A Critical Examination of Race and Antiracism in the Sport for Development Field: An Introduction

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We welcome you to this special issue of the Sociology of Sport Journal which was envisioned as an opportunity to reimagine and recreate sporting spaces for true racial inclusion and equity. We developed the special issue because of what we saw as an absence of a specific and sustained focus on race and racism in Sport for Development (SfD) as well as an antiracist approach to research and analysis of SfD. This was driven, in part, by the ways in which race; racism; antiracism; and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) permeated U.S. society following the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020.1 As statements of solidarity were released, equity audits performed, diversity statements crafted, chief diversity officers hired, DEI training mandated, and strategic plans reframed, we found ourselves (as individuals actively engaged in the SfD field) asking about the ways the field was responding in this moment, given its intentional focus on the use of sport to achieve social change outcomes.

As a microcosm of the broader society in which these interventions exist, the field of SfD has a complicated history with race and racism. For example, historical racial power dynamics are apparent in SfD practice, with practitioners (especially those in leadership roles) and funders more often being economically privileged White people, and participants more often being economically oppressed Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC; Anderson et al., 2021). With this in mind, how did conversations unfold in these settings related to the Black Lives Matter movement, which began in 2013 as a response to the tragic murder of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old Black male?2 How did SfD organizations, particularly those in the United States, respond when a 46-year-old Black man cried out to his mother just before he was killed at the hand and knee of Minneapolis police officers? And how did researchers study these phenomena? Did they identify connections between structural conditions that preceded and contributed to the manifestation of these heinous events? We know the COVID-19 pandemic created space for communities to pause, focus, listen, and learn of the mobilizing message that galvanized the prevailing usage of languages of former colonizing countries (i.e., perceived primacy of European universities) including the prevailing usage of languages of former colonizing countries (English, French, Spanish, and German) in international communications and concurrent suppression and erasure of Indigenous, African, and Asian epistemologies also reflects the ongoing vicissitudes of settler colonialism (Chen & Mason, 2019).

In this special issue, race and racism are the central foci and are conceptualized as socially constructed systems of oppression that empowers White supremacy and reproduces systemic marginalization. Their messaging took hold as 2020 saw an increased number of protests, rallies, and demonstrations (Chotiner, 2020). And yet, how did stakeholders across the SfD field respond?

The Black Lives Matter movement was not the only race-centric movement focused on advancing justice, equity, and self-determination in society and sport in recent years. In 2018, for example, Crystal Echo Hawk launched the IllumiNative organization to “disrupt the invisibility of Native peoples, re-educate Americans, and mobilize public support for key Native issues” (IllumiNative, 2023). This organization produced multiple resources to educate and support an accurate depiction of Indigenous people. In addition, they curated materials to support BIPOC more broadly and to build alliances with non-Indigenous people. These critical, yet thoughtful resources focused on representation (e.g., What’s In and What’s Out for Native Representation), advocacy (e.g., For Our Future: An Advocate’s Guide to Celebrating Indigenous Peoples Day), and mascots (e.g., 2020 Native Mascots Fact Sheet, Unpacking the Mascot Debate Explainer) (IllumiNative, n.d.). The work of IllumiNative sought to promote community, connectivity, and, when necessary, social movement activation. And yet, what was the role and response of SfD to this race-centric movement?

Conversely, how did or does SfD address the fact that White supremacy and social control are woven into the fabric of our society? Recent examples within the United States include the efforts of politicians at the local, regional, and national levels to legislate against the use of critical race theory (CRT) and DEI, to ensure that any efforts to share history and facts regarding the experiences of BIPOC are not permitted within educational, corporate, and/or social spaces (Schwartz, 2021, 2023). In higher education settings in the United States, at the time of this special issue’s publication, 22 bills in 13 states had been introduced that would prohibit colleges from engaging in DEI efforts (Hu et al., 2023). Within the K–12 environment, most recently, the South Carolina House passed legislation that bans “race-based” discussion in K–12 school classrooms and allows parents to sue districts that do not abide by the prospective law (Budds, 2023). Globally, the prevalence of Eurocentric educational curriculum (i.e., perceived primacy of European universities) including the prevailing usage of languages of former colonizing countries (English, French, Spanish, and German) in international communications and concurrent suppression and erasure of Indigenous, African, and Asian epistemologies also reflects the ongoing vicissitudes of settler colonialism (Chen & Mason, 2019).

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grounded in political and economic domination and enacted on the basis of differences in phenotypical features and cultural backgrounds. Given this, our hope is for SfD scholars, practitioners, and other stakeholders to develop a deeper understanding of race and racism and to embrace the challenges of an antiracist praxis within SfD, particularly through critical analyses framed by approaches such as CRT. CRT was specifically born out of critical legal studies during the Civil Rights Movement, and positioned as an academic framework that situated race and racism as endemic, permanent, and interwoven into daily structures of society (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Taylor et al., 2023).

When examining the lived realities of BIPOC through a critical lens, it becomes possible to recognize how racist policies and practices disproportionately affect experiences for these groups, from access to affordable housing to overrepresentation in the school-to-prison pipeline to high mortality rates, infant morbidity rates, and increased deaths of Black and Latinx people by police (Feagin, 2013). In sport, the use of similarly critical lenses has illuminated race-centric issues in leadership (Cooper et al., 2017), with Indigenous mascots (Castagno & Lee, 2007; Claw Nez & Verbos, 2015), through fan experiences (e.g., Black, Asian, minority, and ethnic groups; Lawrence & Davis, 2019), of sexual orientation and gendered experiences (Anderson & McCormack, 2010; Carter-Francique, 2020; Simien et al., 2019) within leisure sport (Hylton, 2005), and, to this special issue’s purpose, promoting antiracism (Cooper, 2022; Hylton, 2010). Within the Sociology of Sport Journal, race-centric issues have also been examined (e.g., Burdsey, 2011; Hartmann, 2000), though often through an intersectional lens, such as a focus on race, class, gender, sexuality (Cooky et al., 2010), and an exploration of microaggressions and microaffirmations (Gearity & Henderson Metzger, 2016).

In identifying these connections, we would be remiss if we did not mention the historical social movement efforts of Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (Association for the Study of African American Life and History, n.d.) as they lean on the notion of education and freedom which intersect with the focus of this special issue. The growth of sport opportunities in the United States in racially oppressed communities during the early 20th century was entrenched in the idea of using these activities and spaces as extensions of broader social change efforts in areas such as education, religion, politics, and business. Sport educators such as Edwin Bancroft (E.B.) Henderson, William A. Joiner, Garnet C. Wilkinson, Robert N. Mattingly, Benjamin Washington, William J. Decatur, Haley G.Douglass, and Ralph V. Cooker were pioneers in the SfD movement among the African American community in the early 20th century (Cooper, 2021). While the fullness of their efforts is beyond the scope of this introduction, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History represents the epitome of social movements in building an association in 1915, initiating Negro History Week in 1926, and through allyship, forging the expansion of Black History Month in 1976. Additionally, the association’s 2023 theme of Black Resistance embodies the spirit of Black people, acknowledges their experience with chattel slavery, segregation, and voter suppression, and illuminates their multifaceted resistance methods to disrupt White supremacy through their platform, including the use of sport. While not affiliated with the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport and its membership, we believe there are opportunities for synergistic thinking, with this special issue representing one such scholarly effort to promote racial equity and social justice through the platform of SfD. The intentional composition of a diverse group of scholars to serve as editors was one effort toward creating a meaningful special issue on race and antiracism in SfD.

**Special Issue Editorial Team**

In our respective academic appointments, leadership roles, and community service engagements within and outside of institutions of higher education, we felt the impact of the shift in dialogue about race, racism, and antiracism these past few years, as well as the desire to engage with centering race and racism in our work. We also recognize the need to amplify the importance of antiracism and DEI efforts within our affinity for SfD. As a collective, we are a transdisciplinary team of scholar-practitioners with roots in sport sociology, sport management, sport psychology, educational leadership, and advocacy. We also have a diversity of training and educational experiences; research, monitoring, evaluation, and learning perspectives; field experiences; personal histories; and sociocultural positionings. In sum, we all came to know and experience SfD in diverse ways over different periods of time which we felt important to share openly in this introduction.

**Joseph N. Cooper.** As a sport sociologist whose research focuses on the intersection of race, sport, education, and culture, Joseph Cooper was drawn to be a part of this special issue editorial team because the field of SfD encompasses multiple aspects of his scholarly interests. In contrast to mainstream traditional sport, SfD programming is intentionally created to redress social inequalities such as systemic economic deprivation and cross-cultural conflicts, to name a few. As a Black male, former athlete, and lifelong sports enthusiast, Cooper possesses an affinity for the transformative power of sporting spaces, particularly those that do not overemphasize competition and individualism. As such, being a part of a group that solicited scholarship that examines the SfD field from critical perspectives was not only appealing, but inspiring to Cooper. According to Cooper, despite the progressive intentions of the SfD field, it is not immune to the challenges that face all academic fields in terms of perpetuating racialized ideologies, systems, practices, and outcomes. This special issue seeks to highlight innovative ways in which SfD research can be defined, created, implemented, and examined. As a scholar who uses a range of critical theories, Cooper found that this special issue prioritized the value of applying critical lenses such as decolonization, CRT, and anti-racism frameworks to understand how, when, where, why, and what types of SfD interventions are beneficial or detrimental to and for whom. The articles in this special issue challenge all of us to reconsider and reimagine what constitutes SfD work and the importance of engaging in perpetual critical reflexivity and concerted and courageous race-conscious systemic change as scholars, practitioners, observers, and participants.

**Meredith A. Whitley.** A former university athlete and coach, Whitley first engaged in SfD through field experiences in schools, community centers, and recreation spaces in Boston, East Lansing, San Francisco, Queens, NY, and the Kayamandi Township of South Africa, along with intensive study in sport psychology and youth development during work on her graduate degrees. Her focus expanded to other “parent disciplines” of SfD as she recognized that SfD interventions are not operating within linear, organized confines but are actually enmeshed in a dynamic, messy, interconnected world. Rather
than studying SfD with a reductionist approach, dissecting complexity into manageable—and often discipline-specific—parts, Whitley takes a systems approach that embraces this complexity, seeking to understand the whole and the parts concurrently (Whitley, Donnelly, et al., 2022; Whitley et al., 2018). Systems thinking is now infused into her two main lines of research: (a) the intersection of sport, trauma, and resilience and (b) the quality of research and evidence in the SfD field. Additionally, Whitley has actively engaged in an ongoing process of racial and cultural awareness, consciousness, and positional identity. As a White, cisgender, heterosexual female with privilege embedded into her life from the start, she is learning how to engage in and with spaces, topics, and persons through empathic listening and self-reflexivity. Her interest in this special issue was driven by the lack of a critical or comprehensive collection of research and writing on the broader practices and experiences of racialization and/or anti-racism in the SfD field.

Simon Darnell. Darnell is a sports sociologist, sports fan, and baseball and hockey coach. He grew up in a white, middle-class family in a multicultural neighborhood of East Vancouver. These childhood experiences of being White (both identifying as and being seen as), combined with his family’s class and gender politics, eventually fomented his awareness of, and interest in, the structuring role of race and racial hierarchies in contemporary Canadian culture. For nearly 20 years, he has been interested in the social and political implications of conceptualizing, organizing, and mobilizing sport to meet non-sport goals, such as supporting social development and contributing to peace and conflict resolution. He has conducted research internationally, in the Caribbean and Southern Africa, as well as at home in Toronto. His work tends to draw on, and sometimes to combine, a range of sociological and political theories, often with the aim of investigating and examining the ideologies, material relations, and/or relations of power that underpin SfD. This approach has often brought issues of race, Whiteness, dominance, and normativity to the fore of research.

Akilah Carter-Francique. Carter-Francique started as a youth sport participant in track and field, martial arts, volleyball, and dance. Sport, education, and the notion of equity were a mainstay for her as a Black child born to and raised by a K–12 educator in Topeka, Kansas, home of the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka.3 These early experiences led to her participation as a collegiate track-and-field athlete, team captain, peer mentor, Student Athlete Advisory Board (SAAB) member, and double major who was gaining knowledge in diversity, equity, inclusion, and advocacy. As her experiences and knowledge grew in educational spaces, Carter-Francique would serve as an advocate professional (parent engagement specialist) for K–8 students and cross-country and track coach at the high school level. She then served as an administrator in campus recreation at the collegiate level and became a member of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association. As a member of NIRSA, she presented research and gave presentations with NIRSA and its affiliated Emerging Recreational Sports Leaders (ERSL) Conference. The “goal of the ERSL Conference has ever since been to provide minority students who are interested in careers in collegiate recreation with the tools and network connections needed to succeed in this dynamic field” (NIRSA, 2023). This meaningful affiliation, rooted in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) activist efforts, shaped Carter-Francique’s professional development and continued to nurture her drive to promote equity, voice, and representation through scholarship, leadership, teaching, and consulting. Hence, Carter-Francique came to the SfD space with a range of personal and professional experiences that prompted her appointment to the research council for Laureus Sport for Good USA in 2018 and her on-going consulting with this child- and youth-centered foundation. This affiliation, coupled with her scholarly focus on race, racism, and social justice (e.g., Carter-Francique, 2017; Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013; Hawkins et al., 2017), feature her keen interest in equitable experiences for youth in SfD programs. This interest includes supporting the leadership efforts of women and people of color and aiding Laureus in supporting those leaders through education, training, and resource access (e.g., grants, funding).

Kip O’Rourke-Brown. O’Rourke-Brown was shaped by the community of sport from an early age through a local Little League program as a player, volunteer, and umpire, and then to high school varsity (baseball and basketball) and collegiate club (rugby) sports experiences. He eventually connected with a New York City-based award winning organization, Play Rugby USA, and was tasked with designing and implementing a SfD after-school program designed around flag rugby. Play Rugby USA and its affiliation (and co-location for a period of time) with Up2Us Sports connected O’Rourke-Brown to the growing community of practitioners, researchers, and designers of SfD programs of all shapes and sizes in NYC and across the globe. O’Rourke-Brown eventually led all programs at Play Rugby USA, validating their outcomes by working with SfD and youth development peers in the collaborative design of AlgoRhythm’s youth development sport evaluation tool. This success led to applying his experience at an SfD organization, Harlem RBI, that was transitioning to a network of public charter schools, rebranded and formed as DREAM. Additionally, O’Rourke-Brown learned about Whiteney’s partnership with the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation to lead a collaborative of practitioners to come together regularly and tackle different topics relevant to the day-to-day experiences of SfD staff. O’Rourke-Brown used this platform to become an initial member and the inaugural Chair of the Laureus Sport for Good Leadership Council in New York City. This council eventually formed an equity committee where he helped source and vet DEI consultants and then execute an extensive DEI plan to ensure race and anti-racist measures, practices, and foundations were in place. The DEI pathway was both personally and professionally revelatory. As a male born in Queens of mixed race parents (black and white), he lived in a majority black community as a $fD practitioner (Harlem, NY), juxtaposed to being raised in a majority white community (Saratoga Springs, NY).

The uniqueness of our editorial team lies in the fact that, collectively, we have rich and nuanced experiences with studying race and antiracism within sporting spaces. Our respective research areas intersect (directly and indirectly) with SfD research, and thus, we share a mutual concern about whether (and how) this field acknowledges race and promotes antiracism. The SfD field is centered on the role of sport in facilitating developmental and social change outcomes; however, there has not yet been a comprehensive critical exploration of race and antiracism within SfD. This special issue helps to fill this gap.
SfD Research

Themes in SfD

To date, research into SfD has tended to fall into several notable categories. While an exhaustive assessment of the SfD literature and its categorization is beyond the scope of this section (see Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Whitley, Collison-Randall, et al., 2022), three themes are useful to posit here. First, and often foremost, has been the question of how to measure the outcomes or effects of SfD programming, with a particular focus on the experiences of participants or user groups (Whitley, Massey, Camiré, Blom, et al., 2019; Whitley, Massey, Camiré, Boutet, et al., 2019). Scholars working in this space, like Levermore (2011a, 2011b), have drawn attention to the various approaches used in the monitoring and evaluation of SfD, such as positivist versus participatory approaches, while others, like Coalter (2007, 2013), have highlighted the benefits of critical realist evaluations in SfD that can help to explain not just whether SfD works or not, but how such organizations achieve their goals. This work has tended to question, in a positive sense, the paradigms through which to assess SfD activity, but has often stopped short of examining race, power, and privilege within SfD activity.

A second category of SfD research are studies focused on the structures and features of the SfD sector, often in sociomanagerial terms. This work has led to comparative analyses of SfD (Svensson & Woods, 2017), categorical or descriptive analyses of the SfD sector and its component organizations (Giulianotti, 2011; Straume, 2018; Svensson et al., 2020), and theoretical or empirical groundings of SfD in specific issues like hybridity (Svensson, 2017) or professionalization (McSweeney et al., 2021). Again, research in this category has been useful for documenting and theorizing how SfD operates, and the structural and organizational tensions therein, but has rarely opened up space for analyses of racial or social hierarchies.

The third category to which we draw attention has been the critical sociological analysis of SfD, the subset of SfD research that has analyzed most specifically the ways in which power operates in SfD. This work has examined how knowledge and power in SfD create and maintain preferred subjects (Darnell, 2014), in terms that are gendered (Hayhurst, 2013) or grounded in neoliberal understandings of responsibility or social change (Darnell, 2010a; Forde & Frisy, 2015). Also, there have been examinations of the ways in which SfD confirms, reproduces, and/or reifies colonial histories and hierarchies (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Essa et al., 2022). It is within this literature that something of a critical race analysis of SfD has emerged. This subset of SfD literature has tended to examine the production of whiteness within SfD experiences (Darnell, 2007), the ways in which knowledge production (including monitoring and evaluation) in SfD is produced through racialized encounters (Darnell, 2010b; Nicholls et al., 2011), and the political implications of targeting racialized or Indigenous groups in SfD (Arellano & Downey, 2019; Hayhurst et al., 2016; Lucas et al., 2021). This includes research published within the Sociology of Sport Journal (Darnell, 2010a; Darnell et al., 2018; Forde, 2014; Hayhurst et al., 2018; Seal & Sherry, 2018). However, even though some of the literature in this category clearly touches on race, it is often the case that race, racialization, and antiracism are relative afterthoughts in the research questions being asked and analyses offered.

Thus, while this research activity has been important in the creation and development of a critical mass of SfD literature, it is our contention that what is still absent in the study of SfD is a specific and sustained focus on race and racism, along with an antiracist approach to analyzing SfD. Additionally, the preponderance of White researchers in SfD has arguably tended to normalize racial hierarchies in SfD research, a point to which we attend further below.

Race and Racism in SfD: Critiques and Analysis

We also see a rather glaring undertheorization and a lack of in-depth exploration of race and racism in SfD, particularly in comparison to other academic fields (e.g., international development studies and sociology of sport). This combination of a lack of antiracism work and/or reticence to discuss race and racism in SfD is particularly significant given that the presence of race is clear in SfD activity and in the broader international development sector. Indeed, many SfD programs and projects are focused on racialized or Indigenous groups, and international development itself is still often marked by encounters and interactions between racialized subjects from the global North and South. Yet very few practitioners or researchers specifically address the politics, the hierarchies, or the conflicts that produce and/or result from these relationships or encounters. And even though there have been important postcolonial critiques of SfD (e.g., Hayhurst, 2016; Jeanes et al., 2013; Nicholls et al., 2011), these critiques rarely foreground analyses of race and racism specifically. Interestingly, these critiques are conceived as only happening “abroad” or within the international relations and spaces of SfD. Notably, this occurs even though there is a strong tradition of addressing race and supporting antiracism in international development studies (e.g., Baaz, 2005; Heron, 2007; Power, 2006) and the sociology of sport (e.g., Carrington, 2010; Cooper, 2022; Hylton, 2010; Joseph, 2017), both disciplines that we might expect to filter into the critical analysis of SfD.

This raises the question as to why, to date, there has not been the emergence of a critical or comprehensive mass of research and writing on these topics within the SfD literature. There are several possible explanations. One is that the focus on monitoring and evaluation and, by extension, instrumental and/or applied perspectives on SfD remains attractive and carries discursive weight within the field, particularly because they are the easiest to justify and fund. From this perspective, it is easier and more palatable to measure SfD outcomes than to discuss SfD’s sociological implications. Another, and related, possibility is that the current political climate, which arguably increases the need for antiracism work, also increased the chances of backlash, making such work in SfD riskier.

Still, as a group of scholars committed to the sociology of sport and critically informed analysis of SfD, we think that the study of race and racism in SfD should happen, for the following reasons. First, such a focus is necessary to extend scholarly SfD activity beyond that of teaching, and more closely and firmly toward advocating for change. Second, this effort responds positively to calls from scholars like Hartmann and Kwauk (2011) to consider the politics of SfD activity itself. Whereas the dominant vision of SfD tends to train participants to survive amid inequity, a transformative vision of SfD would help illuminate the roots of inequity to which SfD interventions respond. We see antiracism as crucial to this transformative approach. And third, antiracism in SfD can help identify and remind all concerned stakeholders that tensions and hierarchies of race and racism exist within SfD interventions locally and domestically.
and not only on an international scale. That is, racialization in SfD occurs not only during encounters between the global North and South but is fundamental to many SfD organizations and approaches. It, therefore, requires a sustained research focus. In sum, if grounded in antiracist theory and politics, we see the possibility of SfD becoming a site for advocacy and activism, led by a range of stakeholders willing and able to embrace more radical politics toward addressing systemic issues.

In This Special Issue

The articles in this special issue highlight how antiracism in SfD programming can and does include the infusion of decolonial (i.e., settler colonialism), critical (e.g., CRT, intersectionality, and critical whiteness), antideficit, and ecological system theories. Within these critical analyses, the contributing authors are attuned to the ways in which SfD programming in settler colonial milieu inherently contains limitations absent societal transformations. Through this special issue, the authors show how marginalized groups resist racism and intersecting forms of oppression through creative expression, relationship building (social bonding and bridging), resource sharing, mutual respect, trust, and intentionalality. The special issue articles also highlight how antiracism work concurrently involves the centering of marginalized groups via counterstorytelling as well as the application of critical reflexivity among White stakeholders (including scholars, practitioners, and funders). The deconstruction of whiteness and its negative impacts in and through sport involves recognizing how historical and current systems (including narratives) exclude the perspectives, experiences, and contributions of racially oppressed groups such as BIPOC. This approach is particularly important in addressing the harmful prevalence of the White savior myth embedded in many mainstream SfD interventions. The White savior myth refers to the phenomenon whereby White people internalize the belief that the only or primary way for racially marginalized groups to improve their plight is to receive assistance in the form of charity or advocacy (i.e., nominal gestures that often exacerbate the status quo). This is opposed to White people engaging in sustained activist allyship, and in ways that require a commitment to dismantling whiteness and the systemic privileges therein (Cooper, 2022; Jolly et al., 2021). The White savior myth within SfD interventions ignores the impact of settler colonialism and white racial capitalism (Anderson et al., 2021; Chen, 2022). Grounded in antiracism, the special issue articles disrupt and problematize the normalization of whiteness in SfD research and programming and offer insights for a more racially inclusive and equitable path forward within the field. Marginalized groups that were the focus of the special issue articles include BIPOC youth who live in systemically oppressive environments, including those who are currently or previously incarcerated.

Methodological techniques employed by the authors include participatory action research, autoethnography with critical collaboration interrogation, ethnography, dialogic learning community/team-based learning inquiry, self-reflexive writing, transcendental phenomenology, photovoice, sociograms, and life mapping, to name a few.

One of the most compelling themes in this special issue relates to the actual definition of SfD itself, which has been critiqued for its vague, amorphous, complex, and changing terminology (e.g., SfD, SfD and peace, and sport-based youth development; Whitley, Farrell, et al., 2019). In our editorial view, all too often, SfD is defined too narrowly and often privileges the perspectives of White scholars, practitioners, funders, and other stakeholders who do not experience systemic oppression. As a result, SfD interventions are myopically categorized as after-school or community programs created and implemented by people from outside of the communities where these programs are implemented. Many contributors to this special issue embraced a broader interpretation of SfD programming and explored what might be considered nontraditional sporting spaces within the SfD field (at least at the time of publication). As such, a unique contribution of this special issue involves the conceptualization of SfD in both traditional (i.e., after-school and community settings) and nontraditional spaces (i.e., inschool, prison, and religious). The infusion of these perspectives expands current understandings of what constitutes SfD programming and who is identified (or identifies themselves) as SfD practitioners. In addition, the absence of certain scholarship (including a critical mass of first author BIPOC contributions and interdisciplinary analyses) underscores the ongoing need for critical reflexivity within the SfD (and sport sociology) fields regarding the question of whose work is welcomed, included, and valued. We view this special issue as one step within a broader effort to foster more antiracism and DEI within and across academic fields.

Overall, the most compelling reality that we aim to problematize in this special issue is the historical and current boundaries of SfD programming and research. In concert with the special issue authors, we are encouraging a re-examination of the boundaries that define SfD work. When we reference boundaries, we are speaking to ones that are literal and/or figurative. From a literal standpoint, we argue there is a need for more critical examinations and expansive inclusion of SfD efforts across the global South and North. Figuratively, we are referring to the problematic ways in which SfD is defined by scholars, practitioners, funders, and other stakeholders who possess privileged identities and worldviews that limit their ability to critically examine how they subconsciously, unconsciously, and consciously reproduce systems of oppression. As noted earlier, the application of decolonial and critical theories is one way to mitigate this issue. Another important component of antiracist SfD research and programming is the recognition and documentation of critically reflexive positionality/subjectivity statements. All SfD stakeholders possess identities that carry social, historical, political, cultural, and economic weight (or lack thereof). Understanding multilevel power dynamics involved in SfD programming and research is essential to engaging in antiracism work. Such research also involves the disaggregation of racial and ethnic groups, resisting the tendency to treat these groups as monolithic entities that experience systemic conditions in identical ways. We will leave it to the readers to decide, but we think it is interesting to consider who is doing the work, how SfD is conceptualized, and what the future holds for work centered on anti-racism and understandings of race?

Future Directions

In developing this special issue, we hope to elicit critical examinations of and changes in research, policy, and practice to improve experiences and outcomes for racial groups subjected to systemic oppression. It is our intention that this special issue challenges scholars, practitioners, funders, and other stakeholders to reflect upon the following questions: Who benefits the most from historical and contemporary status quo within the SfD field and broader society? Who is disadvantaged and exploited from historical and contemporary status quo and broader society? How can we reimagine and create a new norm that embodies true racial inclusion and equity? Who should be involved and who should be leading these
efforts? How can we collectively work together to reallocate resources and establish a new political economy that is grounded in radical humanism rather than hierarchical beliefs? Answers to these questions could lead us toward a better future. We also recommend more global analyses of SFd programming to examine intersections and divergences across cultural milieu. New and expansive definitions of what constitutes SFd and who can perform it should be considered. We recommend embracing and promoting more BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ scholars, practitioners, funders, and other stakeholders. The application of more decolonial and critical approaches to SFd can also create new ways of thinking, doing, and being that transform our current reality from inequality, inequity, and stratification to equality, equity, and inclusion. We view this special issue as one step toward the reimagining of sporting spaces, but we know that it is far from complete.

Notes

1. George Floyd was a 46-year-old Black man who was arrested in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, on May 25, 2020, for using counterfeit money. During his arrest, a 44-year-old White police officer, Derek Chauvin, knelt on Floyd’s neck for 8 min and 46 seconds while Floyd was handcuffed and lying in the street face-down. This resulted in Floyd dying at the hands of the police. Two other police officers assisted Chauvin in restraining Floyd, while a fourth prevented onlookers from intervening. This sparked a global movement, with millions of people protesting and marching around the world (King, 2020).

2. Trayvon Martin was a 17-year-old Black male who was fatally shot on February 26, 2012, by George Zimmerman, a 28-year-old male of mixed race who identifies as Hispanic. Zimmerman was the neighborhood watch coordinator for a gated community in Sanford, Florida, USA, who became suspicious of Martin walking through the neighborhood. Despite being charged with second-degree murder, Zimmerman was acquitted after claiming self-defense (King, 2020).

3. Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka was a significant landmark case during the Civil Rights Movement. The case refuted Plessy v. Ferguson, finding on May 15, 1954, that “separate was not equal” and thus segregation in public educational spaces was illegal and violated the equal protection clause under the 14th Amendment of the United States (United States Courts, n.d.).

References


