How a turn to critical race theory can contribute to our understanding of ‘race’, racism and anti-racism in sport

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Abstract
As long as racism has been associated with sport there have been consistent, if not coordinated or coherent, struggles to confront its various forms. Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework established to challenge these racialized inequalities and racism in society and has some utility for anti-racism in sport. CRT’s focus on social justice and transformation are two areas of convergence between critical race theorists and anti-racists. Of the many nuanced and pernicious forms of racism, one of the most obvious and commonly reported forms of racism in sport, racial abuse, has been described as a kind of dehumanizing process by Gardiner (2003), as those who are its target are simultaneously (re)constructed and objectified according to everyday myth and fantasy. However, this is one of the many forms of everyday racist experiences. Various forms of racism can be experienced in boardrooms, on television, in print, in the stands, on the sidelines and on the pitch. Many times racism is trivialized and put down as part of the game (Long et al., 2000), yet its impact is rarely the source of further exploration. This article will explore the conceptualization of ‘race’ and racism for a more effective anti-racism. Critical race theory will also be used to explore the ideas that underpin considerations of the severity of racist behaviour and the implications for anti-racism.

Keywords
anti-racism, colour-blind, critical race theory, micro-aggression, racism(s), speech acts

Background
In this article critical race theory (CRT) is introduced as an important theoretical tool for anti-racists in sport. CRT has emerged out of radical developments in critical legal studies and education in North America, but now contributes perspectives to other areas such as history, disability studies, critical race feminism, whiteness studies, and sport and
leisure studies (Solórzano and Yosso, 2001, 2002). CRT presents anti-racists with a framework to challenge orthodoxies, narrow ‘race’ thinking and under-theorized approaches in sport, and thus to enable their praxis to be strengthened in what critical race theorists view as a fundamentally racist world (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2009; Hylton, 2009). Consequently, this article explores critical race theory and the implications of that framework for theorizing ‘race’ and racism for anti-racists. The study draws on the work of authors who have explored the nature and severity of racist acts from differing perspectives. Long and McNamee’s (2004) attempts to rationalize racism from the level of the individual draws out the need for a broader understanding of ‘race’ and everyday racism in the pursuit of anti-racism in sport. Their argument presents further support to Omi and Winant’s (2002) view that any abstract conceptualization of racism is severely put to the test by the untidy world of reality. The changing nature of attitudes to racialized behaviour, the social construction of racism and even the terminology of ‘race’ are constantly changing, contested and reconstituted, this making the anti-racism acts of critical activist scholars and their abstract conceptualizations ‘works in progress’.

The research of Bonilla-Silva (2006), Delgado and Stefancic (2000, 2001) and Gillborn (2009), among other critical race theorists, address some of the popular discourses and weaknesses of ‘race’ theorizing and anti-racism by developing a closer weaving of thinking in relation to ‘race’, racism and other intersecting modes of oppression in society. Ahmed (2006), in particular, emphasizes that sufficient conditions need to be in place for anti-racism to function; this requires a shift from a rhetorical commitment to change to one actually committed to the performance of proposed change. It is argued here that a CRT framework presents a vocabulary and narrative that facilitates a critical approach to anti-racism. Practitioners, educationalists and policy-makers each have something to gain from this advocacy approach. CRT is intrigued but suspicious of parts of any society that claim to be accessible and fair across racial and ethnic divides. In terms of sport, it is commonly accepted that this physical realm is a colour-blind meritocracy where a ‘level playing field’ operates. Consequently, the centrality of sport as a global entity and the manifestation of racism within its realms can reveal more about racial inequalities in society than many other arenas (Hartmann, 2000).

The focus on anti-racism in this article is not concerned with examining those involved in formal and practical anti-racist interventions in sport. Organizations such as Tackle It! Kick it Out, Sport Against Racism Ireland, Sporting Equals and many others have interesting biographies and stories to tell about their origins and strategic visions. Each organization has emerged from a particular set of circumstances within governing bodies, nationally/internationally, culturally and historically, and these stories have been unpacked by authors (Burdsey, 2007; Garland and Rowe, 2001; Hylton, 2009; Long and Spracklen, forthcoming). Sport has been viewed by many sport sociologists as a ‘contested terrain’ and therefore requires a critical lens from which to view it (Carrington and McDonald, 2001; Hartmann, 2000; Hylton, 2009; Long and Hylton, 2002). In relation to this, Burdsey (2007) significantly draws on the work of Parker and Lynn (2002) to emphasize that CRT aims to combat racial subjugation whilst at the same time acknowledging that ‘race’ is also a social construction.
Hartmann (2000) describes how the sporting arena has the potential to resist or reinforce inequalities in a dynamic environment and therefore becomes a useful litmus test of cultural cohesion and togetherness for most societies. Recognition of racialized processes obviates the necessity for a critical race consciousness that draws upon the everyday knowledge that structural inequalities find their expression in sport. This means that where we experience sport there is always the potential for racism and its resistance (Carrington, 1999) through anti-racism interventions (Bonnett, 1993, 2000). However, at the same time we ought to acknowledge that some critics contend that representations of anti-racism often trivialize the politics of anti-racism to a reductive exercise, whose focus is sometimes just to be against racism (Gilroy, 2002). For example, organizations in sport that endorse anti-racism charters have been accused of doing no more than engaging in symbolic rather than practical acts of anti-racism. Therefore, being against racism necessitates behavioural change rather than simply relying on the wearing of a band or the signing of a document.

Critical race theory

For those living within W.E.B. DuBois’s infamous ‘veil’, CRT tells us nothing new about the world. For those living with an acute awareness of how societies oppress and disadvantage social groups because of their experience of ‘race’, ethnicity, nationality or multiple social intersections (gender, class, disability), the view of the world being ‘revealed’ by CRT is one they are generally alive to but are not used to seeing systematically debated. Those with heightened senses towards what some might term ambiguous racialized scenarios (Mellor et al., 2001) or intuition borne of the everyday experience of Others (Essed, 2001, 2002) will naturally reach for the available lenses that enable them to reflect these realities; CRT has been found useful in this respect.

CRT has emerged as an effective framework to challenge racism; critical race theorists have utilized it to present alternative criticisms and interventions in the legal system before becoming more widely used in the academy. As Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 219) argue, ‘the incentive to innovate may be stronger in persons for whom the current system does not work’. Audre Lorde (1979) fixed this notion of the need to innovate when she argued that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ (see Hylton, 2009: 34). She encourages us to challenge conventional ideas and practices in a way that brings new tools and ideas into the quest to be critical and inclusive. The use of this metaphor is useful in that if we imagine any building project, the craftsperson, builder or architect are limited by the range of tools and techniques they have available to build their framework. The structure we are considering here is a structuring of paradigms, epistemologies and critiques using available theoretical tools. Theories and conceptual frameworks can limit or facilitate the development, direction and substance of ideas, while empowering or constraining the creative capacity of their users. I have argued elsewhere that CRT can be summarized as a framework from which to explore and examine the racism in society that privileges whiteness as it disadvantages others because of their ‘blackness’ (Hylton, 2009). CRT confronts ‘race-neutrality’ in policy and practice and acknowledges the value of ‘the black1 voice’ that is often marginalized in mainstream theory, policy and practice. CRT challenges past and present institutional arrangements in sport that racially
discriminate, subjugate and oppress (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Nebeker, 1998). CRT has also been described as a hybrid discipline, as it draws from a number of necessarily relevant disciplines to incorporate a transdisciplinary approach to the development of theory and praxis in relation to racism in society (Stovall, 2005). Significantly, CRT is widely regarded as a pragmatic framework of principles, or tenets, that embraces the core ideals that ‘race’ and racism must be central to our scholarship and activism; that intersectional forms of oppression must also constitute this challenge to racism and racialization; that social justice and transformation must also be a significant element of a CRT project; centring the black voice; challenging colour blindness, meritocracies and liberalism; challenging convention; and as a pragmatic framework it is necessarily transdisciplinary. Table 1 outlines some of the key CRT themes and debates.

Critical race theorists are clear that ‘race’ and racism are central to any theorizing or intervention. The prevalence of racism and racial ideologies are no longer in doubt in wider society and even though it is deemed by many to be abhorrent, CRT does not view racism as aberrational nor rare. CRT is effectively a series of critiques seeking to positively disrupt and transform racialized power relations regardless of the actors involved. Whiteness (processes) and the privileges that come with them, rather than white people (social construct) would be the focus of anti-racist interventions. Hence collectivities should be as much part of the focus of anti-racism in addition to more obvious overtly racist individual actors. For CRT advocates the question is not do we live in a racist society? Rather it is a conclusion: we do live in a racist society and we need to do something about it. Therefore, anti-racism should be mainstreamed into the core business of sport.

CRT, ‘race’ and racism

A misreading of CRT’s pragmatic use of the constructed idea of ‘race’ could lead to a view that it is used unproblematically, thereby reinforcing racial thinking. Anti-racists, like others tangling with the thorny issues intersecting the racialization of sport, must be wary of the potential for reinforcing racial thinking in their fundamental assumptions and intuitive responses to racism. Where Gilroy (2002) notes that ‘race’ must be seen with a suspicious eye, it is argued here that CRT navigates the landscape of racialized discourses and applies them pragmatically. Anti-racists cannot approach these issues unproblematically without reinforcing myths, stereotypes and inequalities. ‘Race’ as a social construct in itself must be recognized by anti-racists, but not to the point where it is trivialized and rendered unimportant (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Similarly, CRT’s anti-essentialist standpoint cautions anti-racists to be critical of using ‘race’ and its related constructed categories unproblematically (Glover, 2009; Nanton, 1989).

In responding to racist acts, the construction of ‘race’, racial superiority and inferiority can be contested or perpetuated in processes of resistance to racism. Omi and Winant (1994, 2002) are not satisfied with challenging racism by purely restating the constructed, false and illusionary nature of ‘race’. This position belies the centrality of ‘race’ in the everyday vernacular of public arenas where pragmatic scholarly activism recognizes that the end of ‘race’ cannot be so just by proclaiming it, or wanting it to be. Neither do they accept the less convincing reductionist views that reify ‘race’ and spawn some anti-racist responses in sport (Back et al., 2001). An understanding of anti-racism must come from
an appreciation of racial processes that influence the representation and organization of individual bodies and social structures. Our racialized bodies and structures can be reified, or reconstructed over time through the hegemony of racial ideologies (Goldberg, 1993), raciology (Gilroy, 2000), and the process of racialization (Murji and Solomos, 2005), just as they can be challenged and transformed (Omi and Winant, 1994, 2002; Table 1. Key critical race theory themes

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<th>Key CRT themes</th>
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<td>1. ‘Race’ and racism are central to any theorizing or intervention. Racism is not aberrational or rare – The question is not do we live in a racist society but we do live in a racist society.</td>
<td>Myth: The concept ‘race’ is used unproblematically reinforcing racial thinking. It is argued that CRT navigates the landscape of racialized discourses and applies them pragmatically. Myth: Other social factors are subordinate to ‘race’ and racism. CRT does not present a hierarchy of oppressions and seeks to centralize intersecting forms of oppression but without ignoring any racialized dimension especially where it has been ignored in the past.</td>
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<td>2. CRT presents a challenge to dominant ideas of objectivity, meritocracy, colour-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity.</td>
<td>Myth: CRT is a narrow critique of white society. CRT is more a series of critiques seeking to positively disrupt and transform racialized power relations regardless of the actors involved. Whiteness (processes) rather than white people (social construct).</td>
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<td>3. Social justice and transformation are core goals of CRT.</td>
<td>Myth: CRT is targeted solely on an unreasonable and unrealistic agenda for change. CRT is supportive but critical of the liberal incrementalism of the Left. The gains made through the legal system, and state sponsored racial equality is unsatisfactory and slow.</td>
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<td>4. Centralize the marginalized voice: naming realities</td>
<td>Myth: CRT is reductionist in nature as it homogenizes ‘the black experience’. As CRT is anti-essentialist and anti-reductionist CRT is not the domain of any one social group although the experiences of particular groups are so under-theorized the academy is urged to recognize this disparity. They are often ‘telling the same stories’.</td>
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<td>5. CRT is transdisciplinary in the spirit of challenging dogma and orthodoxies.</td>
<td>Myth: CRT is focused on the law and education only. CRT contributes to our wider understanding of racialized social contexts (and so do other frameworks and perspectives). CRT is necessarily transdisciplinary and so resists disciplinary strictures and conventions. CRT does not stand in isolation as a theory of the social. And draws from many disciplines and contexts.</td>
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Westwood, 2002). Where racialization processes continue in sport, the media, education, the law and in other structural and cultural arenas, Omi and Winant (1994, 2002) posit that racial formations occur: ‘we define racial formation as the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed’ (Omi and Winant, 2004: 124).

For Omi and Winant, racism is a complex process and must be understood as historically situated, operating dynamically at any level of society, and therefore inevitably sport. ‘Racial projects’ occur in sport; for example, coach ideologies about physicality and intellectual abilities do little more than reinforce biological differences and racialized binaries (Spracklen, 2008). However, anti-racism in sport must take on different forms because the racial projects that Omi and Winant speak of are multifarious. Anti-racists must recognize and understand the version of ‘race’ thinking, racialization or as Gilroy would argue ‘raciology’ being manifest through racial projects; and, importantly, how they influence racial relations or resource allocations, in their broadest senses, along the fissures of ‘race’. In sport there are many examples of everyday racial projects that exemplify processes that organize resources along racial lines in seemingly ‘natural’ ways. For example, these processes were emphasized in the experiences of black players across a number of sports and their exclusion from administration and management roles in Long and Hylton’s (2002) study on whiteness (see also Burdsey, 2007; King, 2004). Both discursive and behavioural practices can be identified as targets for anti-racists, however their everyday reproduction makes them slippery, ambiguous and hegemonic, and therefore requiring a critical lens from which to approach them.

Related to the centring of ‘race’ and racism is the myth that CRT views other social factors as subordinate. Drawing on critical race theory, Burdsey (2007) states that one of CRT’s objectives is to highlight the relationship between ‘race’ and other forms of oppression. Like critical race theorists, Gilroy (2002) argues for an intersectional approach to anti-oppression, which incorporates more elaborate strategies to challenge the power relations between men and women, capital and labour, rather than an abstract focus on racism (Burdsey, 2007; Gillborn, 2009; Hylton, 2003, 2005, 2009). CRT does not present a hierarchy of oppressions and seeks to centralize intersecting forms of oppression, but without ignoring any racialized dimension, especially where ‘race’ has been ignored in the past (Delgado and Stefancic, Crenshaw, Wing). Sport itself can be viewed as the sum, albeit contested, of racial projects, behavioural and discursive, that pose a challenge to anti-racists because they are explicit and covert, individual, institutional and societal, routinized and ad hoc. Being anti-racism requires an understanding of racism that is neither fixed nor static, reductionist or essentialist, ahistorical or ill-defined. Accordingly, Omi and Winant (1994: 60) posit that:

Nor is it possible to organize, maintain, or transform social structures without simultaneously engaging . . . explicitly or implicitly, in racial signification.

**CRT, colour-blindness and anti-racism**

Anti-racism must pose a level of resistance to sport’s pluralist ideologies of ‘level playing fields’ and ‘colour-blindness’. CRT presents a challenge to dominant ideas of objectivity,
meritocracy, colour-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity. Bonilla-Silva describes colour-blindness as an ideology that defends the racial order. His use of four main ways that colour-blindness is framed has utility in explaining some of the complexities of anti-racism, and also why colour-blindness is such a central target for critical race theorists. For Bonilla-Silva, abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism frame colour-blindness. However, Bonilla-Silva views abstract liberalism as the most pervasive and dangerous view owing to its seemingly conciliatory, rational and yet commonly heard arguments. Abstract liberalism incorporates the same pluralist ideology that argues for free markets, individualism and agency while extending the ideas of unfettered social policy to equality and anti-racism, which denies the state’s role in contributing to and reinforcing racialized inequalities (Cross and Keith, 1993; Omi and Winant, 2002; Wieviorka, 1995; Winant, 2001). Where the moral high-ground becomes blurred in this issue, especially in the public sector, strategies to challenge racism and racialized processes are then prone to being derailed. This is the same liberalism that underpins capitalism and free markets, and that critical race theorists have established as a major factor in their challenge to historical inequalities. The need for positive action often described as ‘radical’ because of its redistributive approach, is often opposed by liberal critics because of CRT’s transformatory but ‘anti-competitive’ approach.

In sport, positive action or equality strategies that attempt to rebalance historical inequalities are sometimes criticized for their denial of resources to those whose status in the past has rendered them privileged by their whiteness. In South Africa, Sports Minister Makhenkesi Stofile is campaigning for black talent to be given the opportunities and support that had been given to white sportsmen and women in the past. Stofile refuses to ignore the historical legacy of apartheid, just as others would not wish to ignore slavery, Jim Crowism, colonialism, or racial bigotry and xenophobia. In 2009, Sports Minister Stofile, as a follow up to his 2008 budget speech in which he had said ‘most of our sports federations do not have a transformation agenda, except on paper only’ (Stofile, 2008), subsequently spoke on the subject of deracialization and transformation:

We cannot leave the issue of unequal access to opportunities to chance or the market forces. If we did, sport will divide, not unite South Africa. We have been there before . . . For some this will be a threat to their privileges. For others it will be a window of hope. How we see this will invariably be influenced by what apartheid bequeathed to us. So, Transformation is a non-negotiable . . . But we must, as we attempt to deracialise and transform our sport, have clarity of mind as to whether we stick to professionalism or economism. What I mean here is that we cannot at the expense of being professional and having our sport contribute positively towards the national priorities, allow the wealthy few to determine the direction of sport at the expense of our people. (Stofile, 2009, emphasis added)

Social justice and transformation are core goals of CRT. As in Stofile’s example, policy and practice cannot be blind to racialized relations, especially regarding services and facilities. For Stofile, as for critical race theorists, transformation means a challenge to the status quo caused by historical racialized privileges that still maintain a residual value. Where approaches to anti-racism in sport deny that the under-representation of black people is a real problem, or even that the need for state intervention is not
necessary in prioritizing the resourcing of some over others, the quest for ‘social justice’
is encumbered by ahistorical, colour-blind approaches. CRT is supportive but critical of
the liberal incrementalism of regulative change from the Left. History has shown that
gains made through the legal system and state sponsored racial equality are unsatisfac-
tory and ponderous in many cases (Solomos and Ball, 1990; Winant, 2001). Social
change needs to be strategic but, wherever possible, proactive and radical. For Stofile to
argue that ‘most of our sports federations do not have a transformation agenda, except on
paper only’ is to challenge the system in the way that CRT seeks to challenge convention
and existing power relations. This advantaging of some over others may prompt those
using an abstract liberalist view to argue that this approach is ‘inequitable’.

CRT has been critical of mainstream methodologies in being apolitical, colour-blind
and reinforcing oppressions, whilst subordinating the voices and values of those ren-
dered invisible by conventional modes of thinking. ‘Race’, class, gender and their inter-
sections have regularly been excluded from important social and political landmarks and
developments in knowledge or dominant paradigms. As a result, the use of ‘voicing’ and
storytelling/counter-storytelling have become popular tools in the expression of CRT
perspectives (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). CRT contests traditional approaches to criti-
cal studies, especially where such research challenges power relations without necessar-
ily challenging racialized relations. Professional environments too, with their cloaks of
authenticity, must not be overlooked by anti-racists; they regularly remain uncontested
due to their ability to self perpetuate and validate such practices. Crabbe’s observations
and reflections on the institution of football are useful to understand the nature of power
relations and recursive practices in the hierarchy of the professional game. King (2004)
utilizes narrative to illustrate how whiteness processes structure the experiences and
identities of sport coaches, just as Long et al.’s case studies enable anti-racists to under-
stand the real world experiences of players in amateur sport, as their racialized experi-
ences of playing and administering their sport are revealed. Similarly, Burdsey’s (2007)
use of narrative enabled a demystifying of myths and stereotypes about Asians in sport.
Far from essentializing experiences and reducing the diversity of ethnic groups, CRT
approaches to storytelling and counter-storytelling allow anti-racists to more fully under-
stand complex lives and histories. As CRT is anti-essentialist and anti-reductionist it is
not the domain of any one social group, though the experiences of particular groups are
typically so under-theorized that anti-racists are urged to actively recognize this dispar-
ity. As with research into the nature and extent of racism in football, the black players are
often ‘telling the same stories’ (Long et al., 2000). By giving space and time to ‘hear’ and
understand the force of these voices, and the weight of evidence from their mutual
narrative, persuasive arguments for change emerge.

‘Race’, sport and CRT

Anti-racism in sport has been informed by critical sport and leisure studies, and, like
most versions of critical theory, is underpinned by critiques of domination and oppres-
sion. However, what is argued in this article is that critical sport and leisure studies, in
identifying the processes and contradictions within institutions that reinforce oppressive
social relations – and by this it is meant the discourses, ideologies, epistemologies and
research—unwittingly dilute anti-racist arguments because of their generalist approaches to specific issues in relation to racism (Burdsey, 2007; Hylton, 2009; Singer, 2005). In particular, they consistently fail to consider the constants of ‘race’, racism and anti-racism that for many people are part of their everyday world. For many activist-scholars, they would have had to ‘insert’ issues of ‘race’ and racism as concerns or topics for further discussion, but they could just as easily not have done so. It could be argued that the dominant concepts, theories or ‘tools’ used to interrogate ‘race’, racism and anti-racism in sport did/do not facilitate this directly, and so for many researchers ‘race’, racism, anti-racism and the black experience, were/are marginal or ignored. Some would say these issues are ‘bolted on’ to critical debates rather than inherent. Previously, sport and leisure studies writers have criticized many of their own intellectual developments as incremental, narrow and myopic (Coalter, 2000; Deem, 1999; Hylton, 2005, 2009). In some cases the marginalization (or even ghettoization) of gender in sport and leisure theorizing still dwarfs the work of those that include ‘race’ and ethnicity, racism and anti-racism in their analyses. Sport and leisure theory, policy and practice can be seen to be willing to accept and facilitate systems that duplicate popular discourses and ignore new or radical ideas. However, the prevalence of racism in sport has had a limited but consistent attention from which to establish the racialized inequalities within this significant cultural product (Burdsey, 2007; Burley and Fleming, 1997; Carrington and McDonald, 2001; Hylton, 2009; Long and Spracklen, forthcoming; Singer, 2005; Spracklen, 2008; Watson and Scraton, 2001; Williams, 2001; Zirin, 2007).

There are emergent examples of critical race theory approaches being used to challenge inequalities in sport. Such approaches are often regarded as uncommon in sport and leisure research and practice; this is because they dispense with some very significant preliminaries that have caused anti-racism, diversity and equality initiatives to be incremental in nature, slowing the pace of change (Hylton, 2009; Spracklen et al., 2006). Critical race theorists are ostensibly pragmatists whose experience and reading of academic and policy texts, as well as socio-historical events, concede that racism is endemic within society and that constantly trying to establish its existence in society before action is taken can often lead to a drain on resources, thereby sustaining fewer challenges to the status quo. Where a critical race theory approach has been used in sport, an inherently anti-racist perspective has been utilized. Burdsey’s (2007) analysis of football explores that game’s exclusion of British Asians from the English Premier League, which could be described as a series of racial projects leading to racial formations: the reinforcement of whiteness in mainstream, grassroots football as well as the professional game. British Asians are heavily involved in sport, especially football, and yet their exclusion from the game at the highest levels, beyond a handful of professional players in the UK, remains a mystery.

Negative myths and pejorative stereotypes about British Asians, such as around their physicality and sporting competence, diet and religion, parental influence and careers, dominate the way that their exclusion from sport is framed. Racist practices are justified along commonsense explanations of self-exclusion and cultural dissonance, this further reinforcing a specific kind of colour-blindness that excludes British Asians. Part of this denial is based upon the symbolic constructions of inclusion by using African-Caribbean role models who have reached the highest levels of sport as players, despite their
numbers being severely restricted amongst those who administer and officiate the game at all levels (Back et al., 2001; Burdsey, 2007; Hylton, 2005; Long et al., 2000). Williams (2001) goes on to argue that the prevalence of whiteness in positions of power in sport has been put down to natural propensities, therefore justifying an ambivalence to inequalities and power differentials and retaining a rationale for the status quo in sport management and administration.

Back et al. (2001) are not likely to be surprised by the findings of Burdsey (2007) and others critical of the pervasive racism in football, especially as their research has identified racialized presences and absences. They further describe a confused and sometimes Janus-faced sporting profession unable to articulate what anti-racism is beyond a good idea, whilst simultaneously being prepared to deny or trivialize racism and its impacts. This is not unique to football, as cricket has been criticized for its ‘limited view of what constitutes racism in the game, and from an ignorance of the prevalence and operation of racism at the recreational level’ (Carrington and McDonald, 2001: 51). As a starting point for sports like cricket and football, Garland and Rowe (2001) urge anti-racists to engage with everyday constructions of ‘race’ in a way that acknowledges its complex manifestations (racisms), and, in particular, the dynamic process of racialization that has been lacking from many strategies in sport.

**Everyday anti-racism and ‘speech acts’**

In questioning ‘anti-racism’, and in relation to reframing policies and strategies, critical race theorists are likely to argue that not all forms of anti-racism are valid (Beneton, 2001) because not all forms of anti-racism are as useful nor as practical as the next. There is no one answer to racism (as the battle against racism needs to take part on many fronts). Just being against racism is not enough to make an anti-racist (Gillborn, 2006). Further, Bonnett (2000) rightly argues that anti-racism is not the inverse of racism either; anti-racism is much more subtle, situated and bespoke. There is no one anti-racism. It is even possible that being committed to particular forms of anti-racism can function as a mechanism of racism, whereby activists unwittingly reinforce racial myths (Hylton, 2009). Anti-racism in sport often focuses on explicit, high profile concerns, and such initiatives are often seen as the answer to racism. Rugby league’s ‘Tackle It’ or awareness-raising campaigns like Thierry Henry and Nike’s ‘Stand Up Speak Up’ cannot be viewed in isolation, as they are inevitably situated anti-racist responses, historically located and resource-led, and with some form of political or ideological position to uphold (Hylton, 2009; Sterkenburg et al., 2005).

Essed’s (2002) examination of everyday racism allows us to identify whiteness as a less well known but clear target for anti-racism. CRT would encourage an anti-racist agenda focusing on those in sporting establishments and hierarchies. Their hegemonic racialized processes and formations would shift our critical gaze from blackness to those implicated in perpetuating these processes of whiteness (Omi and Winant, 2002). Studies have demonstrated that sport is a contested site of racism, resistance and whiteness processes that range from casual racist behaviour by spectators to more institutional racialized processes and formations in governing administrative structures (Long and Hylton, 2002). A consistent recognition of the outcomes of racism in sport often leaves the
privileges of whiteness ignored and firmly ensconced (Rains, 1998). Essed (2002) explains how this everydayness emerges, for racist notions inextricably link to the meanings that make actions ‘manageable and understandable’.

CRT can explain the emergence of some anti-racism initiatives through the concept of interest convergence. This has been popularized by Derrick Bell, a founder member of CRT in North America (Bell, 1992; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Interest convergence takes as its main standpoint that anti-oppression successes, such as desegregation or affirmative (positive) action, tend to be as a result of the convergence of interests for both those in power and those who have been subjugated. Effectively, it is argued that these gains for black and minority ethnic groups would be unlikely to have been acts of altruism, but acts that would just as much benefit those in power. Anti-racism in sport governing bodies is often a reaction to events that force, for example, football associations to respond not so much because of the hurt to those affected, but because of any combination of the following: 1) their standing in the world will diminish; 2) bids for mega-events may be negatively affected; 3) sponsor perceptions; 4) public sector funds may become more difficult to access; 5) a truly global sport has to be seen to be inclusive. Gillborn (2009) states that interest convergence is a useful tool to understand the development of affirmative action hiring policies, but it could be argued that it is just as useful to explain the development of anti-racism in sport. For example, when the public perception of football in Europe was at stake in 2008 due to many examples of off-field racist behaviour, this led to a groundbreaking public stance against racism by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) at the European Championships in 2008. So it was no surprise to see the European Union and football governing bodies like UEFA and FiFP in Austria and Switzerland (where the international European Championships were being held) actively resisting any implication that the game would tolerate such antisocial behaviour. Anti-racist slogans were visible everywhere.

Anti-racism promises can, however, perpetuate inequalities through their non-performance (Ahmed, 2006). Ahmed (2006) calls these symbolic commitments to anti-racism ‘institutional speech acts’. Where a commitment to anti-racism in sport is acted upon, it can be deemed a performed action or a ‘performative act’. Using Ahmed’s (2006) notion of performativity, it can be demonstrated that only committing an organization to racial equality or anti-racism, or educational institutions to critical pedagogy or internationalized curricula, are significant examples of non-performatives. In effect, where insufficient conditions are in place for ‘speech acts’ to become performed, they can be viewed as non-performative. Non-performatives can be evidenced in the number of organizations that sign anti-racist charters in sport, but then proceed to do little if anything to establish the necessary conditions to foster change in their own sphere of influence. For example, FIFA, the world governing body for association football, was criticized in The Guardian newspaper for rolling back on its commitment to ‘take discrimination very seriously’ when it fined Croatian football authorities only £15,000 for racist chanting by local supporters at an international game against England (The Guardian, 2008). Given the finances at the highest levels of football they were also lambasted for the paltry £45,000, they levied on Spanish football authorities for a similar act. CRT argues for transformation, not piecemeal incrementalism.
The act of declaring a commitment to anti-racism or racial equality for sport bodies, or even the act of them admitting that they are implicated in a racist sport is often, and justifiably so, read as something positive. However, for many the act of saying we are racist is the same as we are not racist because by implication it is implied that we are now going to do something about it (Ahmed, 2006). Non-performatives can be illustrated by the number of organizations identified in research already completed on a range of sports and which focused on the nature and extent of racism (Hylton et al., 2006). Here the updated analysis of previous studies of racism in rugby, cricket and football showed that few of the key recommendations had been met, or even attempted, by many of the key official organizations. However, the ‘act’ of supporting the research led to much favourable publicity for the governing bodies, whose non-performativity can still be viewed as an ‘act’ in itself due to their positive association (public relations benefits) with the research.

This issue is complex and nuanced, and in each case massive gains can be achieved in the performance of speech acts; however, it must be made clear that non- or low performance are not necessarily a ‘failure’ for organizations that initiate hollow interventions. Historically, in the public sector, slow incremental strategies have been couched in terms of radical successes to give the impression that projects are operating at a higher level. The pressure of politics for officers and politicians wanting to be ‘seen to be doing the right thing’ for their diverse publics and stakeholders, is just one aspect of the vagaries behind why expectations around anti-racism and race equality are raised, while much less is often delivered (Solomos and Ball, 1990).

**Antiracism in theory and practice**

Long and McNamee (2004) are critical of how racist acts are crudely conceptualized and conclude that there are some that have more impact than others. Therefore, they argue that our theorizing and punishment of such practices must be more logical; therefore less emotive. The authors make a useful contribution to a debate that has exercised the minds of many who have explored the politics of ‘race’. However, they omit to clarify key propositions in attempting such a complex and sophisticated project. What Long and McNamee (2004) raise as an issue, but choose not to pursue, is the everyday racism that other authors urge us to explore in our analyses of ‘race’ and racism (Essed, 2001, 2002). Further, they elect not to explore multiple levels of racism and the complexities of intersectionalities that consequently leads them to a limited notion of a singular racism, rather than ‘racisms’. At least in the UK, it is considered that discrimination occurs at the level of the personal (individual), organizational (institutional) and societal (structural) (Bulmer and Solomos, 1999; Gillborn, 2006, 2009; Solomos and Ball, 1990).

Racist acts are, for critical race theorists, not aberrational nor occasional; neither can they be accounted for solely through individual agency. The message that these are not episodic events (Dei, 2006) calls into question well-meaning anti-racist discussions that are underpinned by narrow conceptions of racism; they lead to conclusions that are limited theoretically and in wider application. Neither can a consideration of racist acts be reduced to the overt and explicit, as opposed to the covert, often institutionalized discursive
practices that constitute racialized processes; these regularly lead to undocumented racist exclusions or disadvantages. Consequently, by drawing on the work of Blum (2002), Long and McNamee (2004) reflect a view of racism and racist rationalization that is important, but not yet complete (see Figure 1). It is incomplete because they need to revise these propositions:

1) That they are justified in choosing to view racism only from the point of view of individual agency.
2) That racist actors can become non-racists dependent upon the severity of their actions and their ability to self-correct.
3) That the severity of racism is measurable.

It is commonly accepted that individual racism is a manifestation of wider cultural and structural dynamics, and that individual agency is part of this (Essed, 2001). Blum’s (2002) thesis adumbrated by Long and McNamee (2004), rests on a semantic turn: a relatively narrow consideration of whether a person should be considered a racist if they were to commit a racist act. Blum (2002: 28), for example, contends that ‘It is a more serious moral reproach to call a person a racist than to call one of his [sic] acts racist’. From an anti-racist perspective, however, I adopt Essed’s (2001: viii) view that ‘Although individuals are agents of racism, my concern is practices and their implications, not the psyche of these individuals.’

Bonilla-Silva (2006) presents a critical view of work like that of Long and McNamee when he argues that they are:

Snarled up in the problematic of individual psychological dispositions (. . .) I see the views of actors as corresponding to their systemic location (...) whether actors express resentment or hostility towards minorities is largely irrelevant to the maintenance of white privilege (. . .) prejudiced people are not the only racists. (Bonilla-Silva, 2006: 8, emphases added)

Bonilla-Silva’s view consolidates the argument that those with power will consciously or otherwise rationalize their circumstances and behaviours in relation to others less
privileged in society. This leads to a reinforcement of racialized hierarchies, colour-blind ideologies, and power relations that perpetuate racial inequalities in society and maintain the status quo. The simple view is that people have learned to reconstruct their views depending upon the situation. Therefore, Long and McNamee’s (2004) position that actors are likely to implicate themselves after a racist act is highly unlikely. Even ex-Manchester United manager and football pundit, Ron Atkinson, who resigned his job with both The Guardian and ITV Sport after ‘off-the-record’ racist slurs on a live link to the Middle East, did not want to be viewed as a racist (Howe, 2004).

Atkinson vented his spleen at the World Cup-winning and French international team captain Marcel Desailly, whom he described as ‘a fxxxing lazy thick nxxxer’. Bonilla-Silva (2006) would doubtless describe Atkinson’s comments as a further example of the linguistic manner and rhetorical strategies of ‘race’ talk in society. ‘Race’ talk is both crude, as in Atkinson’s on-screen utterances (that he thought were off-screen), and very subtle in the case of newer, covert forms of racism. Atkinson’s use of the ‘N’ word, Bonilla-Silva (2006) argues, is more likely to be used amongst friends (as Atkinson conceded when saying that he was ‘off camera’). In more polite circumstances, the linguistic manner and rhetorical strategies of ‘race’ talk are more likely to be circumspect, non-committal, and less likely to self-implicate bigotry or racism. Atkinson’s post hoc rationalization articulated further mitigation for his integrity and standing in the community as a ‘non-racist’ by arguing: ‘I was responsible for putting Black players in the First Division when other managers wouldn’t, so how can I be racist?’ Such scenarios are examples of a form of aversive racism where, for example, voters argue that they really like Barack Obama but vote for the other candidate because they think that the country ‘isn’t ready for a black president!’ Reed (2008) and Bonilla-Silva (2006) argue that this position leads us to ‘racism without racists’; Long and McNamee’s (2004) premise leads us in the same direction. For many, this position absolves perpetrators of responsibility for racism, and allows those who err to offer a more reasonable version of their acts. CRT accepts that racism in society is endemic, and as such it is irrelevant if one person errs for the first time and is therefore absolved of the label ‘racist’; racism without racists is a philosophical question but not a practical one. To place a racist actor in an ‘ethically excusable’, rather than ‘committed racist’ category, as illustrated by Long and McNamee, becomes merely an abstract academic exercise.

Blum’s insistence on urging us to consider that there are some racist acts worse than others is common sense, and a point that most would agree with. Generally, the difference in impact of a ‘heat-of-the-moment’ exchange compared with state-sponsored racism is clearly a case of one dwarfing the other. However, narrow conceptions of racism – especially the ideologies of ‘race’ underpinned by ‘race’ neutrality, colour-blindness and meritocracy – are core to equal opportunities frameworks and can be seen in many anti-racist interventions. For example, should the message only be that ‘it’s the colour of the shirt that counts?’ For many, being ‘colour-blind’ is an ideal we should all embrace, and few would argue with it in principle. However, CRT would suggest that the result of such interventions is likely to leave racial hierarchies untroubled, and ambiguous ‘micro-aggressions’ unproblematized, trivialized or ignored.

The accumulated emotional costs of small acts can be easily misunderstood, ignored or discounted, but not for those who have experience of these everyday. Those who have
been humiliated by a joke, an off-hand comment, or some other action that could be construed as ‘low impact’, ‘ambiguous’ or ‘ethically excusable’, would understand that the totality of these experiences could make the last ‘trivial’ racist act, the emotional tipping point. Who is to know which act(s) caused a particular social group to set up their own sports league and play amongst themselves? Who can say, without knowledge of Others’ complex lives, that their protectionism is invalid? CRT would encourage Long and McNamee not to simplify, but instead to explore these racialized experiences; thereby privileging marginalized voices and allowing them to inform anti-racism.

**Black Like Me**

The complexities and everydayness of racism for those who live with it was succinctly and powerfully illustrated through the action research of John Howard Griffin (1959). Howard Griffin’s study *Black Like Me* demonstrated how the cumulative impact of everyday racism(s) led him to conclude that racism is complicated, cumulative and ambiguous. Howard Griffin was white. He became black in the Deep South of America in the late 1950s. Howard Griffin’s radical step of taking medication and related supplementary treatments to change his skin colour, before going deep undercover, had a profound effect on him. The treatment of Howard Griffin as a black man, only days after his ‘normal’ treatment as a white man, drew terrifying views of the everyday experience of being black. This ‘horrifying’ insight was predicated upon a lifetime of white privilege and insiderness, even with the knowledge that he could go back into what Dubois described as ‘the veil’ of whiteness. This story clearly illustrated that Howard Griffin’s background as a white man did not (and could not) prepare him for the white privileges he had, and then how to live without them. It ultimately explained how ambiguous scenarios, such as a stare or attitude, could cause him to profoundly change his behaviour and begin to act negatively towards white people. These experiences begin to explain the ‘voluntary’ ethnicization of spaces and sport as illustrated by Howard Griffin’s reactions to these everyday acts. For Howard Griffin, therefore, the impacts of racism were complex and *immeasurable* socially, psychologically, physically and materially.

Howard Griffin’s ‘defence mechanism’ has been labelled as a ‘cool pose’ and, for him, in the heat-of-the-moment, it was not so cool and not so posed or ‘put on’ as one would generally expect of a ‘pose’ (Majors, 1986). Howard Griffin’s view of the ‘hate stares’ that he experienced is a form of everyday racism that cannot be isolated from wider societal experiences, which again runs counter to suggestions by Long and McNamee (2004). It is not anticipated that anyone could offer punitive measures to actually prevent a stare, but where such behaviours are part of wider regularized, unconscious and deliberate forms of racialized social relations we must recognize them, and their implications, by using a critical anti-racist lens.

**Conclusion**

CRT is a flexible framework that embraces pragmatic transdisciplinary tenets whose point of departure is not the question ‘do we live in a racist society’, but rather the realization that ‘we live in a racist society’. There is no longer a questioning of this
fundamental position, although its nature, extent and resistance constitute projects for anti-racists to change and transform. The ‘everydayness’ of racism is a challenge for anti-racism, but these challenges are focused not only on the more obvious, often overtly racist politics of the Right, but also the more complex nuances finessed by the liberal Left. The cloak of validity and reliability of those who traditionally support anti-oppression and anti-subordination causes can be imbued with an unwarranted credibility that leaves them immune to critique. This lack of reflexion by activists, policymakers and the academy can lead to accepting and building on ideas that are important, but begin with an inaccurate premise or require further development. Long and McNamee’s (2004) overview of perspectives on ‘race’ and racism is significant here as they have chosen not to include institutional and structural influences in their consideration of racism and racist rationalizations. With reference to a wider social context, which includes the pervasiveness of racism, the multiple forms of racism, the ambiguity of racist acts, and the differentiated effect of racist acts, they would offer a more complete thesis for anti-racists.

Racism operates in a number of ways and incorporates a plethora of acts and processes that include individual and institutionalized practices that can be either overt or covert. Further, conceptualizations of racism consider the personal, cultural and societal nexus, while others offer a critical lens on the complexities of intersectionality, racial hierarchies, and the situatedness of racism. These and other such ideas have contributed to recognition of the differential experience of racism, even amongst those who suffer from it least. These are approaches that would develop further the one outlined by Long and McNamee. These researchers (2004) detach variegated manifestations of racism from their model so that it is presented in a static and relatively uncomplicated manner. This step takes their good intentions on a divergent course from the lived realities of those who have experienced racism in the past and still do today.

Long and McNamee (2004) allow their core analysis to ignore wider collective social issues, as they focus solely on individual agency. Although this is their prerogative, they engage in a philosophical debate that misses the crux of critical race theory arguments in that justice cannot be merely theoretical (Parker and Lynn, 2002), and that any standpoint must be able to offer resistance to racisms rather than an abstract set of ideas (Goldberg, 1993). They also miss the most important point, which is a question that emerges from such actions: ‘was it a racist act?, if the answer is yes (!), then we are very unlikely to be able to guess the impact of that act on the individual, or on a social group. Further, it is the ‘act’ that should be the focus of our attentions. However, Long and McNamee feel able to assess the severity of a racist act and attribute the label ‘racist’ to individuals dependent upon their level of remorse and frequency of behaviour. However, a discussion of racism cognizant of racialization, racist discourses and hierarchies and everyday micro-aggressions is more likely to offer a more realistic and practical starting point for anti-racists. Omi and Winant (2002) suggest that although racism can emanate from any group or individual, we must recognize that it impacts upon us differently as groups and individuals. Further, the power of white racism has historically and significantly found its way into everyday discourses and practices, and therefore has the power to influence far more than the racism from traditionally oppressed or subordinated groups. All racism is evil, but the source of racist acts catalyses a racialized power rooted in historical events
and micro-aggressions that emphasizes even further the complexities and dialectical nature of everyday racism.

Critical race theorists would argue that, in a racist society, anti-racism is often a reaction to racisms that require more careful consideration than the actions or practices they are responding to. In some cases these responses are opportunistic as the result of interest convergence, while at other times politics can dictate the need for such initiatives or campaigns. In many cases altruism and social justice do not necessarily drive the desire to support anti-racism. A practical CRT framework maintains the potential for anti-racists to adopt a critical standpoint that can challenge mainstream agendas and epistemologies and therefore transform them (Hylton, 2005, 2009). Utilizing CRT in anti-racist sport practice and policy offers potential for resistance to the reproduction of established practices, knowledge and resources that make up the social conditions that facilitate colour-blindness, ‘race’ logic and racialized processes. Anti-racists must be wary of ‘speech acts’ that are common phenomena in race equality work; consequently, if they do not become performative acts they will remain merely symbolic. It is also clear that the conditions that need to be in place for effective anti-racism performance must be sufficient so that thought, commitment, and performance are synchronized to ensure that these initiatives do not perpetuate the status quo.

Note

1. Though it is recognized that there are many debates about the use of this term, ‘black’ is used here as an umbrella political term to incorporate those who suffer racism as a result of colour, culture or physiognomy.

References


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