and revenue-generating power, rather than to their academic talents or ability to engage in critical and independent thought. Thus, neoliberalism devalues education due to the significant time demands of big-time college athletics and the ideological view that athletes are sources of revenue, rather than students (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Under the politics of neoliberalism, good value for athletic departments translates into athletes enrolling in less labor-intensive student-athlete friendly courses and majors (Fountain & Finley, 2009). Consequently, college athletes merely maintain eligibility rather than become high-achievers and active learners; they are expected to devote excessive time and energy toward their sport to deliver winning seasons and secure corporate sponsorships for the college or university (Comeaux, 2015b). Neoliberal practices certainly send the message that student interests are less a priority than market interests, and individuals are to blame for their social positions, rather than the market or power structures (Giroux & Giroux, 2004). In short, athletic programs have

embraced neoliberalism—and the logic of athletics stakeholders that drives neoliberal practices and politics, no doubt, threatens the viability and sustainability of the NCAA system, as well as opportunities for athletes to maximize their potential both inside and outside of the classroom.

Community Culture of Wealth: A Lens for Reform

Understanding what student-athletes bring to college and how their backgrounds impact their experiences is essential to implementing cultural transformation and reform that will place priority on the quality of the student-athlete experience. These pre-college experiences are a form of capital. Capital is a term derived from economics in reference to accumulated wealth and/or assets that are used to enhance an individual's economic capacity (Marx, 1909). This type of capital is used to purchase goods and to develop or sustain wealth. Capital can be applied in the education context as "cultural capital," meaning the "accumulation of knowledge, behaviors, and skills that one can tap into to demonstrate one's cultural competence, and thus one's social status or standing in society" (Cole, 2017, p.1). In this regard, any form of capital can be used as a means of social mobility, upward or downward movement through the multiple layers of social stratification, or social reproduction. This describes the relationship between education, family, and class, and how these relationships reproduce social inequality (Bourdieu, 1977). Pierre Bourdieu (1977) conceptualized cultural capital to explain social and cultural reproduction; essentially those who are privileged will continue to be privileged, while those who are disadvantaged will continue to be disadvantaged.

Although Bourdieu's model of cultural capital was meant to explain social inequality, Yosso (2005) argued that Bourdieu's outlook posits White, middle class communities as culturally wealthy, while others, specifically people of color and working-class communities, are culturally poor. Yosso (2005) introduced an alternative framework, community cultural wealth (CCW), to examine and recognize how background characteristics that Bourdieu regards as cultural deficits, can actually be viewed as assets and sources of wealth. CCW includes six forms of capital: aspirational (e.g., hopes and dreams), familial (e.g., immediate family and home community), social (e.g., peers), linguistic (e.g., language and communication skills), resistant (e.g., ability to overcome societal barriers), and navigational (e.g., ability to navigate social institutions) (Yosso, 2005). The CCW model challenges deficit thinking and provides an "understanding of the empowering potential of the cultures of communities of color" (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). Further, it highlights background traits that are rarely acknowledged as cultural assets for people of color (Yosso, 2005).

In addition, Yosso (2005) used CRT as the conceptual framework for CCW. CRT provides a framework for understanding the societal interplay between race, power, and privilege (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). Derived

from legal studies and sociology, Ladson-Billings and Tate (2016) asserted that CRT can be used to understand educational inequality, by examining racism as an endemic that is deeply woven into society. Additionally, Solórzano (1997) posited that CRT can be used to challenge racism and racial stereotypes, by providing clear examples of racism, identifying stereotypes in media, identifying stereotypes in the workplace, and finding examples that challenge stereotypes. Yosso (2005) used a CRT lens to challenge Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, explaining that such a lens provides a framework to begin challenging deficit thinking and understanding how the experiences of students of color can be sources of empowerment.

Yosso (2005) argued that CCW can be used to transform the school experiences of students of color and calls for practitioners to commit to addressing social and racial injustice at their institutions using this approach. In the current landscape of college athletics, neoliberal capitalism is used to exploit the gifts and talents of student-athletes, particularly student-athletes of color. Moreover, student-athletes' strengths are used for the financial gain of predominantly White institutions, and White male coaches and administrators (Harper, 2018). Yosso's (2005) CCW, however, explains that nurturing other forms of capital has the potential to produce a "transformative cultural expression that can inspire and inform social movement" (Yosso, 2005, p. 84). For example, once individuals notice how structures work to oppress them, they can begin to use their resistance capital in a transformative matter, and work toward social and racial justice. We have seen this in the form of lawsuits filed by student-athletes on the grounds of negligence, pay for play, and sexual harassment (See Chapter 2). Generally speaking, students at all levels of education are using transformative resistant capital to call for an end to race, gender, and class inequalities through protests and demonstrations. Yosso (2005) acknowledged that capitalism is widely regarded as a system that oppresses and exploits people of color. In contrast, CCW posits that socio-cultural historical contexts for communities of color can be sources of empowerment. Helping marginalized groups develop a sense of consciousness and form a collective identity can turn what is often viewed as deficit into resources that can be used as a source of empowerment and advancement. Helping student-athletes identify and tap into the culture of wealth inherent within their communities is an important aspect of reforming policies and practices that disenfranchise marginalized groups.

Conclusion

Our society is more diverse than ever before; yet, racism, sexism, and capitalism continue to permeate the cultural climate of many environments including academic institutions and big-time college sports programs. The growing number of scandals and incidences of gross misconduct coupled with increased spending and lack of governance and control of college

sports warrants critical reflection on policies and practices in place that are designed to protect, but ultimately oppress, student-athletes. Only a handful of scholars have problematized oppressive structures that exist in intercollegiate athletics, but more conversations are needed to bring critical issues to light. Understanding and learning to use critical frameworks and perspectives, such as CRT, neoliberal capitalism, and community culture of wealth, to deconstruct macro- and micro-oppressive systems that disenfranchise vulnerable populations is necessary for reform and rebuilding structures that are supportive, equitable, and inclusive for all students.

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