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I Introduction

Today I will be discussing Indigenous and racial minority female athletes' experiences of racism in North America.

Why does sport matter?

Sport is a key part of North American culture; it is a place where different histories, traditions and myths meet and intersect, creating cultural meanings and identities which travel across different mediums, national borders and commercial markets (Gray, 2005). Historically, sport is where social dramas have been played out among different groups. Recall Jesse Owen's victories at the Berlin Olympics, Althea Gibson breaking the colour bar at Wimbledon, and Cathy Freeman's run to gold at the Sydney Olympic Games. As a site of interracial competition, cooperation, and antagonism, sport has played a profound role in civil rights, and social justice struggles in North America and across the globe (Carrington, 2010).

That said, sport is a complex and contradictory space, for it is a place where the presence and success of 1 or 2 Indigenous or racial minority female athletes is seen as evidence of equality – or of the absence of racism – rather than exceptions to systemic racial exclusion. In addition, because physical activities are bodily practices, beliefs about ability and performance readily lend themselves to reinforcing narratives about the presumed biological differences that differentiate social groups (Willis, 1982).

Sport is important precisely because it is an area of social life where we seem to be dealing with straightforward reality (Willis, 1982). For example, putting a basketball in a hoop and explosive speed are actions that are seen, rather than interpreted. This is one of the key elements of the power of sport, namely that it is an area of life that seems to exist in the realm of the *natural* and therefore does not require interpretation (Willis, 1982). So the fact that the times for the men's 100 metres, the distance thrown for the shot put, etc. are different than those for women has been used as a way of reinforcing prevailing gender ideologies about the superiority of men over women (Willis, 1982). Similarly, the fact of black success in basketball and sprint events, for example, reinforces longstanding beliefs about the presumed athletic superiority of Blacks over Whites. This presumed athletic superiority is seen as innate and is believed to indicate bodily prowess over powers of the mind. By contrast, the visibility and success of white Europeans in winter sports is not read as evidence of innate athletic superiority and the absence of intellectual ability, but, rather, proof of discipline and mental application, illustrating how the meaning and import of athletic performance and sporting events hold a significance that extends well beyond the fields of play within North America's racially structured societies (Carrington, 1998).

Before turning to Indigenous and racial minority female athletes' experiences of racism, let us look at sport's role as a social force. Modern sport was created during colonialism. In North America it emerged as a homo-social cultural arena that was also segregated by race and class. As an historically male preserve, sex differences were

institutionalized and emphasized qualities like aggression, strength, power, and competitiveness (Messner, 1988). Similarly, sport is associated with heterosexual masculinity; we are familiar with the derogation of boys and men who pursue sports not deemed “masculine,” such as figure skating. The rules of male-dominated sports systems have long influenced female involvement, as evidenced by the classification of some sports as feminine and others as masculine (Griffin, 1998). Moreover, because of the patriarchal and heterocentric attitudes and structures that govern sport, all female athletes continue to navigate the belief that athletic competence masculinizes girls and women. The conflation of dominant cultural expectations of gender and sexuality has meant that for girls and women, participation in sport stands in opposition to dominant notions of gender appropriate female behaviour, and thus raises concerns about their heterosexuality (Krane, 2001; Lenskyj, 1990). For example, the belief that athletic achievement and muscular physiques are traits that reside in the male body means that success in sports for a woman implies that she has symbolically become a man, as illustrated through the familiar phrase “too good” to be a woman (Cahn, 1994). The conception that athleticism and femininity are irreconcilable is evidenced by the International Olympic Committee’s introduction of sex tests in 1967 (they were suspended at the 2000 Olympic games). Therefore, girls are encouraged to play so-called feminine sports, such as tennis, golf, and swimming and they are discouraged from participating in sports deemed masculine such as basketball, rugby, and ice hockey.

It is also important to keep in mind that for certain groups of women – such as Indigenous and black women - enslavement and colonialism located them outside the dominant ideals of womanhood (hooks, 1981). The legacy of these histories continues to influence sporting cultures, both in terms of accessibility and ideas about which bodies are best suited to certain sports. For example, at its inception track and field was regarded as unsuitable for white middle-class women since it required demonstration of strength, power and speed, traits defined as masculine in nature (Cahn, 1994). At the 1928 Olympics a number of women collapsed at the end of the 800-metre race overcome with fatigue. Critics took note and for a time female distance events were removed from competition - it was not until 1984 that the women’s marathon was introduced in to the Games (Cahn, 1994).

In the U.S. following the Second World War black women entered track and field in large numbers, at a time when it was regarded as too arduous for allegedly “normal” American (i.e. white) women. Their participation was due to the fact that the sport did not carry the same disapproval for black women, who had historically occupied an entirely different relation to their physicality, their bodies and notions of femininity (Cahn, 1994; Lansbury, 2000). Although segregation limited competition for black women, despite these obstacles, they flourished. However, their success was a mixed blessing, since their athletic achievements bolstered colonial beliefs that black women were innately different from white women, confirming them as outside the boundaries of “true” womanhood (Ware, 1992).

II Manifestations of Racism

Today I will offer several specific examples regarding the various forms of discrimination that confront Muslim, Indigenous and South Asian women in Canada and Black women in the U.S. to illustrate how the intersection of class, gender, and religion, shape how racism functions as a “gender specific phenomenon” (Collins, 2004, p. 7) in the form of gendered racist stereotypes (Sudbury, 1998) and “gendered racism” (Essed, 1991, p. 5).

Muslim

In Canada’s post 9-11, young female Muslim athletes have been told to either take off the hijab or leave the field of play. In a 2007 incident that received extensive media coverage across the country, during a soccer match 11-year-old Asmahan Mansour was instructed by a referee to remove her hijab, or face expulsion. According to the Quebec Soccer Federation, the hijab was specifically prohibited because of the risk of accidental strangulation, and it was following a mandate laid out by the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). Mansour, who had already worn her hijab for two matches in the competition without a problem, refused to remove the garment and was ejected from the game. Her team subsequently left the tournament in protest (Wyatt, 2007).

In 2012 FIFA voted to lift its ban on the hijab after finding no medical literature to support the claim that the headscarf posed a danger. However, as Salam Elmenyawawi, a member of the Muslim Council of Montreal stated, “The rule-change is too little too late because now you have a generation of girls who have given up on the sport. They’ve missed out on an aspect of their childhood and they’ve been made to feel different, to feel inferior because of their religion” (Curtis, 2012).

Notably, despite this rule change, in July 2012 9-year-old Rayane Benatti was told to take off her headscarf for “safety reasons.” When she refused – she was subsequently ordered to the sidelines as her team played in the final match of a soccer tournament. The 9-year-old’s response is poignant - when asked how she felt- Benatti stated, “It made me feel very sad - I love soccer” (Fedio, 2012).

In sum, the preoccupation with the headscarf in sport reveals the fissures in Canada’s policy of multiculturalism and embrace of diversity.

Indigenous

Reflecting on her experiences as a track and field athlete, Cree scholar Dr. Janice Forsyth spoke of how in Aboriginal groups she was told that she should stop competing and focus on becoming a wife and mother. She said “That was tough because it meant that few people celebrated my successes in sport in the same way they would celebrate male accomplishments” (Vitello, 2010). She also had to deal with the colonial discourse that locates all Aboriginals as *naturally* good athletes. In her words, “When I did well, people who believed in that racist discourse overlooked the amount of training I put into running... the flip side is that when I had a bad race, people thought I was being lazy and said I should train more, whereas the white athletes were praised for having done well and worked hard..., or consoled for not performing up to their expectations” (Vitello, 2010). In contrast Forsyth described her experiences as an athlete at the North American

Indigenous Games as liberating, because in her words, she “was just another athlete and could be openly proud about being Cree” (Vitello, 2010). Afterwards, she said she no longer felt that she needed to hide her Aboriginal identity and became more committed to speaking publicly about her background to educate people. She acknowledged that she although she “still had to deal with the objectifying questions, ignorance, and racism,” knowing there were many other athletes like her trying to do the same thing made it easier (Vitello, 2010).

It is significant that while many Aboriginal youth participate in the North American Indigenous Games, many of these same youth are not trying out for school teams (Champagne & Halas, 2003). Only a single Indigenous athlete (pentathlete Monica Pinette) represented the country in Beijing and Athens and there was only one self-identified Canadian Aboriginal athlete (snowboarder Caroline Calve) who competed for Team Canada in the 2010 Vancouver Games.

While racial and gender stereotypes and racism in sport are key elements contributing to the dearth of Aboriginal female athletes, their absence and their corresponding struggles for recognition and social justice must be understood as linked to dispossession, the Residential School system and ongoing colonization as Aboriginal girls and women more than any other group of women in Canada are targets of violence (Bruun & Bailey, 2015).

South Asian

Let us now briefly turn to the subject of South Asian women. A study conducted in Vancouver, British Columbia revealed a pattern similar to that of the Indigenous students mentioned above: South Asian girls were also dropping out of sport programs. However, their reasons are different from their Indigenous counterparts. For example, they spoke of being fed up with dealing with stereotypical beliefs about “Indian” culture which conceive of South Asian females as weak and passive and thus not athletically inclined. They also found that the prevailing sport system is geared towards the interests and needs of the dominant culture (Vertinsky, Batth, & Naidu, 1996). These patterned exclusions are significant given that Aboriginal and racialized minority groups comprise the fastest growing members of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2007, 2008).

Crucially, there is limited research on the sport experiences of racially diverse girls and women. This is evinced by the categories of Hispanic and Asian, which obscure the linguistic, geographic, and economic diversity that exists within these groups.

This final series of examples show the systemic exclusion layered upon African American female athletes’ specific experiences of racism in sport.

In a 2007 report on high school sophomores by the United States Department of Education, white girls had a 51% participation rate in sports, compared with 40% for black girls, 34% for Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 32% for Hispanics. The rates of unequal access to, and participation in, sports at youth levels continues at the intercollegiate level, where African-American women are underrepresented in all but two sports: Division I

basketball – 50%, and track and field - 28%. They are all but absent in lacrosse (2.2%), swimming (2.0%), soccer (5.3%), and softball (8.2%) (Rhoden, 2012).

Of the 228 scholarships available for female athletes, only 33 are dedicated to sports dominated by African-Americans: 15 for basketball and 18 for track and field. In contrast, 195 are assigned to sports dominated by Whites, comprising soccer, ice and field hockey, volleyball, golf and tennis. In sum, the young women who are able to fund at least a portion of their college education through an athletic scholarship are overwhelmingly white (Hattery, 2012).

In 1972 the U.S. government introduced Title IX, legislation that sought to redress sex-based discrimination in federally funded education programs and activities. Its aim notwithstanding, Title IX has disproportionately benefited white women at the expense of Indigenous and racial minority women. While there are few professional opportunities for women coaches or athletic administrators, the gap is far more significant for racial minority women who have been involved in high school and college athletics. Despite their presence as athletes, black women held only 35 of the 300 head coaching jobs in Division I college basketball, while white women held 166. White women retain the senior woman administrator positions holding 84.7 % of the positions, while African-American women hold just 10% (Lapchick et al., 2014).

The dearth of Indigenous and racial minority women as participants in a range of sports, in conjunction with their scarcity as coaches, administrators and leaders means that there are few role models, and therefore, limited opportunities for mentorship. These patterns of participation are significant because they reinforce a racial logic whereby the power of the visibility of the difference that we see on the playing fields and in the gymnasiums becomes part of our everyday understanding of the *natural* order of things (Giroux, 1997). To put it another way, race, class and gender inform our expectations, and influence whom we regard as trustworthy, whom we perceive as intelligent and athletic and whom we believe should be in charge as coaches, administrators and leaders (Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004).

In sum, the marginalization of Indigenous and racial minority women as athletes, coaches and administrators is consistent and continuous with their marginalization in other institutions in both the U.S. and Canada, defying claims of multiculturalism and colour-blindness (Douglas & Halas, 2013).

Black American

Black female sporting bodies occupy a particular cultural currency in the public imagination owing to legacies of domination. Classified as property during enslavement black women were rendered devoid of human qualities. In addition, black women were deemed masculine because they were compelled to labour alongside men in the fields, and in later years their work outside the home excluded them from dominant cultural definitions of womanhood (hooks, 1981).

Different sports gave prominence to different standards of womanhood (Cahn, 1994; Gissendanner, 1994). Tennis, for example, developed in accordance with particular sensibilities regarding race, gender, class and sexuality. Upper class women were allowed to participate because it was regarded as an activity that did not compromise their (heterosexual) “femininity” (Festle, 1996).

From the turn of the century when it was introduced to the United States until 1951 when Althea Gibson broke the colour bar at Wimbledon, tennis was a segregated sport. The sole black woman in an all-white sport, Gibson’s “fierce” style of play and her physicality were portrayed as “mannish” (Cahn, 1993), while her mastery of skill was seen to further defy gender norms (Festle, 1996). At the U.S. national championships in 1957 Gibson was granted permission to compete only *after* she took a chromosome test to confirm she was female (Rhoden, 2007). In 1958 when Gibson walked on to the court to defend her U.S. Open title, she saw a sign in the stands that said, “Go back to the cotton [sic] plantation nigger” (Newman, 2007).

Nearly five decades later, two talented black American female teenagers from the unlikely city of Compton, California, a location understood as a site of urban decay and gang violence, profoundly disrupted the white racial order (in addition to the class and geographic boundaries) of the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) tour. Like their predecessor, Venus and Serena Williams have experienced hostile crowds and mass media have described them as “masculine,” “aggressive,” and “ugly” (Douglas, 2002; McKay and Johnson, 2008).

Last year Shamil Tarpishev, head of the Russian Tennis Federation and a member of the IOC, expressed a similar sentiment on Russian television when he referred to Venus and Serena as the “Williams brothers,” adding “it’s scary when you really look at them.” He was fined \$25, 000 and suspended for 1 year by the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA). The persistent claim that black women are unfeminine and unattractive is significant because these gendered racist messages are increasing. Correspondingly, the descriptions of the sisters as threatening and possessing an unyielding power, communicates a familiar racial imagery, one that sees black bodies as dangerous and thus deemed worthy of fear and contempt. It is a narrative that resonates across U.S. society with increasingly dire consequences.

While on hiatus due to injury, Venus and Serena’s eldest sister, Yetunde Price, was fatally shot in Compton, California not far from the house where they grew up. The death of their sister was followed by a shift in the tone of the media’s response towards the sisters, portraying them as greedy and self-indulgent. Following Serena’s withdrawal from the Australian Open *Sports Illustrated* feature writer Jon L. Wertheim (2004) wrote “if I’m Nike and just lavished her with \$ 40 million, [Serena had signed a multi-million dollar contract with Nike months earlier], I’m not smiling,” adding, that tour officials were displeased with Serena’s withdrawal. Another journalist characterized Serena’s absence as a “mystery” and when Venus returned to the tour she struggled and her losses were described as a “shock” and the end of the “Williams’ family invincibility” (Dillman, 2004, p. D1). The minimization of the amount of courage, effort and dedication that it

took for Venus and Serena to return to the courts following the murder of their oldest sister reveals the continued narrative of white racism through the denial of black humanity.

Moreover, that Yetunde was murdered not far from where the sisters grew up reinforces the notion that they are trespassers whose presence undermines the cultural integrity of women's tennis. The significance of these gendered racist stereotypes of black women as invincible and devoid of feeling rests in the fact that media accounts establish identities and create stories that explain athletes and events to audiences (Tudor, 1998).

Social Media

I want to briefly discuss online and social media because they signal a shift in the terrain of cultural struggle. Modern communication technologies allow individuals to openly and anonymously voice their beliefs, with no fear of repercussions at an accelerated rate to an ever-growing audience. As central forms of communication and of knowledge production, new media are a site through which racism in its myriad forms is being reproduced and disseminated.

For example online bloggers have been far more blunt in their assessment of Venus and Serena's physicality; they are routinely referred to as men, or in the words of one, "decent blokes." Serena Williams is consistently referred to as a "beast," or a "freak" and is accused of taking steroids. In other comments:

- "Serena is a stupid kneegrow gorilla. the end. I believe the proper term when referring to it is a "She-Grilla". It's defined as a life form with part male human DNA and part female gorilla DNA."

It is clear that the public, the media, and sport officials use a vocabulary reminiscent of the dehumanization of black women during enslavement equating their physicality and athletic performance to that of men or animals. As you can see, the use of race talk - the inclusion of racial signs and images that have no other purpose than humiliation, is widely entrenched (Morrison, 1992; Myers, 2005). The force and breadth of these everyday messages of racism based on notions of white racial superiority is unprecedented and the harm remains underestimated. The violence of language is important precisely because "assaultive speech" and the name callers themselves do not exist in isolation (Lawrence, 1993, p. 68), but are supported by other forms of domination (Dei et al, 2004; Matsuda et al, 1993). That black female athletes have been made to see and experience themselves as 'Other' is significant for it establishes and reaffirms the racial boundaries (Kawash, 1997). In sum, attention to these practices of discrimination is imperative because the fact that racism is expressed in mundane attitudes, values and behaviour means that racism is habitually not acknowledged, much less "problematized" (Essed, 2002, p. 214).

In sum, sport is a crucial locus of social justice struggles because it not only teaches us to "see" difference, it teaches us to regard some differences as more important

than others, to magnify them and then use them to support ideologies of racial inferiority and superiority, thereby sustaining unequal social relations (King & Springwood, 2001; Willis, 1982). Moreover, racism in sport is a women's issue because athletic competitions are, and have always been, imbued with a cultural and political significance that extends beyond the playing fields (hooks, 1994). But racism in sport is a human rights issue because diverse female sport participation empowers Indigenous and racially diverse women, in spite of the odds against them (Burton Nelson, 1994).

IV Recommendations - Best Practices

How can we help empower them?

During the 6th Ad Hoc Session Ms. Fanon-Mendes of France identified *the need to deconstruct the notion of racism* to adequately respond to the persistence of inequality and domination related to racial distinctions in pluralistic contemporary societies. A key challenge remains intervention in the context of the denial of the relevance of race and the significance of racism in both Canada and the U.S. You can see that racism takes many forms – some of which are symbolic, embodied, psychological, and systemic (Hall, 1996). Racism is produced through silence and invisibility as well as through covert, embedded and accumulative actions which can be difficult to identify. The examples demonstrate that racism is not a homogenous or a static entity, and owing to diverse histories, geographic location, and cultural differences, racism is not homogeneous in its effects (Essed, 2002). Consequently, to respond to racism we must have some understanding of what it involves - we need to recognize its diversity and complexity. In turn, our responses must also be multidimensional and expansive; we need to acknowledge it is not an individual problem, but a social issue.

Broadly conceived I will briefly speak to 3 possible areas of intervention: research, social policy, and education.

Following *Article 70 in the Durban Declaration* which recognizes “the need to develop more systematic and consistent approaches to evaluating and monitoring racial discrimination against women, as well as the disadvantages, obstacles and difficulties they face in the full exercise and enjoyment of their civil, political, economic and cultural rights because of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”...

Research

Further to a question raised by the delegate of Switzerland during the Ad Hoc 5th sessions– there is a paucity of research regarding Indigenous and racial minority girls and women's experiences of racism (and its intersection with sexism and homophobia). We need research on experiences of differently racialized women in different locations to identify and understand the various barriers that prevent diverse women from fully participating in sport and society. In addition to quantitative material that documents patterns of inclusion and exclusion, we need qualitative research which seeks to understand the lived experiences of the women themselves.

2 Exemplars for monitoring expressions of racism:

1) Philomena Essed outlines a model for assessing everyday racism is a useful tool for evaluation. See: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/essed45.htm>

2) The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport's annual production of the Race and Gender Report Card can serve as a model for different sport organizations (both inter and intra-nationally) and other related NGO's etc. to identify participation patterns at all levels of engagement. See Lapchick, R., & Fox, J., Guiao, A. & Simpson, M. (2014). The 2014 Racial and Gender Report Card: College sport. *The institute for diversity and ethics in sport*. Available at: <http://www.tidesport.org/2014%20College%20Sport%20Racial%20&%20Gender%20Report%20Card.pdf>

Related strategies:

The National Collegiate Athletic Association's Inclusion Strategies offer other strategies to respond to systemic exclusion (Lapchick et al., 2014): e.g., Leadership Institute and Professional Development: To ensure equitable participation of Indigenous and female minority women in decision-making and in career planning – diversify networks, introduce racial minority women to administrators, key stakeholders – provide them access to governance structures.

Create mentorship programs.

During the Ad Hoc Committee's 5th Ms. Daniela Gomes addressed how language is used to sustain racism. A diversification of media sources and members is necessary. E.g., the development of a leadership institute and professional development can be applied to media to the organization and operation of inter/national sport governing bodies.

Social Policy

Articles 10, 18, 50, 51 and 53 in the Durban Declaration refer to “the equal participation of all individuals and peoples in the formation of just, equitable, democratic and inclusive societies can contribute to a world free from racism, racial discrimination.” Building on insights made in the 5th and 6th Ad Hoc Sessions regarding the relevance of social policy – potential interventions involve a combination of returning to what exists and implementing and introducing new protocols. For example legislation such as Employment Equity, Affirmative Action, and Title IX, already exist – what is needed is measurement and accountability. What are the consequences for non-compliance?

It is clear that media and sport institutions do not correspond to the multiracial, pluri-cultural and pluri-lingual characteristics of the populations of Canada and the U.S. As a way of redressing this imbalance (in conjunction with the documentation of the demographic composition of these organizations, the same legislation could be developed and applied to sport governing bodies – inter and intra-nationally (e.g., FIFA, FIBA, IAAF, IOC).

Education

Following Article 210 in the Durban Declaration which seeks to strengthen

cooperation, develop partnerships and consult regularly with non-governmental organizations and all other sectors of civil society to harness their experience and expertise, thereby contributing to the development of legislation, policies and other governmental initiatives.

In this context: Who are our leaders/teachers/coaches/educators in the world of sport?

How many sport studies programs offer courses centered on no-white perspectives, antiracist approaches, or anti-Eurocentric methods covering issues like ethics, coaching, history, management, or training?

Strategy: Education – at university levels – more diversity amongst teachers, changes in curriculum.

Strategy: To increase exposure to diverse sports offer free tickets to Indigenous and racial minority female youth to sport events (at all levels). Note: A substantive change in the presence of these groups might have a secondary effect of shifting the response of the predominantly white spectatorship of events.

Who will acknowledge the interests and experiences of the marginalized? Despite the numerous barriers to equity, we can continue to strive to create more just institutions and work to cultivate relationships that are founded on the principles of equality, integrity and respect. There is no time like the present to analyze our positions and commit to broadening our understanding of the interconnectedness of systems of domination in sport and society. Nothing less than a collective response will do.

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