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Investigating the impact and value of anti-racist pedagogy within the undergraduate sport and leisure curriculum:

A York St John University case study.

Executive Report
July 2023

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LEISURE STUDIES ASSOCIATION

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Introduction

Increasing ambitions for social justice within higher education (HE) in the Global North has cultivated a growing interest in and action towards anti-racist pedagogy and the decolonisation of the curriculum (Anderotti *et al*., 2015; Moghil and Kadiwal, 2021; Riches *et al*., 2017; Tate and Baggulely, 2017). Anti-racist pedagogy attempts to educate about race and racism in a way that develops critical analytical skills and illuminates uneven power relations behind racism (Kishimoto, 2018). Decolonising the HE curriculum includes diversifying reading lists, critiquing racist underpinnings within key concepts, and disrupting hegemonic Whiteness (Arshad *et al*., 2021). Within the United Kingdom (UK) HEs, efforts to decolonise the curriculum focus on the requirement to address shared colonial histories and to examine the racial inequalities that structure the curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and assessments (Bhambra *et al*., 2020).

Decolonial and anti-racist pedagogy involves challenging oppression and changing educational structures that have marginalised both knowledge produced in the global South and academics of colour (Anderotti *et al*., 2015). Ono-George (2019: 4) describes decolonial pedagogy as teaching that 'challenges exclusionary practices that promote, reinforce and reproduce dominant knowledge and the status quo'. This form of pedagogy is central to campaigns that seek to dismantle existing orthodoxies, such as *Decolonising the Curriculum Movement* and *Why is my Curriculum White* (Adray *et al*., 2021). Such pedagogy and campaigns aim to end the domination of Western epistemological traditions, figures, and histories by raising awareness and unlearning dominant ways of knowing (Gibson and Faias, 2020; Masaka, 2019; Molefe, 2016).

In the UK, decolonial scholarship often revolves around moving beyond Eurocentric and Western-centric thought and disrupting the 'Whiteness' of the curriculum (Bhambra *et al*., 2018; Laing, 2021). 'Whiteness' as a socially constructed concept centres white people and White ways of knowing (Evans-Winter and Hines, 2020). Within the context of HE, Whiteness is perpetuated through Eurocentric curricula (Arday, 2018), developing from the advancement of White privilege and supremacy (Wise, 2008). According to Ono-George (2019), disruption should include encouraging students, especially those in the comfortable majority, out of their comfort zones. Such pedagogical approaches are understood to be crucial for developing a critical consciousness among students whose Whiteness can inhibit their awareness of race or their white privilege (Evans-Winter and Hines, 2020). Privilege in this sense refers to systematic advantages, such as preferential prejudice and exemption from racial oppression, afforded to white people with European ancestry over those who are racialized with non-European ancestry.

The HE curriculum has become a focal point of efforts to attain epistemic justice through 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo, 2009, 2011). Considering how to promote epistemic justice in HE, Masaka (2019: 305) asserts:

> I imagine epistemic justice that focuses not only on the issue of diversifying sources of the curriculum content but also on ensuring that the knowledge that are imparted to learners enables them to become independent thinkers who are disposed to use their creative agency to improve their lives and that of the world.

Part of the epistemic justice and disobedience process involves centralising marginalised voices, perspectives, and ways of knowing (Mignolo, 2011).

One possible barrier to epistemic justice and disobedience in Sports degrees is the dominance of positivistic research epistemologies and ontologies. These positivistic paradigms often frame race and athleticism through objectivist and inductivist lenses (see St Louis, 2004). For instance, Spracklen (2008) notes how sports science literature often publicises ideas about innate genetic differences and athletic ability, drawing on scientific language to bolster unsubstantiated claims. This epistemology is problematic as it foregrounds race as a 'biological truth' used to explain performance based on genetics (Cleophas, 2021: 1539). A more social science perspective, positions 'race' as a social construct. However, sport sociologists have argued that 'race' is a defunct concept which lacks both scientific validity and sociological value (Green, 2008; Spracklen, 2014). As a social construct, the changing manifestations of the concept of race reflects ideological attempts to legitimate domination in different social and historical contexts (Bhavnani, Mirza and Meetoo, 2005). As such, Burdsey (2007) and Hylton (2010) are critical of sports science research that utilises generalist discourses, epistemologies, and ideologies that reinforces oppressive social relations and unwittingly dilutes anti-racist arguments.

A possible further barrier to epistemic justice and disobedience can be the person teaching such content and the approach they take. Scholars in sport, leisure and education have reflected on their experiences teaching decolonial and anti-racist pedagogy. Hylton (2015) reports on teaching concepts of 'race' and 'ethnicity' alongside the social issues associated with these concepts, which can be challenging, particularly when students have seldom explored or been exposed to these social issues. This scarcity, coupled with the sensitivity of such topics, can make delivering such content challenging. Hobson and Whigham (2018) discuss their discomfort when providing curricula content related to racial inequalities and racism, due to their Whiteness and privilege in being exempt from racial oppression. They cited feeling more comfortable teaching arguably less sensitive 'safer topics' such as social class, social theory, or policy. Central to this discomfort appears to be White scholars' lack of experiential knowledge alongside their learned knowledge of race and racism, and awareness of their white privilege (Burdsey, 2019). Whilst challenging, the importance and value of decolonial and anti-racist pedagogy is stressed by all the authors.

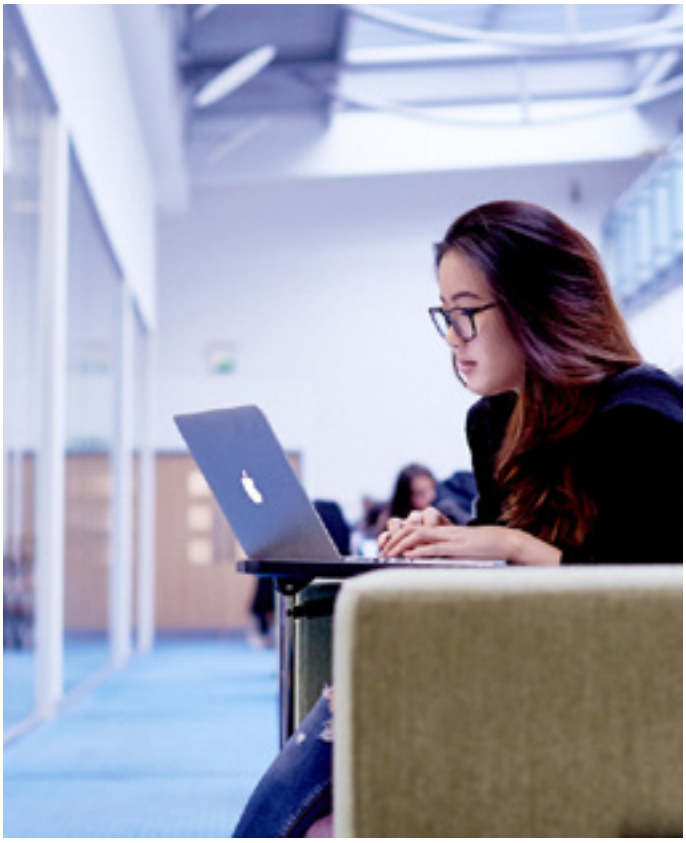
There are several recommendations to overcome such challenges. It is important to encourage dialogue and incorporate time for critical reflection within the curriculum (Burdsey, 2019; Hylton, 2015). Hylton (2015) seeks to liberate dialogue and facilitate cooperation to foster dissonance 'in the familiar', which can empower students to become critical, actively reflexive and take ownership when discussing 'race' and 'ethnicity'. To enable students to take ownership, Burdsey (2019) stressed the importance of naming and defining sociological concepts and providing students with key resources to discuss issues of racism. To facilitate reflexivity, White and Whigham (2018) encourage students to reflect upon their own socialisation and their experiences of White privilege or preferential prejudice, or their racial oppression or racial discrimination in the context of sport and leisure. Such dialogic, critical, and reflective processes are only made possible by creating a safe learning environment whereby robust and honest conversations about race and racism can unfold (Race *et al*., 2022). Central tenets with a safe learning environment often include; accepting humility, non-confrontational or non-judgemental discussions, no naming or shaming of individuals, listen respectfully and respect other people's opinions, and be open to correction (DiAngelo, 2018; Race *et al*., 2022).

As well as academic recommendations, students have provided valuable reflections and requests. In Laing's (2021) project, Geography students requested more student-led workshops to encourage horizontal relationships between educators and students. The students also sought to diversify module reading lists by increasing non-White and non-Western forms of knowledge. Some students felt these processes helped those who feared being racially stereotyped (Sakata *et al*., 2023). As well as reducing fear, such processes can enable minority ethnic students to challenge discursive practices of 'othering', to treat someone as though they are not part of, or different from, the group. These insights demonstrate the value of actively engaging students in the anti-racist and decolonial pedagogy process.

This report seeks to add evidence to this value by centralising students' reflections when evaluating the impact of anti-racist pedagogy within the HE sport and leisure curriculum. As such, the purpose of this report is:

- To understand how studying race and ethnicity impacts students' perceptions of scientific essentialism, racial discrimination and racism in sports, leisure and society.
- To ascertain students' perception of how anti-racist pedagogy within the undergraduate sport and leisure curriculum prepares them for future careers in sport and leisure.

This report is based on findings from a case study involving current and former students who participated in two sociology of sport and leisure-based modules at York St John University. Derived from engaging with the students' voices, this report concludes by providing a resource guide to aid educators when facilitating students learning on the topics of race, ethnicity, racial inequality and racial discrimination in sport and leisure, whilst provoking critical discussions on racism in sport and challenging students' White privilege.



The Case Study:
Sociology of Sport and Leisure at York St John University

York St John University (YSJ) has a predominantly White student population, which on sports courses has become more ethnically diverse over the last three years.

Table 1: Ethnicity of sport students at YSJ

Ethnicity	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Asian	1.69%	1.59%	1.56%
Black	0.65%	0.8%	1.95%
Ethnicity not known	-	0.40%	0.78%
Mixed	2.59%	1.99%	3.13%
Other	1.94%	5.18%	10.16%
Prefer not to state ethnicity	0.32%	0.80%	0.78%
White	93.20%	89.24%	81.64%

At YSJ, sport students undertake an undergraduate course in either Physical Education and Sports Coaching, Sports and Exercise Science, and Sports and Exercise Therapy. In alignment with YSJ's commitment to social justice, all sport students undertake compulsory sociology of sport and leisure modules in Levels Five and Six (Years One and Two). These modules aim: a) to develop students' understanding of social justice, b) to enable students to become analytical thinkers on a range of ethical and sociological issues in sport and leisure, and c) to encourage students to promote social justice in sport, leisure, and society.

Each module contains 11 lecturers and 11 seminars. In Level 5, one lecture and seminar are spent introducing the concepts of race, ethnicity, scientific essentialism, scientific racism, and stacking. This content involves framing 'race' as a defunct concept lacking scientific validity and sociological value (Green, 2008; Spracklen, 2014). Ethnicity is introduced to students as a far more useful term (Green, 2008), referring to cultural traditions and shared heritage amongst social groups or collectives. Students are introduced to the concept of scientific essentialism by discussing the Eugenics movement of the 1920s and 1930s and how this can help explain why sports science literature has fostered widespread beliefs concerning neuro-anatomical differences based on race (Hoberman, 1988; Eberhardt, 2019). Students are encouraged to challenge social Darwinist attitudes that have proliferated in Western and European sports science (Spracklen, 2008) and, therefore, challenge essentialist views in sport, leisure, and society.

At Level 6, two lectures and seminars are spent introducing race relations, racialisation, notions of Whiteness and racial inequalities. Racialisation is presented as a process by which people are assigned cultural and physical differences according to notions of 'race' (Barot and Bird, 2001). Students are tasked with exploring Whiteness in sports and leisure, with the concept introduced as a broad social construction that embraces and privileges White culture (Straker, 2011). Module content includes case studies from cricket and football in the UK, and various sports in the USA and Australia. Within these case studies, students are tasked with placing high-profile contemporary cases within the long-term parameters and changing power relations between different ethnic groups within each sport. Students are encouraged to consider prejudice at structural levels through institutional racism and individual levels through micro aggressions. Students are challenged to engage with discriminatory practices in sport and leisure through the lens of anti-racism, antisemitism, and anti-indigenous racism.

Methods

Sampling criteria and procedure

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to identify potential participants who would allow the researchers to gain as much information on the specific research questions of the project (Clark *et al*., 2021). Subsequently, participants were recruited for their ability to answer questions about the two sociology-based modules delivered to undergraduate sports students at YSJ. A criterion-based strategy was also utilised; the criteria included: (a) all participants must currently be, or have graduated within the past two years from, an undergraduate sports degree at YSJ; and (b) all participants must have attended the taught sessions, lectures, and seminars, in which the content related to race, ethnicity, scientific essentialism, and racism were delivered. In total, 14 current undergraduate students and four YSJ Alumni were recruited. Table 1 displays participant information; each participant provided a numerical pseudonym related to their degree programme. Degree programmes are communicated through the following acronyms: PESC (Physical Education and Sports Coaching); SET (Sports and Exercise Therapy); SES (Sport and Exercise Science).

Table 2: Participant information

Participant Course / Number	Gender	Level of Study
PESC 1	Male	Level 5
PESC 2	Female	Level 5
PESC 3	Female	Level 5
PESC 4	Male	Level 6
PESC 5	Female	Level 6
PESC 6	Female	Level 6
SES 1	Male	Level 5
SES 2	Male	Level 6
SES 3	Male	Level 6
SES 4	Male	Level 6
SES 5	Female	Level 6
SET 1	Male	Level 5
SET 2	Male	Level 5
SET 3	Male	Level 5
Alumni 1	Female	Graduated 2022
Alumni 2	Male	Graduated 2022
Alumni 3	Female	Graduated 2022
Alumni 4	Male	Graduated 2022

Data collection methods

Data was primarily collected through semi-structured interviews, which focused on topics relating to the purpose of the report whilst allowing elaboration on any points of interest (Clark *et al*., 2021). This flexibility allowed participants to articulate their bespoke experiences of the sociology of sport and leisure-based modules at YSJ. Fifteen interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams video calling, with the further three conducted in-person at the sports campus at YSJ. These locations were determined through participant preference.

Social scientists increasingly utilise online interviews as they offer a time/cost-effective data collection method (Clark *et al*., 2021). A further claimed benefit of the remote interview is that it creates a more relaxed and comfortable atmosphere for participants to discuss their thoughts and experiences than in-person interviews (Wellers, 2017). One benefit of developing this type of atmosphere is that, as Fielding and Fielding (2012) suggest, it can reduce power imbalances between the researcher and their participants. This factor was a significant consideration for this project, given the educator-student relationships. Students opting for in-person interviews were asked if they would like a drink, and a more casual conversation was had before starting the interview. Such rapport is less possible with online interviews. To mitigate this potential pitfall (Clark *et al*., 2021), participants were asked to use their webcams so the interviewer and interviewee could observe and react to visual cues (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014).

Interview data was supplemented with responses from two Mentimeter questions posed during the taught Level 5 seminar. Mentimeter is an online software package that enables students to complete live polls, word clouds, quizzes and multi-choice questions (Moorhouse, 2017). Participation in this seminar activity was voluntary, with some students not opting in. In total, 74 students provided anonymous responses to the questions posed, two of which are presented shortly.

Ethical considerations

An ethical consideration was the potential for coercion of participants, given the uneven power relations between lecturers and students at British universities (Comer, 2009). Conscious of the inevitable power relations at play, Matthew, a postgraduate researcher who co-taught the seminars, was tasked with recruiting and interviewing all participants. Matthew approached participants to take part via email, independent of the sociology-based modules. Upon agreeing, the voluntary nature of their participation was underlined within the participant information sheet and consent forms completed before the interviews. Before commencing interviews, participants were reassured that they would not be assessed, judged, or discriminated against due to their responses or receive any preferential treatment should they wish to participate. To reinforce this, participants were assured that their module directors, Spencer and Mark, would not be made aware of their participation. Furthermore, participants were informed that their age or ethnicity were not collected to develop further confidence in the anonymity and confidentiality of their participation. Finally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the project, without reason or consequence, within any time up to 28 days after completing the interview.

Data analysis

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis. This qualitative data analysis technique allows data to be worked and reworked into patterns and themes. Before the analysis, all data was imported into NVivo-12, a computer software enabling researchers to organise and manage qualitative data (Jackson and Bazelely, 2019). This software aided the thematic analysis process due to its functionality, which allows navigation through large data sets (Jackson and Bazelely, 2019). Once imported, the researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and re-reading interview transcripts. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide, stages two and three involved data being placed into codes and emerging themes. In stage four, the themes were reworked into hierarchies, with the researchers identifying 15 separate themes. Stage five involved naming these themes and grouping these into five overarching themes. Stage six included in-depth conversations between the research team, in which themes were reviewed and written up into this report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The agreed themes are presented under the following sub-headings: (a) Students' understanding and awareness of race and racial inequalities before university; (b) Students increased racial literacy and racial awareness; (c) Perceived impact and value of anti-racist pedagogy at York St John University.

Results and discussion

Students' understanding of race and racial inequalities before university

14 of the 18 participants reported that they had limited knowledge of the concept of race or racial inequalities, which, when probed, they attributed to their limited exposure due to their primary and secondary socialisation. With many participants growing up in Yorkshire and the North-East of England, which tend to be majority White populations, most interviewees suggested that they had little exposure to racial divisions, racial inequality, or racism. Embodying notions of whiteness, many participants were able to attribute their lack of exposure to and awareness of these social issues to their own privileged self-identified White British ethnicity:

> SES Student 1: I am a White person. I don't think I am faced with any issues or anything. Obviously, people, like Black people and stuff, I think they face a lot of discrimination and inequality.

> PESC Student 3: Personally, I've never been targeted racially. I've been very privileged in that aspect…we are very privileged in terms of like race and stuff.

> PESC Student 6: I'd say I am from a town which is very White. There is not a lot of diversity, so it was never like a massive conversation. It was kind of mentioned here and there but it was never like a big thing that we learnt about…I've never been taught to an extent what it is and things like that.

As noted by White scholars (Burdsey, 2019; White and Whigham, 2018), students' lack of knowledge was related to their lack of experientially lived or witnessed experience. Whilst it was difficult to determine the degrees of colour blindness in their reflections, it was clear that many students' homogenous upbringing had not exposed them to the realities of racial oppression and racial inequality. This finding is not surprising given Azzarito and Harrison's (2008) findings that young people's construction of race reflects the cultural context of their upbringing.

This finding becomes more apparent when contrasted to students' responses who self-identified as non-White British ethnicities during interviews.

> SET Student 2: I think from my own personal experience, like I am from a mixed-race background so my family, people in my family and my immediate family look different. So, there's like different things that I would notice.

> SES Student 2: So, I grew up in a Spanish household, you know, speaking Spanish…I grew up in a fairly White neighbourhood, so I was like one of the few, like, you know, Latino kids.

These students perceived their ethnicity as particularly influential in their awareness of and exposure to race and racial inequalities during their formative years. This narrative was more broadly apparent when viewing 74 students' Mentimeter responses.

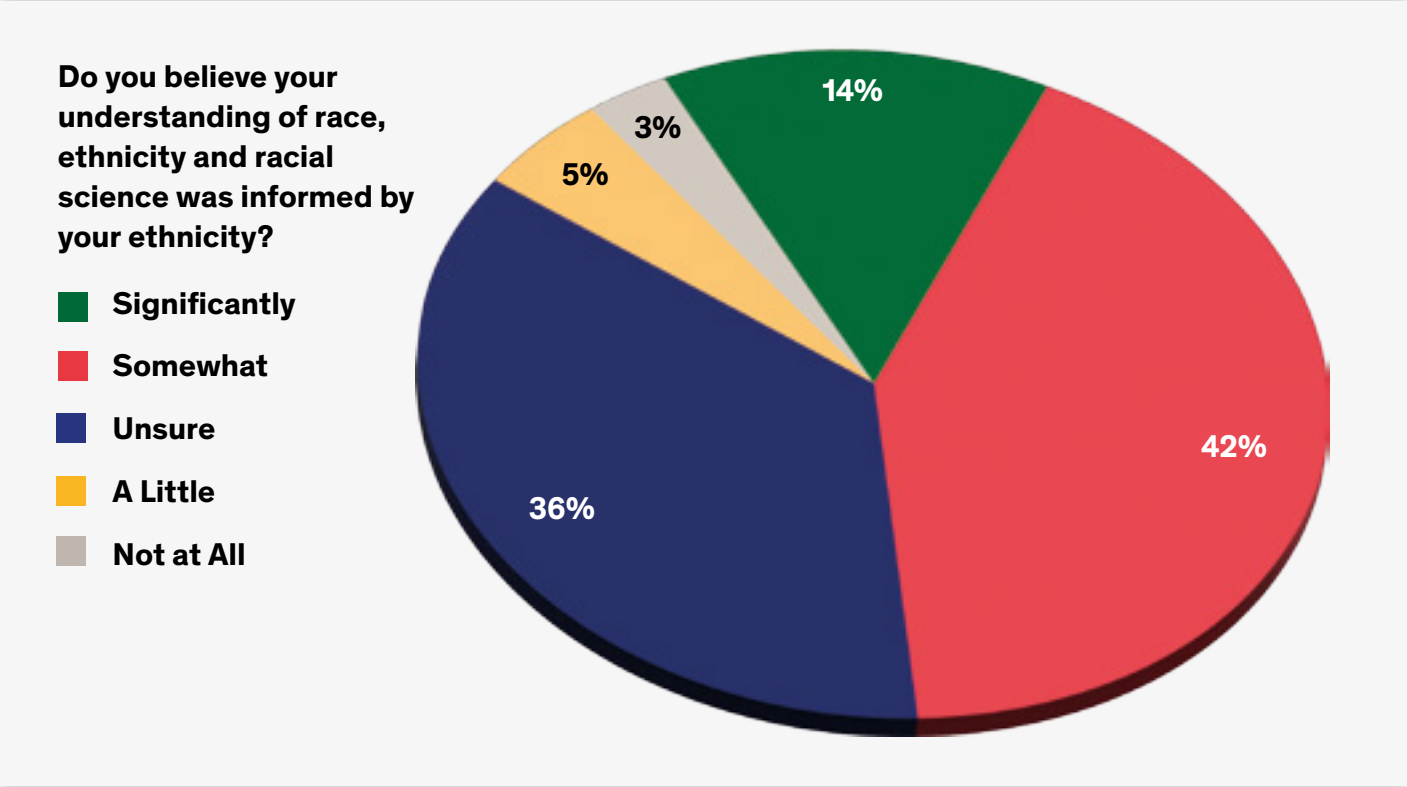


Figure 1: Mentimeter Responses: Understanding of Race before University

56% of the students believed that their ethnicity somewhat or significantly impacted their understanding of race, ethnicity, and racial science before attending university. Notably, 36% of respondents were unsure whether their ethnicity influenced their understanding, with only 3% indicating that they did not perceive a link.

Given this identity-based and/or experiential-informed understanding of race and racial inequalities, students were asked if such concepts and inequalities were taught during their pre-university formal education. Students from Yorkshire or the North-East of England repeatedly expressed minimal, limited and narrow engagement in race education during primary or secondary school:

> SES Student 3: I think the main thing for me was you'd like through secondary school you had a citizenship course, which wasn't too informative. They just kind of gave you, kind of like bare bones explanations.

> SET Student 3: Nothing in primary school and I don't think so in secondary school. We had like PSHE and citizenship and that, kind of sociology which kind of slightly touched on that and that's where we did racial inequality and social inequality. It wasn't very detailed.

These school experiences are perhaps not surprising given critiques of the UK education system in which policy and practice often lack coherent conceptualisations of race and racism within its curricula (Heleta, 2016). Whilst damming in the sense that before attending university young people may not have accrued the knowledge required to understand race and ethnicity, and the difference between the two, or be able to identify racial inequalities, it emphasises the need for higher educational institutions to enlighten students through decolonial knowledge and anti-racist pedagogy (Anderotti *et al*., 2015; Moghil and Kadiwal, 2021; Tate and Baggulely, 2017).

One reported consequence of this lack of lived experience and formal education was students' fear of 'saying the wrong thing' when asked to reflect upon and discuss race, racial inequalities and racism:

> PESC Student 1: Not very comfortable to be fair. I wasn't really wanting to discuss it. You don't want to upset anyone [by] saying the wrong thing.
>
> PESC Student 6: Before coming to Uni, I wouldn't be overly comfortable just because I don't know a lot about it, and you wouldn't want to say the wrong thing...Saying the wrong thing but you don't mean it.

Students' lack of knowledge and lived experience on such matters heightened their sensitivity towards causing offence. However, their fears in this respect also demonstrate their implicit awareness of racial and ethnic differences and the necessary etiquette needed. To this end, a lack of confidence appeared to be primarily based on using the 'correct' terminology. The fear of implicit prejudice or unintentionally causing offence often results in students staying silent on such issues and seldom discussing such matters before attending university (Maxwell and Chesler, 2019). The following section evidences the role universities can play in exposing students to different ethnicities and providing the necessary learned knowledge to increase students' confidence to discuss such matters.

Students increased racial literacy and racial awareness post-modules

Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of their sociology of sport and leisure modules and to recall any of the content they learnt through their enrolment. Most students were quick to recite definitions of race and ethnicity, with many of the participants describing the benefits of considering ethnicity as a sociological concept as opposed to race:

> SES Student 2: So, race is just your physical attributes, so it's like the colour of your skin, you know, the shape of your face and you know, hair texture.
>
> SES Student 4: Ethnicity is, you know, a group of people that share some sort of more of a social context or a culture. Ethnicity is linked to cultural attributes of an individual you know, with a shared social context.
>
> SES Student 3: I think it's [my understanding] has been influenced a lot by the modules because it's, it's something that I was… I think I used interchangeably [race and ethnicity], not something that you think of been two different things.

Introducing key concepts and their differences gave students the confidence to define and differentiate both concepts. As well as definitions, students were also introduced to scientific essentialism, a concept no student had heard of before their Level 5 module. During interviews, half of the participants felt confident enough to openly discuss what this term referred:

> PESC Student 4: A pseudo-scientific term coined in the 18th and 19th century… it's like false claims of like a scientific method. It is like the idea of fixed like perceived differences between races.
>
> PESC Student 5: There's like stereotypes that people have which are not like substantiated, like those kind of myths that generalise people within different racial categories.

Not only could some students articulate what the term referred to, but several suggested that they had witnessed examples of essentialised knowledge, in the form of racial stereotyping, through participating in and consuming sport:

> SET Student 2: I guess I've never, I never really heard of the term or stacking but you definitely see it play out in sport and my own personal experience. Then obviously watching sports as well.
>
> SES Student: 4: I think the biggest thing for me was that it was evidenced when you learnt about it. You realise it has been evidenced throughout your life but you don't realise where it's come from. You know, like growing up people, I'd heard people say like Black people can't swim as well as White people. And you know, just it's something that you never sort of questioned, you know, you didn't know why people were saying that and where it's come from.

Through learning about such terms, participants reflexively self-realised examples of retrospective racialisation. For some, this experience was enlightening, providing them with some answers to either previously unknown or unquestioned experiences, espousing some degree of criticality, which Masaka (2019) attributes to one enabling factor of epistemic justice.

A further concept that students were unfamiliar with before attending university was anti-racism, the process of actively identifying and opposing racism. Whilst many participants noted their understanding and awareness of racism before university, anti-racism was reported as a new concept:

> SES Student 3: Before university I didn't think there was an actual thing of anti-racism. I didn't realise that was a thing.
>
> Alumni 1: Anti-racism would be when you try and work against that [racism] and actually work towards more equality and unity between everyone.

The reflections offered by the participants indicated that their racial literacy improved considerably by attending and engaging in such sociology-based modules, providing them confidence in discussing anti-racism. The importance of introducing undergraduate students to sociological concepts related to race, ethnicity, and racism has been argued elsewhere by Burdsey (2019), Hylton (2010) and White and Whigham (2018). Findings here contribute to this argument.

Whilst participants expressed their discomfort and fear of discussing matters related to race and racism, which could manifest in avoiding such conversations, they also advocated the approach adopted during the sociology-based modules in encouraging them to remove such tensions or barriers:

> SES Student 4: I'd say I felt comfortable because we were in an educational situation, it makes it a lot easier to discuss things when it is for educational purposes. So, for example, in your seminars you'd talk about the situation at hand and then to further our knowledge ask for our opinions. So, I think that helps, that helps a lot.
>
> SES Student 1: We don't normally get answers or can't really discuss it without it being quite controversial because it is a sensitive topic, so it's quite hard to deliver. But it's been delivered quite openly and like you can ask questions without feeling uncomfortable on the subject. It's been very open to discuss.

Enabling and encouraging students to share their personal experiences of racial discrimination in sports was described as an important pedagogical approach to facilitate students' learning. Menon *et al*. (2021) advocates such approaches, which promote the disruption of traditional teacher-student hierarchies to promote open conversations. The importance of students' engaging in open dialogue around race and racism is stressed by Young (2004: 360), who explains that 'racial dialogues have been shown to reduce prejudice, increase compassion, dispel stereotypes, and promote mutual respect and understanding'. As recommended by DiAngelo (2018), the pedagogical approach adopted aimed to provoke a dialogue amongst students for students to enhance their racial literacy and racial awareness.

When probed on how the lecturers created a learning environment in which students felt comfortable discussing topics that they were less willing to discuss before university, the students explained how the honest and open style of delivery encouraged them to share their own experiences:

> SES Student 3: I'd say I felt quite comfortable discussing it [race and racism] during the seminars. I think it's made highly clear when we have the seminars that you know it's sort of a safe space, urm, for people to be comfortable. It's, you know, it's to free up discussion.

> SET Student 2: It's good how the classroom is like a safe space where you can voice your opinions, and everyone has a bit of a debate. It's interesting to hear what other people have got to say, differing opinions and experiences and stuff.

What emerges here is that it is not just 'what' content is delivered but 'how' it is delivered which is an important feature of promoting students' knowledge acquisition and broader racial awareness (Laing, 2021). This openness can also include the teacher, who can discuss their own Whiteness and lived experience to facilitate discussions, as recommended by Phillips *et al*. (2019). Collectively, this openness and possible co-construction of experiential-informed knowledge is best fostered in a safe learning environment. Central to this environment was a humility, non-confrontational or non-judgemental discussions, and a desire to listen respectfully and respect other people's opinions (DiAngelo, 2018; Race *et al*., 2022).

The final point of reflection on the modules that students offered was the importance of including high-profile sporting case studies within the lecture slides and seminar discussions. On this point, students explained how the inclusion of case studies that have been discussed within sports media aided their understanding of racial inequalities and racism in sport and society:

> PSEC Student 1: The case studies help bring everything together. All the stuff you've been taught. I think it helps you put a real-life example on it. It gives you a better understanding because without a real-life example you don't really understand it.

> Alumni 4: It wasn't just like racism in general. It was practical applications and lots of case studies. It was quite in-depth case studies of different examples of discrimination and racism within the sports industry, so it was quite eye-opening.

Case studies enabled students to apply theory and/or conceptual nuances into applied practice, which is an important process within more theoretically based modules. Furthermore, students expressed how well-documented incidents of racism and racial inequality in sport helped them externalise and de-personalise the sensitivities of the concepts and social issues during their discussions. This process, therefore, alleviated their concerns about such sensitive topics and enabled enlightenment through group discussion.

Students' reflections on the value and impact of the sociology-based modules

All students were asked the degree to which they felt that covering such topics were important to their future career in sport.

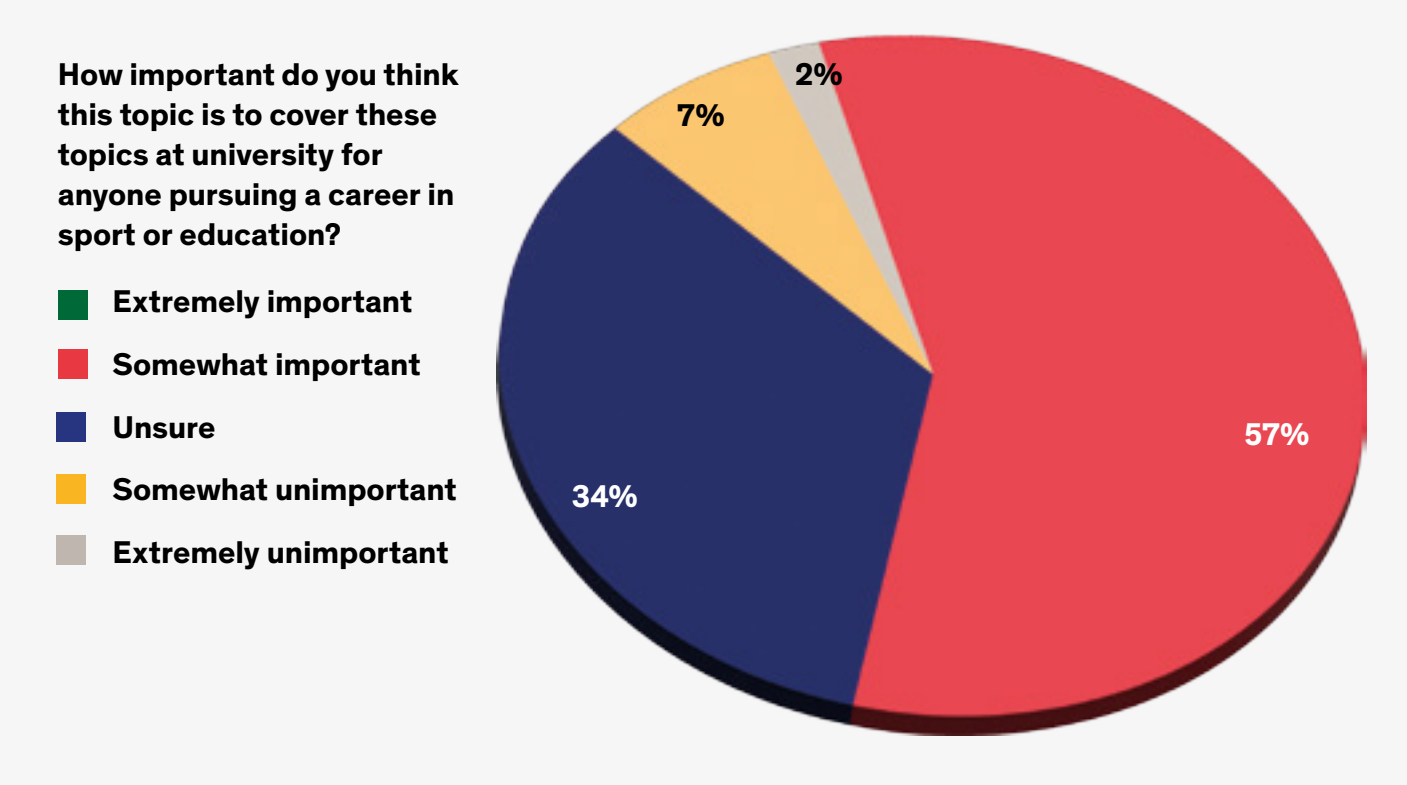


Figure 2: Mentimeter Responses: Importance of Anti-Racist Pedagogy

The results of the Mentimeter question revealed that 91% of respondents perceived the module content to be at least somewhat or extremely important to their future career aspirations. Given the diverse sport courses that students were on and their equally disparate range of careers desired, this degree of unanimity surprised us. Whilst this data somewhat highlights our anecdotal beliefs that students are becoming more inclined to social justice, it does not explain why students attributed such importance to such topics.

This level of insight was gleaned from alumni students' retrospective thoughts given during interviews.

> Alumni 4: I think at the time it's very difficult to underpin how valuable it was. But I would now agree that it is valuable for the work I am in [Physical Education teacher]. Because you don't know what you don't know at the time of undergraduate. Now that I can apply everything that we've learnt, you see the value. Like you see all the work preparing me to come into the world of teaching.

> Alumni 1: I didn't necessarily see the value initially on the course because I kind of when in thinking it's a sport course and I didn't necessarily give thought to the fact that I would be exposed to people of all backgrounds, cultures, races, religions, everything. Having an awareness of certain beliefs and values is really beneficial… again, it was something that I hadn't given thought to because it hadn't directly impacted me, but I am grateful for the understanding.

Whilst broad reflections in some respects, the fact the value added was realised some years after these modules illustrates not only the possible distance travelled in terms of knowledge attained and applied, but also how such knowledge can be realised in a non-linear, sporadic and, ultimately, non-assessed manner.

This level of retrospection was not available to current students, whose responses offered a more immediate feel:

> PESC Student 6: I think I've been a bit sheltered from it [racism] and maybe I was a bit naïve to what was happening. Now, I think that it's like a wider world and not just the small bubble that I've been in… it's kind of brought to light a bit more on a bigger scale.

> PESC Student 2: They [modules] have brought it [racism] more to light and bettered my understanding of it... just even being talked about because where I am from it's not talked about at all.

> SES Student 3: I'd say in terms of value in everyday life, I'd definitely say I'm more aware. I'm now more aware when I'm talking about sort of racism and inequality in society with regards to race and ethnicity, just simply from the terminology I use, the way I phrase things. It also makes you more aware, now you pick up on it a lot more.

Perhaps unaware of specific career destinations, currents students attributed value primarily based on enlightening them to the social justice issues of racial inequality and racism, which broadened their horizons, fostered their interest, and gave them confidence in discussing such issues.

The time required for such learning to take place and value added is an important consideration. Whilst participants valued such teaching and learning opportunities, several participants stated that more time spent discussing and unpacking such topics could further their levels of understanding and confidence:

> PESC Student 2: We've only got an hour. Obviously, like the seminars and stuff. Especially with big topics like race, obviously we have got like a discussion part but if you maybe hear like, you know, more of other people's opinions, especially with people that are from like a wider range of like different countries and stuff, to get an understanding of their knowledge.

> PESC Student 3: I felt like a lot of students when we spoke to them, they all these you know brilliant ideas and topic matters and discussion points. I feel if there was a bit more time, maybe people might have eased into the comfort of talking.

This finding was useful when evaluating pedagogic practices, how best to facilitate a safe learning environment, and how much time is needed to allow for co-constructed learning processes and 'epistemic disobedience' (Mignolo, 2009, 2011). This finding perhaps points to the siloed way modules (mostly 20 credits) are delivered on sport courses whereby sociology of sport and leisure-based modules often cover several social justice issues over the course of one semester. However, the students' desire for further time on this topic is encouraging and solutions should be made to facilitate this wish. Students can and often do choose this topic as an independent dissertation research topic.

Conclusion

This report has sought to present and analyse the findings drawn from interviewing with current and alumni sports students. By discussing students' awareness, exposure, and understanding of race and racial inequalities before attending university, we have demonstrated how many students are often ignorant of such social issues due to a lack of personal experience and formal education. Reflecting on their experiences of the sociology-based modules at YSJ, participants unanimously explained how their racial literacy improved, which increased their confidence in discussing matters of racism and racial inequalities, which they were reluctant to discuss before university. Furthermore, students praised the pedagogical approach to delivering such sociological concepts, in which creating a dialogic and supportive learning environment was cited as a key contributing factor to students learning and levels of reflexivity. Finally, current and former students reflected on the value and impact of the sociology-based sport modules, outlining how, for many, the modules challenged their own White privilege and the ignorance they had previously fostered through broadening their horizons to the degree that racial inequality is a social issue.

Overview of key findings

This case study aimed to explore the value and impact of anti-racist pedagogy within the undergraduate sport and leisure curriculum at York St John University. The research sought to explore students' experiences of the sociology of sport and leisure-based modules that all sports students are enrolled on. The findings were unanimous regarding the modules increasing students' racial awareness, racial literacy, and confidence in discussing issues of racism and racial discrimination in sport, leisure and society.

This case study discovered several benefits of such modules in raising students' racial awareness by conducting 18 semi-structured interviews with a combination of Level 5 and Level 6 students and YSJ alumni. Many participants who were educated in the North-East of England explained how they had limited awareness of racial inequalities in sport, leisure and society before attending university due to their White privilege. The consequence of students lacking experiential knowledge of race and racial disparities before attending university was a shared fear of discussing racism and racial inequalities, with many students articulating anxiety about saying the wrong thing due to limited racial literacy. While acknowledging the importance of recognising and challenging oppressive race relations, students' socialisation and education before attending university were found to constrain them from discussing such social inequalities. Whilst aware of concepts of race, ethnicity and racism before attending, students were seldom aware of the differences between race and ethnicity and were unaware of anti-racism as an active approach to challenging racial discrimination. Students' reflections on the sociology in sport and leisure-based modules at YSJ revealed that students' racial literacy and confidence in discussing racial inequalities improved significantly from engaging in the modules.

Finally, current students and YSJ alumni reflected on the value and impact of the sociology of sport and leisure-based modules. Many cited their increased racial literacy, awareness of racial inequalities, and confidence in discussing and challenging racialisation and racism. Most participants expressed how the structure of the seminars aided their racial understanding and promoted the dialogic approach implemented by the educators. Being provided with a safe space to reflect on their own white privilege and experiences of racial inequalities was seen as particularly beneficial to students' learning. However, students also explained how increasing the length of seminars, currently lasting 60 minutes, and dedicating more teaching weeks to the subject may further increase their understanding and awareness of racial inequalities. Subsequently, implementing and delivering anti-racist and decolonial pedagogy is complex and requires protected time for students to explore and debate issues of race and racism.

Limitations and recommendations

Upon reflection, we identify three limitations of this research. Firstly, we must acknowledge the research team's White British middle-class male demographics. Throughout the project, the research team reflected upon their ethnicity and White privilege (Carrington, 2008; Hylton, 2009), carefully considering mitigating concerns of influencing participants' responses through hegemonic 'whiteness' (Ware and Back, 2002). A further limitation of this research is the inclusion of only four York St John University alumni, all of whom graduated from the Physical Education and Sports Coaching degree programme. The report may have been strengthened by hearing the reflections of former students who graduated from the Sports and Exercise Science and Sports Therapy and Exercise programmes. Whilst several former students were invited to participate, only the four alumni agreed. Finally, on reflection, we may have delayed the time of interviews with current students until after the university exam period. Many potential participants were deterred from participating due to workload concerns, and therefore, if we were to conduct the project again, we may have delayed the interview period until the end of the academic year. However, the 14 current students who did participate provided detailed descriptions, which enabled us to answer the research questions and meet the research aims.

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