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# **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 is a standpoint established to challenge these racialised inequalities and racism in society and has some utility for antiracism in sport. CRT's focus on social justice and transformation are two areas of convergence between critical race theorists and antiracists. 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 dehumanising 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 the television, in print, in the stands, on the sidelines and on the pitch. Many times racism is trivialised and put down as part of the game (Long et al 2000), yet its impact is rarely the source of further exploration. This paper will explore the conceptualisation of 'race' and racism for a more effective antiracism. Critical Race Theory will also be used to explore the ideas that underpin considerations of the severity of racist behaviour and the implications for antiracism.*

## **Background**

In this paper critical race theory (CRT) is introduced as an important theoretical tool for antiracists 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 antiracists with a framework to challenge orthodoxies, narrow 'race' thinking and under-theorised 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, the paper explores critical race theory and the implications of this framework for theorising 'race', and racism for antiracists. This 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 rationalise racism from the level of the individual draws out salient points for the need for a broader understanding of 'race' and everyday racism in the pursuit of antiracism in sport. Their argument presents further support to Omi and Winant's (2002: 137) view that any abstract conceptualisation of racism is severely put to the test by the untidy world of reality. The changing nature of attitudes to racialised behaviour, the social construction of racism and even the terminology of 'race' are constantly

changing, contested and reconstituted, thus making the antiracism acts of critical activist scholars and their abstract conceptualisations 'works in progress'.

The research of Bonilla-Silva (2006), Delgado and Stefancic (2001, 2002) Gillborn, (2009) as well as other critical race theorists address some of the popular discourses and weaknesses of 'race' theorising and antiracism to develop a closer weaving of thinking in relation to 'race', racism and other intersecting modes of oppression in society. Ahmed (2006), in particular, emphasises that sufficient conditions need to be in place for antiracism to function; this requires a shift from a rhetorical commitment to change to one 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 antiracism. Practitioners, educationalists and policymakers 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 antiracism in this paper is not concerned with examining those involved in formal and practical antiracist interventions in sport. Organisations 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 organisation has emerged from a particular set of circumstances within governing bodies, nationally/internationally, culturally and historically, and these stories have been unpacked elsewhere (Garland and Rowe, 2001; Burdsey, 2007; 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 (Hartmann, 2000; Carrington and McDonald, 2001; Long and Hylton, 2002; Hylton, 2009). In relation to this, Burdsey (2007: 9) significantly draws on the work of Parker and Lynn (2002) to emphasise 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 racialised 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 antiracism interventions (Bonnett, 1993, 2000). However, at the same time we ought to acknowledge that some critics contend that representations of antiracism often trivialise the politics of antiracism to a reductive exercise, whose focus is sometimes just to be *against racism* (Gilroy, 2002). For example organisations in sport that endorse antiracism charters have been accused of doing no more than engaging in symbolic rather than practical acts of antiracism. Therefore, being

against racism necessitates behavioural change rather than relying on the wearing of a band or the signing of a document..

### **Critical Race Theory**

For those living within W.E.B. DuBois' 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 racialised 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 as critical race theorists have utilised 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) as she encourages us to challenge conventional ideas and practices in a way that encourages new tools and ideas in 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 that 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 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' (Hylton, 2009). CRT confronts 'race-neutrality' in policy and practice and acknowledges the value of 'the black<sup>1</sup> 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 Stefancic 2001). CRT has also been described as a *hybrid* discipline [emphasis added] 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 to be 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

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<sup>1</sup> Though it is recognised 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.

must also constitute this challenge to racism and racialisation; that social justice and transformation must also be a significant element of a CRT project; centering 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 theorising 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 racialised 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 antiracist interventions. Hence collectivities should be as much part of the focus of antiracism 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, antiracism should be mainstreamed in the core business of sport.

### **CRT, 'Race' and Racism**

A misreading of CRT's pragmatic use of the constructed idea of 'race' would lead to a view that it is used unproblematically, reinforcing racial thinking. Antiracists like others tangling with the thorny issues intersecting the racialisation 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 racialised discourses and applies them pragmatically. Antiracists cannot approach these issues unproblematically without reinforcing myths, stereotypes and inequalities. 'Race' as a social construct in itself must be recognised by antiracists but not to the point where it is trivialised and rendered unimportant (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Similarly, CRT's anti-essentialist standpoint cautions antiracists to be critical of using 'race' and its related constructed categories unproblematically (Nanton, 1989, Glover, 2009).

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 recognises that the end of 'race' cannot be so just by proclaiming it, or wanting it to be. Neither do they accept the lesser convincing reductionist views that reify 'race' and spawn some antiracist responses in sport (Back, Crabbe, and Solomos, 2001). An understanding of antiracism must come from an appreciation of racial processes that influence the representation and organisation of individual bodies and social structures. Our racialised 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 racialisation (Murji and Solomos 2005), just as they can be challenged and transformed (Omi and Winant, 1994; 2002; Westwood, 2002). Where racialisation 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 inevitably sport. 'Racial projects' occur in sport e.g. at the level of sport, coach ideologies about physicality and intellectual abilities do little more than reinforce biological differences and racialised binaries (Spracklen 2008). However, antiracism in sport must take on different forms because the racial projects that Omi and Winant speak of are multifarious. Antiracists must recognise and understand the version of 'race' thinking, racialisation or as Gilroy would argue 'raciology' being manifest through racial projects; and, importantly, how they influence racial relations or resource allocations, in their broadest sense, along the fissures of 'race'. In sport there are many examples of everyday racial projects that exemplify processes that organise resources along racial lines in seemingly 'natural' ways. For example, these processes were emphasised 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 King, 2004; Burdsey 2007). Both discursive and behavioural practices can be identified as targets for antiracists, 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 centralise intersecting forms of oppression, but without ignoring any racialised 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 antiracists because they are explicit and covert, individual, institutional and societal, routinised 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, Colourblindness and Antiracism**

Antiracism must pose a level of resistance to sport's pluralist ideologies of 'level playing fields' and 'colourblindness'. 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 colourblindness is framed has utility in explaining some of the complexities of antiracism and also why colourblindness is such a central target for critical race theorists. For Bonilla-Silva, abstract liberalism, naturalisation, cultural racism, and minimisation 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 antiracism, which denies the state's role in contributing to and reinforcing racialised inequalities (Omi and Winant, 2002; Winant, 2001; Wieviorka 1995, Cross and Keith, 1993). Where the moral high-ground becomes blurred in this issue, especially in the public sector, the strategies to challenge racism and racialised processes are 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 because of CRT's transformatory but 'anti-competitive' approach.

In sport, positive action or equality strategies that attempt to rebalance historical inequalities are sometimes criticised for their denial of resources to those whose status in the past has rendered them able to be 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 as a follow up to his 2008 budget speech where he said 'most of our sports federations do not have a transformation agenda, except on paper only' [!] (Stofile, 2008), Sports Minister Makhenkesi Stofile spoke on the subject of deracialisation 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 [Emphasis added to the original] (Stofile, 2009).

Social justice and transformation are core goals of CRT. As In Stofile's example, policy and practice cannot be blind to racialised relations, especially regarding services and facilities. For Stofile, as for critical race theorists, transformation means a challenge to the status quo caused by historical racialised privileges that still maintain a residual value. Where approaches to antiracism in sport deny that the under-representation of black people is a real problem, or even the need for state intervention is not necessary in prioritising the resourcing of some over others, then they approach social justice with an ahistorical, colour blind approach. CRT is supportive but critical of the liberal incrementalism of regulative change from the Left. History has shown that the gains made through the legal system and state sponsored racial equality are unsatisfactory 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 argument to suggest 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 rendered invisible by conventional modes of thinking. 'Race', class, gender and their intersections 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 a CRT standpoint (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). CRT contests traditional approaches to critical studies especially where studies challenge power relations *without necessarily* challenging racialised relations. Professional environments too, with their cloaks of authenticity, must not be overlooked by antiracists because 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) utilises narrative to illustrate how whiteness processes structure the experiences and identities of sport coaches, just as Long et al's case studies enable antiracists to understand the real world experiences of players in amateur sport as their racialised experiences of playing and administering their sport are revealed. Similarly, Burdsey's (2007) use of narrative enabled a demystifying of myths and stereotypes of Asians in sport. Far from essentialising experiences and reducing the diversity of ethnic groups CRT approaches to storytelling and counter-storytelling allow antiracists to more fully understand 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-theorised that antiracists



are urged to recognise this disparity. As in the 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**

Antiracism 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 oppression. However, what is argued here 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 – their antiracist arguments are diluted because of their generalist approach to specific issues in relation to racism (Singer, 2005; Burdsey, 2007; Hylton, 2009: 38). They consistently fail to consider the constants of 'race', racism and antiracism 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. It could be argued that the dominant concepts, theories or 'tools' used to interrogate 'race', racism and antiracism in sport did/do not facilitate this in a direct fashion and so for many 'race', racism, antiracism 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 criticised many of their own intellectual developments as incremental, narrow and myopic (Hylton, 2005, 2009: 37; Coalter, 2000; Deem, 1999). In some cases the marginalisation (or even ghettoisation) of gender in sport and leisure theorising still dwarfs the work of those that include 'race' and ethnicity, racism and antiracism in their analyses. Sport and leisure theory, policy and practice can be seen 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 racialised inequalities within this significant cultural product (Burley and Fleming, 1997; Carrington and McDonald 2001; Watson and Scraton (2001) Williams, 2001; Singer, 2005; Burdsey, 2007; Zirin, 2007; Spracklen, 2008; Hylton, 2009; Carrington, 2009; Long and Spracklen, forthcoming),

There are emerging 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 because they dispense with some very significant preliminaries that have caused antiracism, diversity and equality initiatives to be incremental in nature, slowing the pace of change (Spracklen et al, 2006; Hylton, 2009). Critical Race Theorists are ostensibly pragmatists whose experience and reading of academic and policy text, 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 antiracist perspective has been utilised. 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 the racial formation that is the reinforcement of whiteness in mainstream grassroots 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, remains a mystery.

Myths and stereotypes surrounding British Asians around physicality and sporting competence, diet and religion, parental influence and careers dominate the way their exclusion is framed. Racist practices are justified along commonsense explanations of self-exclusion and cultural dissonance reinforcing further a specific kind of colour-blindness that excludes British Asians. Part of this denial is based upon the symbolic constructions of inclusion through using African-Caribbean role models who have reached the highest levels, despite their numbers being severely restricted amongst those who administer and officiate the game at all levels (Long et al 2000; Back, Crabbe and Solomos, 2001; Hylton, 2005; Burdsey, 2007). 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, Crabbe and Solomos (2001: 8) 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 racialised *presences and absences*. They further describe a confused and sometimes Janus-faced profession unable to articulate what antiracism is, beyond *a good idea* whilst simultaneously being prepared to deny or trivialise racism and its impacts. This is not unique to football as cricket has been criticised 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 antiracists to engage with everyday constructions of 'race' in a way that acknowledges its complex manifestations (racisms) and, in particular, the dynamic process of racialisation which has been lacking from many strategies in sport.

### **Everyday Antiracism and 'Speech Acts'**

In questioning 'antiracism' and in relation to reframing policies and strategies, critical race theorists are likely to argue that not all forms of antiracism are valid (Beneton, 2001) because not all forms of antiracism are as useful or 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 antiracist (Gillborn, 2006). Further, Bonnett (2000) rightly argues that antiracism is not the inverse of racism either, antiracism is much more subtle, situated and bespoke. There is no *one* antiracism. It is even possible that being committed to forms of antiracism can function as a mechanism of racism whereby they unwittingly reinforce racial myths (Hylton, 2009). Antiracism 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 antiracist responses, historically located and resource-led with some form of political or ideological position to uphold (Hylton, 2009: 106; 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 antiracism. CRT would encourage an antiracist agenda focusing on those in sporting establishments and hierarchies. Their hegemonic racialised 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 the casual racist behaviour by spectators to more institutional racialised 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 (Reins, 1998). Essed (2002) explains how this everydayness emerges as racist notions inextricably link to the meanings that make actions 'manageable and understandable'.

CRT can explain the emergence of some antiracism initiatives through the concept of interest convergence and popularised by Derrick Bell a founder member of CRT in North America (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Bell, 1992). Interest convergence takes as its main point that anti-oppression successes such as desegregation or affirmative [positive] action tend to be as a result of the convergence of interests for 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. Antiracism 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 antiracism 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 FiFPro in Austria and Switzerland (where the International European Championship was being held) actively resisting any implication that the game would tolerate such antisocial behaviour. Antiracist slogans were everywhere.

Antiracism promises can, however, perpetuate inequalities through their non-performance (Ahmed, 2006). Ahmed (2006) calls these symbolic commitments to antiracism 'institutional speech acts'. Where a commitment to antiracism 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 organisation to racial equality or antiracism, or educational institutions to critical pedagogy or internationalised 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 organisations that sign antiracist charters in sport but then proceed to do little if anything in the way of establishing the necessary conditions to foster change in their own sphere of influence. For example FIFA, the world governing body for Association football, was criticised in *The Guardian* newspaper for rolling back on its commitment to "take discrimination very seriously" when it fined Croatian football authorities only £15000 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 £45000, they levied on Spanish football authorities for a similar act. CRT argues for transformation not piecemeal incrementalism.

The act of declaring a commitment to antiracism 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 organisations identified in the research completed on a range of sports 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 organisations. 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 organisations 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 antiracism and race equality are raised while often less is delivered (Solomos and Ball, 1990: 222).

### **(Anti) Racism 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 theorising 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: 410) 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 lead 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), organisational (institutional) and societal (structural) (Solomos and Ball, 1990; Bulmer and Solomos, 1999; Gillborn, 2006, 2009).

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 antiracist discussions underpinned by narrow conceptions of racism that 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 racialised processes that 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 rationalisation that is important but not yet complete (see fig 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 semantical turn that revolves upon a relatively narrow consideration of whether a person should be considered a racist if they were to commit a racist act. Blum, for example, (2002: 28) 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 antiracist 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.'*

**[INSERT FIGURE 1: Long and McNamee (2004) A Racist Register]**

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 rationalise their circumstances and behaviours in relation to others less privileged in society. This leads to a reinforcement of racialised 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 *The Guardian* and also 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 nxxxxer. Bonilla-Silva (2006) would 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 he thought 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 rationalisation 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 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 antiracist 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’ unproblematised, trivialised 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 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 to explore these racialised experiences; privilege these marginalized voices and allow them to inform antiracism.

### **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. Howard Griffin *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 a black man. This ‘horrificing’ 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. These new experiences that begin to explain the ‘voluntary’ development of black communities in parts of the city, now studied through concepts like the racialisation of space, also illustrated for Howard Griffin the previous behavioural traits of black people towards him in response to recurring and recursive practices; the impact of these everyday acts find their expression in how and where people play sport too. 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. For Howard Griffin 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 Griffin, 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 counters suggestions by Long and McNamee (2004). It is not anticipated that anyone could offer any punitive measure to prevent a stare but where they form part of a regularized, unconscious and deliberate forms of wider racialised social relations we must recognize this, and its implications, by using a critical antiracist 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 antiracists to change and transform. The 'everydayness' of racism is a challenge for antiracism, 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 initially 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 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 antiracists.

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 (2004). These researchers (2004: 410) 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 that justice cannot be merely theoretical (Parker and Lynn, 2002:12) 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 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 racialisation, racist discourses and hierarchies and everyday micro-aggressions is more likely to offer a more realistic and practical starting point for antiracists. Omi and Winant (2002) suggest that although racism can emanate from any group or individual we must recognise 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 racialised power rooted in historical events and microaggressions that emphasises even further the complexities and dialectical nature of everyday racism.

Critical Race Theorists would argue that in a racist society antiracism 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 antiracism. A practical CRT framework maintains the potential for antiracists to adopt a critical standpoint that can challenge mainstream agendas and epistemologies and therefore transform them (Hylton, 2005, 2009). Utilising CRT in antiracist 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 colourblindness, 'race' logic and racialised processes. Antiracists 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 symbolic. It is also clear that the conditions that need to be in place for effective antiracism performance must be sufficient so that thought, commitment, and performance are synchronised to ensure that these initiatives do not perpetuate the status quo.

**Figure 1**

**Long and McNamee (2004: 413) A Racist Register**

<b>Ethically Excusable</b>			<b>Ethically Inexcusable</b>
Ethically disabled	Ethically immature		Committed racist
Ignorance	Misperception/misrecognition		Evil
One-off racist remark (out of character)	Occasional		Typical (in character)
Unintentional	Negligent		Premeditated
Incapable of change	Amenable to change/education		Entrenched

## Key Critical Race Theory Themes

Key CRT Themes	Myths
1. 'Race' and racism are central to any theorising or intervention. Racism is not aberrational or rare –The question is not <b>DO WE</b> live in a racist society but the contention that <b>WE DO</b> live in a racist society.	<p><i>Myth – The concept 'Race' is used unproblematically reinforcing racial thinking – It is argued that CRT navigates the landscape of racialised discourses and applies them pragmatically.</i></p> <p><i>Myth – Other social factors are subordinate to 'Race' and Racism - CRT does not present a hierarchy of oppressions and seeks to centralise intersecting forms of oppression but without ignoring any racialised dimension especially where it has been ignored in the past.</i></p>
2. CRT presents a challenge to dominant ideas of objectivity, meritocracy, colour-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity.	<p><i>Myth - CRT is a narrow critique of white society –</i></p> <p>CRT is more a <u>series of critiques</u> seeking to positively disrupt and transform racialised power relations regardless of the actors involved. Whiteness (processes) rather than white people (social construct)</p>
3. Social justice, and transformation are core goals of CRT.	<p><i>Myth - CRT is targeted solely on an unreasonable and unrealistic agenda for change –</i></p> <p>CRT is supportive but critical of the momentum of the liberal incrementalism of the Left. The gains made through the legal system, and state sponsored racial equality are unsatisfactory and slow.</p>

<p><b>4.</b> Centralise the marginalised voice...naming realities</p>	<p><i>Myth – CRT is reductionist in nature as it homogenises ‘the black experience’ –</i>  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-theorised the academy is urged to recognise this disparity. They are often ‘telling the same stories’.</p>
<p><b>5.</b> CRT is trans-disciplinary in the spirit of challenging dogma and orthodoxies.</p>	<p><i>Myth – CRT is focused on the law and education only –</i>  CRT contributes to our wider understanding of racialised social contexts [and so do other frameworks and perspectives]. CRT is necessarily trans-disciplinary and so resists disciplinary strictures and conventions. CRT does not stand in isolation as a theory of the social. And draws from multi-disciplines and perspectives.</p>

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