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Published online: 28 Jan 2022.

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Using a Culturally Responsive MTSS Approach to Prepare Black Males for Postsecondary Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Postsecondary attainment is often viewed as an accomplishment yielding financial, social, and economic gains. Moreover, education has been a passport to a better quality of life. However, certain populations are often hindered from achieving these aforementioned goals. In particular, Black males are viewed from a deficit perspective, especially when it comes to excelling and achieving in the sphere of education. The authors discuss the collaborative role of school psychologists and school counselors as change agents in the college and career readiness of Black males. Specifically, the authors present an innovative approach to using a culturally responsive multitiered system of support that infuses Critical Race Theory to address the negative postsecondary outcomes Black males encounter. School psychologists and school counselors are appropriately trained to implement this model; therefore, recommendations for policy, practice, and research are provided in this article.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Given the recent events of anti-Black racism against Black boys and men, currently Daunte Wright and George Floyd in addition to Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, and Tamir Rice, it is obvious that a culturally responsive approach is needed to engage and work with Black males. In the U.S. education system, Black boys and men have the poorest educational outcomes, especially with high school graduation, college-going, and college graduation rates. Therefore, school psychologists and school counselors must serve as the bridge to preparing Black males for postsecondary opportunities and they possess the skills and training to potentially change the narrative and statistics regarding Black boys as well as men in education and beyond.

For decades, Black males have experienced negative schooling outcomes that narrow their chance to access a variety of postsecondary opportunities. Black males are often overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in gifted and honors courses (Ford & Moore, 2013; Hines et al., 2020). They are also more likely to receive in and out of school suspension than their peers, thus increasing their propensity for academic failure (Ford & Moore, 2013; Hines et al., 2020; Schott Foundation, 2015). Black males also frequently experience teacher bias and low expectations (Ferguson & Simms, 2016; Mayes et al., 2016). College enrollment for Black males is lower than other racial and gender groups and once Black males enter college, about a third of them tend to graduate within a six year time frame (Cose, 2014; Harper, 2012; National Center for Education Statistics, [NCES] 2020). In addition to poor academic outcomes, Black men are at risk for adverse health conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity as well as twice as likely to die from COVID-19 than White men (Center for Disease Control,

2010; Reeves et al., 2020). The unemployment rate of Black men is higher than that of White men in addition to facing barriers to upward mobility and lower wages (Reeves et al., 2020). Clearly, a solution is urgently needed to change the academic and postsecondary trajectory of Black males. Specifically, there is a need for school psychologists and school counselors who implement interventions that lead to postsecondary attainment for Black males.

Postsecondary attainment leads to increased salaries and an improved quality of life (e.g., access to better healthcare and retirement benefits; Carnevale et al., 2015). Further, a postsecondary education can lead to improved economic status, leadership opportunities, and social conditions (Baker, 2005; Jackson & Moore, 2006). A college degree can yield one million dollars more in salary over a lifetime than a high school diploma (Carnevale et al., 2015). Thus, it is critical to encourage and expect Black males to pursue postsecondary opportunities. Given the alarming statistics of Black males and postsecondary readiness, this article provides school psychologists and school counselors a blueprint

to develop a partnership for postsecondary preparation using a culturally responsive multitiered system of support (MTSS) approach. We provide a new model of MTSS that incorporates Critical Race Theory (CRT) and a strengths-based approach to college and career readiness for Black males. To note, postsecondary and college and career readiness are used interchangeably throughout this article.

BLACK MALE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Academically, Black males are the least likely to have successful academic outcomes compared to their racial peers (Ford & Moore, 2013; Hines et al., 2020). Jackson and Moore (2006) suggested Black males experience differing levels of achievement than their White male counterparts. Black males graduate high school at a lower rate than their gendered peers (Schott Foundation, 2015). For the 2012–2013 freshman cohort, the high school graduation rate for Black males was 64% compared to Asian males (93%), Latino males (74%), and White males (84%; NCES, 2019). Further, White males are enrolling in college at a higher rate (39%) than Black males (33%), although Latino males are the lowest (32%; Hussar et al., 2020).

The genesis for the aforementioned data starts in the P–12 school system. Reading scores for 12th grade Black males were lower than both males of other races and females (NCES, 2015). Specifically, Asian, Latino, and White males score significantly higher (291, 272, and 290) than Black male reading scores (262; NCES, 2015). Moreover, math scores were lower for Black males (132) compared to Asian males (176), Latino males (141), and White males (162; NCES, 2015). The overrepresentation of Black males in special education is a barrier to postsecondary opportunities (Harris et al., 2016). Cloonan (2016) noted that Black males account for 12% of students who have a learning disability and 21% of those identified with an emotional disturbance, but Black males represent only 9% of the student population.

Further, Ford and Moore (2013) highlighted the negative school outcomes of Black males. Black males tend to have higher levels of disciplinary infractions, academic failure, lower grades, and lower grade point averages, specifically those from urban areas. Additionally, Black students were less likely to enroll in courses that are considered college ready, thus contributing to the lack of preparation for postsecondary opportunities (Ford & Moore, 2013; Hines et al., 2020; Hines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2013). Tyson and colleagues (2005) found that Black males in 9th grade tend to enroll in college preparatory math and science courses at higher levels, respectively at 80% and 73% and as they transition to higher grade levels (e.g., 10th, 11th, and 12th), enrollment decreases in these classes.

It is important to understand that these statistics do not indicate failure among Black males, but point to a system that continually fails Black males. For example, as Black males navigate P–12 educational systems, they are likely to encounter educator bias and systemic racism (Dancy II, 2014; Ford & Moore, 2013). For example, educator bias often regards Black male behavior as aggressive and in need of punishment rather than seeing it as typical behavior of childhood (Dancy II, 2014). That same bias is what pushes Black males towards restrictive spaces and prevents their access to rigorous spaces (e.g., gifted & talented education, advanced placement courses; Ford & Moore, 2013; Hines et al., 2020; Mayes & Moore III, 2016). Essentially, educator bias leads to the systemic segregation that occurs within a school through the policing and push out of Black males (Dancy II, 2014; Howard, 2018; Mayes & Moore III, 2016; Shifrer, 2018). On a systemic level, racism allows for Black males to attend schools that are perpetually underfunded, under-resourced, and segregated (Capper, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Because contemporary schooling is still connected to its colonial roots, much of how schooling is governed and functions protects whiteness, thus when disparities often occur, it is never seen as a systemic issue to address but the failings of individual students, especially Black males (Albritton et al., 2019; Dancy II, 2014; Girvan et al., 2017). In particular, the aforementioned data is used to reinforce the supposed moral and cultural failings of Black male students and their families rather than the ways in which the system is steeped in and perpetuates racism. Thus, we must interrogate the educational system that perpetuates inequitable outcomes for Black males.

Multitiered Systems of Support

Multitiered systems of support (MTSS) is an organizing framework for delivering prevention and intervention resources and supports aimed at student success (Center on MTSS, 2021). In particular, MTSS expands on previous models of educational interventions which focused primarily on students in special education to include a whole school context which integrates academic, socioemotional, and behavioral resources and supports (Sugai et al., 2019). As a framework, MTSS integrates a data-driven, tiered system of support that integrates evidenced-based practices to achieve academic and behavioral goals and outcomes for students (Center on MTSS, 2021; Sugai et al., 2019). Typically, there are three tiers which include agreed-upon and developmentally appropriate benchmarks along with prevention and intervention strategies that are unique to the respective tiers. For example, tiers may include the following:

- Tier 1 – universal or primary prevention strengthening socioemotional and academic behaviors for success which takes place in classroom and schoolwide systems for all students.
- Tier 2 – secondary prevention focuses on solidifying protective factors and minimizing risk; offers more group supports.
- Tier 3 – Intensive or tertiary prevention addresses significant risk and absence of protective factors whose challenges require specialized/individualized supports.

It is important to note that Tier 1 is considered the universal tier in which all students receive the related prevention resources and supports. It is estimated that while every student receives Tier 1 supports, Tier 1 alone will be insufficient for approximately 20% of students. As such, the 20% of students will receive Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports. Tier 2 and Tier 3 involve more individualized supports that are tailored to a smaller group and individual students.

As an organizing framework, MTSS is also promising as a way to tailor supports to the unique context of individual schools and their subsequent student populations. In particular, MTSS can be used to improve systemic issues related to disproportionality and inequities through a multifaceted, systemic, data-driven, and culturally sustaining approach to this process (Bal, 2018; Betters-Bubon et al., 2019). This calls for MTSS to focus not only on culturally appropriate practices and student outcomes, but also calls for educators, including school counselors and school psychologists, to challenge and dismantle school structures and policies that contribute to inequities and negative outcomes for students.

While typical MTSS models have an all hands on deck approach, school psychologists and counselors often serve multiple roles. School psychologists and school counselors may provide leadership along with direct services to support the successful implementation of the model and ultimate positive outcomes for students. More specifically, the nature of traditional MTSS frameworks (i.e., academic, socioemotional, and behavioral development) integrate school psychologists and school counselors at all levels, though they are more likely to be engaged in consultation and coaching teachers to implement Tier 1 supports while they may provide more direct services for Tier 2 and Tier 3. Provided their integral leadership and direct service in MTSS, it is important to understand the role of school psychologists and school counselors.

The Role of School Psychologists and School Counselors

School psychologists are trained to provide services in a variety of areas including assessment, academic and behavioral intervention, consultation, counseling, data-based decision-making, and family–school partnerships (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2020a). Due to their diverse role, they work collaboratively with school professionals such as school counselors, general and special education teachers, interventionists, principals, and social workers. In recent years, the profession has made intentional shifts to embed social justice into school psychology practice (Graybill et al., 2018). For example, the NASP Board of Directors adopted a definition of social justice in 2017 and social justice was identified as a goal in the NASP 2017–2022 Strategic Plan (NASP, 2017). With the ongoing violence and attacks on Black communities, NASP as an organization has disseminated numerous statements including the "Resolution Committing to Antiracism Action" (NASP, 2020b) to emphasize the field's commitment to social justice and antiracism and the role of school psychologists in supporting minoritized students, particularly Black youth. Nonetheless, there is a continued need for research and literature that address existing gaps in training culturally responsive school psychologists. School psychologists must come to terms with the oppressive history of schooling for Black males and engage in professional development activities to gain the knowledge and skills to combat systemic racism and policies and procedures that negatively impact the outcomes for Black males. Thus, this paper makes a significant contribution by providing guidance for school psychologist engagement in culturally responsive MTSS practice. School counselors play a seminal role in the holistic development of students (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2019). According to the ASCA, "School counselors are certified/licensed educators who improve student success for ALL students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program" (ASCA, n.d., para 1). They are trained to help students in the areas of academic success, socioemotional learning, and college and career readiness (ASCA, 2019). More importantly, school counselors have a unique skillset as they are trained in both education and counseling, thus having the ability to promote student achievement through both theory and practices (Erford, 2019). In other words, school counselors can connect theory to practice through using their counseling skills and their knowledge of the K–12 education system. It is recommended by the American School Counseling Association that school counselors should spend 80% of their time in direct as well as indirect services for students (ASCA, 2019). These services include, but are not limited to advising students in academic planning, facilitating individual and small group counseling, preparing students for postsecondary opportunities, addressing access and opportunity gaps using a data driven approach, and collaborating with other school personnel to ensure student achievement and success (ASCA, n.d.; Erford, 2019).

School counselors are trained in using MTSS to provide deliberate interventions to support student success (Erford, 2019; Hatch, 2014). Moreover, school counselors are seen as stakeholders in the MTSS process (Rock & Leff, 2019). Further, MTSS can serve as "intentional guidance" for school counselors so that their time is carefully planned and thorough rather than being consumed by the many unscheduled activities that come with this professional role (Hatch, 2014). MTSS serves as a data-driven model for school counselors as it shows them the problem to be addressed, what types of assistance or interventions are needed for students (i.e., tiered approach), and what interventions work to solve the problem (Dimmit et al., 2007; Hatch, 2014). Specifically, school counselor engagement in MTSS promotes a greater collaboration with the school psychologist to develop a universal and targeted approach to help Black males become college and career ready (Mayes et al., 2019).

Empirical research examining partnerships between school counselors and school psychologists has yet to be conducted; however, there are many benefits to their collaboration theorized by conceptual research (Harris et al., 2016; Hines et al., 2019; Vega et al., 2016). Though there is some overlap in their training and skillset, school psychologists and school counselors also have unique competencies that can lead to fruitful collaborations to support students from a variety of school settings and of different backgrounds such as Black males in the area of college and career readiness (Harris et al., 2016; Hines et al., 2019; Mayes et al., 2019; Rowley, 2000; Vega et al., 2016). For example, school counselors and school psychologists can successfully collaborate to assist Black males, particularly those with learning disabilities, prepare for postsecondary opportunities through using shared training skills such as individual counseling, group work, community partnerships, and educational programs (Harris et al., 2016; Mayes et al., 2018). Mayes et al. (2019) noted that school counselors and school psychologists advocate and promote social justice and educational equity for Black males (p. 160). Given the frequency of their work with teachers, students, and their families, both practitioners may have strong rapport and existing relationships to broaden their scope of practice to include postsecondary preparation activities (Vega & Puff, 2020). These preparatory activities should include a targeted focus on social emotional learning for Black males. Given the permanence of racism (Bell, 2018), it is imperative that school counselors and school psychologists simultaneously disrupt and dismantle oppressive systems within schools and work with Black youth to ensure they have the necessary social and emotional competence to navigate their racist experiences.

Social and Emotional Learning for Black Males

School psychologists and school counselors are uniquely trained to promote social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools (ASCA, n.d.; NASP, 2020c; Van Velsor, 2009), an often neglected but key contributor to college and career readiness. Thus, their partnership, as well as their collaborative efforts with additional stakeholders, is critical to ensuring that anti-Black racist conditions in schools are disrupted and dismantled to promote conditions for healthy SEL in Black males along with their White counterparts. SEL interventions focus on developing competence in five areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Practices and policies that align with these areas help students acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote personal development, social relationships, ethical behavior, productive work, and even protect from negative outcomes (Taylor et al., 2017). This micro level work is needed in addition to the macro level work of disrupting and dismantling systems of oppression. School performance, economic benefit, life and well-being, and career and workforce achievement have all been positively correlated with the acquisition of SEL competencies. While such student-centered competence development is an important part of antiracist college and career preparation for Black males, it cannot fully account for nor mitigate the dehumanizing conditions that Black males endure in and out of school.

Disproportionate minority contact with school discipline and the justice system, for example, is a historic and racist phenomenon that persists in cities across the United States, and especially in urban areas (Marchbanks III et al., 2018). And this disproportionate contact is often fatal, as observed through the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020, and Daunte Wright in 2021, just to name a few. The pandemic, due to COVID-19, that has claimed the lives of over 2.97 million people across the globe and 547,000 in America, has disproportionately claimed the lives of Black people (APM Research Lab, n.d.). The primary and secondary racial trauma endured through such dynamics only compound the trauma Black males encounter throughout their educational experiences. Such processes in schools that deprive Black males from basic human decency include, but are not limited to, disproportionately low teacher expectations, inordinate discipline referrals, systematic exclusion from gifted and talented programs and advanced courses, inappropriate placement in special education, and more (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019). These dynamics are unique stressors that adversely affect mental and physical health of Black males (Williams, 2018). To reiterate, it is both important to address these violent and harmful practices

and cultivate the development of social and emotional competencies of Black youth who persistently endure them.

The dehumanizing conditions in schools and the subsequent effects on Black males are manifestations of systemic anti-Black racism that is woven into the very fabric of the United States and a longstanding phenomenon that warrants targeted antiracist intervention to effectively disrupt and dismantle structures that uphold it. Thus, SEL interventions, and the path to competence in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making, must be forged through the lens of antiracism (Harris & Perry, 2021). Only interventions that explicitly engage the phenomenon of racism will prepare Black males for the realities that will persist in their postsecondary pursuits. If school psychologists and school counselors are to achieve the traditionally regarded benefits of SEL such as decreased anxiety, improvement in perception of classroom and school climate, or academic performance, the systematic and systemic nature of Black male trauma must be explicitly acknowledged and addressed at the individual and systems level. In the case of Black males, this must involve centering their voices in such a way that they inform policy and practices in schools. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, n.d.) framework calls for coordinated systemic efforts that foster youth voice, agency, and engagement. Such coordinated efforts can be conceptualized through a critical race lens to ensure that the unique postsecondary preparation needs of Black males are appropriately addressed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critical Race Theory

Ladson-Billings and Tate introduced Critical Race Theory (CRT; 1995) into the field of education over 25 years ago. The authors asserted that race was and remains a significant factor in society and, subsequently, in education. In particular, they argued that CRT along with its central tenets were underutilized in theorizing and understanding the racist underpinnings and overt processes of education. Without this critical lens, scholars and practitioners alike have the immense capacity to perpetuate racist structures and inequities while overlooking the salience of race for students and their families.

CRT includes six tenets: (1) permanence of racism, (2) whiteness as property, (3) interest convergence, (4) critiques of liberalism, (5) intersectionality, and (6) counter storytelling (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Permanence of racism refers to the ways that racism is experienced both as individual acts but also institutionally as it is deeply rooted into the fabric of American society. As such, students, especially Black boys may experience racism from their individual interactions with educators, but also in the very foundation and structures of schools which are steeped in colonialism (Dancy II, 2014). The second tenet, whiteness as property, contends that systems and structures often serve and benefit white people (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In schools, this can play out in the ways that learning (i.e., curriculum and content) center whiteness as well as programs that allow for whiteness to benefit (i.e., gifted programs enrolling mostly white students; special education and inclusion allows for white students to be in less restrictive environments while non-white, especially Black boys are often excluded; Howard, 2018; Shifrer, 2018). We can also see the ways that school, in general, is seen or held as a white space when juxtaposed with the steady push out of Black students from P–12 schools (Albritton et al., 2019; Dancy II, 2014; Girvan et al., 2017).

Interest convergence and critique of liberalism are interrelated tenets. First, interest convergence suggests that any progress related to equity that stands to benefit minoritized individuals will and must essentially benefit whiteness even more (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling is often highlighted as an example of interest convergence due to the international attention it received along with the potential impact it could have had for minoritized students. The ruling preserved whiteness as caring entities while still allowing for the segregation of schools through other means. Ultimately, this ruling allows for a new generation of minoritized students, including Black boys, to be disenfranchised by their access to P–12 schools that are more likely to be segregated and underfunded (Capper, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Additionally, critique of liberalism asserts that color ambivalence and postracial lenses which contend that enough progress has been made and that race is not of any relevance presently, only work to perpetuate structural racism and disparities. Said differently, the critique of liberalism contextualizes the present impact of racist systems despite any progress that may have been made likely due to interest convergence (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Intersectionality is also a salient part of CRT. Intersectionality refers to the interaction across multiple minoritized identities (e.g., race, disability, socioeconomic status, etc.) that intersect with planes of oppression (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For example, Black boys with disabilities experience the intersecting planes of oppression related to racism and ableism. As such, Black boys with disabilities are

often subjected to the most exclusionary practices in school, which essentially push them out of school rather than pushed towards opportunities to learn among their peers (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Provided the aforementioned tenets, counter storytelling is of the utmost importance as it allows for a joyful resistance against dominant narratives. Counter storytelling allows for the recentering and valuing of minoritized youth, especially Black boys as truth tellers about their existence in and critique of a deeply racist system meant for their demise (Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It also allows for minoritized youth, including Black boys, to highlight their own intersectionality as a part of their counter storytelling.

We employ CRT as a foundational framework to not only understand race and racism in schools, but to understand the uniqueness of the terrain Black boys must navigate. Further, we integrate this theory as a means to develop meaningful supports using culturally responsive MTSS as an organizing framework for systemic prevention and intervention efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A Culturally Responsive MTSS for College and Career Readiness for Black Males

We present an innovative MTSS model to college and career readiness for school psychologists and school counselors to implement as prevention and intervention efforts to disrupt the status quo and eliminate systemic barriers for Black males. This model is unique as traditional MTSS frameworks focus primarily on the development of academic skills and prosocial behaviors. Yet, often missing are the specific connections to college and career readiness which is also a developmental process which students should engage at all levels of schooling. Further, despite the call for a systemic view in relation to student functioning, MTSS frameworks can often focus solely on student intervention rather than challenging the system. Said differently, student functioning can indicate a skill deficit but it also may indicate the ways in which school policy and practices are systemically failing students. In the case of the latter, there is a need to address the school as a system rather than focusing solely on students. This is where the intersection of CRT and MTSS is critical to the comprehensive understanding of student success. The integration of the CRT and MTSS allows for prevention and intervention for students while also making sure that the system (the school) is optimal for student success. A CRT frame to MTSS calls for educators, including school psychologists and school counselors to disrupt and dismantle racist policies and practices which harm and impair students. Our model uses a strengths-based, empowerment approach for students while also challenging policies and practices systemically (Gutierrez, 1995; Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007). Below, we detail the approach with recommendations around policy and practice. See Figure 1 for model and subsequent paragraphs for a detailed explanation of each tier with its CRT application as well as the section on policy recommendations.
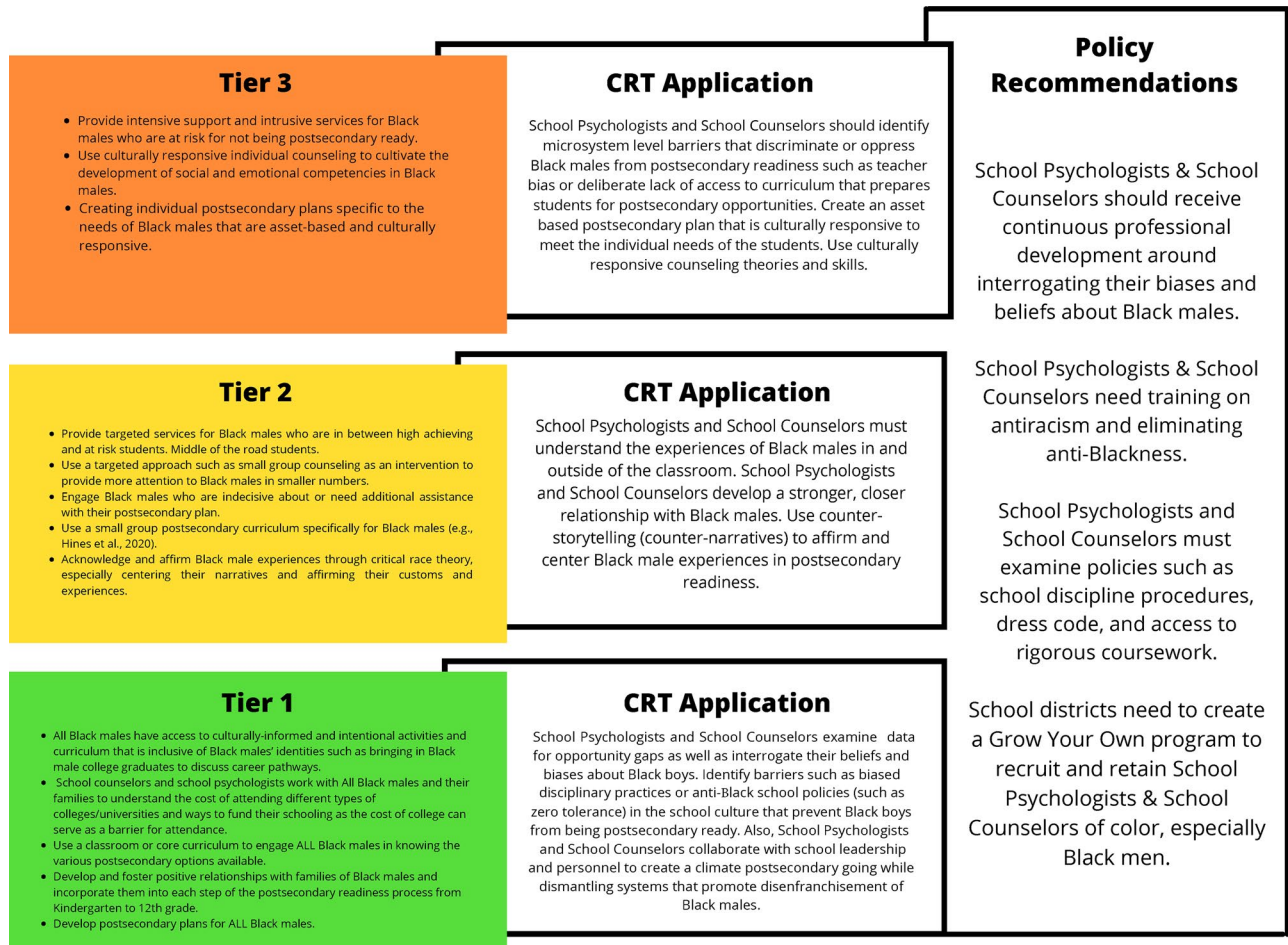
A Critical Foundation

Prior to engaging in the MTSS model with a CRT lens, it's important that both school counselors and school psychologists engage in their own personal learning and reflection. This is particularly important as their own internalized (mis)understandings of Black males' humanity and capabilities will guide how they create systems of supports to respond to their needs (Adkison-Bradley, 2011). As such, school counselors and school psychologists should be continually engaged in a learning and reflective process that helps them further develop their critical consciousness. Singh et al. (2020) defines critical consciousness as a counselor and psychologists' ability to understand the power that exists in helping relationships between counselors/psychologists and clients/students especially as it relates to privilege and oppression. This critical lens is needed to understand how past and present school counseling and school psychology activities have contributed to the ways that Black students, especially Black males, have been dehumanized, overlooked, and silenced (Drake & Oglesby, 2020). For example, critical consciousness and reflections allow for understanding how school counselors and school psychologists contribute to the overrepresentation of Black males in special education as well as the disproportionality in school discipline, thus limiting educational opportunity (Girvan et al., 2017; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Trotman Scott et al., 2015). Critical consciousness also allows for a critical understanding of racism that Black males face while also bringing into sight black joy and Black excellence (Love, 2019). Finally, this critical consciousness helps school counselors to understand the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black males and that a return to normal perpetuates that harm in P–12 schools and what is needed is a "hard re-set" that is focused on culturally centered pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

TIER 1-UNIVERSAL

The postsecondary opportunity gap is evident in its impact on Black male students and underscores how

Figure 1. Culturally Responsive Multitiered Systems of Support Model of Postsecondary Readiness for Black Males

Tier 3	**CRT Application**	**Policy Recommendations**
• Provide intensive support and intrusive services for Black males who are at risk for not being postsecondary ready. • Use culturally responsive individual counseling to cultivate the development of social and emotional competencies in Black males. • Creating individual postsecondary plans specific to the needs of Black males that are asset-based and culturally responsive.	School Psychologists and School Counselors should identify microsystem level barriers that discriminate or oppress Black males from postsecondary readiness such as teacher bias or deliberate lack of access to curriculum that prepares students for postsecondary opportunities. Create an asset based postsecondary plan that is culturally responsive to meet the individual needs of the students. Use culturally responsive counseling theories and skills.	School Psychologists & School Counselors should receive continuous professional development around interrogating their biases and beliefs about Black males.

Note. MTSS model for black males and postsecondary readiness with CRT application and policy recommendations.

institutional racism is embedded in the educational system; therefore, remediation must occur on a systems level. School counselors and school psychologists can play a critical role in leading and assisting educators to develop and implement supports under a MTSS model. Identifying areas of need can help to implement a robust culturally responsive framework model to address preparedness for postsecondary opportunity (Hines et al., 2021a). A starting point is to develop a team of school personnel including the school counselor and school psychologist to examine data for patterns of disparities by race, ethnicity, and gender and related intersectional identities. For example, at the elementary and/or secondary school levels, data should be reviewed to answer the following questions: Who is enrolled in advanced placement courses? What do students do after high school graduation? Who is enrolling in college after high school graduation? What kinds of postsecondary institutions do graduates attend? Who is enrolled in special education? Who is enrolled in technical and career-track courses? Using school and/or district-level data to answer these questions can guide preventative approaches and interventions to support Black male students being disproportionately excluded from opportunities. For example, if data show Black males are disproportionately identified with a specific learning disability, a closer look at whether referrals come from specific teachers or grade levels, what type of interventions are implemented, if any, and what measures are being used to determine special education eligibility will be important areas for follow up that the school psychologist and school counselor can lead. The information uncovered should lead to meaningful change in practices and/or policies deemed discriminatory (e.g., oversight of intervention selection and administration and review of data prior to evaluation).

School psychologists and school counselors should be culturally responsive to students, especially by interrogating their own bias and beliefs about ALL Black males and their abilities. Their preparedness to address the racist

conditions that negatively affect the educational experiences of Black males through a culturally responsive MTSS approach can also enable them to tackle exclusionary curricula that do not represent Black students' identities and policies and practices that promote the status quo for Black male students. There is a strong need for school psychologists and school counselors who can and will disrupt the historical pattern of low expectations, discrimination, and disproportionate punishment and placement in special education. Educators must also understand that this exclusion clearly displays whiteness as property and revision or even elimination of said policies and related practices must include student, family, and community voices. School psychologists and school counselors may implement a professional development series for educators to address any patterns of disproportionate exclusion of Black males as informed by school and/or district-level data gathered (e.g., revise exclusionary policies, develop cultural competence). Of course, this requires school psychologists and school counselors who are equipped with the knowledge and skills to lead this training further highlighting the importance of social justice oriented practitioners.

Tier 1 of MTSS represents access to the core curriculum for all students (Rinaldi et al., 2011). Black students would benefit from a core curriculum that incorporates their racial identity. Though previous legislation banning (e.g., Arizona) and attempting to ban ethnic studies curricula and the emergence of new legislation to ban CRT in schools (e.g., Florida), ethnic/racial studies research has identified benefits for minoritized students including improved school attendance, increased GPAs, attainment of course credit, and increased rates of graduation (e.g., Dee & Penner, 2017). Inclusion of a representative curriculum also requires culturally responsive educators to teach the course content. The lack of diversity within the education field in general creates obstacles, which calls for intentional recruitment of teachers equipped to teach and support minoritized students. Also, without honest conversations about the adverse impact educators and schooling has on Black male youth, the strategies discussed in this paper will be minimally effective. It is not enough for just the school psychologist and school counselor to implement culturally responsive strategies, instead all educators must be on board and work collaboratively to effect systemic change.

The application of postsecondary readiness at the Tier 1 level has not been discussed widely in school psychology literature and minimally in the counseling literature (Morningstar et al., 2018). At Tier 1, the vision of a culturally responsive MTSS framework to support postsecondary opportunities would provide all students access to knowledge, information, resources, and preparation to be college and career ready. It must also be specifically tailored to support Black males given their attendance and persistence rates in college are discrepant compared to other racial/ethnic groups (Hussar et al., 2020).

First, it is important for discussions about postsecondary opportunities to happen early in Black males' schooling (i.e., elementary school) and continually to foster college and career aspirations (Hines et al., 2021). The middle and high schools are critical times to intensify discussions about postsecondary opportunities. At this level, Black males must be exposed to a variety of college and career possibilities including two-year and four-year colleges and universities, technical colleges, and trade schools. Black males may be interested in a specific college or career pathway (e.g., medicine or massage therapy) but lack knowledge about what it takes to achieve that goal. Therefore, this discussion is critical. Additionally, by exposing all students to different pathways everyone can be informed about the multitude of options that exist. Hosting career and job fairs provides access for all students to learn about different college and career paths. Moreover, college fairs should include representatives from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as it provides representation to Black males that they may not see in their schools or in the media. Also, representatives participating in career fairs should also reflect Black student's racial and gender identities. School counselors and school psychologists can take the lead and/or collaborate with other school personnel to ensure these activities are culturally-informed and intentional in being inclusive of Black males' identities. They can also collaborate with community members to participate in events such as career day and fairs; for example, Black male college and vocational graduates can be invited to discuss their journey to various career pathways. These opportunities also center the voices of Black male business owners and enable them to share their stories.

School counselors and school psychologists can also work together to implement programming that will inform students about the cost of attending different types of colleges/universities and ways to fund their schooling as the cost of college is often an inhibiting factor, particularly for minoritized students (Naylor et al., 2015). These discussions can occur through guidance lessons from the school counselor, collaborative presentations and workshops from the school psychologist and school counselor, and/or during homeroom period. Again, this allows all students equitable access to information related to postsecondary opportunities. These discussions should be frequent, recurring, attend to the interests of Black males, and involve action planning to help them develop plans

for the future and receive feedback on their plans such as specific ways to achieve their goals (Zambrano et al., 2012). Cook et al. (2021) examined Black, Latinx, and biracial students' experiences with their high school counselors and found they reported specific information about college such as financial aid options, college entrance exam readiness, and help completing admissions applications particularly helpful. Therefore, these topics are important to address and feedback from students about their postsecondary aspirations and goals will help ensure approaches are culturally-informed and inclusive of Black male students' interests.

Due to the unique structural barriers Black male students encounter in their schooling, educators, school psychologists, and school counselors must tailor tiered interventions to support their success. Black males are disproportionately identified with disabilities and placed in special education, receive special education services in more restrictive placements, and are disciplined at higher rates than other students (Trotman Scott et al., 2015). Coupled with low expectations and discrimination from educators (Trotman Scott et al., 2015), Black males often do not receive the educational experiences they deserve, which severely impacts their postsecondary experiences. Therefore, educators must be prepared to discuss how factors such as belongingness, microaggressions, and stereotype threat may influence Black male student college and career aspirations and outcomes (O'Hara et al., 2012; Tovar-Murray et al., 2012). Educators alongside school psychologists and school counselors should also discuss strategies to support the success of Black males such as the benefits of attending HBCUs (Brooks, 2015; Palmer et al., 2010); familial, peer, and faculty supports (Baker, 2013; Brooks, 2015); strong racial/ethnic identity (Tovar-Murray et al., 2012); and engagement in campus leadership roles and student organizations (Harper, 2015). In addition to tailoring specific supports, school counselors and school psychologists should also work to dismantle the ways that schooling often works to discriminate and dehumanize Black male students (i.e., tracking, access to rigorous courses, special education, discipline). By removing these structural barriers while also building up Black males strengths, school counselors and school psychologists can ensure their successful college and career readiness (Hines et al., 2021).

Involving families in discussions and activities about postsecondary opportunities is really important to help answer questions and understand the processes related to college and career pathways (Hines et al., 2021). Extant research emphasizes a positive relationship between family support and college-going aspirations among Black and Latinx families (Berbery & O'Brien, 2018; Carey, 2016;

Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019). Therefore, families play an important role in their children's future plans and it is necessary for them to be involved. School counselors and school psychologists can coordinate information sessions for families covering a variety of topics related to career and college opportunities.

TIER 2-TARGETED/SMALL GROUP WORK

Tier 2 is a more targeted approach for students whom Tier 1 was insufficient. A small group approach is appropriate for working with Black males as it allows them to address issues and concerns they all share and can be facilitated throughout the academic year (Erford 2019; Hines et al., 2020) . Also, Tier 2 is for Black males who are between high achieving and at risk students for not being postsecondary ready. For example, Black males who are interested in going to college but are not doing well in college ready courses can use a small group approach to discuss their grades, motivation for attending college, and a strategy to improve their academics. School counselors and school psychologists are both trained to facilitate small group counseling sessions, especially around college and career preparation. Small group counseling is seen as effective for academic improvement and a responsive service delivery that is efficient in time and cost (Erford, 2019).

School psychologists and school counselors can incorporate CRT into group work by asking Black males about their experiences in the classroom and out-of-school as it relates to the type of messages they receive about postsecondary opportunities. These educators should acknowledge and affirm Black male experiences, especially if the narrative has been from a deficit paradigm. More importantly, school psychologists and school counselors should be aware of the bias and beliefs they have of Black males and the ways it may hinder or help Black males become college and career ready. School psychologists and school counselors can celebrate the brilliance, talents, and gifts of Black males in a small group by speaking positive affirmations to them and seeing them as the experts in their lived experiences.

Hines and colleagues (2020) developed a five-lesson, small group curriculum aimed at preparing 10th grade Black males for college. The curriculum is designed to be culturally relevant for Black males and includes activities such as students researching Black men in various careers and discussing them with each other, bringing Black men to the group that have graduated from college to speak to the group, and discussing supports for Black males at the college level, particularly at HBCUs. School counselors and school psychologists can facilitate this curriculum in a way that brings breadth and depth to helping young Black men

in 10th grade methodically and strategically plan their high school career around postsecondary preparation. Also, this curriculum is preventative in nature as it starts by engaging Black males in the early years of high school.

School counselors and school psychologists should advocate for policy specific initiatives in their state and national organizations (i.e., NASP and ASCA) to address the academic and postsecondary outcomes of Black males. Also, school psychologists and school counselors can lobby their school districts for joint meetings to discuss how to best support Black males district wide as a coordinated effort to address their academic and opportunity gaps. As leaders in schools, school psychologists and school counselors use data to inform their school administrators why group work using a culturally responsive MTSS model should be the norm as an intervention in postsecondary preparation rather than the exception.

TIER 3-INDIVIDUALIZED

Tier 3 supports are more intensive in nature and usually longer in duration (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). School counselors and school psychologists can generally contribute in direct service to students through individual counseling or in support of individual students through recommending evidence-based academic and behavioral interventions and monitoring their progress. Tier 3 can be reserved for Black males who are at-risk for not being prepared for postsecondary options and need additional support and intrusive interventions to support their academic success, socioemotional development, and their postsecondary readiness. As advocates for the success of all students, school psychologists and school counselors are uniquely trained and positioned to ensure that equity and justice are the lenses through which every Tier 3 intervention is conceptualized and delivered. In the case of Black males, school psychologists and school counselors must first ensure that Black males are not being recommended to tertiary intervention based on a biased process. Even the most well-intentioned MTSS process can unintentionally cause harm to Black males by not understanding the role racism plays in their educational experience. Labeling their behavior and/or academic performance as solely an individual problem in need of intense intervention versus the issue being seen as a product of a broken system in need of attention is problematic and perpetuates the aforementioned dehumanizing conditions that exist in schools. For example, in MTSS, the actual instruction to which Black males respond (and upon which a determination is made about the need for secondary and tertiary intervention) could be poorly implemented and biased, thus rendering the resulting recommendation incredibly flawed (Proctor et al., 2012).There needs to be

a legitimate need for sustained and intensive individual intervention with Black males and the intervention must be strengths-based and not be deficit-oriented. In other words, whoever is delivering the needed services must be sure to highlight and reinforce the existing internal and external assets available to Black males, while emphasizing the deficits in the systems of which they are a part that exacerbate their challenges. Further, traditional counseling theories must be appropriately interrogated and set aside, as appropriate, in favor of critical counseling theories that better account for structural oppression and marginalization of groups in society. Similarly, whatever resources outside of school that school counselors and school psychologists connect Black males with should be those that facilitate the empowerment as Black males by creating space for their voices to be heard, valued, and appreciated.

Policy

Culturally responsive training for in-service school psychologists and school counselors should be set as policy at the building and district level. Specifically, professional development should include instruction on how to assist them in checking their bias and beliefs to ensure it does not create a barrier to Black male academic success, especially at the Tier 2 and 3 systems. School psychologists and school counselors need to be trained to be antiracist at the Universal/Tier 3 level to speak out against racism and injustice of Black males in the P–12 education system. Districts should create an educator pipeline or use a grow your own approach (Fletcher, 2014) to produce more school counselors and school psychologists of color (i.e., Black men) to implement a culturally responsive MTSS too.

As a part of instituting culturally responsive training and coaching at the district level, there is also a need to examine policies that lead to disparities in education for Black males. In particular, schools should dismantle zero tolerance discipline policies and seek culturally responsive and restorative practices aimed at keeping Black males in the school community (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019). This is particularly important as school discipline often leads to Black males spending more time away from critical learning opportunities, thus have limited chances to prepare for postsecondary opportunities. Additionally, policies around eligibility and gatekeeping practices for rigorous courses (i.e. AP, IB, honors, etc.) as well as gifted education should be revisited to ensure that Black males have the opportunity to enroll and be successful in said courses (Hines et al., 2020; Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Mayes & Moore III, 2016). Access to and completion of rigorous courses allows for deeper skill development along with content knowledge that can propel Black males forward in their postsecondary preparedness.

Research

More research is needed that takes a strengths based approach to understanding Black males' success in college and career readiness. These projects can inform the ways that Black males experience joy and excellence as a part of their college-going process. It can also provide deeper insights on the impact of systemic practices which center the wholeness and humanness of Black males. A case study approach can be used to understand how school psychologists and school counselors collaborate to implement this culturally responsive approach to MTSS for Black males to prepare them for postsecondary opportunities, specifically by looking at the process, interviews, and documentation. Lastly, scholars can interview Black males to gain insight on what would help them in a culturally responsive MTSS approach as the voice of the recipient should be at the center of this process.

CONCLUSION

It is long overdue to utilize culturally informed practices to support the educational experiences of Black males. The racism inherent in the public education system has continually hampered not only the P-12 experiences of Black males, but also their postsecondary opportunities. School should not be a traumatizing or dehumanizing experience for Black males, instead it should be a place where their identities are acknowledged and affirmed and voices are heard. Systemic inequities must be disrupted and access to postsecondary opportunities must be the norm. School counselors and school psychologists are more than equipped to lead efforts and collaborate with each other and other school personnel to implement supports to increase the college and career preparedness of Black males. The culturally responsive MTSS approach outlined in this article provides an optimal way to support Black males at multiple levels and ensure they are receiving equitable educational experiences and opportunities. Using a data-based and progress monitoring approach highlights inequities and forces educators to directly address anti-Black racism.

DISCLOSURE

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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Erik M. Hines, PhD, NCC, is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and Learning Systems at the Florida State University, where he also serves as the coordinator of the Counselor Education Program and School Counseling Track. Dr. Hines prepares pre-service school counselors, and his research agenda centers focuses on (a) college and career readiness for African American males; (b) parental involvement and its impact on academic achievement for students of color; and (c) improving and increasing postsecondary opportunities for first generation, low-income, and students of color (particularly African American males). Additionally, his research examines career exploration in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) for students of color. Over the years, he has secured major funding from the National Science Foundation to study Black males and their decision to pursue advanced degrees in Engineering. Finally, he is a proud American Counseling Association (ACA) Fellow and recipient of the Association for Specialists in Group Work Al Dye Award.

Renae D. Mayes, PhD, NCC, is an associate professor in the Department of Disability and Psychoeducational Studies at the University of Arizona. She is a licensed school counselor and national certified counselor, with experience in K–12 schools along with specialized educational settings. Informed by Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism, DisCrit, and bio-ecological systems theories, her research agenda focuses on the academic success and college readiness for gifted Black students with dis/abilities and Black girls. Her research details the experience of students and families navigating schools, while also offering specific recommendations for dismantling systems of oppression through policy and practice. Dr. Mayes has extended this research to include implications for leadership, advocacy, and collaboration for school counselors and school administrators.

Paul C. Harris, PhD, NCC, NCSC is an Associate Professor of Education in the Department of Educational Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education at The Pennsylvania State University. He also holds affiliate appointments in African American Studies and the Center for Educational Disparities. Dr. Harris' research focuses on achieving three goals: 1- Improving the college and career readiness process of underserved students; 2) Promoting the development of a multidimensional sense of self for Black male student athletes; and 3) Facilitating the empowerment of anti-racist school counselors. He is the creator of Men Passionately Pursuing Purpose (MP3), a program and mobile application that exists to see Black male athletes thrive in and out of sport. His work has been funded by numerous agencies, including the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). He currently serves on the editorial review board for the Professional School Counseling journal and on the Senior Advisory Board for The Professional Counselor journal. He is also the former president of the

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Desireé Vega, PhD, is an associate professor in the School Psychology program within the College of Education at University of Arizona. Her research focuses on three main areas: (a) fostering the academic success of African American and Latinx youth; (b) examining resilience in higher education among African American, Latinx, and first-generation college students; and (c) preparing culturally competent and bilingual school psychologists.