

# Living and Embracing Intersectionality in Sport: Introduction to the Special Issue

## *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*

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Intersectionality is a theoretical concept that carries both scholarly and personal meaning for the editors of this special issue of the *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*. Commonly associated with critical legal studies and Black feminist thought, intersectionality was originally defined as “the ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of black women’s . . . experiences” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). Although Crenshaw coined the term in 1989 as a way for the legal profession to contemplate Black women’s experiences with oppression, the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black queer feminists, had issued a statement in 1975 explaining how the lived experiences of Black women were inextricably tied to interlocking systems of oppression of race, gender, and class (Collective, 1977). This statement would lay the groundwork for Crenshaw to powerfully articulate the intersectional nature of employment discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). Subjected to discriminatory hiring practices that excluded them from factory jobs held by White women and Black men, Black women were being oppressed by a legal system that refused to recognize the interlocking nature of oppression, forcing them to sue in court on the basis of race or gender oppression. Patricia Hill Collins would later note that intersectionality was not just a critical theory, but it had also become an accepted practice that created communal spaces for collectively resisting social injustice and oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2020). While intersectionality has been expanded to include other social constructions of identity like ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, ability, and faith, as guest editors for the special issue, we wanted to provide the reader with a historical overview of the concept and acknowledge its original intent and focus.

As the editorial team, we were purposeful in highlighting the importance of intersectionality within sport, exercise, and performance psychology settings. Society, sport, and the field of sport psychology have historically failed to

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recognize the multidimensional nature of identity and how athletes who navigate multiple axes of oppression (e.g., classism, homonegativism, racism, sexism, ableism) have learned to survive and thrive. By providing a collection of works that highlight lived experiences, reflective interpretations, as well as practical and clinical implications for creating inclusive spaces where all feel heard, seen, valued, and supported in the field, sport, and performance settings, our intention was to provide practitioners in all stages of their careers from student to retiree an opportunity to submit their works and from our call, we received a variety of articles. We are grateful to the authors who took up the call and submitted their scholarly efforts to the special issue. We acknowledge the limited number of scholars who are willing to engage the sociocultural aspects of the profession and explicitly name the harm that occurs within applied sport psychology practice due to the interconnected nature of privilege and oppression that pervades the field.

Part of this issue's not-so-subtle exploration of matrices of oppression (within applied sport psychology practice) is the concomitant belief among the authors and the editors of this special issue that harm done to clients, stakeholders, and members of the sport psychology community must be remedied. As the editors of this special issue, we are especially grateful to authors who made the scholarly choice of engaging purposefully with this issue through creative analytic practice (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) by submitting poetry, autoethnography, and mediated accounts of lived experiences. Several intersectional themes have emerged in this special issue of the *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* that lay the groundwork for practitioners to explore their own multidimensional identities and the worldviews of the clients we serve.

The first section of this special issue is composed of three articles that explore the theoretical and practical applications of intersectionality within applied sport psychology practice. Debra Kriger, Amélie Keyser-Verreault, Janelle Joseph, and Danielle Peers introduce "The Operationalizing Intersectionality Framework" as a multidimensional model of social justice designed to assist practitioners with identifying and mitigating patterns and systems of oppression within sport, sport psychology, and applied sport psychology settings. The framework is situated by four guiding principles: learning, harm reduction, transformation, and accountability and transparency. By asking the question "Who is centered?" the framework invites practitioners to consider which bodies and identities are centered in our practices. By asking "Who is centered?" we are able to draw attention to those who are in the margins and foreground the oppressive systems within our teaching, research, service, and consultancy practices. As such, sport psychology practitioners will find the framework useful for creating affirming and inclusive spaces for all athletes.

In "Intersectionality in the Sport Psychology Classroom: Reflections from a Neophyte Instructor," Shelby Anderson discusses her experiences as a neophyte instructor implementing culturally responsive and intersectional teaching practices in a sport psychology classroom. The article provides sport psychology practitioners and educators with pedagogical tools for cocreating inclusive and anti-oppressive sport psychology classrooms. The author leaves sport psychology educators with powerful lessons learned from the author's intersectional teaching experiences, including listening to the needs of learners who might be challenged and providing them with autonomy to grow, providing the space for personal self-reflection, continually educating ourselves on the privilege and oppression that

exists within society, seeking out other instructors and peers who can act as mentors, and engaging in self-care.

Shameema “Shams” Yousuf in “Musings of a Transnational Intersectional U.K. Practitioner Psychologist” uses poetry to meaningfully contemplate her experiences as a transnational, intersectional sport psychology practitioner. Many of the athletes we serve will find resonance in these phrases: “They see me, but don’t see my strength. They see me, but they don’t see the athlete in me.” In shifting from poetry to autoethnography, the author then shares personal experiences of being Muslim and a woman in the field, and the need to disrupt hegemonic and colonial practices within applied sport psychology settings. Through anti-oppressive praxis and creating spaces for self-healing and communal reflection amongst practitioners, we can enliven the field.

The special issue then moves into the second section which highlights research articles that provide suggestions for improving diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the field. Rena Curvey, Shannon White, Emily Murphy, Travis Sheadler, Myles Englis, Laura Phelps, and Candice Hargons illuminate that historically sport psychology graduate programs were not required to incorporate multicultural and social justice principles in their curriculum in “Multicultural Training and Awareness Among Sport Psychology Practitioners.” In this light, the authors pose that sport psychology professionals may not be adequately trained and/or prepared to navigate the multicultural challenges that organizations, teams, and clients experience. Findings from their interviews with 12 sport psychology professionals suggest reforming training programs to ensure sport psychology professionals are able to fulfill their professional and ethical responsibilities; moreover, for training to shift from multicultural competence to cultural humility where self-reflexivity, cultural sensitivity, and a critical examination of one’s own identities, as well as their worldviews, are centered. In addition to graduate programs integrating multiculturalism into all aspects of curriculum, authors suggest the Association of Applied Sport Psychology require cultural diversity continuing education be central to maintaining one’s certification and recommend current practitioners invest in their own learning by seeking opportunities facilitated by educators with intentionally ignored identities.

Next, Tsz Lun (Alan) Chu, Ellea Bachmeier, and Taylor Mair share their quantitative findings from “Still an Old Boys’ Club? Certified Mental Performance Consultants Gender-Typed Sport Specialization and Employment Setting.” While qualitative studies have unveiled gender inequities in sport and sport psychology careers, the authors were the first to examine gender differences in the specialization and work placement of Certified Mental Performance Consultants (CMPCs) by extracting data from the CMPC directory. Researchers suggest that CMPCs are equitably represented by gender in the military, college sport, and private practice; however, gender inequity exists within professional sport. Authors encourage future researchers to further examine additional intersectional identities to provide a more accurate mosaic of inclusion in the profession. In addition, they provide potential explanations for why sport psychology professionals who identify as female may be more inclined to obtain their CMPC than their counterparts who identify as male. Our editorial team also appreciates their thoughtful suggestions for Association of Applied Sport Psychology and the American Psychological Association, Division 47, to consider when increasing gender equity in the field.

The third section of this special issue moves beyond applied sport psychology practice and delves into topics of intersectionality that are pertinent to the field but extends beyond its disciplinary borders. As editors, we feel that these border crossings are essential for culturally reflexive practice within the discipline and the field as they have the power to foster nuanced understandings of the holistic needs of athletes. In “Gender Equity in Disability Sport: A Rapid Scoping Review,” Diane Culver, Majidullah Shaikh, Danielle Alexander, and Karine Fournier utilize a five-step scoping review methodology to interrogate and decenter hegemonic (masculine) identities within disability sport. Through an analysis of 61 journal articles, the authors excavate the ways in which women athletes negotiate their marginalized gender identities while participating in disability sport. The authors also provide the readership with strategies on how to enhance the quality of participation for these athletes.

Next, in “I Would Not Trade It for the World: Black Women Student-Athletes, Activism, and Allyship in 2020–2021,” DeAnne Brooks and Rob Knox distill the lived experiences of six Black women student-athletes at a Historically White Institution and create a compelling account of how these athlete-activists negotiated and performed their intersectional identities during a global pandemic. The authors make specific recommendations on how sport psychology practitioners and other athletic personnel can become transformational allies by supporting not only these athletes’ sport performances but also their overall health and well-being.

In further highlighting the need to bring awareness to student-athlete health and well-being, Aidan Kraus and Erica Tibbetts examine athletes’ help-seeking behaviors and experiences with anxiety and depression at a Historically Women’s College. In the article entitled “Depression, Anxiety, and Help-Seeking Among NCAA Division III Athletes at a Historically Women’s College,” the authors cite how the rates of anxiety, depression, and help-seeking behaviors of these athletes are much higher than what has been reported in previous research. They also find that gender identity varies widely among these athletes and the importance to address the needs of genderqueer/gender nonconforming athletes.

The final section of this special issue brings what we feel is not a closure to the issue, but a call to action for the field. In “Hope for a Better Future in an Uncertain Present: A Social Justice Reflection in Sport Psychology,” Bernadette (Bernie) Compton invites readers to take a journey as she discusses her experiences in the field of sport psychology and actively searches for the answers to struggles and obstacles encountered. The article provides space for those truly interested in engaging in and pushing forward social justice work in the field of sport psychology. We implore the readers of this issue to recognize their role in shaping our field and encourage each person to embrace intersectionality in their work and with those they serve.

We all have a role in transforming sport to be an inclusive space where everyone, no matter our intersectional identities, “feels” and “knows” we are welcomed and embraced for all of who we are. We hope each reader takes learning and growth with them after engaging with this special issue, and that this issue leads to additional scholarly work around intersectional identities and antioppressive practices. As an editorial team, we thank all of our colleagues who have

contributed; it has been our honor to steward this project for *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* and, more broadly, the field of sport and exercise psychology.

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