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International Review for the Sociology of Sport 2011 46: 299 originally published online 13
August 2010

DOI: 10.1177/1012690210378283

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International Review for the
Sociology of Sport
46(3) 299–314

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DOI: 10.1177/1012690210378283

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Abstract

Interscholastic sport in the United States is a social institution within which the social relationships and attitudes needed to sustain the existing dominant economic and class relations of the larger society could be perpetuated or reproduced. This single case study allowed us to explore the question of social reproduction by examining the nuances of how a young Black male high school basketball player helped to reproduce his social class position in society by aspiring to a career as a professional athlete. Our findings reveal that not only does this young man exclude himself from alternative opportunities for social mobility, but also in the context of pursuing hoop dreams, he lacked the cultural and social capital for navigating his way to his desired goal. Practical and research implications are discussed.

Keywords

Black males, career aspirations, high school basketball, social reproduction

Introduction

According to a recent report produced by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), high school sport participation in the United States has increased significantly and steadily since the early 1970s (see Howard and Gillis, 2008). More specifically, the number of boys participating jumped from 3,666,917 in 1971–72 to 4,372,115 in 2007–08, with a total of 552,935 participants in the second most popular

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sport of basketball (see The National Federation of State High School Associations, 2008). Although the report does not break down participation by racial background, Black males, particularly from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, are well represented in this population of high school basketball participants (Braddock, 2005; Eitle and Eitle, 2002). Eitle and Eitle (2002) reported that Black males are 2.5 times more likely than their White counterparts to participate in high school basketball. Moreover, although Black people account for only about 13 percent of the population of the United States, Black males account for a high percentage of athletes who play professional and major college basketball in this country. For example, 75 percent of the players in the National Basketball Association (NBA) (Lapchick et al., 2007) and 60 percent of the players in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I men's basketball programs (Lapchick et al., 2009) are Black males.

Sailes (1998a) explained that Black males' high representation in professional and major college sports can be attributed to the fact that for many of them, sport participation appears to be one of the few allowable and available opportunities for social mobility and success in a perceived racist and oppressive society. Furthermore, the privileged, high profile status (i.e. fame and fortune) that some young Black male professional athletes have achieved as a result of their athletic prowess has turned them into role models for young Black males, and this probably has further perpetuated many Black males' ambitions to pursue careers as professional athletes. Several scholars have focused on the athletic aspirations of Black males (Harris, 1998; Harrison et al., 1999, 2002; Lee, 1983; Sailes, 1998b), and essentially, this research has shown that Black males, in comparison to their White counterparts, are more likely to play sports with the expectation that it would lead to a college athletic scholarship and/or professional sport career.

Despite the extremely long odds that most high school athletes in general face in regards to becoming elite basketball athletes (i.e. earning a college scholarship to play at the Division I level and/or a professional sport contract in the NBA or other leagues; for specific details, see Bracken, 2007; Simons and Butow, 1997), countless numbers of young Black males still have *hoop dreams* or a set of expectations about their chances of success as future basketball players, that, in most cases, are unrealistic. The widely popular movie from the 1990s, *Hoop Dreams* – which is a documentary of the career paths of two Black boys' high school basketball players from inner city Chicago who had aspirations to play professional basketball – illuminates a number of important issues concerning race, social class, economic division, and values in contemporary America. Arthur Agee and William Gates are two young Black males who had some athletic talent and a dream but struggled to improve their athletic skills and social status in a job market with heavy competition; and in the end, they were unable to make it to the pros. However, they were able to turn the film's success and their subsequent fame into some post-athletic career opportunities for themselves (i.e. Arthur Agee started a foundation to support the education of inner city youth and created a sportswear line, and William Gates became a senior pastor at a community center; see *Hoop Dreams*, 2009).

The stories of Arthur Agee and William Gates are just two examples of the plight that many young Black males who pursue hoop dreams in the context of American society might experience. These young men's experiences could be very similar to as well as distinctly different from other Black males in the United States. The point is that the pursuit

of hoop dreams by young Black males is a complex phenomenon that could lead to various life outcomes – positive, negative, or otherwise – for these individuals. What complicates this matter are the myriad of social, political, economical, psychological, and educational issues that are deeply rooted in the very power structure of American society that have created some challenging circumstances that many Black males have had to struggle to overcome (Jenkins, 2006).

As alluded to earlier, sport has been regarded by many people to be one of the few places where this particular group could find success, be accepted, and achieve the American dream (at least as elite athletes). But how true and realistic is this assertion, particularly for ‘average’ (i.e. those who lack the talent and physical ability to play elite level basketball) high school basketball players? Further, how realistic is this dream for those who do not have the right connections or proper exposure? With these questions in mind, our goal was to explore the question of reproduction by examining the nuances of how a young Black male high school basketball player from a low SES background might have been complicit in the reproduction of his social position in society by aspiring to a career as a professional basketball player. This particular athlete, like most high school athletes, had ‘average’, at best, basketball skills. Our single case study is guided by the theoretical lens of social reproduction theory.

Social reproduction and Black male athletes

Social reproduction theory as well as other complimentary bodies of literature serve as an appropriate framework through which to understand and critically reflect upon the sporting experiences and career aspirations of Black high school boy’s basketball players because they help us to explore the central questions of how and why relationships of inequality and domination are reproduced in society and its many social institutions (particularly schools). Broadly speaking, reproduction theorists have been concerned with the ways in which the educational or schooling process, in particular, has helped to perpetuate or reproduce the social relationships and attitudes needed to sustain the existing dominant economic and class relations of the larger society. Organized school sport’s prominent place in America’s educational system has rendered it a potential site for the social reproduction of inequality.

The work of several scholars and reproduction theorists is relevant to our discussion of social reproduction and the Black male athlete in the context of high school sport. Theories of reproduction range from deterministic models on one end of the spectrum, to models that allow for the relative autonomy of individuals in their own cultural settings (MacLeod, 1995). From a structural determinism perspective, Bowles and Gintis’s (1976) early work is especially noteworthy. Essentially, these scholars advanced the argument that achievement in school and one’s life chances are determined, for the most part, by their class background in this capitalistic society. Furthermore, they asserted that the American educational system is structured and designed to prepare those from wealthy backgrounds to assume positions of dominance in society (and the workforce) and those from the lower rungs of the class structure to assume positions of subservience. This suggests that schools in suburban, affluent areas with a high concentration of White students have curriculums, resources, and programs that prepare students for career success

and leadership positions in capitalist America; and to the contrary, it has been argued that schools in urban, rural and working-class areas and neighborhoods with a high population of students of color tend to lack the resources and support needed to prepare these students to compete for leadership positions and other opportunities within the American economy. Jonathan Kozol's (1991) case studies in the book, *Savage Inequalities*, provides substantial insight into the disparities that exist between suburban and urban schools and the impact this has had on the educational experiences and outcomes of poor and racial minority students.

Given the current structure of schooling in capitalist America and the negative outcomes associated with the educational experiences (e.g. inadequate academic preparation and performance, underemployment, unemployment) of countless young Black males from working-class family backgrounds, but the athletic success, and consequently, upper social mobility of a few (i.e. athletic scholarship to college, professional sport contract), many young Black males view school sport participation as perhaps their only hope and primary reason to attend school. In line with Bowles and Gintis's *correspondence principle*, many Black male athletes' participation in the school process could be motivated by external rewards. That is, they might be motivated to go to class and achieve good grades so that they can be eligible to participate in football or basketball (see Braddock, 2005) with the expectation that this will lead to a professional sport contract via their participation in high school and/or college sport.

Many Black males' predominant focus on athletics within the current sociopolitical and historical context of American society and its school system raises concerns regarding whether or not some of them will have or acquire the skills and competencies that are necessary to compete in the economy and lead successful lives once their playing days have ended. In this regard, a focus on *cultural capital* further contributes to our discussion of the impact that social and cultural reproduction has on Black male high school athletes.

The concept of *cultural reproduction* has been used by sociologists (see Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) to explain how schools and school officials (e.g. teachers, counselors, coaches) help to reproduce social inequalities through the promotion of certain forms of class-specific cultural knowledge (Jennings and Lynn, 2005). In particular, Bourdieu (1977) introduced the concept of cultural capital, which he described as the general background, knowledge, disposition, and skills passed down from one generation to the next. More recently, Braddock (2005) defined cultural capital as 'cultural signals such as attitudes, behaviors, preferences, and credentials that are commonly used for social and cultural inclusion and exclusion' (p. 272). According to Bourdieu and colleagues, the cultural capital of students from upper and middle-class social origins (typically families of wealthy White and affluent people) is what is valued and taught within the school setting, while the 'community cultural wealth' (see Yosso, 2005 for a critique of Bourdieu's interpretation of cultural capital) of the lower and working class (i.e. typically families of people of color and the poor) is devalued and ignored. In short, schools help to reproduce social inequality by requiring certain academic credentials and experiences that ultimately lead to superior jobs and economic opportunity for those who possess the cultural capital of the economically privileged social classes, the majority of which are White (see Oliver and Shapiro, 1995).

Because many young Black males (including the one in this current study) do not belong to these upper and middle-class groups (see Oliver and Shapiro, 1995; Shapiro, 2004) they tend to experience the negative effects of the cultural reproduction that takes place in school. However, according to Jennings and Lynn (2005), these effects of cultural reproduction, in some ways, are mitigated by each individual's habitus, which they described as 'the specific way in which an individual acts and responds to the system and the practices of those who maintain it' (p. 20). These scholars further suggested that, to a certain extent, an individual has some degree of agency in making choices that might be to his or her benefit or detriment. According to Bourdieu (1977), however, individuals from poor and working-class backgrounds will have limited agency in a class-stratified society because these students have not had the same experiences, and therefore, their habitus might be quite distinct from their counterparts from middle- and upper-class backgrounds.

More specifically, according to Braddock (2005), the activation and acceptance of cultural capital in educational settings may be different for White students than it is for African American students. He cited the work of Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999), who found that African American and low-SES students receive less educational return for their level of cultural capital than do White and higher-SES students. Braddock (2005) further noted that this issue has not received much attention among African Americans or with regards to interscholastic sports. However, he did report that research has revealed that a lack of cultural capital had a significant impact on African American males' increased participation in football and basketball in comparison to their White counterparts. This lack of cultural capital among many African American males, and subsequently, their myopic focus on sport participation in the context of the school setting speaks to the importance of understanding the nexus between the structure of schooling and human agency.

In this regard, the theory of resistance in education becomes an important part of this discussion pertaining to the aspirations of Black male high school athletes. In developing a theory of resistance, Giroux (1983) criticized social reproduction theorists for overemphasizing the idea of domination and structural determinism in their work, and for failing to provide substantial insights into how students, teachers, and other human agents (e.g. coaches) come together within specific historical and social contexts in order to both make and reproduce their conditions of existence. According to Giroux (1983), 'there are complex and creative fields of resistance through which class-, race- and gender-mediated practices often refuse, reject, and dismiss the central messages of the schools' (p. 260). Because Giddens's (1984) structuration theory – which is an attempt to reconcile theoretical dichotomies of social systems such as agency/structure – holds that all human action is performed within the context of a pre-existing social structure which is governed by a set of norms and/or laws it is also important to this discussion of how structure and agency contribute to the reproduction of class status and relations.

Paul Willis's (1981) research in a working-class school with one group of students that conformed to the school system's achievement ideology (i.e. ear'oles) and one that rejected it (i.e. the lads) provides support for this theory of resistance. Jay MacLeod's (1995) work with two distinct groups of low-income, working-class students from the

same housing project (i.e. the brothers and the hallway hangers) further extends our understanding of the relationship between social structures, human agency, and individual aspirations and practices. Similar to the lads from Willis's study, the hallway hangers (mostly White group) rejected the achievement ideology of the schools and had low aspirations for their future positions in the labor market; they were unable or unwilling to see past their current state, and appeared to be content with being trapped in a perpetual cycle of poverty and despair, and opting for a life involving illegal activity in the underground economy (e.g. drugs). Conversely, the brothers (mostly Black group) were more similar to the ear'oles from Willis's study in that they embraced the achievement ideology promoted in the schools; these students tended to view the racial discrimination against their parents and previous generations as a thing of the past, and therefore, they could achieve success in life if they worked hard and conformed to the system. But despite the brothers' initial optimistic aspirations, racism took a toll on these aspirations; and the brothers' eventual outcomes were not much better than that of their White counterparts.

Doug Foley's (1990) book, *Learning Capitalist Culture*, is also useful to our analysis because it draws heavily on the work of Paul Willis in discussing how rituals surrounding high school football in a small south Texas town – that had been in the midst of a 'painful' process of cultural and political change since the 1960s – helps to reproduce certain dominant ideologies of class, race, and gender. Foley examines the way in which the youth of this economically depressed, predominantly Mexican American town learn traditional American values through participation in football, membership in informal and formal social groups, dating, and classroom interactions with teachers and peers. It is a study of how the school setting serves as a cultural institution where the students learn to perform their future class roles in sports, social groups, and via classroom rituals. This study is one of the first and few that emphasizes the role sport plays in the social reproduction process within the context of schooling.

But as it relates more specifically to Black youth in organized school sport, Polite's (1994) research with 115 African American male high school students (many of which were athletes) is of great significance to our discussion. In discussing these students' response to schooling, Polite categorized them as either an active conformist (i.e. those who acquiesced to the schools rules and procedures with the hope of reaching their life goals just like the ear'oles and brothers), passive conformist (i.e. those who viewed themselves as a part of the system, but had a limited knowledge of the system and its operations), nonconformist (i.e. those who saw very little use for the schooling process and covertly resisted it), or overt resistor (i.e. those who openly rejected schooling, and engaged in oppositional behavior just as the lads and hallway hangers did).

Although some African American males from this study were represented in each of the aforementioned groups, the highest concentration of them was labeled as nonconformist by Polite. Many of the nonconformists in this study were talented and had a great deal of potential (academically and otherwise), but dropped out of school or were dropped from the active enrollment due to a lack of regular attendance. Furthermore, many were influenced by the drug subculture and were concerned more with materialism and the social aspects of schooling, not the academic. This was evidenced in the fact that one of the student's only real motivation to be in school was because his basketball

coach pushed him to keep up his grades so that he could participate, and his girlfriend threatened to leave him if he stopped playing basketball.

Polite's (1994) research with Black male high school students has great relevance to our research with the Black male high school basketball player who was the focus of this current study. Moreover, Polite's research addresses MacLeod's (1995) concern that most studies of social reproduction overemphasize the role of schooling in the perpetuation of class inequality, and give only token consideration to other socializing agents and their impact on students. For example, some of the active conformists (which were few in number) in the study were exceptional athletes and above average students who had parental influences in how they related to schooling, and who also received additional incentive and support from the coaching staff at the school. Examples such as this one provides the impetus for why we have chosen to explore issues of social reproduction within the sporting realm. Perhaps an examination of the role organized school sport plays in students' schooling experiences, aspirations, and their subsequent outcomes will provide us with greater insight into how social reproduction operates within the structure of the school system. In the next section, we present the individual case of a young Black male high school basketball player in our efforts to uncover how the process of social reproduction plays itself out in an urban school setting.

Methods, findings, and discussion: The case of Cerico

The case discussed below is drawn from a broader ongoing study of the athletic career aspirations of 18 young Black men who competed for Northeast High School in Northeast, Georgia, from 1998 to 2005.¹ We initially interviewed these young men in each of their senior seasons and will continue to track their career paths via bi-annual interviews over the next 10 years. The interviewer served as an assistant coach and conducted both participant observation and structured interviews. The research was primarily focused on the young men's indulgence in basketball, motivation for pursuing the sport, and the young men's playing experience around basketball. With the exception of occasional meetings with teachers to discuss young men who had problems in the classroom, the interviewer primarily observed the activities of the young men around their participation in the game of basketball.

We have selected Cerico's case to present here because it is generally representative of the conditions of other young men in the study who are making similar choices to pursue athletic careers. Scholars have discussed the potential for a single case study to contribute to a broader understanding of some social phenomenon (Donmoyer, 1990; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Moreover, social scientists have used single case studies to illuminate the nuanced complexity of social life in a variety of contexts (e.g. Shaw, 1930; Wacquant, 2004). Although the case study approach is effective for the purpose of illustration, we caution that it is limited in both its 'generalizability' and in its effectiveness at distinguishing the inconsistencies between what people say they believe during interviews and their in situation actions. Still, we believe this approach will open up a broader discussion on the role of athletics in the social reproduction of social class. Here, we want to begin to investigate the kinds of early career path choices that may result in the reproduction of social class status for young men like Cerico who aspire to athletic careers.

First, a brief discussion of Northeast community and high school are in order. Northeast is a small metropolitan area with a population of approximately 106,000 residents. The high school, Northeast High School, is a predominantly African American high school with an annual drop out rate of approximately 51 percent. It is located in the low-income community of Eastridge which is made up of densely populated, low-income public housing and is plagued by crime, open-air drug markets and the associated street violence common to poor, Black, urban areas throughout the United States. In fact, four former Northeast Knights over the last 15 years have been murdered as a consequence of street violence. Hence, many of the young men of Northeast view athletics as the only viable means of escaping the desolate conditions in their community. In fact, based on their responses during the interviews 11 of the 18 young men interviewed had the explicit goal of competing in post-high school athletics, with hopes of making it to the professional level. Of those young men who were not specifically in pursuit of the 'hoop dream', the general consensus was that they wanted to play and compete in post-high school athletics. In general, the young men focus on the pursuit of hoop dreams to the exclusion of other types of aspirations that might place them in a better position for mobility.

Using Cerico's case below, drawn from interviews with him, we examine his social background and the contexts in which young men like Cerico decide to pursue hoop dreams.

Cerico, a 21-year-old high school graduate, was born in Northeast to unmarried parents. His mother is a single parent who raised her two sons and one daughter in the Hillside housing projects. Cerico's father is now remarried and has left the Northeast area. Cerico's older brother is 27 and currently works for the City of Northeast in their 'plunger system'. His brother, who also played high school basketball at Northeast, attended one year of college, but came back home after a year when his basketball aspirations did not work out. Cerico's older sister is a 25-year-old, single parent who just gave birth to a little boy. As Cerico describes it with disdain, his sister 'just works at McDonald's'.

Both of Cerico's parents played sports at Northeast High school a generation before Cerico. Cerico 'heard' that his mother, who stands at 6'0", was good enough to play basketball on college scholarship, but had to leave school when she became pregnant with Cerico's older brother. Cerico started playing basketball when he was about eight years old. He first started playing when his mother told him, 'go outside and play'. Cerico describes it this way:

She made me go out and play basketball because she played. She didn't force me to play. I played, because I liked to play. And my older brother was playing and he would take me everywhere to play with him . . . Basketball is my favorite sport. I don't know why, I just love it.

Although Cerico's mother issues a directive that most parents might, Cerico, within the context of his own brother's participation, and based on the fact that his mother had also participated, chooses basketball. This suggests that although Cerico's mother has influence, the context within which he is given the directive 'to play' helps to shape his desire for basketball.

From an early age Cerico was exposed to the belief that athletics were a viable means of mobility from out of his community. In his neighborhood Cerico was considered a natural athlete because he came from a line of locally successful Northeast High School athletes. Hence his focus on athletics flowed from the reputation of his family and his perception of the limited choices one has for mobility growing up in places like Hillside housing projects. It is with this understanding in mind that Cerico embarked on a career in basketball. His perceptions of athletic ability and those factors that influence athletic outcomes further bolstered his pursuit of hoop dreams.

Cerico said, 'Athletic ability is not God given. The only thing that's God given is whether you are tall or you can jump. Even slow people can play basketball.' But Cerico believes that one advantage he had stemmed from growing up in the housing projects because 'you just know how to understand more things . . . it makes you more tougher and more hard'.

Cerico affirms the idea that success as an athlete is based on one's hard work, but he also views the social context in which one develops their mentality and skills as important. Like many other young men who are attempting to establish their individual identities, Cerico believes that he can determine his own future by hard work. Similar to those young men in Macleod's (1995) and Willis's (1977) studies who choose to pursue their aspirations within arenas wherein they might have success, Cerico focuses on basketball. It is Cerico's perceived social advantage derived from his social environment that affirms his hoop dreams. Hence, Cerico is making his choice to focus on athletics out of a social context that not only supports the idea that athletics is a viable means for social mobility, but also that those who are 'tougher' from a housing project have an advantage over those 'softer' young men who pursue similar hoop dreams.

Although most young men who choose to focus on the pursuit of professional basketball do so with undying attention, Cerico became distracted by his immediate desire for money. The temptation associated with immediate gratification typically supports the reproduction of one's social class position. Fortunately for Cerico, his desire for earning money immediately was satiated by legitimate work whereas many young men from his neighborhood became involved in the pursuit of cash through the illegal drug trade (May, 2008).

Cerico played his freshman year of high school, but the second year:

I came out for the team, but decided not to keep playing because I had a job and I wanted to earn money. I used to work overtime even—like about 60 something hours a week. This affected my grades and my mother made me quit. She told me that I could choose to play basketball or work, but that I was working too much. She didn't care which one I chose as long as I kept up in school and finished high school.

In his comments Cerico reveals that his mother seemingly gave him a choice between work and basketball. Yet, Cerico also seems to indicate that his mother was primarily concerned about his performance in school. If this is in fact the case then her encouragements present counter-evidence to the argument made by John Hoberman who proposes that one reason why young Black males pursue athletic careers is because

Black families disproportionately encourage their children to take up athletic careers to the detriment of intellectual development (see Hoberman, 1997). Whether Black families disproportionately encourage their children to take up athletic careers is an empirical question that cannot be answered here. Suffice it to say that Cerico, in his comments discussed a little later, recognizes the importance of school to the extent that it helps him to get the opportunity to play college basketball and realize his dream. In this way, school participation is seen as a means to sport success.

In his junior year of high school Cerico decided to focus all of his energy on playing basketball. He began watching basketball on television and spending time reading *SLAM* magazine. His favorite kinds of stories 'were about how high school players go to the pros'. He liked Allen Iverson, Ray Allen, and Shaq. His favorite athlete was Ray Allen because, 'It seems like he came out of the projects. His game is just tough man. He is the silent assassin.' He also likes Allen Iverson because, 'He is just happy to be out of the projects.'

Cerico identifies with professional players who are presumed to have struggled through difficult times as young men themselves. These professional athletes were a source of inspiration to Cerico because they came 'out of the projects' and serve as a living example to Cerico that he too could survive his living conditions to experience mobility, fame, and success.

Although Cerico focused on basketball he was also aware that school was required if he wanted to participate in interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics. However, it is his perfunctory attention to school that increases the likelihood that Cerico will settle into low wage employment if he is unable to achieve his basketball aspirations. Cerico views school through the lives of others in his community who have gone to high school and end up working low wage jobs like McDonald's. His sister is an immediate reminder of this kind of life. Hence Cerico seems to be resigned to the idea that athletic attainment rather than educational attainment is his opportunity out of 'ghetto life'. It is as if Cerico recognizes that educational opportunity in a place like Northeast High School will not produce the necessary skills for success beyond his community and thus he focuses on his hoop dream.

Cerico attended school regularly, 'but I ain't goin' lie man, I hate getting up early. If school started at twelve I know I'd be a straight A student man.' Cerico, who was enrolled in general academic courses at Northeast High School claimed to enjoy school, but really liked 'The citizenship course because the teacher challenged him.' Cerico sees himself as a low B, high C student and added that 'I, I think, I'm a great student because, like say if I got a 69.5, I bet you I get a C in that class cause I don't ever say nothing in class I just do my work.' Cerico did not exert a lot of energy on his school work because 'in high school you don't gotta study nothing man. I don't know why we had people [players on the team] failing classes because there was no excuse in my mind. I ain't never failed no classes.'

Cerico's belief that being a 'great' student simply requires him to be civil in the classroom is a limited view of the educational process. Perhaps Cerico's choice to pursue hoop dreams seemed better than the pursuit of education given that 51 percent of the entering freshman at Northeast saw education in a poor enough light to drop out of school. Of those students remaining, only about 60 percent go on to four-year colleges.

For students like Cerico, from the low-income areas of Northeast, these numbers are much lower. Indeed, we submit that the social class position of the student significantly increases the likelihood that the student will end up reproducing their social position. For young men like Cerico, basketball is both the way out, and one of the only reasons for going to school.

Cerico indicated that if he were not playing basketball in college that he doesn't want to go to college because 'that's just too much school for me. I want to go to the Navy to learn how to do something on the computer or something.' Ultimately, Cerico aspires to play professional basketball because he believes he has the ability: 'Yeah. I got the skill man – like what all them folks doing on the bench man, I don't understand that. They supposed to be professional players. I know I'm better than some of them.'

Although Cerico had not been recruited to play basketball by any colleges, he was decidedly focused on basketball when he was first interviewed after his senior season. In fact, school was seen merely as something that one must do in order to pursue hoop dreams. We can see the manifestation of this attitude in the kinds of activities in which Cerico was able to participate after he left Northeast High School.

After graduating from high school, Cerico spent the first year working odd jobs. He was a 'helper' to a man that painted and performed minor home repairs. Cerico also tried to enlist in the Navy but did not meet the test qualifications – these tests are frequently designed to evaluate basic reading, logic, and computational skills required for military service. He worked odd jobs including as a summer camp counselor for the local Boys and Girls club in Northeast. He got a regular part-time job with the Boys and Girls club and has worked there for the last three years. He continues to supplement his employment there with odd jobs – like helping people move furniture, painting, and other handy work. He is especially proud of 'working with the kids man'. He continues to reside in the Hillside community near his mother and spends the evenings playing informal basketball games at the recreation center.

Cerico's focus on basketball to the exclusion of educational pursuits has meant that he has been unable to develop many of the necessary skills that would enhance the possibility he might experience social mobility. Although Cerico demonstrated a sense of agency in his decision to pursue his hoop dreams, his perception of opportunity was limited to this pursuit and the recognition that people from his community end up in low skilled labor jobs. At this time it appears that Cerico has made decisions that only support the reproduction of his social status. We will continue to follow Cerico and the other 17 players that were the focus of the initial study to explore how the social reproduction process unfolds over the course of these young men's lives. For now we posit some key ideas about the social reproduction process as it relates to athletic aspirations.

Conclusion and implications

Although the widely popular movie, *Hoop Dreams*, received a great deal of attention in the popular press there has been little attention in the research literature on how the 'average' high school athlete is thinking about a career playing professional sport, and

the outcomes associated with their career aspirations. Our study is a small step in the direction of beginning to address this void in the literature. Through our case study of Cerico, we sought to highlight the complexities of the relationship between the structure of schooling and sport participation, and human agency and individual aspirations, and how this impacted the social mobility of this young Black male. These multiple factors cannot be isolated from one another in attempting to understand why this young man has been unable, to this point, to achieve his hoop dream of becoming a professional basketball player, and why he continues to be positioned in his current lower class status in the community in which he grew up.

Although our single case study certainly has limitations – particularly because we focused primarily on Cerico and how his sporting experiences and aspirations as a high school student growing up and living in a low-income neighborhood, and not on additional social contexts (e.g. classroom setting) like Foley (1990) did in his ethnographic study of high school football – we believe this research makes an important contribution to the literature on social reproduction theory. First, our explicit focus on race and class are significant to the discussion of social reproduction in interscholastic sport. Oliver (1980) discussed how both race and class are important in determining the extent to which mobility opportunities are available to various groups in American society, insisting that the disadvantages of class and racial obstacles are often compounded for Black people. Perhaps this stems from the racist history of America (Feagin, 2006), and consequently, the lower class status of many Blacks today, particularly compared to that of Whites (see Bowser, 2007; Oliver and Shapiro, 1995; Shapiro, 2004; Wilson, 1996). Research shows that Black and White American's sport participation patterns are affected by structural inequalities in school and neighborhood resources (see Eitle and Eitle, 2002; Goldsmith, 2003; Hodge et al., 2008).

So what role could the structure of Cerico's school sport participation experiences, and the structural inequalities in his neighborhood resources have played in the reproduction of his current class status and social position? And how did/does his career aspirations and subsequent choices contribute to his current circumstances? Sports and schooling are inextricably linked in American society today, and therefore, it is important to reflect upon how the structure and function of interscholastic sport and the practices individual actors (e.g. athletes, coaches) within this context engage in might impact high school athletes, especially those who come from low-income neighborhoods and see sport participation as their 'meal ticket' to upper social mobility. Although some research on the impact that high school sport participation has on Black student-athletes suggests it could positively impact their school engagement and academic self-confidence and achievement (see Jordan, 1999), based on our case study with Cerico, it did not appear as if structures and mechanisms were firmly in place that could assist young men like Cerico in learning about important things such as career planning and how sport could be used as a vehicle to future social mobility in realms outside of sport participation.

Moreover, Cerico appears to have made choices about his schooling experiences and athletic career aspirations based upon the social context in which he lived and attended school. He developed his aspirations to become a professional athlete without a clear understanding of the process by which one becomes a successful professional athlete.

That is, first and foremost, one must have the necessary basketball skills and the knowledge of the career path (i.e. cultural capital) one must typically take to be a professional athlete; and second, high school athletes need to be tied into the appropriate networks (i.e. have the social capital) so that they can have the exposure beyond the local level (e.g. be invited to participate on Amateur Athletic Union basketball teams). Unfortunately, Cerico seemed to be oblivious to these realities. Therefore, although Cerico had what Yosso (2005) refers to as 'aspirational capital', a form of community cultural wealth where an individual has 'the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality' (p. 77), he was devoid of the cultural and social capital that is currently needed to fulfill his hoop dreams in American society.

Without the necessary athletic skills, appropriate knowledge, and social networks for attaining his athletic goals, and his already systemic exclusion from resources that helps one to develop the skills necessary for achieving social mobility through the educational process, Cerico experienced what we label as the 'double bind of marginality' against mobility. In essence, because Cerico put all of his eggs into the proverbial 'basket' of pursuing a professional sport career, and fell way short of that goal, he found himself back in the midst of the working-class neighborhood from which he came without much of an 'education' to show for his schooling experiences, no professional sport contract, and what appears, at this point, to be few prospects for future social mobility.

Given the findings from this study, there are some notable practical and research implications that we wish to briefly discuss. In terms of practical implications, if young men like Cerico can be made aware of what it truly takes to become a professional athlete, and they can recognize that they have not met the requisite requirements at an early stage in the educational process, then perhaps coaches, parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, and counselors could guide them to other career fields (see Singer, 2009). This does not necessarily mean that Black males should be discouraged from having that aspirational capital that encourages them to pursue hoop dreams; however, what it does mean is that the above-mentioned educational stakeholders have a responsibility to teach them to dream with their eyes open to the realities that very few make it professionally as an athlete, but that they can and should aspire to vocations and professional fields where other Black males have more consistently found opportunity and success. These stakeholders also have a responsibility to put mechanisms in place that not only allow these student-athletes to maximize their potential as athletes, but first and foremost, as students.

In terms of future research, we will continue to follow the lives of Cerico and other Black males from similar backgrounds. It might also be interesting to investigate the career aspirations and outcomes of high school and college male athletes from different social class and racial backgrounds to assess the role these demographic factors might play in the social reproduction process.

Note

1. All names of people and places are pseudonyms. For more background information on the young men and the competitive context, see May (2008).

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