

‘Race’, sport and leisure: lessons from critical race theory

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ABSTRACT *This paper presents and explores critical race theory (CRT) as an ontological starting point for the study of sport and leisure. CRT is based on five precepts outlined by Solorzano and Yosso that centre ‘race’ and racism, social justice, plurivocality, transdisciplinarity and challenge orthodoxies. There have been a number of recent criticisms and debates amongst leisure and sports studies writers that challenge their general focus of study as narrow and myopic. The five precepts have been fundamental to radical shifts in critical legal studies over the past fifteen years and have significance for the development of critical sport and leisure theory. CRT and ‘race’ critical perspectives are drawn out, clarified and their mutual agendas focussed. It is argued here that researchers and writers need urgently to centralize ‘race’ and racism as core factors in the study of social relations in sport if Birrell’s optimism in the development of sport (and leisure) theory is to be realised.*

Introduction

This paper presents and explores critical race theory (CRT) as an ontological starting point for the study of sport and leisure. Research agendas dominated by what could be viewed as an elitist Eurocentric social science are foci for part of this transformation. The resultant outcome of using a CRT perspective is likely to lead towards a resistance to a passive reproduction of the established practices, knowledge and resources, that make up the social conditions that marginalize ‘race’ as a core factor in the way we manage and experience our sport and leisure. Mainstream agendas and epistemologies are therefore simultaneously transformed (Birrell, 1989; Messner, 1992; Layder, 1994; Rowe, 1998; Collins, 2000). This paper consists of three sections, concluding with a call to sport and leisure theorists and policymakers to centralize ‘race’, racism, and race equality in their everyday considerations. Section one contrasts CRT and ‘race’ critical theory and rationalises their mutual transformative social capacities. Solorzano and Yosso’s (2001) five precepts of CRT are then outlined as a framework from which to consider an emergent development in sport and leisure theorising. Section two maps out the parallel developments of critical theory in sport and leisure sociology and the more advanced critical legal studies experience, which gives an insight into what can be

achieved when writers develop a critical 'race'-centred approach. It further introduces a critical black ontology that has many supporters in the study of sport such as Henderson (1988), Hemingway (1999) and Scraton (2001), although few active in advancing theoretical frameworks in which to challenge dominant paradigms and epistemologies in the study of sport or related areas such as Birrell (1989), Anthias (1998) and McDonald and Birrell (1999). After sketching out these theoretical links the implications for the study of 'race' and racism in sport and leisure are spelled out in section three. More importantly, critical race theory is advanced as a worthy theoretical framework from which to interrogate issues of 'race', and to refocus the theoretical lens onto anti-oppressive theory, race equality and related areas in sport and leisure studies.

Birrell's (1989) optimistic view of the sociology of sport as a field of study moving purposefully to a more critical theoretical position is one worthy of further consideration. Her argument that a black ontology would centre the experience of black people, where before it had been at the margins of such work in sport and leisure, has merit. This would ultimately result in the location of black people and their relations being viewed in a different light. That is, as purposive actors in their own 'real worlds' as opposed to passive 'victims' in increasingly pathologized stories; similarly whiteness does not escape this theoretical lens. This is accomplished by ensuring the experiences of marginalized groups come through clearly in the stories disseminated by and to research and policy communities. A critical black theoretical standpoint challenges social scientists to (re)interpret the black experience, racial formations and processes in the study of 'race' and race equality, therefore generating a more liberating and emancipatory discourse. Collins (1990) exemplified this debate when she accused white social science of struggling to maintain the credibility of being the most appropriate viewpoint from which to study 'race' and racism in society. However, the 'race' biased knowledge of white social science would be far more difficult to maintain were emergent themes, ideas and perspectives reflecting black experiences in sport evident (Goldberg, 1993; Carrington, 1998a; Gramann and Allison, 1999; Jones, 2002).

Authors such as Bulmer and Solomos (2004), Gunaratnam (2003), Coates (2002), Twine and Warren (2000) and Stanfield II (1994) argue that researchers and writers need to urgently centralize 'race' and racism(s) as core factors in the study of wider social relations. Such actions improve and enhance the bodies of knowledge pertinent to 'race', racialization and racial formations as they 'challenge and transform' epistemologies and ways of thinking about the world (Gunaratnam, 2003). This has the effect of questioning everyday assumptions about socially constructed groups that often become the foundation for myth and folklore (e.g. identity, homogeneity). Stanfield II's challenge is that we *all* should establish new lines of inquiry whilst criticising traditional epistemologies, rather than acquiescing to their hegemony.

Critical race theory and 'race' critical theory

The juxtapositioning here of CRT and 'race' critical perspectives is a practice that Essed and Goldberg (2002) argue is not a regular enough occurrence in the social sciences. They are critical of what they see as academic parochialism, that they

only see CRT applied to socio-legal issues. CRT is, however, a pragmatic perspective that engages a theoretical framework that has been applied as effectively to education as freely as it has been rigorously applied to US law (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker, 1998). The unapologetic focus on 'race', racism and anti-subordination translates the best of what is seen as theory from late modernity whilst pragmatically sponsoring the anti-essentialism of post-structural and post-modern ideals. According to Valdes *et al.* (2002):

the trick is to forge a potent theory and praxis through a critical and self-critical melding of identity-conscious analysis, anti-essentialist politics, and anti-subordination principles. (Valdes *et al.* 2002: 3.)

The agendas and foci of critical race theory and 'race' critical theory are complementary, although they have been the subject of some conflation and misinterpretation even though there is more to unite than separate them. Seidman's (2004) analysis of critical race theory is one such example of the misplacing of 'race' critical theory and critical race theory labels as he juxtaposes the work of Asante, West, hooks, and Appiah. Implicit in Seidman's analysis is the notion that the use of the term CRT can be used interchangeably with 'race' critical theory. One point of departure for race critical theorists such as Appiah (1992) and CRT writers has been the centring of 'race' that has left CRT writers open to accusations of being essentialist or deterministic. This fundamental CRT standpoint on 'race' and racism is a topic for re-examination by CRT writers and explored further in this paper. Although many approaches are shared by both sets of writers in terms of social justice and their challenges to orthodoxies, Seidman's critique of CRT writers implies their explicit adoption of a CRT framework, which these writers have not, even though the work of hooks, and West in particular have been instructive in the development of critical 'race' perspectives in the USA. By not offering a CRT framework from which to locate these theorists Seidman consequently presents the views of 'race' critical theorists as critical race theorists.

Over the years 'race' critical theorists have, according to Goldberg (1993), and later in his work with Essed (2002), been critical of CRT as its global impact has been reduced due to (i) its primary focus over the 1980s and 1990s being with the law (*sic*), and (ii) because they would like to see a more 'generous...acknowledgement of the conceptual debt to the wider history of racial theorizing in the critical tradition' (Essed and Goldberg, 2002: 4). Goldberg (1993) was clear in his appreciation of CRT principles when he posited that:

In contrast to liberalism's universalism and postmodernism's communitarian particularism, a [CRT] commitment against racism must seek to resist specific forms and expressions of exclusion, exploitation, and oppression, to transform particular racist social formations in the name of general principles of social transformation. (Goldberg 1993: 214.)

However, in excluding the work of CRT writers such as Patricia Williams, Lawrence Parker, Kimberle Crenshaw, Richard Delgado and Gloria Ladson-Billings, Essed and Goldberg's (2002) prospects of incorporating the best of 'race' critical writing over recent history became flawed when they responded to their critical second point (above) by excluding CRT writers from their text '*Race Critical Theories*'. An opportunity was missed to draw together key forms of 'race' theorizing that would have allowed readers to see the overlap between these two

complimentary theoretical areas, although the benefits are not ignored here. As an umbrella concept 'race' critical theory embraces CRT; however CRT embraces 'race' critical theory only where some of the basic tenets outlined below are seriously considered. Finally in response to Seidman it can be concluded that CRT is necessarily 'race' critical theory although the five precepts (outlined below) give an indication that 'race' critical theory is not necessarily CRT.

The five precepts of critical race theory

This paper supports the principles that maintain a CRT perspective. A CRT framework as outlined below acts as an umbrella for a range of views. The points discussed here are presented as a foundation to approaching matters of 'race' in sport and society. It engages constructively with anti-essentialist ideals and significantly, rejects the canons and beliefs that have afflicted the work of some writers such as those critiqued by Seidman, and Chong-Soon Lee, such as Appiah (1992), who deny the efficacy of 'race' as a social category. It is useful at this juncture to point out that CRT perspectives should be as fluid and dynamic as the problems they attempt to tackle. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) illustrate this as they offer a breakdown of five significant points that draw out the main ideas of CRT. The first involves centralizing 'race' and racism at the same time as recognizing their connection with other forms of subordination and oppression (Gordon *et al.*, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Parker, 1998). For example, class cannot be theorized in isolation from 'race', as Marxists might wish, as 'race' must be central to the theorizing of class relations from a CRT viewpoint (Nebeker, 1998). Anthias (1998) has further argued that although there is some recognition amongst writers and researchers that 'race' and ethnicity are significant, they have done little more than acknowledge this as they wander onto more familiar theoretical terrain. Stanfield II (1993) also asks researchers to consider less the question of methodology but more the notion of an epistemology that gives a more accurate picture of the black experience in society. Back *et al.* (2001) are keen to follow this advice as their investigations into racism in football demonstrate the need for innovation and diversity in their methodologies to show how racism is a:

Multiply inflected and changing discourse...this involves understanding how forms of inclusion and exclusion operate through the interplay of overt racist practice and implicit racialized codings. (Back *et al.*, 2001: 6.)

In the public sector, underlying the development of equal opportunities policies since the 1950s, has been a worldview that draws its reasoning from a racialized, race-biased discourse (Nanton, 1989). This discourse has as its basic principle an oversimplified reductionist tenet that reinforces biological arguments, homogeneity and universalism (Harris, 2003). Gordon *et al.* (1990) give this process the label 'communicentric'. In leisure policy this communicentricism, or marginalization of 'race' is manifest in the lexicon of policy makers who have promulgated a vocabulary that legitimates rather than challenges the notion of 'race', monolithic racial identities and the black 'other' (Gilroy, 1987; Cross and Keith, 1993; Goldberg, 1993; Back *et al.*, 1999; Thomas and Piccolo, 2000; LMU, 2003).

Second, CRT challenges traditional dominant ideologies around objectivity, meritocracy, colour-blindness, race-neutrality and equal opportunity (Nebeker, 1998; Solorzano and Yosso, 2001; Gardiner and Welch, 2001). Nebeker's (1998) recommendation to those in education that a CRT perspective would allow a powerful dismantling of colour-blind and 'race'-neutral policies is an invitation that could be easily extended to those who write and implement policy in sport and leisure (see Lyons, 1991; Sports Council, 1994; LMU, 2003). The challenge to mainstream writers and practitioners is that for too long they have hidden behind these discourses as black people have waited, hoped and fought for change and now it is time for the orthodoxies to be contested further and in a more sustained way than they have been in the past. The implications for sport policy and practice are immense although the reality is, as Nebeker (1998: 26) insightfully stated, 'difficult to apply as it is based on addressing the concerns of people of colour, yet people of colour do not comprise the popular majority of educators, administrators or policymakers'. In addition a CRT lens turned upon the mainstream writing of sport and leisure studies throws light upon a domain that traditionally reflects the power and knowledge interests of white social science.

Solorzano and Yosso's (2001) third tenet is that CRT has a clear commitment to social justice that incorporates elements of liberation and transformation. A critical ontology ensures that where a writer/researcher is conscious of the crucial social processes that structure his/her world they take those ideas forward as their starting point. That is, where racism and the distribution of power and resources disproportionately marginalize black people's position in society, sport, local government and any other major social structures, then they will ensure that those issues stay at the centre of their investigations or lens, rather than at the comfortable rim. West's (1989) starting point is that black consciousness should be a focus for a challenge to Eurocentric, patriarchal (homophobic) agendas. So, for example, as a critical black theorist he considered postmodernist debates not so much for their emancipatory content but more to find out the context, actors and location of these arguments as an opportunity to position black opposition to the hierarchies of power.

It is this centralizing of the marginalized voice that is often tabled as a significant contributory aspect of CRT and is the fourth principle outlined next by the two writers. Storytelling and counter-storytelling methodologies are thus seen as 'race' centred research that can effectively voice the experiences of black people in a bid to offer different or competing versions of the 'truth' that is often the prerogative of white social scientists (Delgado, 1995). Henderson (1998) offered a post-positivist critical framework to be utilized by feminists, or writers with other social agendas, to explore the meaning of leisure from the perspective of Other individuals in the social system (see Aitchison, 2000). That is, to centralize the experiences of women or black people in such a way that any engagement with marginalized or alienated groups becomes a political one. Authors therefore embrace the researched, and researchers' grounded values that are frowned upon in positivist research. Henderson and others also support this as a major thrust of enlightened meaningful research. A CRT viewpoint allows us to get a clearer understanding of the major structures involved in the organization of leisure and sport, which is crucial when racial-equality is the ultimate target. A focus on power processes,

white hegemony, racism and equality, account for some of the contemporary concerns that have perplexed 'race' theorists and complicated the study of 'race', at the same time as being consistently ignored by mainstream theorists.

The fifth element posited by Solorzano and Yosso (2001) is the transdisciplinary nature of CRT. As much as CRT, sport and leisure studies are necessarily multidisciplinary. It is argued that they should not locate themselves in a narrow multidisciplinary straitjacket that might constrain them in explaining modern (or historical) phenomena (Coalter, 1998; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). In their cultural analysis of sport, McDonald and Birrell (1999) go as far as to describe this process as '*anti-disciplinary*'. For want of a better term they attempt to emphasize the need for writers to constantly engage in an intellectual challenge to broaden their theoretical and methodological frames. CRT draws on necessary critical epistemologies to ensure that their social justice agenda intersects to highlight related oppressive processes or the 'multidimensionality' of oppression that affects gender, social class, age or disability (Harris, 1999). Where this, albeit limited, transdisciplinary stance has been employed in sport and leisure, the strengths of critical 'race' analyses have been evident. Scraton's (2001) argument that 'race' cannot be added to other sites or discourses of oppression in an additive fashion draws this aspect of Solorzano and Yosso's (2001) work into sharp relief. For example, the challenge to interrogate phenomena such as whiteness and 'race' in the historical and contemporary developments of sport and leisure, and how processes within sport and society conspire to reinforce or liberate oppressions, is one worth taking (Long and Hylton, 2002).

Limited work have been successful in realizing the potential of theorizing sport phenomena through the strategic use of related critical arenas such as critical cultural studies, sexuality, masculinity and feminist theory, class, 'race' critical theory, history, politics, discourse analysis, post-structural, post-modern and post-colonial analyses. Cultural analyses that have juxtaposed 'race', class, masculinity, politics, nation, identity and popular culture, evident in the work of Birrell (1989), Messner and Sabo (1990), Gilroy (1993), Werbner (1996), Carrington (1998b, 2002), Back *et al.* (2001) and Garland (2004) have, in addition to other writers mentioned, demonstrated the potency and insight afforded transdisciplinary techniques. A consideration of these issues is likely to assuage some of the criticisms levelled at leisure and sports studies writers accused of a narrow theoretical focus, although in the case of 'race' a concerted effort is required before an established body of knowledge is formed. Taking this opportunity, critical leisure and sport studies could broaden out their foci and utilize further instructive epistemologies likely to illuminate the multiple intersections of 'race'. Consequently critical sport and leisure studies will be more likely to consider 'race' and racisms with reference to converging social markers and processes such as power, gender, class, and how they play out in sport and leisure contexts. By employing such techniques common ground between CRT, and core sport and leisure studies theory is likely to become more evident, especially where narrow disciplinary epistemologies are rejected.

As a result of this transdisciplinarity there evolves shared theoretical resources with post-structural and post-modern perspectives, of course with Parker and Lynn's (2002: 12) caveat that 'Justice can not be merely theoretical.' CRT writers

are anxious to avoid the ambivalence of postmodern perspectives by adopting a critical theoretical position on 'race' and stratifying structures and processes at the same time as they stress that there are no canons, dogma or methodologies that embrace all CRT scholars. They attempt to use the necessary theoretical devices at their disposal to reinforce their challenge to the privileging mechanisms and accepted orthodoxies in place. Thomas (1993) refers to postmodernists as 'armchair radicals' as they regularly rehearse arguments that challenge traditional, established, modernist, structuralist ways of perceiving things, of which research and practice are two aspects. Their challenge to established grand theory is explicit and has ramifications for critical race theorists who propose oppositionist views to structural racism. hooks (1990) proposes that postmodernist insights should not be overlooked in the maelstrom of abstract, apolitical debates that themselves reinforce racial formations and power relations; even as they champion their 'master-narrative' of difference, otherness and heterogeneity. hooks (1990: 30) goes on to reinforce this view by stating that 'to change the exclusionary practice of postmodernist critical discourse is to enact a postmodernism of resistance.' This postmodernism of resistance is one that West (1989: 91) identified as part of his 'black opposition to the hierarchies of power.' Maynard (2002: 112) also sponsors West's cautionary approach to postmodernist ideas as she considers the effect of over-emphasizing difference, otherness or heterogeneity in feminist research '*which runs the risk of masking the conditions that give some forms of difference value and power over others*' [emphasis added]. This can lead to the detriment of anti-racist projects whose substantive agenda is 'race' and anti-racism, thus the conditions that Collins (2000) argues are symbolic for uniting black women activists are those that strategically employ the notion of difference that could dilute their efforts if used uncritically.

Leisure and sports studies: reflections on critical theory

There have been a number of recent criticisms and debates amongst leisure and sports studies writers that challenge their own focus of study as narrow and myopic (Deem, 1999; Coalter, 2000; Hemingway and Wood Parr, 2000). Their concern has been the limited research agenda, incidentally in which 'race' issues have been peripheral, where specific concerns were seen to have been played out too often both here and in the US. Of this Coalter added that:

Leisure studies would benefit from a wider debate about some of the 'domain assumptions', a greater plurality of perspectives and greater clarity in the meaning and relevance of certain widely used terms. (Coalter, 2000: 38.)

Clearly an agenda for change is being advanced by Coalter (2000). Just as Deem (1999), Gramann and Allison (1999) and Hemingway (1999) are supporting a carefully constructed agenda that does not marginalize equity and issues of inclusion. Deem (1999) in reflecting upon gender and leisure studies, a relatively well-documented body of knowledge compared to 'race' and equality issues, complained of a 'ghettoization' of gender by other leisure researchers in their analyses. Deem's (1999) argument to locate gender in the mainstream is a question a long way off the slowly developing interests in the analysis of 'race' in sport and leisure in the

UK. This systematic neglect of 'race' is of some concern (Floyd, 1998; Back *et al.*, 1999; Stodolska, 2000; Carrington and McDonald, 2001; Scraton 2001).

A cursory review of the literature that takes a critical view of 'race' related debates would show that there are a number of categories in which similar viewpoints are expressed. Critical race principles can be observed in 'race' critical theory (Essed and Goldberg, 2002), in critical cultural analysis (Williams, 1997; Back *et al.*, 1999; Owusu, 2000; Garland and Rowe, 2001; Lapchick, 2001), in critical black studies (Solomos and Back, 1995; Carrington and McDonald, 2001) and related fields (Ratcliffe, 1999; Kivel, 2002; Long and Hylton, 2002). The few writers to engage with 'race' in informing leisure and sport research have been intent on working towards 'race' centred approaches that would progress a critical theoretical understanding of epistemological approaches in sport and leisure (Floyd, 1998; Gramann and Allison, 1999; Scraton, 2001; Watson and Scraton, 2001). Some writers have been successful in raising the profile of 'race' in understanding sport and leisure contexts to the point where the efficacy of established paradigms are being challenged (Jarvie and Reid, 1997; Floyd, 1998; Henderson, 1998; Back *et al.*, 1999; Gramann and Allison, 1999; Carrington and McDonald, 2001; Long and Hylton, 2002).

However, in attempting to engage a critical theoretical viewpoint, leisure and sport writers in the UK and the US have reached a stage that critical legal scholars had in the US in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This has been exemplified by the recent work of Hemingway (1999) and Hemingway and Wood Parr (2000) as they argue for critical theory to be adopted to challenge the pseudo-scientism of established paradigms in sport and leisure studies. Although in each case each writer misses the opportunity to outline techniques to reduce the chances of 'race' being subsequently marginalized or even ignored. This recent movement towards critical theory encourages writers in sport and leisure to do a number of things in different ways. Critical theory challenges leisure and sport writers to make their research political rather than neutral, transformatory rather than merely critical. It also urges writers to reject paradigms as dogma for more plurivocal epistemologies and methodologies. However, it was critical race theorists that forced a centring of 'race', ultimately defining a new paradigm for legal scholars. This could be the next step for leisure and sport studies in the UK as writers like McDonald (2002: 101) attempt what he calls a radical anti-racist agenda in sport. He urges us to 'reconcile a commitment to progressive political change with sound sociological scholarship'.

By engaging with research that is fundamentally political, McDonald, like many feminist writers and critical race theorists, challenges the concept of value-neutrality, positions himself within a cause and attempts to identify the criteria for the transformation of, in his case, the racist institution of cricket. Where Henderson (1988), Birrell (1989), Anthias (1998) and McDonald and Birrell (1999) are agitating for change, and where Hemingway's (1999, 2000) work needs further consideration, it is for leisure and sports studies to develop a meaningful theoretical framework for 'race' and race equality. Where McDonald differs from CRT writers is in his criticism of the 'researcher as activist' technique, which he sees as separate albeit contiguous roles. McDonald's apprehension is one of traditional attachment/detachment rigour. However, the researcher as activist role has been

utilized explicitly in innovative work in Ben-Tovim *et al.*'s (1986, 1992) ethnographic study, and advocated by CRT writers Crenshaw *et al.* (1995), Williams (1997), Delgado and Stefancic (2000), who argue that the researcher should be part of the process and their reasons for doing the research should not just be implicit in the work. This self-reflexive aspect of Bhopal's work 'on and for' Asian women was emphasized as a crucial element of her work. Here these principles allowed Bhopal to,

Examine and question the differences and similarities (in terms of gender and 'race') that exist between the researcher and the researched and how this affects access, the influence of personal experience and power (Bhopal, 2000: 70).

Writers need to centralize 'race' and racism in their analyses and research agendas. Where 'race' has been ignored, include it, where it has been marginalized, centre it, and where it has been problematized, theorise it. 'Race' is not centred consistently in leisure and sport analyses although as stated earlier the development of a critical theory of 'race' in leisure and sport does mirror the emergence of critical race theory in the US. It is to this that we now turn after the implications of critical theory in the sociological analyses of sport and leisure are considered.

Critical theory: implications for leisure and sports studies in the analysis of 'race' and racism

Sport and leisure writers have been keen to emphasize their critical voices over the years (Rojek, 1989; Hargreaves, 1994; Jarvie and Maguire, 1994; Polley, 1998; Sugden and Tomlinson, 2002). Critical theory has the capacity to make a considerable contribution to our understanding of sport and society. Kellner's (1989) belief is that critical theory has as its fundamental underpinnings a critique of domination, and a liberatory focus. He is keen to recognize that under the umbrella of 'critical theory' there are different versions, which have been adapted and transformed by social and historical events. These phenomena have been manifest amongst other things in the shape of research, social problems, and intellectual insight. Harvey (1990) concurs that a critical approach is particularly concerned with attempting to make links between important social issues and wider structural and power relations. Such an agenda facilitates clearer connections with, and conclusions about, oppressive structural relations.

Critical social theorists have made the connection between critical perspectives and their use in research (Gramsci, 1971; Habermas, 1987; West, 1989; Thomas, 1993; Watson and Scraton, 2001; Wray, 2002). That is, the experience and interests of the researcher/writer informing and being overtly part of the process of political liberation and emancipation. Forst's (1996) analysis of critical theory resonates with Watson and Scraton (2001) and Wray's (2002) views on the leisure lives of Asian women as they offer an endorsement to this realm of social research. They link techniques of criticism with the ability for purposive actors to unravel the ambiguities of a constructed society with the 'actual' experiences of marginalized voices that offer up a story from a more gritty existence.

This paper adopts a critical 'race' perspective that aims to 'unearth and transform ideological and institutional arrangements' (Apple, 1996; Nebeker, 1998;

Parker, 1998). That is, the basic standpoint that we live in an unequal society, where resources and power are unevenly distributed, are key aspects of a critical theorist's perspective on society. The need to demystify these social arrangements is a clear aim of critical theorists (Lenzo, 1995; Sugden and Tomlinson, 2002). The message from 'race' critical theorists Essed and Goldberg (2002), which is a source of agreement for sport and leisure writers over the years, is that we should all be concerned with positive social change and processes concerning structure, agency and power (Hargreaves, 1986; Jarvie, 1991; Sugden and Tomlinson, 2002). The critical element of this type of inquiry engages political ideas that without them would render work tame, and therefore unable to influence mainstream agendas. It is argued that critical researchers should be engaged in social and cultural criticism, that there should be recognition of inequality in society, that oppressive dominant forces should be laid bare and challenged, that oppression has to be tackled on more than one front, and significantly, that mainstream epistemologies and research agendas make up part of the forces of oppression. The principles of a CRT approach make up an essential framework from which to invite sport and leisure academics to reconsider their own positions. It can be seen below how research and writing that adopt CRT principles have been considered to be at the cutting edge of emergent critical black and cultural studies research (Stanfield II, 1993; West, 1995; Parekh, 2000).

Contesting 'race': conceptual and theoretical issues

This paper holds that the spectre and discourse of 'race' is so powerful that when it is the point of debate, especially in public policy, the starting point often becomes an unproblematic notion of 'race' that implies a clear association with ethnicity. This is often articulated in a black/white binary¹. On the contrary here, the use of critical race theory does not imply that 'race' is being applied without some tensions in its application. In addition, there is no attempt to deny difference, individuality or identity in this paper by not consistently referring to ethnicity, as it is recognized here that people experience 'race' and racism(s) in different ways. It would be fallacious to talk of a common experience, and monolithic phenomenon of 'race', racism or even blackness or whiteness (hooks and West, 1991; Collins, 2000; Long and Hylton, 2002; Harris, 2003; Frankenberg, 2004). But rather, in theoretical analyses, writers sometimes have to acknowledge that these debates are ensuing and at the same time we must accept a theoretical frame from which to move if inequality, 'race' and racism in society are to be the ultimate foci of our energies. Hence this paper's predilection for the use of 'race', especially as its power as a social category is still persuasive for many others, similarly, blackness as a core signifier of political unity is utilized strategically here (Husband, 1984; Cornell and Hartmann, 1998; Essed and Goldberg, 2002; Ward and Lott, 2002).

Accepting 'race'

'Race' as ideology and theories of 'race' are useful theoretical explanations for its use in critical studies (Guillaumin, 1995). However, to *acknowledge* the social and physical differences that make up these 'races', as critical writers on 'race'

do, is not the same as *agreeing* that they essentially determine intellectual, social or physical attributes (Lewis, 1998). Chong-Soon Lee (1995) warns writers that 'race' is defined not by its inherent content but by the social relations that construct it. She challenges Appiah's (1992) view that 'race' has no ground to give it meaning apart from where there is racist intent. Appiah's argument that ethnicity or culture should substitute for 'race' is a belief that does not fully recognize the institutionalized discourse of 'race' and therefore the historical cultural markers that go with it. Chong-Soon Lee goes on to argue that Appiah's condemnation of 'race' fails to recognize the social nature of the concept. The 'racialization' or meaning attached to relations in sport will not disappear and neither will its racial formations. Sport fulfils a number of roles in society that fix and sharpen our views that define:

...the already established boundaries of moral and political communities; to assist in the creation of new social identities; to give physical expression to certain social values and to act as a means of reflecting on those values; to serve as potentially contested space by opposed groups. (MacClancy, 1996: 7.)

The meaning of 'race' changes over context and time, therefore the opportunity for 'race' to be redeployed by critical race theorists to assert the power of social groups is one worth taking. Using the term 'race' in critical race theory is to use a powerful metaphor and to reject it out of hand is to deny a potential political vehicle (see also Haney-Lopez, 2000). Chong-Soon Lee's pragmatics argue for a critical navigation of the definitions of 'race' and a focus on its related social processes rather than becoming stymied by unceasing debates and their limiting outcomes. In achieving political outcomes a critical application of these conceptual and theoretical debates need to be in operation in the discourse of 'race' and race equality in sport and leisure. Goldberg (1993) reiterates how the success of any standpoints on 'race' and racism must depend on their ability to offer resistance to racism(s). To conclude this section, it is argued here that writers should navigate the various meanings of racialized discourses but in addition should bias their efforts toward transforming the targets of these competing accounts, rather than solely concentrating on whether definitions are oppressive or otherwise.

Critical race theory and 'race' in leisure and sports studies

Stanfield II (1993) encapsulates the need for writers to engage with 'race', ethnicity, equality, and policy in sport, when he wrote, 'There is a great need to begin to treat racial and ethnic studies as a serious area of inquiry, worthy of epistemological and theoretical reflections and innovation.' (Stanfield II, 1993: 6). It has been generally agreed that critical race theory is a theoretical framework that has emerged from the writing predominantly of black scholars in North America (Delgado, 1995; Nebeker, 1998; Parker, 1998). CRT has come out of a particular struggle by black legal scholars who in challenging one of the most symbolic bastions of white privilege and power, the legal system, have developed a transdisciplinary tool in which to oppose the hegemonic influence of the white establishment. The legal system embodies a conspicuous site of struggle that says as much about who has power and who is privileged in society as who has not. It is also in this arena where battles are fought that have a massive impact upon the way black

and white people engage with social systems on an individual and collective basis. Further, not only does CRT shape the discourses of minds closed to 'race' centred perspectives they also wish to influence the lethargy in liberal critiques of those debates. CRT writers argue that:

Racism has been ingrained through historical consciousness and events, and that racist ideologies have directly shaped the law, racial categories, and racial privilege (Parker, 1998: 45).

Haney-Lopez (2000) emphasized the role the legal system plays in constructing the notion of 'race' and racial identities and why a critical 'race' consciousness is necessary to uncover the assumptions and presumptions implicit and explicit in the way structures in society work. Sport, just like the law, can be observed as a key tool in the subjugation of black people and the magnification of the place of 'race' as a major mediating factor within society; in sport many have made these connections (Carrington and MacDonald, 2001; Lapchick, 2001; Marqusee, 2003). Sport, like the law, is supposed to be a 'level playing field' however there is a body of knowledge to suggest otherwise. Sport is another racially contested arena that is used as a 'ring to wrestle' for academics, participants and policymakers. As much as our cultural background is mediated by the intersection of gender and class, critical sport and leisure sociology is beginning to focus on these and other more conventional fronts concerning racial formations and related processes around gender, identity, nation, racism(s), and related policy developments (Marqusee, 1994, 2003; MacClancy, 1996; Carrington and MacDonald, 2001; Watson and Scraton, 2002); racism(s) (Shropshire, 1996; Polley, 1998; Long, 2000; Lapchick, 2001); and policy (Horne, 1995; Gardiner and Welch, 2001; Hylton, 2003).

Ladson-Billings (1998) goes further to make a crucial distinction between critical legal studies (CLS), and for that matter critical theory, and CRT. Although she has acknowledged that CLS and by default CRT are ostensibly grounded in critical theory, she argues constructively that critical [legal] theorists [like many in sport and leisure studies], have identified the processes and contradictions within institutions that reinforce oppressive social situations, for example discourses, ideologies and other related practices. However, she is critical of two aspects in particular that dilute critical [legal] theory, and for that matter much writing in sport and leisure studies, as a source for transformative action. The first point is that CLS, like sport and leisure studies and Hemingway's (1999, 2000) critical theory, fail to centralize 'race' and racism as a starting point of its critique of social systems. CLS signifies that structures are inequitable, however the political 'race' focus, the emancipatory edge for black people, is not the starting point, yet this is a crucial element of CRT. The second point relates to strategies for transformation. CRT's aim is to give voice to black people, and to make them and their views heard in the system where presently in sport they hold a marginal position. Their need for social justice and transformation, from a public policy perspective, is exemplified in a wish to move beyond slow and painful political gains as witnessed in the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) and local government 'race' standards (CRE, 1995, 1999; LGA, 2001) to more sweeping radical action. In the UK, as in the US, there is a long history of human and civil rights gains, but for many the pace of change negates any meaningful transformations.

The criticism by CLS writers that social power is mediated through the law is a central moral issue for them as they feel that the legal system needs to acknowledge the oppressive social impact of purporting to be neutral, rational and apolitical. As a result, powerful inequalities are reproduced through these social practices that recreate the social conditions for colour-blindness, as one example, to continue (Crenshaw *et al.*, 1995; Gardiner and Welch, 2001). As a colour-blind approach only reinforces racial disadvantage in sport policy formulation, ignoring 'race' and ethnicity causes inconsistencies and fragmentation in both policymaking and service delivery (see Gardiner and Welch, 2001). In their study of 'race' and racism in football, Back *et al.* (2001) found that although black football players have challenged the myth of racism in the game their longevity as coaches, managers and administrators takes on a different guise. Recent high profile examples of colour-blindness in British sport reiterate the disparity between professional black footballers and those who go on to become managers (none at the highest level). A representative from the League Managers' Association stated that:

We don't have any form of positive discrimination [action] because being a football manager should be about ability, regardless of colour. (Sunday Times, 2003: 11).

Similar statements and conditions are typical of other sport and leisure contexts where 'race' has been ignored or marginalized to privilege the white institution over the externalized 'other' (McDonald and Ugra, 1998; Long *et al.*, 2000; Back *et al.*, 2001; Hylton, 2001; Jones, 2002; LMU, 2003).

The targets for CLS activists is not just the conservative right but also the liberal left who put their trust in a system with the vain hope that it will somehow ensure fairness. According to West (1995) CRT challenges both liberals and conservatives whose assumptions are such that they reconstruct white privilege. Also those seen as radicals who have marginalized or stayed silent on 'race' and racism in society are prime targets. This has serious implications for local authority sport providers who refuse to accept a collectivist perspective on race equality (Horne, 1995; Clarke and Speeden, 2000; Hylton, 2003). In fact CLS writers and activists were concerned that the historical inequities and power differentials were continually being reproduced. In addition, people from similar privileged backgrounds were reconstituting those making the key decisions. However, as Ladson-Billings (1998) argues, CRT emerged out of these critical ideas due to the feeling that CLS, which came out of a group predominantly made up of white writers, did not have enough of a focus on 'race'. CRT writers felt it significant enough to centralize 'race' and racism in their challenge to the way hegemonic power relations are constituted. The work of Jones (2002) in his analysis of the experience of black players and administrators in semi-professional football and Carrington's (1998a) study of black masculinity and cultural resistance in cricket are examples of this type of approach. This shifts 'race' from the margins to the centre and enables CRT principles to transform more orthodox approaches to critical sport and leisure developments. It is this shift that Henderson (1988), Birrell (1989), Gramann and Allison (1999) and others are advocating if sport and leisure studies are to adequately accommodate 'race' in their analyses.

Conclusion

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

Critical Race Theory applied to sport and leisure, like feminism, focuses on core social relations and processes of power. 'Race' and racisms are central to any CRT focus and its transdisciplinary nature ensures that disciplinary borders and conventions do not preclude appropriate methodologies or epistemologies from being applied. CRT's political agenda of challenge, change and transformation contributes to the ability of sport and leisure communities to critically reexamine how 'race', and racialized processes and formations are incorporated in their theory and practice. The CRT framework is presented here for serious consideration; whether or not Birrell's (1998) view of the sociology of sport (and leisure) is realised depends upon what happens next.

Note

1. Perea (2000) warns writers of this black/white binary that negates and renders invisible the experiences of those groups not normally considered as black (or white for that matter). This is a common mistake of writers in discussions of 'race' and social policy.

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