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THIS WAY . . . THIS EXPLAINS MY REALITY

Critical Race Theory in sport and leisure

Kevin Hylton

Introduction

In 2005 Michael Banton wrote a retrospective on fifty-five years of research in sociology (Banton, 2005). In particular his work focused on ethnic and racial studies. Widely regarded as one of the leading international sociologists, his reflections on his approaches to the sociology of ‘race’ and ethnic relations was published in the same year that I was challenging academics in the sociology of sport and leisure to engage in a more inclusive and critical exposition of racialised phenomena (Hylton, 2005). Some of the questions that I was asking included: (a) at what point will those in the field recognise that a narrow academic focus will leave them with charges of repetition and theoretical myopia; (b) do academics in the field recognise that even critical theories with a social justice focus can ignore ‘race’; and (c) are academics in the field willing to incorporate other marginalised ideas and voices to address these imbalances? In regards to the academy, my ire was focused on how sport and leisure studies, a necessarily multidisciplinary field, marginalised specific issues of ‘race’ and racism.

My paper focusing on Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Leisure Studies (Hylton, 2005) consisted of three sections, concluding with ‘a call to sport and leisure theorists and policymakers to centralize “race”, racism, and race equality in their everyday considerations’ (p. 94). The first part of the paper explored the shared racial justice agenda of CRT and other areas of ethnic and racial studies. The paper unpacked the fundamentals of CRT’s precepts as a useful introductory point for readers new to the framework. As a device to emphasise how a critical ‘race’-centered approach can strengthen social theorizing, the paper then moved on to the second section that mapped out the flawed analogous developments of critical theory in sport and leisure sociology and the North American based critical legal studies, as both were inconsistent in their treatment of ‘race’ in their analyses. In the final part of the paper CRT is advanced as:

A worthy theoretical framework from which to interrogate issues of ‘race’, and to refocus the theoretical lens onto anti-oppressive theory, race equality, and related areas in sport and leisure studies.

(Hylton, 2005, p. 82)
I haven’t shifted from this position, though I wish to make the point firmly that in attempting to develop theoretically informed interventions one is bound to make mistakes (Banton, 2005). I also wish to make a few brief related points: (a) CRT is not a theory but a framework, which I outline in this paper, and elsewhere, through the use of precepts or tenets (Hylton, 2009, 2012); (b) though ‘race’ and racism are central, CRT has a larger anti-essentialist focus to contest other forms of subordination; and (c) CRT uses the term ‘race’ that incorporates discourses of ethnicity and urges all to use racialised terminology politically, pragmatically and under advisement.

In many ways, I have seen CRT gain a foothold and flourish at conferences, in academic journals and postgraduate studies across a plethora of disciplines; indeed, BritCrit, the substantive application of CRT in the UK, has become more conspicuous (Gillborn, 2011). Yet there will still remain criticism of the place of intersecting identities and forms of oppression that are being de-centred, or worse, devalued in opposition to ‘race’. Even though CRT is an anti-essentialist framework that embraces intersectionality and all forms of social justice agendas, there will inevitably be complaints of topics that have not yet significantly emerged in some areas using this emerging framework.

In 2005 I summarised precepts of CRT as: (a) the centralising of ‘race’ and racism at the same time as recognising their connection with other forms of subordination and oppression; (b) challenges to traditional dominant ideologies around objectivity, meritocracy, colourblindness, race-neutrality and equal opportunity; (c) a clear commitment to social justice that incorporates elements of liberation and transformation; (d) centralising the marginalised voice; and (e) necessarily transdisciplinary. These are not exhaustive precepts, though are popular in most theorizing of this framework. If sociology has taught us anything it is that ‘race’ has no foundation in science and remains a social construction. However, if history has taught us anything it is that ‘race’ is a lived reality, and it is this fundamental point that forces CRT to recognise its constructed nature while pragmatically putting racialisation and racism in the sights of these activist scholars. CRT is distinctive because it centres ‘race’ and racism where other critical perspectives are more circumspect in their pursuits of social justice. Critical race theorists ensure that the salience of ‘race’ is recognised and racism is disrupted so as to ensure racial justice or even racial transformations become goals in the way we do business (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001).

CRT’s starting point is that society is ridden with racisms that have been explained historically, politically, culturally, economically and epistemologically. Foundational writers Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001) are typical of critical race theorists’ expositions on racism when they state that racism is ‘Ordinary, not aberrational—“normal science,”’ the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color’ (p. 7; see also Crenshaw, Taylor, Gillborn and Ladson-Billings, 2009; Dixson and Rousseau, 2006; Gillborn, 2009). Similarly, MacPherson’s (1999) conclusion at the end of his enquiry into racism in the London Metropolitan Police reinforced a CRT viewpoint when he stated that, ‘there must be an unequivocal acceptance that the problem actually exists as a prerequisite to addressing it successfully’ (p. 652). For social transformation to occur, this must be understood.

Simple conceptions of racism as, for example, overt and covert, do not fully engage the sophistication of its manifestations in society; ergo sport and leisure. These racial processes and formations (Omi and Winant, 1994; Winant, 2001) are experienced discursively, materially or affectively, ranging from actual events to those that are felt. Racisms can be viewed simply as perceived or more comprehensively as a cancerous social concern that affects all of us. Though this intellectual debate must be taken seriously it is important that scholarly gymnastics make us limber in a practical sense to challenge historical racialised inequalities in the everyday. Like MacPherson (1999) cautioned, it is imperative not to be stymied by these debates and to,
‘Take the view that the important issue now is to stop arguing about definitions and do something about the racism’ (p. 650).

Racism in sport

Racism in sport is a serious contemporary issue and one that, on any given day, is likely to produce multiple examples of global controversies. Today it is the turn of Italy’s FA President, Carlo Tavecchio, to be banned from any position within European football body UEFA as a result of making racist remarks in his campaign for the FIGC presidency. Reuters reports that his remarks were based upon a fictitious African player when he said:

In England, they identify the players coming in and, if they are professional, they are allowed to play [...] Here instead we get ‘Opti Poba’, who previously ate bananas and then suddenly becomes a first-team player with Lazio.

(Homewood, 2014)

Other recent and sensational events that fall into this category include NBA Clippers owner Donald Sterling, fined $2.5 million USD and banned from owning an NBA franchise because of the cynical racism he inadvertently divulged to the world via a telephone conversation with his partner (Barrabi, 2014). The presence of racism in sport and society is obvious to many, and Bondy (2014), of the *New York Daily News*, argues that they know of at least ten of the ‘most egregious examples still plaguing the athletic field and the boardrooms’. I have summarised Bondy’s arguments in Table 27.1.

It is overly simplistic to suggest that racism is only the vestige of the far right and/or hooligans, though we should be clear that there were periods where their presence was much more conspicuous. One thing we see less of in the professional domain internationally, but specifically where it comes to football in the UK, is the racist violence that blighted stadia in the 1970s–80s. However, a review of the Runnymede Trust’s bulletin reports reveals the inter-generational prevalence of ‘race’ and racism in sport, leisure and society. One year after the European Parliament’s Committee of Enquiry into the rise of fascism and racism in Europe, we witnessed horrific scenes in the Heysel stadium in Brussels where thirty-nine people died, fuelled by such bigotry (Runnymede Trust, 1985a). Football stadia, the recruiting grounds for neo-Nazis such as the National Front (NF), found the NF distributing racist literature urging their followers to ‘kill the n**s’ (Runnymede Trust, 1987). Some of the leaflets they distributed at Heysel were asking questions of supporters that are disturbingly being heard today. ‘One leaflet at Heysel entitled *Unemployment* asked, “Have you been thrown on the scrapheap by foreign imports?”’ (Runnymede Trust, 1985a, p. 7).

Politics of ‘race’ shift over time, though it may disturb some how closely aligned elements of the far-right NF discourse from the racist violence in sport from the 1980s are still with today’s major political parties. Labour wish to secure borders, crack down on immigrants undercutting British workers, and the Tories wish to implement a new hardline immigration strategy. The notion of sport as a prism on society becomes clearer at these times.

The mingling of British neo-Nazis and Italian fascists before Liverpool v. Juventus at Heysel in 1985 should not be lost on those in football today who feel that fascism is acceptable. It was the Tyneside and District Antifascist Association in 1985 that called for a total ban on the National Front at football matches, as these activities had been ignored for so long, yet it was on neighbouring Wearside in 2013 when an openly fascist manager was taken on by Sunderland Football Club. The controversy following Paolo Di Canio’s management contracts at both
Swindon FC and Sunderland were prompted by those unwilling for history and politics to remain forgotten in the direction they pointed their moral compass. The European Union Fundamental Rights Agency’s (FRA, 2010) study on racism, ethnic discrimination and exclusion of migrants and minorities in sport found that racism, anti-Semitism and anti-gypsyism were consistent across all twenty-seven-member nations. As we go back and forwards in decades, and as the social and political climate change, we can see that racism and policy responses in and through sport tangle with recurrent issues. Integration, Xenophobia, Far Right Politics, Racist Violence and even Fascism reminds us that the genealogy of these ideas and politics metamorphosise into new discourses. For example, in 1985 The Runnymede Trust (RunnymedeTrust, 1985b) reported on an article in the *Telegraph* that a Chelsea fan was fined £100 for wearing a T-shirt that read: ‘Chelsea’s Yid-busters Coming Soon to Rid The World’.3

This was an obvious anti-Semitic dig at rivals Tottenham Hotspur (Spurs) whose history of attracting Jewish fans has made them a target for rivals. Twenty-nine years later in 2014 the tensions continue and are more complex, as Spurs fans express a fondness for the use of

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*Table 27.1* Current examples of racism in sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ice hockey fans on the internet – the abuse that black players endure on social media is something relatively new, and truly disgusting. When Wayne Simmonds was creating problems for the Rangers in the first round of the playoffs, a torrent of racist tweets hit the web.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Lack of translators for Spanish-speaking players.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Redskins – The NFL’s franchise in Washington continues to churn out public relations releases, citing surveys that indicate Native Americans don’t really mind the obviously offensive nickname.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Graduation rate for black college athletes – Top college basketball and football programmes continue to recruit and then exploit black athletes without proper academic counselling. The majority who don’t make it will need to find a different profession – without a college degree. At Wisconsin they reported a 100 per cent graduation rate among its white basketball players and a 0 per cent rate among its black players.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Stereotypes of Asian players – Asians and Asian Americans are pigeonholed too often by sport. They’re supposed to be good at golf, baseball, tennis and figure skating, but not at basketball or football.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The coverage of black players in the media – The cultural gap remains huge between the largely white media that cover professional sport and the largely black population of players in football and basketball.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Owners – Until ownership of professional sports teams becomes more diverse there can never be a trickle-down effect. Too many white owners employ too many white executive vice presidents who employ too many white general managers.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Upper management in baseball</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Cleveland Indians baseball team mascot</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>European football fans – Football supporters in Spain, Italy, Holland and all over Eastern Europe have demonstrated over the years they are the most ignorant bunch of all. Crowd behaviour was awful at Euro 2012 in Poland and Ukraine. Then last year, players from AC Milan courageously walked off the field in Lombardy after spectators there uttered derisive chants at Ghanian-German player Kevin-Prince Boateng. Most recently, Barcelona’s Dani Alves tried to defuse matters by picking up a banana thrown at him by a Villarreal fan (who was arrested), peeling it and eating it before he took a corner kick.</td>
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Source: Based on summary of Bondy (2014).
self-identifying chants such as Yid Army! and Yiddo! that could easily be read as anti-Semitic. Spurs are in the middle of a heated debate as to who can use the word Yid; is it offensive when reclaimed by Spurs fans? Spurs fans in 2014, as well as rival supporters, risk being prosecuted for anti-Semitic chants just as the Chelsea fan was two decades earlier. Prime Minister David Cameron added to the debate that it was acceptable for Spurs fans to chant the word, even after the Football Association warned that fans could face criminal charges and long banning orders (Johnson, 2013; TelegraphSport, 2013). Here, two major stakeholders in the race equality landscape of sport are at complete odds and are another example of the significance and complexities of ‘race’ and racism in sport. Furthermore, sport demonstrates here how contemporary racialised issues of terminology, identities, politics/policy and racist intent in the use of language abound as ideas are constructed and reworked.

In an example where intent was unequivocal, Norman Tebbit used sport as a starting point for another famous discussion on integration in 1990 as he argued, ‘if you don’t support the national team where you are living then you couldn’t be integrated into that society’ (RunnymedeTrust, 1990). Tebbit used the sport of cricket to make this point and in particular targeted south Asian communities to challenge their validity as productive and integrated citizens. This Loyalty Test was not well received, yet it further demonstrates that over the years sport and leisure spaces have emphasised the broader divisions we see every day while, as with the Spurs chants, not necessarily resolving them. Racial abuse in sport is still rife and the Runnymede Trust has recorded many incidents and responses to them. For example, soon after 1993, when the Commission for Racial Equality launched its Let’s Kick Racism Out of Football campaign (now Kick it Out), Derby County players Gary Charles and Paul Williams were substituted at Millwall after receiving racist abuse (RunnymedeTrust, 1994); a BNP councillor had also just been elected in the Isle of Dogs. Interestingly, Brendan Batson, spokesperson for the Professional Footballers Association, felt that taking the players off was a backward step and that the players should have been kept on the pitch. However, two decades later in 2013 many ex-players and football governing bodies, lauded as heroic the action by Kevin Prince Boateng who walked off the pitch for being racially abused by spectators as he played for AC Milan against Pro Patria. Ideas and tolerances shift and move on yet ‘race’ and racism remain significant.

In 1999, I wrote a paper for The Leisure Manager entitled ‘Where are the Black leisure managers?’ (Hylton, 1999). I am disappointed that over fifteen years later the same questions are being asked. As Chelsea football club manager, Jose Mourinho, is roundly condemned by FIFA for saying there is no racism in football (Ackerman, 2014), his naivety and White privilege become exposed. The discourse of ‘race’ in sport has retained the equivalence of Guinier and Torres’ (2003) ‘Miner’s Canary’ as it continues to be reiterated in discussions of leadership, management and coaching, the media, local government, pedagogy, science, migration and research, to name a few. A miner’s canary was used in the past to detect levels of poisonous gasses in mines and the presence of the canary meant the presence of this danger. The continued presence of ‘race’ as a starting point to focus critical ‘race’ scholars on such projects, as CRT’s key writings develop fluidly to engage new and challenging racialised phenomena in sport, denotes the pernicious presence of racism in society that permeates it. The resilience of ‘race’ and more specifically, racialised issues, processes and formations to manifest themselves inter-generationally, internationally, intersectionally, culturally, politically, economically and socially force a constant revisioning of ways to disrupt their insidious onslaught.

Leading up to and subsequent to the Leisure Studies paper in 2005, part of my challenge has involved balancing the development of CRT as a theoretical framework to explain and challenge more complex subjects. In the vein of Banton’s (2005) urgings that sociologists need to make their theories less abstract and to consider more diligently ‘the adequacy of the
explanations of problems that can be derived from theories’ (p. 466), I have developed and applied CRT in my work through examinations of theories of education and ‘race’ (Hylton, Pilkington, Warmington and Housee, 2011; Pilkington, Housee and Hylton, 2009); ‘race’ and culture in tourism and events (Hylton and Chakrabarty, 2011); social capital and social integration (Hylton, 2008, 2010b); football studies (Hylton, 2013, 2014; Long, Hylton, Welch and Dart, 2000); Olympism (Hylton and Morpeth, 2009, 2012, 2014); antiracism, sport, and its development (Hylton, 2010a, 2011); migration (Long, Hylton and Spracklen, 2014; Spracklen, Long and Hylton, 2014); methodologies (Hylton, 2012); and Whiteness (Hylton and Lawrence, 2015; Long and Hylton, 2002). At the same time, it is important not to lose sight of the fact of racism and the constant need to restate the issues for new generations of policymakers, practitioners and students that often require ‘old wine in new bottles’. Hence, my policy- and practice-oriented research informed by CRT have included studies for a range of national governing bodies, government departments and local authorities. The difficulty of continuing any sociological development is the requirement to engage intellectual pursuits while ensuring they are couched in lived realities. Critical Race Theory’s movement towards social justice cannot be purely theoretical, even though theoretical debates can be had, neither can it be purely interventionist because of our need to observe thoughtful action. Academics with an interest in ethnic and racial studies in sport and leisure would draw similar conclusions to me in the Leisure Studies paper that:

The resultant outcome of using a CRT perspective is likely to lead towards a resistance to a passive reproduction of the established practices, knowledge and resources, that make up the social conditions that marginalize ‘race’ as a core factor in the way we manage and experience our sport and leisure.

(Hylton, 2005, p. 81)

Research and writing informed by CRT have become widespread and more common than in the 2000s. They definitely outstrip the foundations that I based my initial ideas on in the 1980s and that developed into the application of CRT in my doctoral studies in the 1990s (Hylton, 2003). For many, CRT’s attraction comes from its ability to articulate and explain the lived realities of racialised and minoritised actors. Just as other theoretical standpoints enable a more accurate and honest telling of social relations from the perspective of the classed, gendered or disempowered in other ways, CRT offers a pragmatic critical framework that facilitates different uses and approaches. This framework can be encapsulated in what I referred to as precepts, sometimes tenets, and it is to these issues that I now turn.

Critical race theory

I often describe journeys to CRT in ontological terms. CRT is a way to say this way . . . this explains my reality . . . these realities. CRT’s framework enables an articulation of issues that reflect a lived experience. A lived experience where activist scholars, such as Derek Bell (Bell, 1987), Patricia Williams (Williams, 1997), Gloria Ladson-Billings (Ladson-Billings, 1997) and Charles Mills (Mills, 1997), begin much of their work. From such an experiential starting point, they then apply razor-sharp critiques to challenge embedded racial inequalities in the law and wider society (Bell), colourblindness (Williams), racialised inequalities in education (Ladson-Billings) and ‘race’ and White racism (Mills). Similarly, my doctoral thesis emerged out of my unease at the glass ceiling in the local authority that I was working in as an innercity community sport development officer, and a desire for social justice and transformation. I had few Black role
models in my authority and felt further isolated in meetings in and out of my organisation. In conducting graduate degree research across a number of authorities, I found, scattered across other local authorities, similar stories from Black officers where ‘race’ and racism affected their opportunities and well-being in the workplace. Yet at the same time I needed to establish what institutionalised processes framed and perhaps even caused these racial formations. At that point I began my PhD journey.

Using CRT, I was able to explore issues that were being ignored or marginalised, thus enabling me to challenge orthodoxies in sport and leisure settings. The very process of asking new questions from a particular social location, identifying the power-to-knowledge dynamic, theoretical and methodological colourblindness forced an uncomfortable framing of the academic landscape and persuasive reasons for change. Change for the academy was matched by the demystifying of ideas concerning sport for all and meritocracy in local government as equal opportunities and race equality policies failed to be implemented in practice, thus impacting minoritised participants and practitioners in terms of access, recruitment, retention and progression (Hylton, 2003). The work had to cross existing theoretical fields in a transdisciplinary fashion. Though not exhaustive, it included the policy sciences, sociology, community studies, ethnic and racial studies, critical Whiteness studies, Black feminism and gender studies, urban studies and human resource management. Using CRT to centre ‘race’ meant that a transdisciplinary critique enabled a more persuasive need for research on ‘race’. Here the limitations of the past were surpassed by a theoretical approach that shifted the marginalised voice of Black academics and ‘race’ research from the margins to the centre.

My thesis and subsequent work for an antiracism in sport organisation, Kick it Out, forced me to more diligently consider the place of Whiteness, White privilege and White supremacy in sport and leisure (Hylton, 2009; Hylton and Lawrence, 2015; Long and Hylton, 2002; Long et al., 2000). Related applied research on the nature and extent of racism in grassroots football revealed processes that privileged Whiteness in local government that systematically ignores historical inequalities and made apparent the snowy peaks at senior levels. This ranged from the Whiteness of league officials and disciplinary panels, county officers and racism on and off the pitch that went unpunished, often leading to the internalisation of racism by Black players. For instance some predominantly Black teams would not represent themselves at disciplinary hearings because they knew that they would feel alienated as they would not see anyone who looked like themselves across the table, and therefore faced a double-jeopardy (i.e., if they defend a fine and are found guilty they receive an additional fine). However, if they do not turn up for a disciplinary hearing, the panel will deem them guilty. The perception of racial hierarchies and racialised inequalities were ‘accepted’ and the ‘game played’ accordingly to the detriment of Black and minoritised players.

A concern with racism and the regular suspicion towards its nature and extent from academic, practitioner and policy circles has led me to aim to be more specific about not only naming racism(s) but also it is imperative to explain the specific conditions under which particular forms of racism thrive in sport and leisure arenas. For example, in ‘Race’ and sport: Critical Race Theory (Hylton, 2009: 86), I move to illustrate how racial practices are recreated while naming their specific incarnations as (a) racialisation and mediated racial identities, (b) Whitecentrism, (c) the myth of difference and mimetic accuracy and (d) the myth of assimilation and enlightened racism. Though not mutually exclusive, my use of a CRT lens enabled an analysis able to persuasively explain how the print media reproduced racialised ideologies while naming the different techniques. Similarly a critique of the London 2012 Olympic Games through the lens of interest convergence (Hylton and Morpeth, 2012) enabled a telling of how state and White interests merged with those Black and minoritised communities in East London who were
overdue infrastructure improvements and employment opportunities (see Bell, 1980; Gillborn, 2009). Such observations caution against superficial approaches to sport policymaking where hubris and plain idealism with a one-off event alone cannot purport to address the embedded racialised inequalities in sport and wider society.

Conclusion

As I continue to develop ideas that use CRT and its related concepts, I find it imperative to work through processes of naming, describing and disrupting ‘race’, racialisation and racism in relation to how they are experienced; for example, as microaggressions in the everyday (Burdsey, 2011; Hylton, 2010a, 2011). As a reflexive and non-dogmatic framework, CRT encourages a critique of those on the political Left as much as they do on the Right. To this end, I utilise microaggressions as a descriptive and explanatory technique to critique loose approaches to antiracism. The question ‘Anti-What?’ in context of challenging antiracists to be clear about what they are against shores up the efficacy of their campaigns and interventions as they use thoughtful action against racism rather than the less focused knee-jerk responses we sometimes witness. Being critical of those on the Left as well as the Right strengthens our activist-scholarship, antiracist interventions, and continues the agenda to undermine racism.

I agree with Banton that in attempting to develop theoretically informed interventions, one is bound to make mistakes (Banton, 2005). As we work reflexively and critically we cannot escape our subjectivities. As we make decisions to research and write we are also making inadvertent decisions to exclude subjects that could potentially be incorporated into these analyses. Yet it is this process of trying to improve explanations that, ‘Obliges scientists to improve their conceptual armoury . . .’ (Banton, 2005, p. 466).

Notes

1 This chapter is a reflection on Hylton (2005) and the work related to it.
2 The UK’s foremost Black think-tank.
3 ‘Yid’ is an abbreviation of the word ‘Yiddish’, a language used by Jews in central and Eastern Europe. The term is often used in the shortened version as a derogatory term.
4 Millwall is an area in London, in the Isle of Dogs, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

References


Applying Critical Race Theory

Daniel Burdsey

It goes without saying that unearthing and engaging with the ideas, insights and theories of others is one of the many pleasures and privileges of life in the academy. The routine nature of such processes makes them no less enlightening or fulfilling when they occur. Then there are those special occurrences when, even in relatively small sub-disciplines – for instance, the social science or management of sport – a new contribution exhibits the potential to facilitate a significant step-change within the field. It is within this category that Professor Kevin Hylton’s application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to sport and leisure resides (e.g., Hylton 2005, 2009, 2010).

Over the last decade, Hylton’s CRT-influenced scholarship has offered a hugely valuable addition to the literature on the sociology and management of sport and leisure. On a personal note, this work has been among the most important influences on my own research. I remember distinctly discovering Hylton’s (2005) article in Leisure Studies a decade ago, and feeling a mixture of excitement, curiosity and even relief about the opportunity to explore and apply this three-letter acronym with which I was hitherto unfamiliar. I recognised immediately how its application could benefit my teaching, research and activism. I was familiar with the critical tradition in sociology and ethnic and racial studies, and the cultural Marxism and feminism of my mentors and colleagues influenced me significantly. Crucially, Hylton’s work provided me (and many others) with a toolkit to combine these standpoints into a race-specific epistemology and praxis with which to understand and interrogate critically racialised phenomena, and to strive for social justice, in sport and leisure.
The immediate appeal of the article lay in various components. These include Hylton’s (2005) insistence that issues of racial subordination in sport should ‘stay at the centre of [researchers’] investigations or lens, rather than at the comfortable rim’ (p. 85); his call for academics ‘to make their research political rather than neutral, transformatory rather than merely critical’ (p. 88); and his identification that ‘mainstream epistemologies and research agendas make up part of the forces of oppression’ (p. 90). I have since sought to embed the CRT approach outlined by Hylton in my own work on race, ethnicity, sport and popular culture, using it primarily as a means of illuminating the experiences of British Asian male cricketers and analysing racist episodes in English men’s football (e.g., Burdsey, 2011, 2014). In addition to its specific topic relevance, it also holds methodological pertinence, linking race to important aspects of ethical and conscious research, including reflexivity, awareness of responsibilities and power relationships, and an appreciation of how knowledge is generated and legitimated (Sampson, Bloor and Fincham, 2008). CRT has also compelled me to reflect critically on my own subjectivity, as a White, male academic. Recognising the contentious relationship between dominant subjectivities and this emancipatory standpoint (Gillborn, 2008), CRT has enabled me to problematise and destabilise my Whiteness; to strive for more equal power relationships in research encounters; and to elevate minority voices in the design, undertaking and analysis of research.

Ten years on from Hylton’s article, the racial inequalities and injustices of the contemporary neoliberal (sporting) conjuncture suggest that its influence and importance to the critical study of sport and leisure will be just as important for the next decade.

Note

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References