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## Research Article

### 'Race' Talk! Tensions and Contradictions in Sport and PE

*Background:* The universal sport discourses of inclusion, belonging, meritocracy, agency, and equality are so widespread that few challenge them. It is clear from the most cursory interest in sport, PE and society that the lived reality is quite different and ambiguous. Racial disparities in the leadership and administration of sport are commonplace world wide; yet from research into 'race' in sport and PE the public awareness of these issues is widespread, where many know that racism takes place it is always elsewhere. For many this racism is part of the game and something that enables an advantage to be stolen, for others it is trivial and not worthy of deeper thought. This paper explores the contradictions and tensions of the author's experience of how sport and PE students talk about 'race'. 'Race' talk is considered here in the context of passive everyday 'race' talk, dominant discourses in sporting cultures, and colour-blindness. This paper focuses on the pernicious yet persistent nature of 'race' talk while demystifying its multifarious, spurious, and more persuasive daily iterations.

*Theoretical framework:* Drawing on Guinier and Torres' (2003) ideas of resistance through political race consciousness and Bonilla-Silva's (2010) notion of colour-blindness the semantics of 'race' and racialisation in sport and PE are interrogated through the prism of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical race scholarship has been used in sport and PE to articulate a political application of 'race' as a starting point for critical activism, to disrupt whiteness, and to explore the implications of 'race' and racism. CRT is used here to centre 'race' and racialised relations where disciplines have consciously or otherwise excluded them. Importantly, the centring of 'race' by critical race scholars has advanced a strategic and pragmatic engagement with this slippery concept that recognises its paradoxical but symbolic location in social relations.

*Discussion:* Before exploring 'race' talk in the classroom, using images from the sport media as a pedagogical tool, the paper considers how effortlessly 'race' is recreated and renewed. The paper then turns to explore how the effortless turn to everyday 'race' talk in the classroom can be viewed as an opportunity to disrupt common racialised assumptions with the potential to implicate those that passively engage in it. Further the diagnostic, aspirational and activist goals of political race consciousness are established as vehicles for a positive sociological experience in the classroom.

*Conclusion:* The work concludes with a pragmatic consideration of the uses and dangers of passive everyday 'race' talk and the value of a political race consciousness in sport and PE. Part of the explanation for the perpetuation of 'race' talk and the relative lack of concern with its impact in education and wider society is focused on how the sovereignty of sport and PE trumps wider social concerns of 'race' and racism because of at least four factors 1) the liberal left discourses of sporting utopianism 2) the 'race' logic that pervades sport, based upon the perceived equal access and fairness of sport as it coalesces with the, 3) 'incontrovertible facts' of black and white superiority [and inferiority] in certain sports, ergo the racial justifications for patterns of activity in sport and PE 4) the racist logic of the Right perpetuated through a biological reductionism in sport and PE discourses.

**Keywords:** 'Race' Talk; Critical Race Theory; Political Race Consciousness

There are many contradictions and tensions in the way we talk about ‘race’ in sport and PE. These daily rituals are rarely the source of investigation and explanation yet contribute to how our lives and identities are structured (Essed 1991; Goldberg 1993). Before exploring ‘race’ talk in the classroom where I use images *from the sport media* as a pedagogical tool I share a story to reflect how effortlessly ‘race’ is recreated and renewed...in this case *by the sport media*. In many regards, discourses on sport, and for that matter, PE, as common goods are often expressed by ignoring or trivialising the racialised issues within. For example, I remember being struck by ‘race’ talk from John Inverdale (an anchor man on BBC sport) who announced of sprinter Christophe Lemaitre *It’s a marketing man’s dream to have a great white hope to rival the likes of Gay, Bolt, and Powell...he’s the real deal! By the real deal*, Inverdale means a) ‘race’ matters in sport b) some ‘races’ of athletes are born with superior physical characteristics in sprints and c) white athletes do not fall into this category. FIFA president Sepp Blatter’s 2011 assumptions underpinning his ‘race’ talk alert us to his naivety in regards to these issues. When he stated that racism on the football pitch could be resolved at the end with a handshake reinforced his simplistic views of the prevalence and virulence of racism in sport and society. As Barack Obama suggested of LA Clippers team owner, Donald Sterling’s ‘race’ talk with his partner, allowing people to speak is likely to reveal their ignorance on a subject (Eurosport.Com).

‘Race’ matters because people are readily compartmentalized and tagged according to it. In a predominantly white institution I am racialised on a daily basis as a black male in a senior position. Each meeting I attend or classroom that I enter brings with it a fresh set of racialised circumstances. Hence teaching about society, ‘race’ and ethnicity incorporates a raft of subtle challenges especially where students have never had to engage such issues before. In addition, working in such

environments for over twenty years has made me adroit at remaining accessible and sensitive in discussions on ‘race’ and ethnicity especially with those who have rarely had to consider them at close quarters. In many ways the paper embeds my ‘voice’ from the margins as I reflect on working with undergraduate students and the challenges some of the recurring issues have presented me as a sociology teacher in a university.

hooks’ (1994: 12) argument that the ‘classroom is the most radical space of possibility in the academy’ heightens my awareness of the nascent opportunities to disrupt ‘race’ talk for sport and PE students. Gates argues that, *we carelessly use language in such a way as to will this sense of natural difference in our formulations* (Gates 1988: cited Godreau 2008, 20), yet racialised problems persist *because* ‘race’ is seen as the problem rather than the broader structural, social, cultural, historical and economic concerns that reinforce subordination and inequalities (cf. West 2001; Hylton and Morpeth 2012). Thus I see the prospect of contesting racialised ideologies and mythologised assumptions in sport and PE means their worst excesses are not so easily perpetuated.

This paper stems from reflections on my recurring experiences of teaching ‘race’ and ethnicity in the sociology of sport to 2<sup>nd</sup> semester first year undergraduate sport and PE students on a shared sociology module. The students from leisure and sport studies hail from courses that are sociologically underpinned though this was less the case for those doing PE. In this institution the module has little ethnic diversity in terms of black and minority ethnic students and is consistently populated by predominantly white British students. In the paper I reflect on a regular discussion with many cohorts of students on this module as I use athletic imagery to focus on the nature of ‘race’ talk and its pernicious yet persistent underpinning ideologies. In so

doing, this process helps students to expose and demystify how they conceive of, and speak about, 'race' in its more persuasive daily iterations.

The issue of 'race' talk is interrogated through the pragmatics of Critical Race Theory (CRT) drawing on Guinier and Torres' (2003) ideas of resistance through political race consciousness and Bonilla-Silva's (2010) notion of colour-blindness. Critical race scholarship has been used in sport and PE by Singer (2005), Burdsey (2007), Hylton (2009, 2010), Spracklen (2008), Long and Spracklen (2011), Harrison et al (2004), Douglas and Halas (2013), Fitzpatrick (2013) and McDonald (2013) to articulate a political application of 'race' as a starting point for critical activism, to disrupt whiteness, and to explore the implications of 'race' and racism for PE and sport. CRT has been used to centre 'race' and racialised relations in analyses of social issues and to focus critical lenses where disciplines have consciously or otherwise excluded them. Importantly, the centring of 'race' by critical race theorists has advanced a strategic and pragmatic engagement with this slippery concept that recognises its paradoxical but symbolic location in social relations. However, critical race scholars are only too aware that challenging 'race(s)' purely as a non-existent fallacious object, or as a social construction, can oversimplify the fact that for many the lived reality trumps these sociological terms. We must recognise the dilemma of 'destabilising the notion of race theoretically' while recognising 'the lived presence of 'race'' (Fine et al 2003, 176). In a racialised society, to reduce 'race' to an objective condition or an ideological construct denies our lived realities.

As an activist text this paper utilises the spirit of Fine's (1994) notion of 'working the hyphens' that undermines processes of othering that invent and construct 'the other'. Part of this project involves recognition of spaces of domination and resistance that can be one and the same. In addition to the classroom, Brunsma et al

(2012) observe how 'race' and racist practices are spun out across different sites including neighbourhoods, friendship patterns, playgrounds, occupations, and the media. In these spaces identities are often constructed as 'seeing is not believing so much as believing is seeing' (Brunsma et al 2012, 722) and it is the integrity of such beliefs that a sociological dialogue can dent, break, and transform.

Like Brunsma et al (2012) and Crowley-Long (1995) this paper discusses ideas emerging from a pedagogy used to 'penetrate the walls' that reinforce Eurocentrism, power and privilege in curricula, the classroom and everyday cultural reproduction. Flintoff et al (2014) argue that the hegemonic whiteness of the teaching profession, in critical issues of 'race' by educators and teachers has led to a lack of recognition of student and teacher centrality and power in processes of racialisation (see also Fitzpatrick and Santamaria 2015). The invisibility of 'race', racialisation, antiracism and whiteness in the physical education teacher education curriculum leaves practitioners free to ignore these issues in their teaching. However, Flintoff et al's (2014) raised awareness of white privilege generated questions the silences and contradictions in their social justice agendas, forcing a more critical engagement with racialised dynamics. Without this pedagogical experience Brunsma et al (2012, 718) state that,

Most white students emerge from college with their walls of whiteness essentially unchallenged, unscathed and often strengthened.

By focusing on past interactions with classes of sport and PE students, the paper explores their everyday reproduction of 'race' talk. Critical race theory's concerns with racial discourses have been effective in exposing subliminal and overt

expressions of racism in society and are further explored here. This approach eschews damaging readings of semantic and utopian post-race debates, while its pragmatics present a challenge to the negative racialised discourses and practices manifest in sport and PE contexts, with a view to transforming them. The danger of ‘race’ talk with the pedagogical challenges it engenders becomes apparent as the paper progresses.

### **‘Race’ talk to level the playing field**

The universal sport discourses of inclusion, belonging, meritocracy, agency, and equality are so widespread that few challenge them. It is clear from the most cursory interest in sport, PE and society that the lived reality is quite different and ambiguous (Spracklen 2008; Hylton 2009, 2013; Fitzpatrick 2013; McDonald 2013). Hylton (2009, 5) argues that, *in sport and leisure the lexicon of policy makers has promulgated a vocabulary that legitimates rather than challenges the notion of ‘race’, monolithic racial identities and the black ‘Other’*. Abusive chanting still inhabit sport stadia and sporting environments around the world; ‘natural’ differences are commonly articulated in sport as physical and psychological stereotypes pervade; racial disparities in the leadership and administration of sport are commonplace world wide; yet from research into racism in sport the public awareness of these issues is widespread, where many know that racism takes place, though it is always ‘over there’ (Hylton, 2009; Long & McNamee, 2004). For many this racism is part of the game and something that enables an advantage to be stolen. A corollary of this is the accommodation of racialised practices by victims of racism who feel that to succeed they must internalise it to overcome these aspects of a sport. Thus offering a passive rather than active challenge to racism.

In its simplest form ‘race’ talk has been described by Gilroy (1993, 89) as a,

Commonsense perspective [that] specifies that animal blacks enjoy an excess of brute physicality and wily oriental gentlemen[sic] conversely display a surfeit of cerebral power, while only the authentic Anglo-Brit is able to luxuriate in the perfect equilibrium of body and mind.

Everyday ‘race’ talk shores up the constructed differences between social groups, which can be evidenced in diverse settings from the classroom to the changing room (Azzarito 2009). This paper highlights how overt and subtle forms of racialised conversations can be manifest through relatively benign topics in the sport and PE classroom (Andrews 1996; van Sterkenburg 2011, 2013).

### **A Conversation – creating ‘race’**

Before exploring ‘race’ talk in the classroom, using images from the sport media as a pedagogical tool, I share a story to reflect how effortlessly ‘race’ is recreated and renewed...in this case by the media. The story is based on a conversation with a sport journalist that occurred a few days before the European athletic championships in Barcelona in 2010; I was asked to comment on the new sprint ‘sensation’ from France, Christophe Lemaitre. Cooky et al. (2010) reinforce the argument that the mass media contribute to the way we are influenced into constructing dominant ideas of ‘race’ and other salient factors affecting our identities. Others contend that the media exacerbates tensions in society by renewing social problems through the use of the uncritical collective memory of stereotypes and mythology such as John Inverdale’s earlier comment (above) (McDonald 1999; Markovitz 2006). Yet in drawing on this



example it brings into sharp relief the necessity for taking a critical sociological lens to everyday relations.

At first viewing, the relatively benign request from the journalist could be seen as analogous to the inoffensive sporting images I use in the classroom with students to prompt conversations on 'race'. Yet, a critical unpacking of the historical, political, social and cultural ramifications of the reproduction of such discourses becomes unsettling when the familiar is made different or 'strange' (Mills 1970).

On Monday 26th July 2010, two days before the 100 metres final of the European Athletic Championships, which Lemaitre won, the journalist contacted me for the interview. I asked, *Why was the sprinter so high profile?* I knew at this point that due to Lemaitre's form the sport media was replete with a racialised polemic, 'race' talk if you will, exemplified by Inverdale, about 'race', natural differences and a matter of fact discourse of black and white physicality in athletics. The journalist was unapologetic that, *Lemaitre has set many people talking because he is the first white man to run under 10 seconds*<sup>1</sup>. In some ways the naturalness of sporting competition presents for many, further evidence of the innate differences between athletes. *The Guardian* (2010) outlined how the story broke in the highly respected French newspaper, *Le Monde*, before the news found its way onto the Internet where even right wing white supremacists were celebrating a victory for the "white race".

These images in the media are historically nothing new. Like Crowley-Long (1995, 2) such images have been used in classrooms as triggers for discussions of 'race' and ethnicity to uncover what she describes as 'hidden prejudices and assumptions'. Many would be reminded of a picture taken ten years before Lemaitre's

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<sup>1</sup> Marian Voronin has the distinction of the first man not of West African descent to run the 100 metres under 10 seconds (9.992, his time was rounded up).

triumph, of the white Australian sprinter Matt Shirvington, side by side with Olympic Gold medal winner Linford Christie *Can Black Beat White* (Observer 1999, 10). More significantly, this and similar images have been used by me as pedagogical tools in classrooms to explore everyday questions of ‘race’ and racism.

For example the picture of Greek sprinter Kostas Kenderis crossing the line first at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games was necessarily provocative because it had Kenderis winning a race with a phalanx of black sprinters in his wake. Showing students this picture has challenged the ideologies that they have grown up with, brought into the lecture theatre and clearly employed to unpack the photograph and deliver an answer to my question ‘*What is wrong with this picture?*’ This approach has remained relevant and thought provoking for some time. Sailes (1993) has also explored similar dynamics in the classroom that resulted in challenging racialised myths and stereotypes in sport, as young people attempted to ‘explain’ success and diversity in track and field.

It must be noted that asking my question ‘*What is wrong with this picture?*’ occurs at the end of a number of conversations focused on social constructionism, the sociological imagination, gender and class. In asking the question I invite them to sharpen their critical tools on the familiar, to rework fundamental assumptions and rehearse new arguments for debates to come, now and in the future. The question ‘*What is wrong with this picture?*’ is an invitation from a devil’s advocate, a *provocateur* that is never asked ‘cold’. Further, as power relations are always a feature of classroom relationships the process of dialogue incorporates the recognition of techniques to manage direct and indirect power especially as teaching can contribute positively or otherwise to the classroom experience (Donnelly 2014). A more traditional model of the teacher as the font of all knowledge and the student as

passive leaves few opportunities for free and open discussion (hooks 1994). As Ochoa and Pineda (2008, 46) argue that if,

Little space is provided for students to enter into dialogue, share their personal experiences, reflect on how they are affected by the course, or critically assess the course curriculum and classroom pedagogy [...] dissension and conflict are discouraged.

My approach to facilitate dissonance in ‘the familiar’ is generally facilitated through cooperation and participation to propagate an empowering and liberating dialogue. Groups and individuals take ownership of previously marginalised issues on ‘race’ and ethnicity as they become actively reflexive and critical. Classes were theory and issue based with dialogue at the heart. However, recognition of the power relations between teacher and student is supplemented with awareness of the differentials in student relations as gender, class and ‘race’ play out (hooks 1994; Ochoa and Pineda 2008).

Many reading this paper will understand that the attention Lemaitre received was disproportionate to his ability as a sprinter on the world stage. As a realistic and sensitive athlete even Lemaitre announced that the attention he was receiving for running, in international terms, for a reasonable sprint time, is unusual,

*Talking about white sprinters, I find this absurd. This story is too much, I don't like it...* He shrugged when told he had entered the history books: *The history of French sprinting, yes, but lets not say that I'm in the big league yet (The Guardian, 2010).*

As a sprinter Lemaitre understood the significance of his work that night he

dipped under 10 seconds at the French nationals. However, uncritical ‘race’ talk is underpinned by ideologies of racial disparities, superiority and inferiority that are regularly manifest in sport and PE play and curricula (Long and McNamee 2004; Spracklen 2008; Douglas and Halas 2013).

### **‘Race’ in class**

Turning to my class of students, when asked ‘*what is wrong with this picture?*’ with the image of Kenderis as he finished ahead of black sprinters, the students invariably proceed to tell me about this anomaly due to the ‘natural’ superiority of black sprinters over white sprinters. This is disturbing because of their recourse to passive ‘race’ talk. The process of association that the students use could be described as racialisation where sprinting (event) and sprinters (black and white) are given racialised attributes chosen from a hierarchy of mythical abilities and stereotypes (Murji and Solomos 2005). Racialisation is sometimes used to explain the processes through which these raced meanings are implied; it is the dialectics of racialisation that cause the divisions between people rather than the static (but not fixed) term ‘race’.

For the students, the position of a white body in their picture was unsettling as it disturbed some of their fixed ideas about physicality (Azzarito 2009). Whiteness was used to disrupt the unmarked and unnamed cultural practices and identities often read as normal, or neutral (Flintoff and Webb 2012; Hylton 2009; Long & Hylton 2002). Further, mimetic accuracy (Hylton 2009) partially explains how myths of difference can be reinforced in such classroom interactions but also where events resonate with a myth (stereotypical events become ‘proof’ of stereotypes) they are

often accepted passively; if images challenge these mythopoetic dynamics they can enable a critical dismantling of assumptions and stereotypes. Because the image fell outside of their comprehension of ‘racial performance’ Kenderis’ winning image challenged student conceptions of racial superiority. My task was to critically engage their attempts to explain why it was *unusual* and *wrong* and to make their ‘familiar’ ‘strange’.

Perceptions regarding the relative over-representation of some social groups in particular sports compared to representation in other social domains lead some to conclude that the causal variable to explain this social dynamic lies with biology and intellect. Thus the physical and mental dispositions that athletes bring to sport distinguish them in the end, rather than more complex explanations that include opportunity, economics, culture, racialised processes of stereotyping, discrimination, the channeling of young people into particular activities, and within activities the ‘stacking’ of participants into particular roles based on a ‘race’ logic.

### **Political race consciousness: Challenging ‘race’ talk**

The same sentiments can be applied to the logic of the students as they answer my question *what is wrong with this picture?* They proceed to tell me what is wrong by first pointing out that white people don’t finish in front of black people in sprints; that black people are the best sprinters; and that different racial groups have propensities for different sports. Leonard’s (2004) use of a ‘racial lens/frame’ enables him to challenge everyday citizens who deny the relevance and real world consequences of ‘race’. In my case the political race consciousness (PRC) that I endeavor to foster with students emerges from critical race theory. Guinier and Torres (2003) describe

PRC as having a) a diagnostic function, b) an aspirational goal and c) an activist project. The diagnostic element ensures that in challenging students the patterns of thinking that lead them to their initial conclusions are unpacked and critiqued. It also facilitates a reconsideration of the myths and stereotypes around people, athletes and the collection of ideas that frame and signify their own essentialised being. In this case it enables a critique of the simple binaries of mind and body, superiority and inferiority, and the ideas that challenge each actor to become part of the critical process of reflection and reassessment of the sometimes simplistic answers they proffer to my questions; locating themselves within the dynamics of racialised power relations is the aspirational element of the PRC. Engaging in ‘race’ talk without this aspirational element leaves the students complicit and likely to passively reproduce their usual conclusions, leaving them further convinced of these fundamental half-truths, falsities, myths and stereotypes. The complexities of the racialisation and location of people is central to understanding how we are located as men, women, classed, disabled and hierarchised in conjunction with political, cultural and historical contexts. A political race consciousness is designed to lead students to an activist conclusion that enables them to consider:

- That the valorization of the black athlete and the subordination of the white athlete signify deeper and darker ills, and asymmetrical power relations in sport and wider society.
- Their own colour-blindness and the colour-blind ideologies of sport.
- Their reductive racialised ideals of ‘natural’ sporting difference.
- Sport as a contested site of struggle in an arena they may have thought benign.

- How they and others are constrained and limited by their own ideas and effortlessly channeled into particular sports.
- How the invisibility of whiteness forces the majority of students in this group to begin to see themselves as raced and implicated in all discussions of 'race' talk.
- Their passivity for a more active politics so that regardless of background, transformation can occur in an activist project.
- Why they don't just say...nothing is wrong!

### **'Raced' discourses in practice**

Myths surrounding sport and reinforcing the notion of natural difference in sport and PE emerge in seemingly positive issues surrounding equal access and the breadth of minoritised social groups in sport; demonstrating sport and PE's success in bringing people together and diminishing any racial differences. For many in sport and PE the seeming equality of its rules and governance are enough to demonstrate an inclusive, colour-blind, pluralist phenomenon that cannot be subverted (Azzarito 2009). Part of the explanation for the conclusions reached by students in such interactions can be explored through the way practices are used to ignore or negate the relevance of 'race' (Spracklen 2008; Ahmed 2012; Flintoff and Webb 2012; McDonald 2013; Douglas and Halas 2013). Colour-blindness was effectively coined by Bonilla-Silva (2010) to illustrate a non-colour-coded race critical framework from which to understand the way these racialised processes operate. Using the concepts of abstract liberalism, minimization of racism, cultural racism, and naturalization he explained how colour-blindness works.

Colour blindness through abstract liberalism can be viewed in sport and PE where it is used to logically underpin (in)activity in relation to diversity and equality (Ahmed 2006, 2012). Professionals engaged in discussions on ‘race’ often use abstract liberal ‘race’ talk, to draw on notions of choice, individualism, and incremental change that slow down positive action or redistributive-activity (Hylton and Totten, 2013). Even seemingly positive ‘race’ talk that highlights the disparities and inequalities in sport can dilute interventions that do not take an upstream or radical approach (Long and Spracklen 2011, Hylton and Totten 2013). In their analysis of London 2012 and the Olympic effect on black and minority ethnic communities Hylton and Morpeth argue that ignoring racialised practices in sport lead to racial hierarchies and continuing discrimination. This can be the result of uncritical ‘race’ talk, customs and practices that leave institutional and individual arrangements undisturbed while the ‘performance’ of race equality results in superficial ‘action’ (Hylton and Morpeth 2012; Ahmed 2012).

Colour blindness through minimisation refers to popular assumptions that the reduced occurrence of explicit racism in sport and PE means it is no longer a problem, though evidence to the contrary is compelling where monitoring and reporting systems are in place (EU FRA 2010). However, anecdotally and experientially the problems of discrimination, racism and ‘race’ talk remain consistent (Lusted 2011; van Sterkenburg 2011). For some the increasing diversity in popular mainstream sports demonstrates encouraging signs of inclusion and the insignificance of ‘race’, as does the increasing diversity of populations. Yet, to say that racial processes are insignificant is a privilege only for those located in positions of power and least likely to be affected by them.



Colour blindness through cultural racism is the third category that complements Bonilla-Silva's (2010) second 'minimization' argument because it emphasises culturally specific reasons for negative racial dynamics, often justified through claims of cultural practice. For example, 'Asians don't play rugby because they can't wear turbans in the scrum!' 'They would rather not play football because their parents want them to be doctors or lawyers', or 'their religion or food preferences preclude them from training regularly or to gain the correct sustenance for particular sports' (Long et al 1995a, b). The iterative process that perpetuates cultural racism like other forms of racism can be used to victim blame or attribute new reasons to support old practices. Again, the mixture of half-truths, stereotypes and ignorance of the Other become the foundation for new incarnations of racist exclusions and micro-aggressions in sport and PE. Part of the reason for the resilience of such ideas is argued by Flintoff and Webb (2012) who state that the dearth of research in PE, and the invisibility of 'race' in physical education teacher education, may play a significant part in reducing the confidence of the profession to adequately challenge these issues. In such instances in the classroom, talking critically about these myths and stereotypes disrupts the calcifying of racial ideas that could potentially lead to new generations of PE teachers and leaders in sport reproducing toxic racialised ideologies.

Finally, Bonilla-Silva's (2010) use of colour blindness through 'naturalisation' is used to explore how some attempt to explain away racial phenomena. For example, all black teams, Asian leagues, and high representations of particular social groups in sports can be read as evidence of high levels of agency being demonstrated in 'choosing' to play with *members of your own 'race'* (Bonilla-Silva 2010, 28). Similar arguments are used to explain the 'natural' propensities for success for particular

social groups and why they gravitate toward these sports. The racialisation of particular sports becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and recurring explanation for the ‘natural’ order of things in sport and PE. This natural order has often been explained in arguments that particular groups are more physical beings with a penchant for sport and the arts, while others have a superior intellectual capacity that leads them toward certain sports and/or positions. Spracklen (2008) and McDonald’s (2013) critiques of relationships between ‘race’, PE, and sport science that underpin the teaching of cognate fields [sport, physical activity and health] reveal how central sources of sport and PE student epistemologies [academics] are predisposed to racialised rationalisations regarding intellectual and physical performance. McDonald’s (2013, 184) polemical question *Considering that biological ‘race’ has been exposed as false, then how does it make its way back into the ontology of PE* emphasises a need for an ongoing challenge to passive ‘race’ talk in the classroom where if left unchecked can effortlessly and uncritically re-emerge.

Bonilla-Silva’s colour-blindness frames are often used in combination, and in the case of my students help to partially explain their responses in my classes. The codification and institutionalisation of reductionist racialised speech that McDonald describes in PE and sport curricula partially underpin these classroom conversations.

The value and reality of a colour-blind discourse is demonstrated for some by the prevalence of black and minority ethnic people participating at all levels. In particular, superstars at the top of many mainstream sports are black and so, it is argued, if it is possible for them to succeed then the system cannot be exclusionary. The success of diverse groups in sport can often reinforce ‘melting-pot’ ideologies and views that we live in a post-racial society, where ‘race’ is irrelevant, and where sport demonstrates integration, fairness and tolerance. Utopian ‘race’ talk in sport is

heavily influenced by visions of wide participation leading to social mobility and conspicuous earning power. Conspicuous consumption among those minoritised groups, traditionally from the working classes, is further evidence of race equality in sport. Sport is everyday 'evidence' of minoritised groups' acceptance and inclusion.

The other side of this argument suggests that those minoritised groups that fail to do so well are not availing themselves of the opportunities, a form of enlightened racism (Hylton 2009). Enlightened racism posits that individual choice rather than structural processes are more likely to affect our ability to progress. Where these sport stars are black, their shadows are cast over those who do not succeed, rather than the system that is stunting their efforts, alienating or excluding others.

Ferber (2007), like Leonard (2004), is perplexed by the contradictions she sees in the way blackness is adored on the track, while white supremacy and racism continue unabated in wider society. Though colour-blindness is an ideal state to achieve, its practice is problematic. Leonard (2004, 287) contends that,

The success of Black athletes and the supposed adoration [America] has for M.J., Shaq, Tiger, and Lebron is posited as evidence of racial progress and colour-blindness.

Leonard (2004) argues that sport and PE are used as strategies to maintain white privilege as colour-blindness is supposedly affirmed through the symbolic representation of 'race' within. Critical race theorists argue that we live in a society structured by 'race' and racism, and that consequently we do not live in a 'race' neutral meritocracy (Gillborn 2008; Hylton 2005, 2009; Solórzano and Yosso 2002). Individuals and institutions in sport and PE are therefore neither neutral nor unbiased, whether conscious of this fact or otherwise. The results of these acts and processes

have differential impacts upon people in sport that vary as 'race' intersects with class, gender and other identifiers of oppression. The nature of 'race' talk in sport and PE emerges through the interplay of factors such as 'race' logic, racialisation, institutionalised colour-blindness, universalism and vernacular discourses consistently witnessed in discussions with students.

My students begin engaging with these issues while discussing images like Kenderis' winning photograph in Sydney. The students initially exchange uncritical 'race' talk, without anxiety... because often the first time white students get the opportunity to problematise 'race' is in discrete moments in their academic careers such as in a classroom like mine (Sailes 1993; Essed 2002 a, b; McDonald 2013; Douglas and Halas 2013). A student's ability to transform from complicit to resistive can emerge when they challenge taken for granted constructions of 'them' and as a result 'us'. By repositioning 'self', 'the powerful' by recognising common conceptions of 'othering' and 'the other' they can begin to relinquish the power to subordinate, for more emancipatory discourses. Clearly the long-term effect of the passive acceptance of racialised myths and stereotypes for sport and PE students remain a problem for all in PE and sport pedagogy.

## **Conclusion**

Some would argue that due to the reduction of overt racism in sport that we are living in a more tolerant society and are willing to describe it as a post-race state. Their thinking relies on the truism that the stopwatch or goal line cannot tell a lie, especially in terms of winning, losing or foul play. Hence sport becomes the great equalizer and 'race' talk like those shared by John Inverdale, Sepp Blatter and Donald Sterling

remain 'trivial acts' that require contestation and assiduous unpacking. This position conveniently ignores racialised relations in sport and PE though this is reflective of the rose-coloured vision of both often promoted by its key stakeholders. Here, the sovereignty of sport and PE trumps wider social concerns because of a number of factors, 1) the liberal left discourses of sporting utopianism 2) the 'race' logic that pervades sport and PE, based upon their perceived equal access and fairness of sport as they coalesce with the, 3) 'incontrovertible facts' of black and white superiority [and inferiority] in certain sports, ergo the racial justifications for patterns of activity in sport and PE 4) the racist logic of the Right perpetuated through a biological reductionism in sport discourses.

Gilroy (1993) suggests that our knowledge of 'race' and racial groupings are not simply the product of racial discourses. Wider historical economic and political rationales are used to argue that racial discourses or racial ideologies often go hand-in-hand to underpin broader coercive social processes that have underpinned such phenomena as apartheid, and migrant labour. Racial discourses or 'race' talk do not exist independent of such phenomena. He goes on to argue that,

At different times, economic, political and cultural factors all play a determining role in shaping the character of 'races' (Gilroy 1993, 20).

Gilroy (1993) supports the notion of the socially constructed nature of 'race' and its complex and multifaceted interdependencies. Thus our understanding of 'race', and 'race' talk in sport and PE may say just as much about other social and political relations in addition to group identities and how power works. Gilroy views a plurality of racisms that reflect historical influences on the specific present as they cross and emerge within societies. Any critical exploration of 'race' talk must be cognisant of the nuances, contradictions and tensions implicit within a broad

discussion of racialisation, and racial discourses. Critical race theory's challenge to ahistoricism, essentialism, and recognition of racism(s) as an endemic and persistent aspect of our society hints at the necessity for such an approach (Hylton 2009).

Like hooks (1994; 1989) I engage my pedagogy to talk back and share an alternative reading of everyday ideas that have spurious racialised underpinnings in 'race' talk. A dialogue and critique of 'race' talk enables what hooks (1989) describes as opportunities to make the abstract concrete or for Mills (1970) make the familiar, strange. My experience of the continued use of passive 'race' talk in the classroom, and beyond, tells us there still remains a widespread problem and a need to continue this project to disrupt it (McDonald 2013; Douglas and Halas 2013). Guinier and Torres' (2003) view of the term 'race' directly challenges those who would argue that it serves no purpose to perpetuate what Gilroy calls 'raciology' (Gilroy, 2004). The use of 'race' for them is one endorsed by other critical race theorists who use a political race consciousness to collectively mobilize around an inclusive if paradoxical term. Political race consciousness emphasises a 'race' consciousness for students in the way that Omi and Winant (1994) encourage it through their use of racial processes, and others do with racialisation; that there are those who are raced as black, and others subordinated through the label of 'race', that find unity, strength, and an oppositional politics with the term.

The term 'race', for Guinier and Torres, IS the miner's canary. The metaphor emphasising that the presence of 'race' in society is symptomatic of more odious nefarious ills that signal wider problematic structural issues. The term 'race' is not the problem just as the canary is not the problem, and so Guinier and Torres argue that not talking about 'race', and therefore ignoring uncritical 'race' talk in the hope that it

will stop us reinforcing it, is equivalent to equipping the canary with a mask that will save it but does nothing about the poisonous gas.

The real paradox here is not just how to understand 'race' talk in PE and sport but to also comprehend that what we are trying to challenge is generally agreed not to exist, and requires a critical approach (Dalal 2008). Rovegno and Gregg (2007) endorse work that encourages educators to shift from tokenistic and additive models of teaching around 'race', and for students to be empowered to be critical of everyday assumptions by broadening ideas that better understand the experiences and perspectives of others. They argue that ideally the next steps to this transformation of ideas should include thoughtful actions as a result. This pragmatic approach accepts the lived reality of 'race' and the endemic racialised power relations evidenced through classroom, media and other dialogues. Analyses of 'race' talk in sport and PE demand a critical lens that takes issue with the contradictions and tensions of post-race, level playing field, and reductionist racial ideologies.

The benign acceptance of black sprinters being best has a sinister endpoint. Those that advocate this passive 'race' talk are saying as much about themselves and their location to positions of power and privilege as they are about sport and PE. The aversion to, and denial of uncritical 'race' talk can only come from a position of privilege. A privilege that Yuval Davis (2008, 102) argues is *likely to overlook the processes within which racism and exclusion are able to flourish.*

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