“Race” and Sport: Critical Race Theory

By Kevin Hylton

Our capabilities in sport are often described in physical or psychological terms, ‘natural’ differences. These ‘gifts’ are often identified as the difference between those who are likely to succeed in a given sport and those who are not. This discourse of superiority and inferiority in sport is not dissimilar to other debates in wider society which revolve around genetics and intelligence, and ultimately underpin imperialist ideologies (Goldberg 1993, Essed and Goldberg 2002, Omi and Winant 2002). There is a popular perception in sport that our genes and to a degree our cultural background dictate the prowess of an individual sportsman or woman. This discourse of advantage and of course disadvantage in sport is invariably reduced to ‘harmless’ racial differences, a deduction that suggests, however, a more sinister undercurrent: ‘race’ logic (Coakley 2001), racial discourse (Goldberg 1993), racial formations (Omi and Winant 1994), raciology (Gilroy 2000) and racialisation (Murji and Solomos 2005).

In this reading I consider some key concepts for the analysis of ‘race’ and sport and later outline five key tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an important framework to critically consider issues related to ‘race’, racism and sport. CRT is presented as a starting point for developing a critical ‘race’ consciousness and defended as a useful political standpoint for racial transformations in sport. For Armstrong and Ng (2005: 35) ‘race is the social construction, but the act and effect of this construction (racialisation) have produced actual divisions between people’. In hard populist terms what ‘race’ often boils down to is physical differences, and in particular physiognomy. Whereas many believe that they can tell the difference between people born in continents and countries across the world, the ability to distinguish

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social groups according to this notion of ‘race’ is beyond the most advanced minds and computers, the truth being we are as much collapsed into one ‘race’ as pieces in a jigsaw: we all may look different but we all fit together to make the one picture. Malik’s (1996) argument that humanity is not a Dulux colour chart with everyone falling into discrete categories is reiterated here.

**Racialized Assumptions**

Assumptions that have endured are those that argue humans could be divided into a few biologically and phenotypically detached ‘races’; the similarities within these groups could be reduced to ability, behaviour and morality; these differences would be naturally passed from one generation to the next; and racial hierarchies exist with white people at the top and darker ‘races’ at the opposite end (Fenton 2003). The ‘Jack Nicklaus syndrome’ typifies the example of this unconscious, benign acceptance of differences in sport premised upon biology or psychology. In 1994, before Tiger Woods had established himself as the best golfer in a generation, Nicklaus was reported to have argued that African American golfers could not succeed at the highest level of golf because of their muscle structure (Hatfield 1996). The ‘Nicklaus syndrome’ has been evident at all levels of sport, and its related impacts replicated internationally. St Louis (2004) accepts that this racist orthodoxy exists while positing that the perception of racial Others as being particularly strong in motor rather than psychological terms, and that evidence of conspicuous success in high-profile sport is evidence of this, provides for many a prima facie case for the existence of racialised propensities. These racial differences that emerge from a flawed social Darwinism begin and end in a biological reductionist morass.

They give support to Younge’s contention that these views (2000: 24) suggest that if (black) people are naturally talented at sport then they are naturally less equipped intellectually. The ability to generate stereotypes of this kind in itself points towards the insidious prejudices, ‘race’ thinking and social positioning of dominant hegemonic actors within sport and academe.

Turning to popular culture, in 1993 Jon Turtletaub’s film Cool Runnings, the story of the Jamaican bobsleigh team competing in the Olympic Games, was written as a comedy that was underpinned by the conception and stereotype that black people cannot do winter sports, they do not like the cold and are quite superficial characters. Also, in Jon Shelton’s White Men Can’t Jump (1992) where the narrative is even more obvious, the film carries still a benign subtext that not only has the white man who couldn’t jump, jumping, but shows him managing it only when he needs to and only after a lot of hard work! Here racial stereotypes prevail again with many racialised ideologies, concepts and stereotypes remaining intact and unchallenged. What was not considered in any respect was the corollary of these arguments which Coakley (2001) alludes to in his examination of race logic in sport as he points to the unlikelihood of
commentators explaining the achievements of Swiss skiing from a biological viewpoint. This racial thinking in sport is perpetuated by four weak theoretical propositions (St Louis 2004: 32):

1. Sports are based on theoretical principles of equality.
2. The results of sporting competition are unequal.
3. This inequality of results has a racial bias.
4. Therefore, given the equality of access and opportunity, the explanation of the unequal results lies in racial physicality.

Racism

Fredman (2001, cited Bhavnani et al. 2005: 15) conceptualizes racism as a process that can be recognised by its penchant for stereotyping which may lead to violence if not prejudice. In Italy's top football leagues Carroll (2001) observed incessant racist chanting, crowd violence and racism on the pitch resulting in an institutional ambivalence that effectively condones this behaviour through a lack of action. (The decision not to act is not unusual in relation to racism in sport organisations. This then leads to cycles of inequality and disadvantage that finally negate the culture of the groups concerned. For Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1993: 2) racisms need to be recognised as ‘modes of exclusion, inferiorization, subordination and exploitation that present specific and different characters in different social and historical contexts’. Racism is often articulated in a plural sense (racisms) as in policy terms it is acknowledged as negatively impacting specific social groups at different levels, but also because we experience racism in often quite different ways.

Racism is often described as operating in the dialectic between individual, institutional and structural forms (Miles 1989, Mason 2000). Although any of these racially motivated discriminations can be direct or indirect, against individuals or groups in society, it is institutions like sport that legitimate these actions and embed them in what seemingly become benign practices. When institutions like sport become complicit in institutionalised racist acts it no longer takes the efforts of rogue actors or right-wing organisations when racism is intentionally or unwittingly perpetuated. Institutional racism is often marked by its more subtle covert incarnation as opposed to the more overt expressions of behavior by individual actors (Wieviorka 1995). Structural- or societal-level racism reinforces the pervasive embedded nature of racism in the major arenas of our social lives. The interconnectedness of these domains—education, employment, housing, health, policing, legal system, politics—leads us to a chronic disempowering of some social groups that marks their existence in a way that requires more of a contest with the system for them to succeed, often despite the system. These processes lead critical race theorists to support the view that racism is effortlessly reproduced and perpetuated in sport and society.
Ethnicity, Nation and New Racism

Solomos and Back (2001) suggest that more recent conceptualisations of racism have shifted debates in a more positive direction. They argue that earlier work zealously overlooked the status of ‘race’ as a social construct and often reinforced the notion of ‘race’ and its implicit meanings for themselves and racialised others in their enthusiasm to tackle racism (cf. Cashmore and Troya 1982). The emergence of whiteness critiques and other metonymic analyses in the new racism debates, media investigations and other influential racial formations have helped to move narrower static conceptualisations of racism into more fluid and critical descriptions and analyses of social relations in diverse and late modern times. Importantly, an analysis of racialisation processes would not be complete without a consideration of ethnicity and identities and their contribution to the way racism is constructed and experienced and the way racial ideologies are (re)created. Ethnicity is a term often used in the social analysis of sport, and has been presented as a more palatable alternative when considering human diversity (Mason 2000). What ‘race’ and ethnicity share are boundary making properties that are socially constructed, can be self-imposed or externally imposed or both, and can be rooted in explanations that can be reduced to territory, culture, biology or physiognomy. ‘Ethnicity’ is often used uncritically in vernacular and political parlance and as such they imply clear objective boundaries between groups. On one hand they reinforce the differences between people that can on the one hand lead to the xenophobic, nationalistic, and racist behaviour evidenced in sport and wider society over recent years (MacClancy 1996), and on the other hand assume static incarnations of ethnic groups that remain as defined and identifiable from generation to generation (Mason 2000, Jenkins 1997). There is much evidence in sport today that ethnic identities are fluid, strategic, and under constant revision. Jenkins (1994: 198) usefully summarises this problematic: Ethnicity is not an immutable bundle of cultural traits which it is sufficient to enumerate in order to identify a person as an ‘X’ or a ‘Y’ or locate the boundary between ethnic collectivities. Rather, ethnicity is situationally defined, produced in the course of social transactions that occur at or across (and in the process help to constitute) the ethnic boundary in question. In sport any examination of ethnicity like those of Burdsey (2004a), King (2004), and Ismond (2003) is welcome, but the message is ‘proceed with caution’.

The subtleties of ethnicity and racism have led to the coining of a new term: ‘cultural racism’, in some cases ‘new racism’. This term is often used by those decrying particular racialized populations where little recourse is made to explicit biological differences. Solomos and Back (2001) argue that this type of racism is often categorized by ‘metonymic elaborations’ as a consequence of racisms being affected through coded signifiers. In this case references to cultural differences reify distinctions between powerful and less powerful groups that present an argument for exclusion, prejudice or hatred. Excluded groups are therefore not the victims of more traditional and overt racism but more subtle incarnations of even more insidious practices. In sport these
discourses have been used as a majoritarian device to set newer communities apart from others by questioning national allegiances through cultural and civic preferences. A constant aspect of this new racism is its ability not to be recognised as the explicit or overt racism of the past as it transforms itself into debates about citizenship, immigration, nationhood. A ‘safe’ distance emerges for these discourses from the more identifiable biological or phenotype explanations of racial hierarchies and inferiority or superiority, and results in amorphous types of racism that are difficult to detect and much easier to deny. The imagined communities as exemplified by Anderson (1991) become a property that is then defended, resisting any perceived differences that would come only from those who have been described in the past as ultimately different in essentializing biological terms. In some cases, who people cheer for when their country of residence plays their country of family origin is an acid test for many public figures. In the UK this has been labelled the ‘Tebbit test’ after Lord Tebbit, who challenged Asian communities to stand with English national teams against the country of their heritage as a test of their social integration, citizenship and loyalty to the nation. In this one ‘test’ debates on immigration and xenophobia become metaphors for a debate on ‘Britishness’ and nationhood.

The absence of some social groups in the writing of sport literature is not only raced but also gendered, as sports writers have failed to include black women in their analyses. Writers such as Scraton 2001, Watson and Scraton (2001), Birrell (1989) and Hargreaves (1994) have been critical of social science’s recidivism in this area. In particular, sports feminists have been reticent in engaging with the leisure lifestyles and sporting experiences of black women and as a result we know far less about black women than we do about black men in sport. Black women are invisible in sports writing in academic and everyday contexts. Where women are given attention in either academic or even sports feminist writing, then the focus is mainly reflective of a white perspective about (white) women in general (Mirza 1997). Writing on ‘race’ and ethnicity has made the black male as conspicuous in sport as the white woman in mainstream gender theorizing, therefore making our understanding of the black woman’s leisure and sporting lifestyles a mystery (Scraton 2001, Birrell 1989). These hierarchies in our epistemologies are reflective of wider raced, classed and gendered power processes that seek to structure our knowledge and intellectual development (Goldberg 1993). Goldberg (1993) recognises the bias of discourses and their ability to normalise vocabularies, thus privileging some whilst marginalizing others. The view that sports feminists have regularly dealt in stereotypes of women in sport as white, middle-class and heterosexual is further emphasised in Mirza’s (1997) work on black feminism which alerts us to this marginalizing process in sport theorising.

Given the significance of ‘race’ and racism and the contested arena of these debates in sport, another paradox emerges to challenge the critical sociologist, the antiracist, student and practitioner. The paradox is, can we really ignore ‘race’, as much as we may want to? Can we somehow reject it out of hand to somehow begin the process of debunking it as
a form of social categorisation? If we do this, then how can we effectively transform racialised relations of power structured by racial projects underpinned by reductionist ‘racial’ thinking? Given the imperative to resist racism, how can we do this without recourse to the lexicon of ‘race’ even with the warnings of those advocating racialisation as a possible way forward? For even with a racialisation framework we still must revert with caution to ‘race’, racial signification and representation in sport to challenge racism. ‘It is impossible to organize, maintain, or transform social structures without simultaneously engaging in racial signification’ (Omi and Winant 2002: 128).

**Critical Race Theory**

CRT has been described as exciting, revolutionary and an intellectual movement (Roithmayr 1999). It can be summarised as a framework from which to explore and examine the racism in society that privileges whiteness as it disadvantages others because of their ‘blackness’. CRT also confronts ‘race-neutrality’ in policy and practice and acknowledges the value of ‘the black voice’ that is often marginalised in mainstream theory, policy and practice. CRT challenges past and present institutional arrangements in sport that racially discriminate, subjugate and oppress (Nebeker 1998, Delgado and Stefaneic 2001). 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).

Like the law, sport is an institution deemed to lessen or eradicate racist dysfunction when it rears its head within this hallowed cultural construct. Research agendas dominated by what could be viewed as an elitist Eurocentric social science are a target for part of this transformation as critical writers such as Goldberg (1993) reiterate how the success of any standpoint on ‘race’ and racism must depend on its ability to offer resistance to racism(s). CRT has the potential to interrupt and transform social structures and racial power to further an agenda of ‘racial emancipation’ (Roithmayr 1999: 1). CRT can also be seen as a configuration of alternative accounts in sport that challenge orthodoxies, canons and dogma. The utility of CRT in our analyses of sport can be drawn analogously to Mirza’s (1999) critique of liberal ‘race’ reform in the US. Here Mirza’s frustration with the discourses of assimilation, integration and ‘colour-blindness’ can be equally levelled at sport where few sports or sport theorists have taken a proactive, radical stance to the construct of ‘race’ and racism in their arenas of expertise. In agreement with Mirza (1999: 112), racial inequality in sport, as in the law, is often seen as ‘exceptional and irregular rather than routinely ubiquitous and deeply ingrained’.

Five precepts of CRT are outlined as a framework to consider as an emergent development in sport and leisure theorising. It has been generally agreed that critical race theory is a theoretical framework that has emerged from the writing predominantly of black scholars in North America (Crenshaw et al. 1995, Delgado 1995, 2000, Nebeker 1998,
Parker 1998). Not only does CRT have the potential to shape the discourses of minds closed to racism-centred perspectives, it also wishes to influence the lethargy in liberal critiques of those debates. Sport can be observed as a key tool in the subjugation of black people and the magnification of the place of ‘race’ as a major mediating factor within society; in sport many have made these connections (Lapchick 2001, Carrington and McDonald 2001, Marqusee 2003). Sport, like the law, is supposed to be a ‘level playing field’; however there is a body of knowledge to suggest otherwise. Sport is another racially contested arena which is used as a ‘ring to wrestle’ for academics, participants and policy makers. As much as our cultural background is mediated by the intersection of gender and class, critical sport sociology is beginning to focus on these and other more conventional fronts concerning racial formations and related processes around gender, identity, nation, racism(s) and policy (Marqusee 1994, 2003, MacClancy 1996, Watson and Scraton 2001, Carrington and McDonald 2001); racism(s) (Shropshire 1996, Polley 1998, Long 2000, Lapchick 2001); and policy (Horne 1995, Swinney and Horne 2005, Gardiner and Welch 2001, Hylton 2003).

‘Race’ and Sport: Critical Race Theory (Hylton, 2008) supports Singer’s (2005a) view that a dialogue should be encouraged with academics, students, practitioners and policy makers to think beyond their everyday opinions and ideologies. In relation to ‘Race’ and Sport: Critical Race Theory, CRT offers an alternative way of knowing and an alternative vocabulary and discourse from which to understand research. Authors such as Stanfield II (1994), Twine and Warren (2000), Coates (2002), Gunaratnam (2003) and Bulmer and Solomos (2004) argue that researchers and writers need to urgently centralise ‘race’ and racism(s) as core factors in the study of wider social relations. Such actions improve and enhance the bodies of knowledge pertinent to ‘race’, racialisation and racial formations, as they ‘challenge and transform’ epistemologies and ways of thinking about the world (Gunaratnam 2003). This has the effect of questioning the everyday assumptions about socially constructed groups that often become the foundation for myth and folklore. Stanfield II’s (1994) challenge is that we all should establish new lines of inquiry whilst criticising traditional epistemologies, rather than acquiescing to their hegemony. As Leonardo (2005, xi) contends, CRT writers explore social issues with ‘race’ (and racism) as the ‘point of departure for critique … not the end of it’.

‘Race’ is neither an essence nor an illusion, but rather an ongoing, contradictory, self-reinforcing, plastic process, subject to the macro forces of social and political struggle and the micro effects of daily decisions … terms like ‘black’ and ‘white’ are social groups, not genetically distinct branches of humankind. (Haney-Lopez, 2000: 65)

**Five Precepts of Critical Race Theory**

A CRT perspective as outlined below acts as an umbrella for a range of views. The points discussed here are presented as a foundation for approaching the issues related
to ‘race’ and sport. It is useful at this juncture to point out that CRT perspectives should be as fluid and dynamic as the problems they attempt to tackle. To present an overview of CRT five significant aspects are drawn out of the main ideas of CRT writers such as Crenshaw et al. (1995), Parker et al. (1999), Solórzano and Yosso (2001, 2005), Delgado and Stefancic (1995, 2000, 2001) and Ladson-Billings (1998, 2003).

1) Centralizing ‘Race’ and Racism

The first tenet involves centralising ‘race’ and racism in sport at the same time as recognizing their connection with other forms of subordination and oppression (Ladson-Billings 1998, Parker 1998). For example, class cannot be theorised in isolation from ‘race’, as Marxists might wish, as ‘race’ must be central to the theorising of class relations from a CRT viewpoint (Nebeker 1998). It has further been argued that, although there is some recognition amongst writers and researchers that ‘race’ and racism are a significant area of study, they have done little more than acknowledge this as they wander on to more familiar theoretical terrain (Anthias 1998). Stanfield II (1993) also asks researchers to consider less the question of methodology but more the notion of an epistemology that gives a more accurate picture of the black experience in society. Back et al. (2001) are keen to follow this advice as their investigations into racism in football demonstrate the need for innovation and diversity to show how racism is a ‘multiply inflected and changing discourse … this involves understanding how forms of inclusion and exclusion operate through the interplay of overt racist practice and implicit racialised codings’ (Back et al. 2001: 6).

The careful centering of ‘race’ and racism in our analyses of sport should engage a thoughtful consideration of racial processes that explore and examine further, past and present processes and practices in sport that are neither inevitable nor accidental. Rather, they can be seen as part of a cycle of activity that can at the very least be broken or disrupted. CRT can develop a political lexis that can heed the advice of Tate IV (1999) and others that is conscious of the clumsy use of systemic racism as a beginning and end in a world that cannot be reduced into homogeneous experiences and polemic binaries. For example, when the talented young golf prodigy Kiran Matharu stated that she had been the victim of racism at golf clubs where she was refused membership, she clearly had grounds to base such an assumption as other less successful juniors were being admitted (Guardian 2007). However we will see further when we explore the fifth tenet of CRT how it encourages us to explore such issues even further as an intersectional analysis of racialisation and racist acts. In Matharu’s case as a young Asian woman from a working-class background, her exclusions from these clubs could be due to a mix of racial discrimination and/or golf’s gender relations which have been the subject of many controversies owing to its patriarchy. In addition golf has been accused of its membership policies relying on social networks and cultural capital as criteria for entry.
Peters (2005) has witnessed CRT become an inclusive and pluralistic framework that resists racism in complex, multidimensional ways. The intersections of ‘race’ and culture, gender, class, space, whiteness, politics, history, community, identity and nation, for example, have ensured a more sensitive theorising of social issues. McDonald and Birrell (1999) see many benefits to moving from single-issue theory and debates to a critical theoretical approach that converges issues and relations of ‘race’, class, gender and sexuality. Similarly a reading of the experiences of Serena and Venus Williams on the tennis circuit would be bereft of its various complexities without a consideration of racialisation, racism, gender, sexuality, class and whiteness (Spencer 2004).

2) Challenging Convention and Colour-Blindness

Secondly, CRT challenges traditional dominant ideologies around objectivity, meritocracy, colour-blindness, race-neutrality and equal opportunity (Nebeker 1998, Solórzano and Yosso 2001, Gardiner and Welch 2001). Two founder proponents of CRT, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001), identified patterns of criticism of CRT in relation to meritocracy and the challenge to objectivity. The challenge to dominant ideals and philosophies is not a pointless one. In effect sport as a racial formation becomes the subject of many challenges across its many racial projects. The academy, practitioners, policy makers, the media and the law join sport in the contested racialised arena of society, each maintaining dominant viewpoints, racial hierarchies, racial inequalities and ‘truths’ open to reinterpretation. An alternative reading of sport and its history for example is likely to challenge the existing orthodoxies surrounding it of cultural pluralism, fairness, integration, racial harmony, colour-blindness and other social benefits. Just as the law, policing, education, health, housing, social welfare and politics cannot afford to be colour-blind, neither can those in sport as managers, policy makers, the media or academics.

Color-blind racism revolves around issues of liberalism or ambivalence to matters of racism; the mechanism of cultural rather than biological arguments to support prejudicial views or racial projects that maintain recruitment and employment patterns, sports participation, sports policy exclusions; the utopian ideal that owing to effective opposition over the years racism is now a marginal or insignificant issue (Bonilla-Silva 2002). This colour-blindness takes a more sophisticated strategy to expose and tackle for ‘race’ critics as the nature of these issues is so divisive because they can seem so innocuous. There are numerous examples in sport where some racialised groups have a higher level of acceptance than others and in some instances are held as exemplars of successful integration. Color-blindness, like the new racism noted earlier, is a device that maintains dominant hegemonies and social hierarchies by regularly ignoring discriminatory criteria for inclusion.

Similarly, a CRT examination of employment practices in sport management, media, education, sport participation and spectatorship reveals parallel findings to those
in CRT and education where the notions of meritocracy and color-blindness are much more closely aligned to a defense of the status quo and racist practices that many would want to distance themselves from.

3) Social Justice

The Third tenet posits that CRT has a clear commitment to social justice that incorporates elements of liberation and transformation (Solórzano and Yosso 2001, 2005). With Bernal (Solórzano and Bernal 2001), Solórzano posits that the core variant of transformational resistance is social justice. For a politics of social change to have any value, the praxis of CRT must culminate in a process of social transformation which in sport might result in radical employment practices that value black people in sport management whether it involves professional clubs or local authority providers; practice in each of these arenas has been woefully inadequate in the UK and North America. Similarly, racism occurs at every level of sport ranging from innocuous exclusions at local clubs to discrimination in sports policy and practice and racist behaviour in the stands and in our living rooms when watching, listening to or reading media sources. CRT’s emphasis on social justice in terms of policy would align itself with radical, proactive forms of policy discourses that would cite racism, amongst other concerns, as the cause of the need for the manipulation and redistribution of resources (Parker 1998). The short-term impact of these policies on some over others may seem inequitable but are necessary if ahistorical conceptions of provision and the concept of a level playing field are to be rejected and the material differences between those disadvantaged in society are thought through in terms of how they are balanced out, leading to a ‘de-cloaking’ of color-blind ideologies and institutional arrangements.

A critical ontology ensures that where writers or researchers are conscious of the crucial social processes that structure their worlds they take those ideas forward as their starting point. That is, where racism and the distribution of power and resources disproportionately marginalize the racialized Other and their position in society, sport, local government and any other major social structures, then they will ensure that those issues stay at the centre of their investigations, or lens, rather than at the comfortable rim.

4) Centralizing Marginal Voices

The Fourth tenet reflects this centralizing of the marginalized voice that is often tabled as a significant contributory aspect of CRT but is also seen as a potential weakness by some according to Delgado and Stefancic (2000). CRT encourages us to explore what sport means to those whose experiences and identities are inadequately represented in the various conceptions of sport policy and practice. The ‘lived experiences’ (Hylton 1995, 2003, Solórzano and Bernal 2001) of those voices rarely heard in sport, such as
black academics, black spectators, black referees, Asian darts players, African Caribbean swimmers, Latina managers and white people talking about whiteness in sport, are highly valued. A criticism of this approach is that the recognition of the black voice has an essentializing effect on the black experience. It suggests that views from racialised individuals somehow represent the experiences of all black people and is open to conventional criticisms around validity, reliability and representativeness. CRT encourages counter-storytelling methodologies such as the centering of a black or racialised ‘voice’ seen as ‘race’-centered research tools that can effectively voice the marginalised experiences of the Other in a bid to present different or competing versions of reality that is often the prerogative of white social scientists (Delgado 1995).

CRT is an empowering framework that encourages Others traditionally excluded from the dominant perspectives to put forward views that have not been heard before. Lorde’s (1979) assertion that the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house is thought-provoking in the extreme as she encourages us to challenge tradition with different viewpoints and methodologies, and not be afraid to present experience as valid resources and knowledge to supplement and challenge established epistemologies. The ‘voice’ aspect of CRT should be viewed as ‘an asset, a form of community memory, a source of empowerment and strength, and not as a deficit’ (Villalpando 2004: 46). Henderson (1998) supports this as a major thrust of enlightened meaningful social analysis. A CRT viewpoint allows us to get a clearer understanding of the major structures involved in the organization of sport, which is crucial when racism is the ultimate target. An emergent counter-narrative helps us to focus on established power processes, white hegemony, racism and equality that have been consistently ignored by mainstream theorists.

5) Transdisciplinarity

The Fifth element posited by CRT writers involves the transdisciplinary nature of CRT. In the spirit of challenging dogma and orthodoxies it is incumbent on CRT advocates to adopt a resistance to ahistorical, unidisciplinary models of analysis. As much as CRT, sport and leisure studies are necessarily multidisciplinary, it is argued that they, like CRT writers, should be wary of utilizing a familiar and/or narrow multidisciplinary straitjacket that might constrain them in explaining modern (or historical) phenomena (Coalter 1998, Delgado and Stefancic 2001). A criticism angled at CRT, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) and reinforced by critical Marxists Darder and Torres (2003, 2004), is whether CRT has taken enough account of globalization, and economic democracy. Darder and Torres rely on a critical Marxist analysis that effectively subsumes all oppressions under those of class that traditional Marxists attempted many years ago. The view that racism is integral to the accumulation of capital and that racialized populations that benefit the least from globalization is one that they would argue generate, little attention from social scientists. This lack of attention to
global racialised processes confirms their argument that some racism theorizing can be parochial in nature and reductionist in perpetuating a dominant black/white binary in the centralizing of ‘race’ as an analytical category. Darder and Torres (2003) go on to accuse ‘race’ critical writers of considering class too superficially and almost in passing. Their reference to CRT writers who emphasize the need to consider the intersections of oppressions does not bring class into sharp enough relief for them and they see this as a failure of CRT. The notion of intersectionality is also seen by them as a smokescreen for avoiding class as a central issue of racism theorizing. A weakness of presenting ‘race’ as a central political construct, and therefore ignoring ‘the class struggle’, is to separate the two spheres—‘A move that firmly anchors and sustains prevailing class relations of power’ (Darder and Torres 2003: 248). Darder and Torres’s (2003, 2004) fear is that ahistorical, apolitical, classless analyses of homogeneous rather than culturally pluralistic societies prevail, thus presenting narrow and static views of racism and racialized politics.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) suggest that these criticisms are justified to a degree. However I have yet to see a theoretical framework that has satisfactorily tackled all of the crucial issues of its time. CRT is clearly metamorphosing in North America in terms of critical subjects ranging from critical race feminism and whiteness to Latino/a critiques (Lat/Crit) which emphasize crucial issues for our time, or for specific racialised populations. In some places like Europe, CRT is only just emerging as a valid framework and so it is not extraordinary that some important questions are yet to be fully explored (Gillborn 2005, Hylton 2005). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) add that this situation reflects the resources and emphasis to date but things change as CRT’s ability to offer important contributions is only strengthened by external and internal reflections.

The need to draw ideas from multiple disciplines will assist this process of growth for CRT, and so in their cultural analysis of sport McDonald and Birrell (1999) go as far as to describe transdisciplinarity as ‘anti-disciplinary’. For want of a better term they attempt to emphasize the need for writers to engage constantly in an intellectual project to broaden their theoretical and methodological frames. CRT draws on necessary critical epistemologies to ensure that their social justice agenda intersects to highlight related oppressive processes or the ‘multidimensionality’ of oppression that affect gender, social class, age or disability (Harris 1999). In this respect, CRT challenges orthodoxies and dominant ideologies congruent with critical approaches to complex social issues. Where this, albeit limited, transdisciplinary stance has been employed in sport and leisure, the strengths of critical ‘race’ analyses have been evident. The crossing of epistemological boundaries forces us to shift from and ultimately ‘unlearn’ the domain assumptions and orthodoxies that many have in their ‘home’ disciplines and opens the door to other innovative ideas and worldviews.

The principles of a CRT approach make up an essential framework from which to invite sport and leisure academics to reconsider their own positions on ‘race’ and
racism. Research and writing that adopt CRT principles have been considered to be at the cutting edge of emergent critical black and cultural studies research (Stanfield II 1993, West 1995, Parekh 2000, Gillborn 2005). The target for CRT activists is not just the conservative right but also the liberal left who put their trust in a system with the vain hope that it will somehow ensure fairness. According to West (1995), CRT challenges both liberals and conservatives whose assumptions are such that they reconstruct white privilege. Also, those seen as radicals who have marginalized or stayed silent on ‘race’ and racism in society are prime targets. This has serious implications for local authority sport providers who refuse to accept a collectivist perspective on race equality (Horne 1995, Clarke and Speeden 2000, Hylton 2003).

Conclusion

Critical race theory has the potential to challenge sport and leisure theorizing through its fundamental belief in its transformative capacity. CRT can be used effectively to generate a useful theoretical vocabulary for the practice of progressive racial politics in sport and leisure theorizing, in addition to understanding the essential formations of racial power and ideologies. CRT rejects orthodoxies as a challenge to mainstream paradigms. In the study of ‘race’ and racism in sport it can be used to reject the notion of neutral objective detachment from issues for more personal political perspectives. Crenshaw et al. (1995) and sports writers such as MacClancy (1996) consider writing about ‘race’ and racial processes as a site where racial power can be reconstructed, therefore redefining it as an arena from which paradigms can be challenged. CRT facilitates analyses of sport and leisure phenomena from a starting point that is ‘race’-conscious. From an example of policies that have had integrationist, assimilation, multicultural or color-blind viewpoints, CRT shifts those paradigms to a ‘race’-centered one. ‘Race’ and Sport: Critical Race Theory progresses from the standpoint that we live in a fundamentally racist and unequal society where processes systematically disenfranchise and limit the potential of black (and white) people. We therefore have a racist society that impinges on all aspects of our lives (Macpherson 1999, Parekh 2000). The academy is one such network that is affected by naturalized systems of order, often where research practice is flawed owing to epistemological (in)consistencies that make claims to the nature and order of things. Delgado and Stefancic (1995: 206) refer to this as a DNA-like process as knowledge bases have a tendency to replicate themselves endlessly, easily and painlessly—knowledge being one of those processes that is regularly modified and recreated through the hegemony of mainstream agendas. This is replicated in other key social institutions.

CRT applied to sport and leisure focuses on core social relations and processes of power. ‘Race’ and racism are central to any CRT focus, and its transdisciplinary nature ensures that disciplinary borders and conventions do not preclude appropriate methodologies or epistemologies from being applied. CRT’s political agenda of
challenge, change and transformation contributes to the ability of sport and leisure communities to re-examine critically how ‘race’, and racialised processes and formations are incorporated into their theory and practice. The CRT framework is presented here for serious consideration.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the ‘Jack Nicklaus’ syndrome’ help us to understand racialized assumptions in sport?
2. Identify examples of racial thinking using St. Louis (2004) four propositions.
3. Identify and describe four different types of racism. Give examples of how each form of racism could be experienced in sport and how they might possibly be tackled in practice.
4. Would ‘race’ and racism become less of a problem if we just ignored them?
5. Name FIVE tenets of critical race theory. Consider how two or more tenets could assist our critical understanding of sport policy and practice.

REFERENCES


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