‘Race’, Youth Sport, Physical Activity and Health: Global Perspectives.

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Abstract

‘Race’, youth sport, physical activity and health: Global Perspectives is part of the Routledge book series on Critical Perspectives on Equality and Social Justice in Sport and Leisure. This book fulfils its ambition to interrogate ‘race’ and reveal processes of systemic racialization in physical activity and youth sport contexts and educational sites for health and physical education. The Editors, Symeon Dagkas, Laura Azzarito and Kevin Hylton, have drawn together an impressive international collection of contributors who define, conceptualise and empirically demonstrate the manifestations of ‘race’ as a social-political construction and its debilitating effects in physical settings. Drawing upon a range of school, community sport and college/university contexts, the book offers teachers of health and physical education, sport coaches, researchers and academics a searing critique of White hegemony in their places of work and can provide that difficult but important step in becoming a more inclusive profession.

Key words: ‘race’, racialization, Whiteness, intersectionality, pedagogy, sport, physical activity, health education.

Review

The interrogation of Whiteness as a social concept and racialized discourse (Gillborn, 2005) and the application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in youth sport, physical activity and health and physical education is an emerging body of research in the field of Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy (PESP). This is not because Whiteness studies or the application of CRT to sport or physical activity has not been done before but, rather, PESP is finally ready for this

focused critique to occur. Editors Symeon Dagkas, Laura Azzarito and Kevin Hylton's previous contributions to the field have provided meticulous, analytical deconstructions of racialization and intersectionality in health and physical activity, physical education, and sport in separate treatments (e.g., Azzarito, 2016; Dagkas, 2016; Hylton, 2018), which is a good indication of the strength of this book. What this new and first of its kind edited collection offers the PESP academy is a genuine and meaningful attempt to capture the integrated complexity of health and physical education, physical activity and sport in their many internationally recontextualised forms.

As a White-settler, non-Indigenous Australian, my own scholarship into Indigenous knowledges in health and physical education (HPE) and Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) in Australia has learned much from the application of Critical Race Theory in education sites (c.f. McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011). The Editors have built this collection around tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Whiteness studies, as well as intersectionality. Richard Milner (2017) contends that 'interest convergence' as one such tenet of CRT, first coined by Derrick Bell (1980), is a particularly helpful analytical tool to understand racism and systemic processes of racialization in education settings, and therefore, it can be argued, in sport, physical activity and HPE settings. Some have read Bell's (1980) take on interest convergence as pessimistic – that interests between Whites and Others will never really converge. However, notwithstanding the prevalence, some would say permanence, of racism in educational systems, Milner (2008, p. 342) contends that *the pursuit of convergence* exposes racism and inequity in these contexts and therefore enables practitioners to act:

Interest convergence can offer [PETE] added language and tools to discuss race, its presence, its pervasiveness, and its consequence in the field. Among other important realities, inherent in the tensions of convergence between Whites and

others are matters of self and systemic interests and a loss-gain binary' (Milner, 2017, p. 295).

There are 14 chapters following an introduction authored by the editors, Dagkas, Azzarito and Hylton. The introduction serves to explain the origin and evolution of the writing project, to introduce key definitions such as 'race', 'racism' and 'othering', and to leave the reader in no doubt that Black and Ethnic Minority (BAME) bodies in PESP are 'bodies-at-risk'. They note that 'a post-racial era' is a utopian discourse, never more pertinent than now as #BlackLivesMatter movements gain global support and attention. Hylton's Chapter 1 establishes key understandings of 'race', racism and race logic. 'Race' is established as a social-historical construct, a central unit of analysis for understanding 'racism', but also problematically as an 'everyday, pedestrian' enabler in perpetuating scientifically discredited notions of racial 'purity'. He explains essential tenets of CRT in this chapter which assist to draw together the remaining international contributions in coherent ways, namely Whiteness, interest convergence and the importance of counter-narrative.

Whilst it could be argued that all chapters necessarily deal with Whiteness in some way, a number of chapters specifically unpack Whiteness and White privilege. For example, Fitzpatrick and Allen's critique in Chapter 13 argues for the decolonisation of health, revealing how White understandings of health marginalise Indigenous and non-Western ways of 'knowing' health. As *Pakeha* and *Māori* authors writing together, they skilfully work across the cultural interface to introduce international readers to the well-known Māori and Pacific concepts of *Hauora* and *Fonofale* demonstrating the value of such typically excluded knowledges in developing fulsome views of health. Still unpacking Whiteness, in Chapter 3, Hill and Walton-Fisette turn the spotlight upon themselves in their contribution as White educators and their predominantly White students in PETE in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (USA) respectively. They acknowledge the BAME student-led activism from

University College London in generating the movement ‘why is my curriculum White?’ and recount the design of introductory courses in PETE in which students learn to ‘see’ the absences in their hegemonic White curriculum and the value of continuous self-reflection. McCuaig and Phillips’ Australian contribution in Chapter 10 illustrates the language games of Indigenous policy, questioning whether ‘normalisation’ of Indigenous culture to ‘equate’ with non-Indigenous culture is the latest version of assimilation. In health and sport policy rhetoric, White peoples’ life expectancies, health status, ways of living, including how and what sport you may play, are the standards to which Indigenous people must conform, ironically out of a past legacy of prohibited or coerced sport participation. The historical account presented in Chapter 10 demonstrates why shared histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples ‘belong’ in the PETE curriculum. With an empirically informed and sobering critique, Azzarito in Chapter 14 comprehensively revisits and bookends these discussions with a post-colonial, post-feminist lens upon racialized ‘bodies-as-deficit’ in the socio-political construction of ‘health gaps’.

Various understandings of interest convergence are exemplified across several chapters which deal with the exploitation of Black athletes in the USA and the exclusion of South Asian players in the United Kingdom. Crawford’s case in Chapter 5 on the commercialisation of high school sports in the United States of America (USA) illustrates a common example of interest convergence favoured by White administrators, that ‘sport is good’ for Black athletes and ‘good for business’. Crawford’s meticulous argument illustrates the false promise of upward mobility of channelling Black students into sport pathways at the expense of academic ones. With similar empirical research in the school sport to college sport system, Harrison, Crooms and Sales in Chapter 8 deconstruct prevalent stereotypes of superior Black athleticism/inferior academic achievement and the very real consequences for the choices for Black youth as they navigate sport and schooling. The college system remains the focus of attention in Chapter 7 where Van Rheeën also takes up the critique of the experiences of Black athletes on

predominantly White campuses, explaining the reality of ‘institutional resentment’ experienced by the athletes from their high visibility.

The importance of counter-narratives is established with the remaining chapters, which are first framed by Dagkas’ account in Chapter 2 of the increasing recognition of intersectionality in PESP. He notes that ‘acknowledging the existence of multiple intersecting identities in pedagogical contexts’ is essential to understand the complexities of health, sport and physical activity disparities from multiple historically oppressed groups (p.25). This allows the reader to appreciate the complexity of the counter-narratives provided in subsequent chapters such as Kilvington’s insider and outsider accounts in Chapter 11 of British Asians’ experiences of exclusion from football in the United Kingdom. He comprehensively illustrates how the idea of merit is tied to racially framed scouting and recruitment processes, providing multiple counter-stories of the lived experience of exclusion. Similarly, Stride’s narrative research in Chapter 4 speaks back to hegemonic perception of South Asian Muslim young women in the UK as reluctant and or oppressed PE participants. She presents narratives of sameness and difference, illustrating that young Muslim women share many experiences of PE that non-Muslim White students do, but with different consequences. The intersectional lens employed in this chapter enables Stride to show how hegemonic understandings of ‘physical competency’ marked Muslim students differently to non-Muslim students for different reasons, but yet they strategically met their school PE participation requirements in agentic, gendered ways.

The final two chapters discussed here offer racialized critique of the relationships between movement/physical activity and healthy living in which PESP rarely engages. Lawrence’s contribution in Chapter 9 problematises the prevalence of young White male participants in parkour or ‘free running’. He contends that whilst this ‘lifestyle sport’, which he also described as a ‘social movement’, may be free of the historical baggage of traditional

sport – created by White men for White men (p.123) – it cannot be completely understood as post-racial. Lawrence shares both narrative accounts of participants or *traceurs* and presents a content analysis of digital media of the racialized and ‘athleticised’ bodies of participants. The relationship between movement and healthy living is under Fazil and Wright’s spotlight in Chapter 12, where they share findings from a unique participatory theatre research project drawing out the intersectional experience of migration and links to and consequences for health of British Pakistani Muslim women. They argue that their research approach allowed Pakistani women to represent themselves to explore the cultural and gendered expectations of healthy living, including what constitutes appropriate physical activity for them.

The Routledge Critical Perspectives series promises to publish books that offer key research dissemination points of interest for scholars, students and policy makers alike and within this context this book does not disappoint. The opportunities for knowledges of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups to inform and reform the PESP field need to increase and the book ‘cracks opens the pavement’ just that little bit more. Future edited collections like this could explore further the scholarship of Indigenous peoples in the PESP academy and continue to develop opportunities for BAME authorship or co-authorship. It is an important step to have the counter-stories of BAME students, teachers and athletes heard but even more powerful to author them. That said, more than half of the authors identify as BAME or non-White which is significant for a publication in this field.

As an international edited collection, the book would serve as an undergraduate text in Health and Physical Education teacher preparation (or PETE) illustrating the different experiences and consequences (successes/failures) for BAME and White students enabled by depressingly consistent oppressive curriculum and pedagogic practices across the globe. As such, it successfully speaks to an international audience and lays the groundwork for reform. It also offers rigorous theoretical application of CRT in youth sport, physical activity and

PETE/PE settings, offering postgraduate students and researchers a current and focused research point, not only for those seeking more empirical research in their own field of study, or their own country, but also those seeking cross-national critiques of how Whiteness and racialization are both normalized, and challenged, in similar settings.

In conclusion, HPE teachers, sport practitioners and PETE educators and researchers will have a clearer understanding of Whiteness, the insidiousness of race logic and the myth of meritocracy in their professional domains because of this book. As Milner (2017, p. 300) explains, '*Whiteness is a mindset, worldview, positioning, belief system, and epistemology that governs and shapes the ways in which people and groups think, teach, practice, study, analyze and act.*' Readers will be in no doubt as to why all PETE students need to know the shared histories and differently experienced consequences for BAME students and White students. In the words of Jane Anna Gordon (2018, p.59), 'put bluntly, one simply learn(s) more in Black Studies': more history, more social-cultural relations, more about the 'absences' to which Dagkas, Azzarito and Hylton (2019) draw the reader's attention. The increasing inclusion of BAME and Indigenous peoples' histories, named experiences and counter-narratives of health and physical education, PETE and sport is an appropriate transformation reminding policy-makers, practitioners and educators that curriculum is always political, always contested and always open for change. The collection highlights and exemplifies that getting to this point has been a long struggle for recognition and acceptance of BAME knowledges as authentic knowledges for the preparation of health and physical education teachers and sport educators.

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- Susan Whatman, Griffith University, s.whatman@griffith.edu.au