

## CHAPTER 13

### RACE AND ETHNICITY IN AMERICAN SPORT<sup>1</sup>

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#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Demonstrate a sociological understanding of what is meant by *race* and *ethnicity*, which includes the ability to discuss both the interrelationships and differences between each concept.
2. Discuss the ways in which each is socially constructed and what this means for sport within the American context.
3. Provide an overview on the relationships between race and whiteness, and how this dynamic shapes the American social institution of sport.
4. Apply theory to better understand how cultural ideology and much of what constitutes American society becomes embodied in sport, a primary informant of which is race and its manifestations.

#### INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be White? What does it mean to be Black? What does it mean to be Latino or Asian or Indigenous? Did you learn how to “be” your race? Were you taught by your parents or a family member how to “act” your race, among other identity traits? Was it through observing peers or watching television shows that you learned to “perform” your race? Do you think about your racial identity? Is this prompted when engaging with individuals from the same racial group as you, or those from a different background? More broadly, what does it mean to have a racial identity? How about an ethnic identity? Do you happen to have a sense of both, one, or perhaps neither? Have you thought about race and race-related topics when you participate in sports? How about when you watch a sporting event? How might the intersection of race and sport have impacted your experience with sport?

Have you ever taken the time to ask yourself these questions? Did you feel any level of discomfort or unease in doing so? Given the underlying theme of race and identity, there’s a good chance many of you felt these questions to be more personal than you might be accustomed. The point that we are trying to make is that while society often tells us that issues relating to race and ethnicity are taboo in general discussion, the reality is that race and racial identities are salient in all aspects of life and carry with them cultural meaning. This cultural meaning emanates from society’s definition of race and its associated identities, thereby causing an expectation of people within that society to internalize and act according to said definitions. Put simply, race is a socially constructed idea comprised of characteristics and attributes that reflect and play out according to a society’s cultural, historical, and political discernments (Gallagher, 2009).

While race holds arbitrarily-derived meaning, it should be noted that the histories of racial and ethnic groups should not be presented as isolated evolutions within a static socio-cultural vacuum. Rather, race should be thought of as part of a narrative that highlights, influences, and is influenced by interactions that have always taken place among and between groups in all social institutions: education, economy, politics, or culture (Sue, 2003). As such, race can be (and has been) leveraged to the benefit of some and the detriment of others; the manifestations of which are systemic racial inequalities. Racial inequality is not a result of essentialism or biological traits, but rather the consequence of systemic exploitation and subjugation (Du

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<sup>1</sup> Bopp, T., & Vadeboncoeur, J. D. (2019). Race and ethnicity in American sport. In G. B. Cunningham & M. A. Dixon (Eds.), *Sociology of sport and physical activity* (pp. 173-188). College Station, TX: Center for Sport Management Research and Education.

Bois, 1940, 2007b). Thus, the functionality of race (and by extension, racism) interposes itself across a myriad of social, cultural, and institutional planes, one of which happens to be the realm of sport.

According to Carrington and Andrews (2013), sport is a cultural activity operating within societal constraints. It is in this vein that sport, as a social institution within the American context, serves to replicate cultural ideologies and phenomena, as well as curate spaces where social relationships further reinforce relations of power. Frey and Eitzen (1991) contend that much of what we know about race and racism in American society simultaneously plays out in sport, providing us a window through which to examine how people not only interact with one another, but also make sense of their own identities (Coakley, 2015). A particular view of sport results “as a contested set of power relations embedded in systems of social inequality at the global, national and local levels” (Spaaij, Farquharson, & Marjoribanks, 2015, p. 400). Consequently, racial inequality helps perpetuate the *Great Sport Myth* (the belief that sport is inherently good and pure and that participants, consumers and sponsors of sport unquestionably benefit from interacting with it) and reify sport as a site for social inequality (Coakley, 2015).

As the authors of this chapter, we implore ourselves as well as you, the reader, to critically assess race in sport so as to better witness and understand race in its true form as a social construct. To do this, we must focus and understand the ways that race embodies culture, experience, and identity within a multitude of sporting spaces. We need to better understand the implications and impact of race within sport (and American society, more broadly), particularly upon communities of color, which we aim to achieve as an underlying foundation of this chapter. To this end, we will begin by offering discussion on the social construction of race, as well as why it is important to differentiate race from other demographic constructs such as ethnicity. Building upon our discussion, we will transition into an introduction of whiteness as not only the purveyor of this “construction,” but also, and more importantly, the normative standard upon which our behaviors, beliefs, and values in American sport are predicated. From here, we briefly introduce various theories that have been utilized in the sport management literature to examine the experiences and underrepresentation of people of color in sport. Lastly, we apply this all to the sporting context, providing an overview of several particular institutional spaces in which race disparately plays out to the detriment of people and communities of color: 1) leadership and coaching in sport, and 2) the intersection of race, education, and sport. It is hoped that after reading this chapter, you will have developed a theoretical and practical foundation from which to advance your understanding of the role and social construction of race in American society and sport. Furthermore, we expect that through this analysis of your experiences in sport, racialized or otherwise, you consider and develop ways in which you can help advance the institution of sport past the current manifestation of race and ethnicity about which you will read in the pages that follow.

## **TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF RACE**

To commence our discussion on the influence of race within the spaces of both sport and physical activity, it is imperative to differentiate our definitions of *race* and *ethnicity* from more standardized uses. We assert that such terms are social constructions that have both physical and psychological consequences, whereas the use of more common, generalizable terms runs the risk of imparting biological and objectively deterministic meaning upon individuals to whom the terms are directed (Helms, 1994). When an individual is perceived to be a part of a particular racial group, their *racial identity* typically takes precedence over membership in all other demographic categories. It is important to note here that most, if not all, other demographic identities fail to exist independent of one’s racial identity (Helms & Cook, 1999), thus, the need to differentiate between demographic identity terms.

### **Race as a Social Construct**

To define *race* reinforces the belief that humans can be divided and classified into biologically distinct groups according to a set of agreed upon cultural and physical characteristics (Morning, 2011). Allen and Adams (1992) claim that a legitimate physiological definition of race, or a means to differentiate individuals by race, would have to satisfy three particular criteria: (a) a detailed explanation of the biologically-derived

criteria used to differentiate between races; (b) the subsequent evidence that individuals within these racial groups adhere to and embody said criteria; and (c) a pre-determined method of explaining away any or all observable overlap occurring between races given the established criteria. However, this would be met with great difficulty due to *transculturation* across our global history, as well as the fact that the physical characteristics commonly used to differentiate races are but a small percentage of genetic traits (both seen and unseen) that comprise an individual. For example, it has been suggested that there exists more within-group variation among individuals of a determinable racial group according to phenotype (i.e., observable physiological traits) than differences that exist between groups (Allen & Adams, 1992). In other words, there may be more genetic variability between two individuals who are both deemed by society to be *White* than there would be between two individuals of two different races.

Nevertheless, while most individuals might find it easy to indicate the racial group to which they “belong,” they might be hard pressed to either demonstrate or contextualize the socio-cultural and -political implications attached to such group *belongingness*. As such, why do individuals remain persistent in their self-adherence to or classification of others to one particular racial group, when a strong likelihood exists that individuals differentiated by certain phenotypical characteristics may actually share common genetic traits? For Helms and Cook (1999), to answer such questions, we must first understand race as a social construct. To say that “something” is socially constructed is to suggest that whichever qualities or traits attached to the definition of “it” are predicated on certain cultural and societal values. Given that societies will oftentimes attach a set of arbitrary qualities or traits to their definitions or meanings of race, it can be argued that race is merely a social product of said values, rather than being based on scientific facts (Gallagher, 2009). In order to crystallize this notion of race as a culturally-derived construct, it may be helpful to think about Gallagher’s metaphorical link between gravity and race:

If you push this book off your desk, do you expect it to fall to the ground? Obviously, you do. If you lived in Brazil or South Africa or Puerto Rico, would you expect the same thing to happen to your book? Of course you would, because you know that gravity is a universal constant. However, someone defined as black in the United States could be defined as white in Brazil, Trigueno (intermediate) in Puerto Rico, and “coloured” in South Africa. Gravity is the same everywhere, but racial classifications vary across place and time because definitions of race and ethnicity are based on the physical traits a society chooses to value or devalue. (Gallagher, 2009, p. 2)

Since a given society is inevitably made up of specific cultural circumstances and historical experiences, ideas about race are going to vary significantly within and between countries. Cultural and historical meaning is attached to race only because societies define and understand it in such a manner (Gallagher, 2009), whereby social constructions are oftentimes utilized by societies to uphold and reinforce societal norms. For instance, in attempting to understand how disparities exist between certain racial and ethnic groups, the following should be considered about race:

[Race] has meaning in the minds and discourse of people who use it, but not in objective criteria. It defines who should have access to societal and in-group resources as well as the rules by which such resources will be dispensed. As such, social consequences result from correct and incorrect racial classifications. (Helms & Cook, 1999, p. 16)

Thus, in becoming socially constructed, race is conceptualized as a nominal category, resulting in the assignment of individuals to racial groups according to ambiguously specified physiological criteria. Unintentionally then, the racial category attached to an individual (whether self or outwardly derived) is often interpreted as a presumed correlation between biological and psychological traits (Helms and Cook, 1999). Said presumptions are often found across all levels of sport as it is commonly presumed that White athletes are successful in sports on account of a greater work ethic and superior intelligence as compared to their

Black counterparts, who are suggested to rely more heavily on an innate superior athleticism. Furthermore, Black athletes are minimized as having inferior intellectual capabilities, which has been utilized (among other “quasi” inferences) as rationale as to why Blacks are unfit to hold leadership positions in sport (Bimper, 2015; Burden, Hodge, & Harrison, 2004). Not only are these inferences egregious in nature, but there exists no theoretical confirmation of this linkage between physical (i.e., racial) appearance and athletic performance.

### **Differentiating Race and Ethnicity**

Race is a fairly ambiguous construct which has become burdened by emotional attachments and discomfort, and as such, is often “re-branded” or referred to in more innocuous terms such as ethnicity (Helms & Cook, 1999). Given the incorrectly synonymous usage of race with such varied terms (also including culture, social class, religion, and other socio-cultural derivations), a pair of consequences emerge: (a) the act of differentiating among these demographic identity terms becomes increasingly convoluted; and (b) the socio-cultural, -economic, and -political implications of race become muddled under color-blind rhetoric. A working definition of ethnicity suggests “a socially constructed grouping of individuals who share in common certain cultural characteristics and features associated with that group, including language, religion, food, national origin, and ancestry” (Valdez, 2017, p. 465). Again, within the United States, whether an individual identifies with an ethnic group depends on historical patterns and expectations of group segregation, assimilation, acculturation, relative visibility within certain regions, and the socio-historical implications surrounding familial immigration (Helms & Cook, 1999). It is from these historical antecedents that culture takes on the meaning of the behaviors, beliefs, language(s), traditions, and values that are shared between generations of a given socio-racial group (Helms, 1994).

While ethnic groups can exist within the confines of societally-deemed racial groups, this does not mean they are the same since racial variability can occur among individuals of the same ethnic group. If we consider current Major League Baseball (MLB) players who would be racially classified as Black (within the American context that is) – such as Andrew McCutchen, Ronald Acuña Jr., and Xander Bogaerts – noticeable would be the variation in languages spoken. For instance, McCutchen, who is African American, speaks English; Acuña Jr., born and raised in Venezuela, speaks Spanish; and Bogaerts, who is Aruban, speaks four languages – English, Spanish, Papiamentu, and Dutch. Similarly, depending on their country of origin, a Hispanic/Latino MLB player may classify themselves as White, while others may self-classify as Black or Indigenous.

### **Deconstructing Race and Whiteness**

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, sociological conceptions of race have been subject to shifting ideology, from notions of rigid, immovable racialized categories, to that of race as an active, fluid social construct (Omi & Winant, 2015; Smedley & Smedley, 2012). As noted by Smedley and Smedley (2005), “racial distinctions fail on all three counts – that is, they are not genetically discrete, are not reliably measured, and are not scientifically meaningful” (p. 16). From this position, whereby race is widely understood to be a social rather than scientific concept, race is a fundamental social concept necessary to understand the social structures of various groups, as well as the individual and collective interests that continue to maintain racial categories in the United States (Renn, 2012). At the heart of this interrelationship between race as a social construct and that which upholds racial categorization is *whiteness*, or the systematic “attempt to homogenize diverse white ethnics into a single category (much like it attempts with people of color) for purposes of racial domination” (Leonardo, 2009, p. 171).

For instance, previous societal generations created and institutionalized a societal ethnocentrism for generations of Whites to benefit from economic, political, and social capital (Taylor, 2016). This ethnocentrism is understood typically to be a system of *ethnocentric monoculturalism*, which is the “belief that one’s race, culture, or nation is superior to all others, accompanied with the power to impose this expression on a less powerful group” (Sue, 2003, p. 101). Mills (1997) noted that within particular nation states such as the United States, Whites stand to benefit from the likes of an ethnocentric monoculturalism, which he argued:

creates a world in their cultural image, political states differentially favoring their interests, an economy structured around the racial exploitation of others, and a moral psychology (not just in whites but sometimes in nonwhites also) skewed consciously or unconsciously toward privileging them, taking the status quo of differential racial entitlement as normatively legitimate, and not to be investigated further. (p. 40)

Put simply, the racialized reality of White Americans is systematically transmitted through the socialization practices of friends and families, neighborhoods, educational institutions, mass media, and various organizations. As it concerns sport, the dominant status of Whites holds constant, particularly if we look at how sporting spaces are spatialized by race (Lipsitz, 2011). What this means is that athletes, coaches, trainers, management, owners, media members, and other sport stakeholders are operating within their respective spaces, many of which not only overlap, but are predominantly comprised of White individuals. This is not to suggest that a predominantly White setting is inherently “bad,” but rather, when physical spaces are racially homogenous (given the socio-historical implications of race and whiteness in the United States), a psychological dominance can become entrenched in the form of whiteness as normative and that which is closer to blackness as *other*.

For example, as similarly presented by DiAngelo (2018), the following is a racialized breakdown of those who control some of the more influential spaces within the institution of sport. The following numbers are pulled from the 2018 Racial and Gender Report Cards (further details and discussion take place later in this chapter):

- Sports columnists: 80 percent White
- Sports reporters: 82 percent White
- Sports editors: 85 percent White
- NCAA FBS Division I athletics directors: 85 percent White
- NCAA FBS Division I conference commissioners: 100 percent White
- Owners of Major League Baseball (MLB) teams: 97 percent White
- Owners of Major League Soccer (MLS) teams: 85 percent White
- Owners of National Basketball Association (NBA) teams: 93 percent White
- Owners of National Football League (NFL) teams: 97 percent White

While this is just a snapshot of sport actors and organizations, the groups listed wield some of the most power in the American (and to an extent, global) sporting realm. Again, it is important to note that these numbers are not endorsing value judgments concerning whether an individual is “bad” or “good,” but rather, serve to demonstrate how a dominant social/racial group (i.e., *Whites*) holds power and control in these positions to spread and foster its own interests, self-image, and values throughout American society (DiAngelo, 2018).

### **THEORIES USED IN SPORT MANAGEMENT LITERATURE EXAMINING RACE**

Having been introduced to the conceptual foundations regarding race, ethnicity and whiteness, we move ahead to discuss the use and application of theories in examining the intersection of all three and sport. As such, we provide a brief description and summary of each theory then demonstrate its use in sport-specific studies examining how race and ethnicity manifest in the institution of sport.

*Social Identity Theory* is a psychological explanation as to how, and the extent to which, individuals define, value and relate themselves to other groups of people, or social categories; this is typically through the cognitive processes of categorization, identification and comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 2004). Categorization is a cognitive tool that allows humans to more easily make sense of their social environment, as well as their relation to and within it. By placing individuals and groups into categories, which have accompanying meanings and norms, people are able to better understand and assign social significance to

others and their interactions with them. Identification, or identity, refers to the process and extent to which an individual associates with other individuals or groups on both a social and individual level. For instance, racial identity can be conceived as the amount of significance one places on their racial group memberships, what it means to be a member of a particular racial group, and how the attitudes, beliefs, norms, stigmas and stereotypes associated with said racial group impacts one's identification, as well as self-concept and esteem (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; see Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Lastly, once an individual identifies with a group, between group comparisons are initiated, consciously and subconsciously, typically resulting in positive or negative affect (e.g., approval, favoritism, or disapproval) of others based on their group affiliation. A number of studies in sport have utilized social identity theory to examine the experiences of student-athletes of color on the campuses of predominantly white institutions (PWI) (Bimper, 2014; Fuller, Harrison, & Bukstein, 2017; Harper, 2018; Tucker et al., 2016). They have found that student-athletes of color are often times perceived to be less than qualified academically and only enrolled at PWIs to advance their athletic career. In turn, they might internalize such perceptions and believe their self-worth and reason for being in college is contingent upon their athletic ability. The process and outcomes of such self-identification and cognitions can be further detailed via social categorization theory.

*Social and Self-Categorization Theory* further explains the cognitive process of categorizing people into social groups. Accordingly, individuals are depersonalized, stripped of their individual agency, characteristics and personalities, and treated as the embodiment of the group attributes to which they are perceived to belong (Hogg, 2003). In essence, individuals are perceived as the group prototype, assuming and portraying similarities and differences between groups, further maintaining the distinctiveness (read: categorization) of social groups. It is the result of these similarities and differences from which positive or negative affect towards others results. In accordance with self-categorization theory, individuals identify themselves and others in social groups, recognizing those with comparable traits, values, etc. as in-group members and those with whom there is too much difference as out-group members (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). In-group members, as well as the group itself, are then judged more favorably as a means to validate one's own attributes and attitudes. Conversely, out-group members are understood through a more critical and negative lens, thus creating an intergroup bias (Cunningham & Sagas, 2005). This bias, both implicit and overt, establishes a penchant for more positive affect and favorability towards group members of a comparable race, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, etc. This plays out in the disparate education and experience of student-athletes at PWIs, particularly those of color, who are stigmatized in comparison to the other students on campus such that they are perceived to segregate themselves from the general student population (see Tucker et al., 2016). Such perceptions facilitate a space in which student-athletes of color might not feel welcome and retreat to the confines of their athletic facility or program, thus perpetuating the stereotype, maintaining the psychological and physical distance to others on campus, and facilitating a network of relationships, or lack thereof. Resulting is an environment in which the academic experiences of student-athletes of color become marginalized (Benson, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Singer 2005).

*Role Congruity Theory* further reveals the consequences of categorizing and comparing, portending the potential for discrimination and prejudice when an individual does not have the perceived attributes necessary or expected to be successful in a particular job or achieve a certain social role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). As such, when an individual seeks to obtain a position, social or otherwise, the evaluation of said individual will be negatively influenced if his or her characteristics and abilities do not align with those of successful predecessors. Conversely, if his or her characteristics and abilities are congruent with the traditional qualities of said position, then their evaluation will be positively skewed (Diekmann & Goodfriend, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thus, the influence of individual perceptions has less to do with identity and categorization, and more so contingent upon descriptive and prescriptive norms and stereotypes (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Diekmann & Goodfriend, 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ritter & Yoder, 2004). Descriptive stereotypes are those that depict current expectations and attributes of positions, social or otherwise, and people occu-

pying them, while prescriptive stereotypes represent desired expectations and attributes. Ultimately, incongruity between one's expectations of individual and group member attributes and those necessary, whether legitimate or superficial, for their current social status or occupational position, can lead to a forged "lack of fit" (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). Though primarily utilized in the sport literature to examine gender discrimination and sexism experienced by women in leadership positions (Burton, 2015; Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011; Tiell, Dixon, & Lin, 2012), the tenets of role congruity theory can also be applied to understanding and examining the racialized roles that have been normalized in sport such that people of color are perceived as well-suited for administrative support roles (Cunningham, 2012; McDowell, Cunningham, & Singer, 2009) and less prepared for leadership positions (TIDES, 2019). Later in this chapter you will read how race impacts the student-athlete experience through the dynamic of academic and athlete roles (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). Such discrepancies perpetuate discrimination and unequal access and opportunities for individuals and groups who do not adhere to or fit traditional social or positional norms, thereby allowing occupational segregation to persist.

*Occupational Segregation* explains how positions in the workplace become racialized such that people of color tend to be overrepresented in positions that are perceived to be less valuable to the success of the organization and require fewer job-specific proficiencies (Maume, 1999a, 1999b). Sack, Singh, and Thiel (2005) applied this concept to the sport world to explain the phenomenon in which people of a particular race and/or ethnicity are overrepresented in certain playing positions based on assumptions about their racialized predisposition to physical, and sometimes cognitive, abilities. Thus, positional segregation in sport, or stacking, is less about the value or skills required of the position, and more so contingent upon mental and physical stereotypes associated with particular races. Typically, these stereotypes keep players of color on the periphery of the action, forced to use their physical skills to support or complement the decision making positions more central to the action, in which players of color will be underrepresented. Sack et al. (2005) demonstrated this manifestation in baseball, where African Americans are underrepresented at the positions of pitcher, catcher, and infield. When analyzing the underrepresentation of African American coaches in football, Anderson (1993) found that coaches of color were not in the jobs, or segregated from the coaching positions, that typically ascended the coaching ladder to the coordinator or head coach position. Similar findings have also been witnessed on the administrative side of sport where people of color, and in particular Black employees, are overrepresented in student-athlete academic and support positions (Cunningham, 2012; McDowell et al., 2009).

*Critical Race Theory* allows for researchers to not only acknowledge the existence and perpetuation of race and racism in all social spheres, institutional systems, and governance (Singer, 2005), but also, and more importantly, deconstruct said structures and commence the process of (re)constructing agency and equitable relations of power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). By understanding the historical and institutionalized elements of a socially constructed society, one is provided a lens to better understand and examine the roles of race and identity in individual and group interactions. Of specific importance to this framework is the operationalization and centering of race so that the lived experiences of racially marginalized individuals can be provided a platform and assessed in earnest (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Moreover, there are several foundational themes present in critical race theory that are central to examining the meaning of race and how it has been utilized to maintain a socially stratified ecosystem (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995):

1. Race and racism exist and persist through all facets of society.
2. Experiential knowledge of racial marginalized communities is valued and validated, as well as critical to challenging dominant structures and discourse.
3. Post-racial narratives (e.g., colorblindness, liberalism, meritocracy) that maintain social hierarchies are implicated and deconstructed.
4. Racial progress is determined at the discretion and by the interests of Whites.

Critical race theory has been utilized in a number of sport studies to allow for the lived experiences of people of color to be shared, understanding that sport as an institution does not exist in social isolation; rather that it is intertwined with the historical influences of race and ethnicity on society, power hierarchies, and sociocultural relationships (Carrington, 2013; Singer, 2005).

*Homologous Reproduction* has been used to help explain social dynamics and the maintenance of power and representation among dominant social group members. Kanter (1977) coined the term when examining women's experiences with discrimination and inequality when attempting to and upon entering male dominated professions. Homologous reproduction suggests that management is more likely to hire and promote people of similar physical attributes (e.g., race, gender) and social characteristics (e.g., socioeconomic status, class). Contingent upon three institutional factors—opportunity, power, and promotion—this theory has been used in sport to dissect racialized hiring practices and the hierarchy of social networks through which people in positions of power operate. For example, Sagas and Cunningham (2005) found support for the existence of homologous reproduction among the coaching staffs of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) DI men's basketball teams, such that White head coaches had more White assistant coaches and Black head coaches had more Black assistant coaches on their respective staffs. Furthermore, Black assistant coaches were significantly underrepresented on the staffs of White head coaches. This is but one example of homologous reproduction, with such discriminatory practices also taking place on the administrative side of college sport. Following this section, we will provide you with the racial breakdown of many leadership positions in college sport, and you are expected to notice the overwhelming majority of power positions held by White males (Lapchick, Zimmerman, Coleman, Murphy, et al., 2019). This has come to be known as the “good old boys” network (Lovett & Lowry, 1994), the representation of which maintains college sport as a space primarily run by “White, Protestant, able-bodied, heterosexual males” (Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001, p. 13).

## **REPRESENTATION OF RACE IN SPORT LEADERSHIP**

To demonstrate how race currently influences the current landscape of American sports, we turn to the Racial and Gender Report Card (RGRC). The RGRC is an annual examination of hiring practices, focusing primarily on coaching and administration, at the collegiate and professional levels of sport. Collecting data on the racial and gender composition of sport participants, leadership and management among all three divisions of the NCAA, the National Basketball Association (NBA), the National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), Major League Soccer (MLS) and the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) reports on the current demographic makeup of each league/association so as to assess and grade its level of commitment and efforts toward diversity and inclusion (TIDES, 2019). It is hoped that the RGRC aids the intercollegiate and professional sport decision makers and leaders in creating a diverse and inclusive workplace environment in which everyone, regardless of race or gender, has an equal opportunity to participate, operate, or manage a team (Lapchick, Liang, Cartwright, & Currie, 2016). What follows is not simply a recapitulation of grades assigned to the leagues/associations over the past few years; rather, it provides an overview of the current representation of people of color among some of sport most prominent entities. It is through these demonstrative numbers we witness the manifestations of the aforementioned theories and outcomes of institutional discrimination and racism on the representation and experiences of people of color in sport.

Despite being the most popular of professional leagues, the NFL has a poor track record of diversity and inclusion with only four (12.5%) general managers and eight (25%) head coaches of color, in spite of a player pool consisting of 72.6% people of color. Likewise, the number of assistant coaches (35.5%) falls well short in comparison to its racial make-up (Lapchick, Zimmerman, Coleman, Barber, Martin, et al., 2019). However, this is nothing new. The NFL has struggled with the underrepresentation of people of color in leadership positions and went so far as to establish *The Rooney Rule* in 2003. The rule initially required teams to interview a racial minority candidate for openings at the head coaching position, but has since been strengthened to include searches for senior-level positions in 2009, and requires teams to interview candidates of color from outside their own organization or someone on the NFL's development list.



Furthermore, the NFL League Office hired a Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer in 2019 to manage and implement diversity and inclusion programs and initiatives across the league and its business endeavors (Lapchick, Zimmerman, Coleman, Barber, Martin, et al., 2019).

Among all men's professional leagues in 2018, the NBA League Office had the highest percentage of record for people of color (36.4%) as did its representation of people of color as general managers at 20% (Lapchick, Estrella, Stewart, & Gerhart, 2018). Similarly, the head coach position was occupied by 10 coaches of color (33.3%) and almost half (45.7%) of their assistant coaches were of color. This might not be too shocking given that the league is comprised primarily (73.9%) of players of color. However, such transitions from the playing court to positions of leadership are not as common and normalized as one might expect, nor are they witnessed in other professional sports.

While MLB has far fewer African American/Black players (8.4%), its racial and ethnic composition of on-field players is much more diverse and international. At the start of 2018, 41% of players were of a diverse background, including 254 players born outside the U.S., the highest level of diversity since 2012 (Lapchick, Zimmerman, Coleman, Barber, Harvey, et al., 2019). The MLB Central Office closely replicated this representation, employing 33.3% people of color among its professional staff. Not as impressive for MLB was the representation of managers and general managers or color (or head of baseball operations), which were 16.7% and 13.3%, respectively.

Lastly, a quick look at the 2018 representation of people of color both participating in and managing intercollegiate athletics reveals a dearth of equal opportunities and a less than diverse and inclusive institution of college sport. At the NCAA headquarters, only four people of color (all African Americans) were in the positions of executive vice president, senior vice president, and vice president, while 19.3% of managing directors and directors, and 22.5% of administrators, were people of color. While the representation of racially diverse people increased, yet remains low, at the NCAA headquarters, a different story continues to play out among member schools and conferences (Lapchick, Zimmerman, Coleman, Murphy, et al., 2019). There has never been a person of color to serve as a Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) Conference Commissioner, and across all of DI, excluding Historically Black Conferences, 28 of 30 commissioners were white. Of the 111 FBS university presidents, 85.4 percent were White and the number of athletics directors of color at the DI, DII and DIII levels were 52 (15.7%), 29 (10%), and (7.3%), respectively. Not much change occurred at the head coaching position in 2018 where 85%, 85.6%, 90.9% of women's teams and 86.2%, 87.4%, and 91.4% of men's teams scores DI, DII and DIII, respectively, were under the guise of white leadership. Of the total number of student-athletes in Divisions I, II, and III, 62.7% were White males and 70.9% were White females.

### **Coaching and Leadership**

You were previously presented with a brief overview of several prominent theories that have been utilized in examining the (under)representation of people of color in coaching and leadership positions in professional and intercollegiate sport, as well as a racial breakdown of several prominent leagues and the NCAA. In this next section, we further examine this underrepresentation by discussing how such a phenomenon has become institutionalized and normalized among coaches and sport leaders.

It's been suggested that the primacy of candidates for a coaching vacancy are likely to be former athletes of that sport (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998). Extrapolating this concept to the greater sport landscape, it is safe to surmise that management roles closely working with teams, athletic departments, and sport organizations might also be comprised of former athletes. Thus, it stands to reason that the make-up of current athletic department and sport leadership positions (e.g., coaches, athletics directors, conference commissioners) would be representative of the demographic make-up of recent student-athlete and player populations. However, as previously established in the 2018 RGRC, people of color are grossly overrepresented on college sport teams, particularly those generating revenue and prestige for the institution, and grossly underrepresented in positions of power (Harper, 2018; Lapchick, Zimmerman, Coleman, Murphy,

et al., 2019). Additionally, at the professional ranks, if we review the typical progression up the organizational ladder (i.e., players -> assistant coaches -> head coaches -> general managers, etc.) we witness an inverse relationship between people of color and the power held in each position. In other words, people of color continue to be underrepresented in management and leadership positions in professional sport while White males, in particular, are overrepresented (TIDES, 2019).

When considering leadership positions in sport, and particularly coaching positions, it is fair to equate one's time as a student-athlete or player within a sport as an entry-level position. After all, it is during this time in which they are practicing their craft and honing their skills. Upon athletic retirement, players and former student-athletes who wish to work in sport, similar to the general student population, are likely to move into a graduate assistant, intern or volunteer position. Here, they begin to shape and apply their skills and abilities with a business-oriented approach. This largely involves accruing human capital (e.g., knowledge, skills, and abilities) through practices, trainings, workshops and other experiential learning opportunities (e.g., film sessions), social capital through networking with others (peers and coaches), as well as cultural capital pertinent to the sport or position one hopes to attain.

As their career advances, each of these capitals becomes more specialized and relevant to the next developmental phase. However, it is also prior to and within each of these career steps that people of color are marginalized and likely to experience racial prejudice and discrimination such that their access, opportunities and intentions to accumulate capital are disparately impacted. Brooks and Althouse (2000) have suggested the outcomes of which manifest in and through six psychosocial and job-related factors: (1) race, (2) athletic participation, (3) ability to mobilize resources, (4) organizational structure, (5) impact of social barriers, and (6) subsequent career mobility. Negative experiences in each of these capacities contribute to the dismal representation of coaches and people of color among sport leadership positions. Although not an exhaustive list, the following demonstrates the numerous ways in which people of color may be disparately impacted due to their race. Coaches, managers, and other leaders of color have experienced discrimination and prejudice in sport such that they have been stigmatized and stereotyped as less qualified than their White counterparts for head coaching and leadership positions (Sagas & Cunningham, 2005; Sartore & Cunningham, 2006; Turick & Bopp, 2016), experience less occupational mobility, opportunities and advancement (Bopp & Sagas, 2014; Day, 2015, 2018; Day & McDonald, 2010; McDowell et al., 2009; Sagas & Cunningham, 2005), endure prejudiced and sometimes adverse media portrayals (e.g., Carrington, 2013; Cunningham & Bopp, 2010), and suffer from disparately impacted career outcomes (Bopp, Wigley, & Eddosary, 2015; Cunningham, Bruening, & Straub, 2006; Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2001; Finch, McDowell, & Sagas, 2010; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004).

### **Race, College Sport, and the Student-Athlete**

Of particular concern to this chapter is the impact of race on the power hierarchy existent in intercollegiate athletics, as well as the manifestation of the intersection of education, race, and athletics. Prior to stepping on campus, student-athletes of color and in particular African American student-athletes, are stigmatized such that their athletic proficiencies are seen as the determining factor for their presence on the campuses of predominantly white institutions (PWI) rather than their academic merits (Bimper, 2014; Harper, 2018; Tucker et al., 2016). In fact, it's been estimated that nearly half of African American males on DI campuses are there for athletic reasons (Fuller et al., 2017). This staggering percentage of athletic-related enrollment has the potential to disparately impact a student-athlete, and more specifically an African American student-athlete's racial and athletic identities. Thus, racial and athletic identities are important factors to consider when examining the relationship between student-athletes and academic outcomes (Bimper, 2014).

The student-athlete experience, particularly as it relates to academics and education, is a unique one on the campuses of colleges and universities. It is perceived they are provided free food, clothing and other provisions, given preferential treatment in housing and class registration, receive financial support (e.g., scholarship) and special accommodations from faculty and staff, as well as additional academic and support

services. Conversely, student-athletes are stigmatized such that they are perceived to be less than academically fit for higher education, lack motivation to earn a degree, segregate themselves from the general student population, and expect special treatment from faculty and staff (see Tucker et al., 2016). This is further compounded by disparities found in the college preparedness of student-athletes of color who may face potential racial biases in standardized testing and/or suffer from underresourced and academically sub-standard high schools (Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006; Maggard, 2007; Maloney & McCormick, 1993; Petrie & Russell, 1995; Sellers, 1992).

Such perceptions and stigmatizations are informed by and contribute to an unfair and manipulative environment in which student-athletes might fall victim to self-perceptions that they are only on campus to enhance the institutional brand through their athletic ability and sport, subsequently limiting their academic pursuits and educational ambitions (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003). However, it is not just students and faculty that hold these prejudices. The reinforcement of such exploitative values and norms on college campuses is strongly reinforced by the inherent pressure to win, as well as by coaches and support staff who may be less inclined to support external educational and experiential opportunities for fear they might “erode student-athletes' free time or distract them from a primary focus on sport” (Murphy, Petipras, & Brewer, 1996, p. 244). Benson (2000) witnessed the effects of such mentalities when she examined the schooling experiences of African American football players, concluding that their marginal academic performances were the result of “a series of interrelated practices engaged in by all significant members of the academic setting, including peers, coaches, advisors, teachers, and the student-athlete themselves” (p. 228). Though succumbing to the pressure of this environment is not exclusive to African American student-athletes, it is this subgroup that is often the victim of academic corruption and athletic exploitation (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Singer 2005).

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the overrepresentation of African American male student-athletes among the 65 member institutions of the “Power 5” conferences: Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Big Ten Conference, Big 12 Conference, Pac 12 Conference, and Southeastern Conference (SEC). In 2016-17, 2.4% of the undergraduate population at these schools were African American males, yet these same students represented 56% and 55% of the scholarship athletes on men’s basketball and football teams, respectively (Harper, 2018). Upon further examination of four cohorts, Harper found that 55.2% of African American male student-athletes graduated within six years, compared to 69.3% of all undergraduate scholarship student-athletes. During this same time frame, 60.1% of Black undergraduate men and 76.3% of the entire undergraduate population graduated. Such discrepancies have been addressed previously by Sellers (2000) who argued the underrepresentation of African American students on college campuses and in the classroom is too often ignored in lieu of discussing athletic overrepresentation. However, as indicated above, even when in the classroom student-athletes of color, particularly African Americans, face discrimination, corruption and exploitation (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Singer 2005; Tucker et al., 2016).

Donnor (2005) presents athletic scholarships as contracts in which student-athletes sacrifice their time, agency, mental and physical well-being through provision of athletic services in return for the moral obligation of the institution to deliver an education, development of skills and abilities, or simply a degree. Yet, student-athletes are not always provided the proper opportunities to pursue a degree and formative career experiences in their area of academic interests. Rather, they might be clustered into “general studies” majors that tend to be more flexible and friendly for student-athletes (Fountain & Finley, 2009). Of particular concern to this chapter are the findings that reveal significant differences in the clustering of student-athletes of color vs their white counterparts (Fountain & Finley, 2009, 2011). Funneling student-athletes of color into easy majors and/or courses can be a disservice to their education and construed as malpractice or a breach of contract (Donnor, 2005; Ferris, Finster, & McDonald, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2005). The mistreatment of student athletes, and particularly student-athletes of color, is more than just the result of a few administrators yielding to the “win at all costs” mindset; rather, it is emblematic of the corrupt and exploitative system of academic institutions.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter we provided you with the theoretical, conceptual, and foundational elements of race, ethnicity and whiteness to allow you to better understand, discuss and apply the interrelationships and differences between each concept within the sport context. By clearly delineating each construct, it is expected that you are able to better articulate and examine the presence and persistent impact of each on the current sport landscape. We then provided you with several theories that have been utilized in sport research to help elucidate how sport has not only developed into (through the embodiment of cultural ideologies of American society), but also maintained as a racialized space. It is hoped that these theories will be considered in your reflection, examination, and interpretation of personal experiences with the intersection of race and sport. Providing you with an updated overview of the racial representation of people of color in coaching and leadership positions at the professional and college levels, as well as the impact of race on the experiences and identities of student-athletes of color, we expect you to integrate the preceding information on race, ethnicity, whiteness, and theories to develop and advance your own research or applied agendas toward a more diverse and inclusive institution of sport.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to differentiate between “race” and “ethnicity”?
2. How can a society become racialized? In what ways has the United States been characterized by racialization?
3. In your opinion, which of the theories presented in this chapter best explains how race plays out in the sporting context? Can only one theory explain the dynamics of race in these spaces?
4. As the demographic landscape of the United States becomes more racially diverse, what might this mean for sport and how it manifests in the institution of it? Will racism and discrimination subside or simply become more entrenched and covert in nature?

## SUGGESTED READINGS

- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2018). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. (Bonilla-Silva discusses how post-racial ideology in the form of colorblindness has served to “covertly” maintain systemic racism in the United States. Additionally, the author argues that as the United States becomes more diversified, a re-construction of racial hierarchies may occur to re-entrench and preserve the dominance of whiteness in American society.)
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2015). *Racial formation in the United States* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Routledge. (Omi and Winant introduce racial formation theory as a means to address critical issues regarding the social realities of race (and by extension, racism). This theory seeks to better address the manners by which racial group relations are constructed, and the socio-cultural, -economic, and -historical implications of racial inequality in American society.)
- Smith, E. (2013). *Race, sport and the American dream* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press. (Smith draws primarily from critical theory and world-system theory to examine the extent to which sport has impacted the economic, educational, familial, and socio-cultural experiences of African Americans – in particular, the relationship between sport and the African American male athlete is explored to shed further light on the nature of this consequential relationship.)

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