Steve Raven – Written evidence (NPS0081)

Whiteness: issues of allyship and the racialisation of sports spaces

Issues of allyship, identities of whiteness and limitations to widening participation in sports, physical activities, and recreations

The racialization of sports and other spaces of leisure

My research for coming up to eight years, following a 30-year stint in Physical Education teaching and the commercial sports sector, focuses on critical analysis of racism, with specific reference to physical and social spaces where sport and physical education occur. Today, I define myself as an anti-racism academic and activist. My particular interest areas are the triggers that cause racism and discrimination and resulting mental health experiences. For myself, a research area is a constant learning journey, and I frequently refer to my own experience of unlearning whiteness. My current fieldwork, due to report early 2022, is concerned with gathering insights of the thinking and perceptions of people who identify as white British or English and their impact on racialising spaces where social interactions take places, such as sports spaces, PE lessons, classrooms, lecture theatres, and recently online interactive learning. A research aim is to explore avenues or approaches that could help overcome what Bell (1992) referred to as the 'permanence of racism'.

An identity of British whiteness

Structural, institutional, or systemic racism has been discussed at length in academic and mainstream media to good effect to frame and describe racial discrimination issues. Terminology such as microaggressions graphically illustrates the threat faced to mental health by those on the receiving end of the drip, drip of on-going systemic discrimination. In the discipline of psychology (Eberhardt, 2019), denial of racism has been explained by the terminology of 'unconscious bias'. My comments in this paper examine the other underpinning side of the equation – that of the role and impact of an identity I have labelled as 'whiteness' that operationalises systemic aspects of whiteness that lead to discrimination for others. In many ways, the whiteness identity and systemic whiteness are the mechanisms that create the barriers to equity, equality, diversity of participation and inclusiveness in society, and therefore sport and recreation.

Systemic whiteness is an umbrella term which encompasses a variety of features which enact racism through a paradigm of dominant power (B. H. Raven, 2008). It draws on white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), white privilege (McIntosh, 1988), white supremacy (Gillborn, 2005) and whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) to establish the character of the constructed identity of the actors. Systemic is used because discourses between actors within a framework formulated to promote

inclusion maintain white (British and English) people's dominance and those who pass as part of the same identity.

From Gillborn (2005) in education policy which recognised the role of whiteness, to the Physical Education school curriculum, labelled as whitewashed by Dowling & Flintoff (2018), to Hobson & Whigham (2018) who illustratively noted the lack of sport and physical education higher education curriculum time for undergraduates studying topics which familiarise the students with issues such as white privilege, whiteness is amplified as the dominant social power. An area of positive action, much has been made of decolonising institutions racism, which is a valid anti-racism and equality-seeking strategy, can also be criticised for abstracting the solutions to one of historical relevance. In this regard, as argued by various authors in the publication edited by Arday & Mirza (2018) both lenses whiteness and decolonising are intertwined and therefore 'messy' to unravel. My argument is whiteness as an actors characteristic of their identity is challenging but more straight forward to understand what reform requirements need to be actioned.

Generalized actions of an equality and equity action to-do list

The idea of being better or important is embodied by whiteness, which develops as an internal truth before we are consciously aware, it goes unchallenged, and it is engrained as an identity (Saad, 2020). Denial or fragility of being racist amongst the white British/English or those who pass as same is a crucial barrier to equality and equity. It establishes an identity of whiteness that is less inclusive, more protective of their advantages and reinforces a persona of supremacy. To the extent that the brand of whiteness is now damaged, creating reputational damage to the national identity. Trust is broken. Hence a contemporary concept that of allyship, or partnership within communities between diverse ethnicities and the people who are white or pass as white, does not have the goodwill to progress forward – in brief whiteness creates distrust. The comments that follow are based on my many researcher-participant conversations with those who watch (sports fans) or participate (at all levels of sport as players or athletes) or have physical education lessons experiences they have relayed to me. Some are on journeys of learning to become PE teachers, sports coaches, or leisure managers. All my comments are geared toward realigning the whiteness identity as trustworthy, having empathy and collegiality. Progress on removing discrimination will only be made when all other members view all community members as equal and equitable. When promoting and developing diversity and inclusion, the mantra cannot be 'join us on our terms' but come together without preconditions.

Comments on the specific actions to be taken

My research suggests a lacuna exists regarding systemic racism, denial of racism, racial consciousness, and allyship concerning the impact that whiteness identities in society generally and very precisely within the sport and physical

education have. From this lens, my comments regarding the questions presented in the call for evidence are made.

Questions 1,2 and 3 - response comments to:

1. How can local delivery be improved to facilitate a notion of 'sport and recreation' lifestyles for all? The primary factor for participation is affordability, not just in monetary terms but also available time for sport and recreation. A regular theme I encounter in discussions is that both low-income capacities mean more time earning is required to meet the basic living costs, i.e. time paucity. Layered on top of this is the additional time taken daily by those who are 'othered' dealing with microaggressions' obstructive behaviours. The issue of disposable income alongside disposable time issues must be understood and solved, before even the notion of 'sport for all' can be achieved. The prevalence of a 'whiteness' identity necessitates against easy to implement solutions; whole community efforts to remove barriers and constraints are required.

2. Increasing participation by children and young people in sport and recreation both at school and outside the school leads to more active lifestyles. My comments in 1. above equally apply to this question. Although some significant steps can be taken immediately:
   a. Reverse the trend of 'contracting out' sport and physical education to private companies and direct school budgets to maintain a substantial team of school Physical Education teachers to cater for varied demands from engaging with sports to wellness orientated activities. A holistic approach to physical education.
   b. The expansion of policies to employ specialist and qualified teachers as full-time physical education teachers in primary schools will support a broad physical literacy curriculum.
   c. Review and develop Physical Education undergraduate and teacher training curricula to enhance the sociological imagination (Molnár & Kelly, 2013) and thereby raising awareness and challenges of a whitewashed curriculum – mentioned in the introduction. In recent years teacher training programmes and undergraduate programmes in sport and physical have experienced a systematic removal of social theory modules favouring business and management education.

3. Under-represented groups will be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles is a topic I addressed in a paper I wrote (S. Raven, 2018) potential gaps limiting employability in the content of sports management degrees, having interviewed leisure and sports centre managers about the process of employing graduates. I noted evidence of good practice amongst centre managers in recruiting professionally and socially aware leisure centre staff, whose degree programmes had included the study of

community needs and diverse groups' requirements and needs. This practice needs to be fully deployed in across sport and recreation facilities, developing awareness and understanding of the negative impact of a whiteness identity being deployed, and how this constrains participation by those who are 'othered' (Stodolska et al., 2019).

Questions 5 and 6 - response comments to:

5. The government is not capturing an accurate picture. The influence of whiteness identity combined with systemic whiteness and its effect on racialising spaces such as sports spaces, recreations spaces and physical education lessons is under-recognised. In a recent pilot study of black youths in PE classes and sports coaching sessions, the most common comment I heard was that they did not go these sessions because of the microaggression that made the space uncomfortable. These microaggressions emanate from conversations that place white identities above or superior to any other identity. The essence of whiteness is racialising the social area of interaction, where sport and recreation take place.

6. The tackling of discrimination is complicated and messy and a social issue of society, not just one sector. The problem of a supremacy mindset, which whiteness currently is, will require a change in education policy.
   a. However, sport and recreation can play a significant role, in several ways at several levels of practice.
   b. For example, redefining the perception of competition in a sports sense is about effective collaboration, not a win at all costs activity.
   c. To remove the incentives to be complicit with discriminating factors will gain the trust of those that experience the impact of 'othering'.

Concluding remarks

In this paper focusing on physical education and community sports, I have argued we should recognise racism, which stems from whiteness identities that are systemic in society, from which sport and recreation do not operate in isolation. While this does not mean sport and recreation should not have a plan or strategies to develop policy, they should not work in isolation from the rest of government policy – they need to be aligned.

Whiteness defined as an identity, and its current incarnation threatens allyship, constrains learning and restricts community participation by all those that are 'othered'; through racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism. Whiteness, as an aspect of national identity, needs reform. The framing of whiteness in this way is under-researched. Therefore, it is not well understood, especially how it could be tackled for the community's benefit and participation in sport and recreation.

A new understanding of racialised spaces' consciousness will facilitate an allyship enabling fuller and broader community participation in sports and recreation

spaces. It will encourage and form the foundation of sport and recreation participation leading to active lifestyles. These developments can be further activated by re-embracing and committing to physical education programmes that cover a physical literacy style curriculum instead of the 'shortcuts' to fitness I have recently reviewed as curriculum documents.

An issue around discrimination that is apparent in spaces where formalised sports and physical activities occur is how the operationalising of discrimination includes the individual in deploying learnt 'whiteness'. That maintains privileges and advantages previously acquired through the same route of membership to the dominant white racial group. The concept has been labelled as the 'diversity bargain' (Warikoo 2018) where equality policies are viewed as positive by the dominant white cohort until it is perceived they will lose their privileged position in some way. For example, they may not be selected for a team because of the more significant numbers due to encouraging diversity. The procedure for them is then not acceptable. Even though the selection is based on each person's capabilities, the competition for places in a team becomes greater – they evidently would prefer to exercise their unjustifiable privilege.

The denial of whiteness further develops a capacity to racialise social interactions within sports spaces, impacting those who are 'othered'. The phrase in my field research I frequently hear that deters widening participation most is "We are all for inclusion here. It's just they have to [conform to our ways]." this is counterproductive and diminishes a spirit of allyship.

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