

## Contemporary Issues of Social Justice: A Focus on Race and Physical Education in the United States

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### ABSTRACT

Ongoing events in the United States show the continual need to address issues of social justice in every social context. Of particular note in this article, the contemporary national focus on race has thrust social justice issues into the forefront of the country's conscious. Although legal segregation has run its course, schools and many neighborhoods remain, to a large degree, culturally, ethnically, linguistically, economically, and racially segregated and unequal (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Even though an African American president presently occupies the White House the idea of a postracial America remains an unrealized ideal. Though social justice and racial discussions are firmly entrenched in educational research, investigations that focus on race are scant in physical education literature. Here, we attempt to develop an understanding of social justice in physical education with a focus on racial concerns. We purposely confine the examination to the U.S. context to avoid the dilution of the importance of these issues, while recognizing other international landscapes may differ significantly. To accomplish this goal, we hope to explicate the undergirding theoretical tenants of critical race theory and culturally relevant pedagogy in relation to social justice in physical education. Finally, we make observations of social justice in the physical education and physical education teacher education realms to address and illuminate areas of concern.

### KEYWORDS

Critical race theory; cultural issues; culturally responsive physical education

Recent and recurring national events point to the salience of race and the consequences of ignoring the obvious racial issues faced in the United States. Although legal segregation failed to survive the 1954 Brown decision (Jacobs, 1998), American educational systems have fallen woefully short of providing equal educational opportunities. In the overturn of *Plessey v. Ferguson*, chief justice Earl Warren stated, “[S]eparate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, para. 14). The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University cited a prevailing pattern of escalating segregation for Black and Latino students since the 1980s (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Thus, while some claim that the election of an African American president of the United States is an indicator of a postracial society, a plethora of indicators posits the persistent and enduring indication that race still matters. Ladson-Billings (2012) pointed out the necessity for continual examination of racialized thinking to diminish the disparaging ways the proclivities and abilities of students based on culture and race are perceived. Although the symbolism of the United States as a melting pot of cultures has been suggested, Banks

(2005) suggested that people of color often stick to the bottom of that pot.

Many examples from present society and recent research suggest the need for examination and application of social justice. At the time of this writing, the recent Supreme Court decision on marriage equality, the nation's response to the murder of nine African Americans in a church in Charleston, SC, and the removal of the confederate flag from the Capitol in South Carolina speak to the heightened focus on issues of social justice, particularly with regard to race, in the United States.

Scholarship related to social justice has been part of educational research (Cochran-Smith, 2010; North, 2008; Zeichner, 2009) for some time; however, careful examination of these social justice issues with a focus on race has been scant in physical education literature. This effort is in no way intended to diminish the importance of international scholars who have, and continue to, address social justice issues (e.g., Azzarito, 2009; Azzarito & Solomon, 2005; Evans, 2004; Fernández-Balboa & Megías, 2014; Kirk, 2014). Nor is this effort

meant to trivialize the work of U.S. authors (e.g., Bain, 1985) who address issues of social justice. However, few of these authors have narrowed the focus of their work to specifically address the unique ways race impacts physical education students and teachers (Harrison, Carson, & Burden, 2010). SHAPE America – The Society of Health and Physical Educators Standard 4 for physical education specifically states that “the physically literate individual exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others” (SHAPE America, 2013, para. 5). A correspondingly similar statement appears in the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2008) teacher education standards that state that prospective teachers should “plan and implement developmentally appropriate learning experiences aligned with local, state and national standards to address the diverse needs of all students” (para. 2). However, few U.S. researchers in the realm of physical education (e.g., Burden, Hodge, & Harrison, 2012; Culp, 2011; Harrison et al., 2010) have examined the moniker of social justice with a racial focus on the physical education context.

The concept of social justice conjures up many related areas that all deserve adequate attention. Culp (2011) cited literature that situates social justice in various domains where groups of people are marginalized by virtue of their race, ethnicity, age, physical ability, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status (SES), and/or age. However, we contend that one of the weaknesses of the ubiquitous phrase “social justice” is the dilution of the individual impact when one attempts to integrate all of these important issues into one heterogeneous term. Therefore, here, we will attempt to peer through the lens of social justice but then adjust the lens to a focus on examining the notion of race.

## The concept of social justice

### *Defining social justice*

In defining social justice, Theoharis (2007) conceptualized it as leadership that makes concerns regarding race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and issues that are often marginalized a focus of those in leadership. North (2008) alluded to the dynamic nature of the meaning of social justice. This author reminded us of the continual transformational nature of the meaning and its confluence with other concepts such as multicultural education, critical pedagogy, postmodernism, postcolonialism, queer theory, and other related concepts (L. A. Bell, 2010). However, North also called attention to two important facets of social justice: recognition and redistribution. North claimed that while some focus on social justice demands for respect and

dignity (recognition), others concentrate their efforts on demands for sharing of wealth and power (redistribution). Fraser (2000) suggested that a focus on recognition of marginalized groups actually complicates and makes progress toward redistribution more difficult. This author suggested that reification displaces redistribution efforts by promoting economic inequity, thus making groups easily identifiable and targets for human rights violations. However, the question remains, how does redistribution take place if the areas of oppression are not reified? L. A. Bell (2010) provided another perspective of the concept by suggesting that social justice is a process as well as a goal. It is a process that ideally allows all groups to participate equally in society and enables them to fulfill their needs. Its goal then is to allow individuals to be self-determining and interdependent, but it requires that people be conscious of their agency and have a sense of responsibility to society.

### *Social justice: A psychological perspective*

Tyler (2000) suggested that social justice be attained through the accomplishment of peace through conflict resolution and provided a descriptive metaphor by which to understand the concept.

I think of justice as akin to the oil within an engine. It allows the many parts within the engine to interact without the friction that generates heat and leads to breakdown. Similarly, justice allows people and groups to interact without conflict and societal breakdown. Just as a car can suffer mechanical breakdown, social interactions can break down amid conflict and hostility. I will argue that social justice minimizes such breakdowns and contributes to the continuation of productive interactions among people. (p. 117)

However, this psychological social justice perspective fails to address the root of oppression or account for historical, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of groups and individuals. Tyler also conceptualized (social) justice judgments as distributive and procedural. Distributive justice considers whether those in advantaged groups are willing to redistribute resources to those with fewer resources. Procedural justice addresses the “fairness” of particular procedural consequences. Consider the issue of distributive justice as it occurs when teachers working in a lower-SES school district have lower salaries than teachers in higher SES districts. Those who work in multi-disadvantaged schools most often receive fewer resources and experience a higher pupil-to-teacher ratio. Moreover, in a physical education context, teachers are often expected to physically educate students with even higher pupil-to-teacher ratios and often with even fewer resources and in environments where their significance to the educational process is devalued (Pate et al., 2006;

Siedentop & O'Sullivan, 1992). Furthermore, Gregory-Bass, Williams, Peters, and Blount (2013) pointed out in their study of teacher quality that every measure of teacher quality was inequitably distributed across every indicator of student disadvantage. That is, multi-disadvantaged schools were staffed with teachers of lower quality compared with advantaged schools regardless of variables used to measure teacher quality or advantage. Procedural justice can be applied in the processes or procedures of teacher salary allocation and teacher quality distribution across advantaged and multi-disadvantaged schools. In many instances, this inequitable distribution is magnified in the physical education context. For example, while low-multi-disadvantaged (low-SES) elementary schools were more likely to participate in Safe Routes to School programs, they were less likely than their more affluent counterparts to have a physical education teacher. Additionally, multi-disadvantaged elementary schools provided students with nearly 5 min less of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (Carlson et al., 2013).

### *Social justice's relationship to oppression*

Just as the concept of social justice encompasses a number of concerns (race, class, gender, etc.), the concept of oppression entails a myriad of issues including discrimination, bigotry, social prejudice, racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, and others. These issues come together to form very complex, restrictive, and hierarchical, institutionalized, and internalized patterns that oppress particular categories of people (L. A. Bell, 2013). L. A. Bell (2013) delineated the collective and interconnected experiences that connect the "isms" in an encompassing frame of dominance and subordination.

Adams (2013) further asserted that to fully understand social justice, an awareness of oppression is necessary. The term oppression underscores the ubiquitous manner in which inequality makes its presence known to those who are sensitive to its impact. Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin (2013) provided a detailed description of oppression and how it functions consciously and unconsciously, at the individual, institutional, and social levels, and through attitudes and behaviors. We argue that oppression is often manifested in physical education settings where multi-disadvantaged schools are less likely to provide students with quality physical education, recess, and/or physical activity time to bolster other academic areas (Beighle, 2012; Young, Fleton, & Grieser, 2007), thus denying students most in need of physical education and physical activity (Carlson et al., 2013; Casazza, Dulin-Keita, Gower, & Fernandez, 2009; Sisson et al., 2009; Wang, Liang, & Chen, 2009).

### *Relationship to privilege*

The flip side of oppression is privilege. Privilege can be compared to bad breath, as it is apparent to everyone except the one who has it. Johnson (2013) suggested:

No matter what privileged group you belong to, if you want to understand the problem of privilege and difference, the first stumbling block is usually the idea of privilege itself. When people hear that they belong to a privileged group or benefit from something like '[W]hite privilege' or 'male privilege,' they don't get it, or they feel angry and defensive about what they do get. (p. 17)

Many individuals will readily acknowledge that some individuals or groups are *underprivileged*, but few will confess to be part of a group that is privileged or *overprivileged*. But privilege exists anytime one group has some commodity of which another group is deprived simply because of group membership rather than anything they have done or failed to do (Johnson, 2013).

McIntosh (1990) confessed, "I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not invisible systems conferring dominance on my group" (p. 31). This author described White privilege as an "invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks" (p. 31). The author has since revised this metaphor to a bank account that is issued to a privileged group at birth. The account was not requested, but the account holder has the ability to spend the contents of the account in the service of social justice because it will inevitably be refilled and thus submit no cost to the owner (McIntosh, 2012). Pratto and Stewart (2012) explained that "... members of powerful groups also do not realize that they are privileged because they don't have the social comparison information to recognize the discrimination they do not experience ..." (p. 31). These authors and their perspectives demonstrate the importance of recognizing privilege in the understanding and application of social justice in any environment. In the domain of physical education, one can be privileged or oppressed by virtue of the school they attend, the priority of physical education in the school, the SES of the school or school district, and a vast number of other variables the impact all schools.

### *Distinguishing between race, culture, and ethnicity*

Within the physical education ecosystem, there has been a call for an ideological repositioning toward race and social justice (Hodge, 2014). Unfortunately, along the lines of recognition, or lack thereof, race has been a prominent topic of discussion in politics and popular culture in recent years; however, it has been conspicuously scarce in kinesiology and physical education academic literature in the United States. In American

physical education literature, race and related concepts such as privilege and oppression are often glossed over or diluted by more politically correct but nonspecific concepts such as multicultural issues, diversity, or social justice. Internationally, there has been greater emphasis on these issues (Benn, 2005; Dagkas & Benn, 2006; Dagkas & Hunter, 2015). However, the study of race as a genetic, biological, or physiological variable has a debatable reputation (Wiggins, 1997). Casual observation of our world today validates that the arbitrary and fabricated lines drawn between races have become severely blurred; yet racial problems in society persist. The perspective of an easily distinguishable nondominant group (e.g., person of color) has much more to do with shared social experiences than shared genetic material (Smedley & Smedley, 2005).

Banks (2005) described an ethnic group as one with shared ancestry, heritage, history, customs, and peoplehood. It seems that what we often describe as race is really ethnicity. Our proclivity to label by race is influenced by culture, habits, and historical remnants that guide our notions of others and ourselves. This racial ideology is embedded and maintained by hundreds of years of history and maintains a firm grip on us socially and psychologically (Cross, 1978; Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991; Omi & Winant, 2014; West, 1994). Although membership in an ethnic group is involuntary, identification with the group is elective. One of the most recent examples of this statement is Rachel Dolezal, former president of the Spokane, WA, chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—a civil rights organization. Dolezal was born White but identifies as Black (Appelbaum, 2015).

Banks (2005) also acknowledged the varying definitions of culture but summarized it as the “values, symbols, interpretations and perspectives that distinguish one people from another” (p. 71). The obvious overlap of ethnicity and culture makes definitive yet unique definitions of these two concepts challenging. This difficulty along with the faulty conception of race further exacerbates efforts to clarify boundaries between these related concepts. Therefore, we will dispense with the technical definitions and utilize the societal murky yet recognizable conception of race.

### Social justice theoretical orientations

Just as social justice has been a fringe topic of discussion within physical education scholarship in the United States, it is no surprise that close, in-depth explorations of race have also been missing. The application of theory, history, philosophy, and epistemology and conceptualization of race in physical education have yet to meet the

depth and standard set by the broader community of education scholars. Although we acknowledge that numerous scholars have committed themselves to race and social justice (Burden et al., 2012; Chepyator-Thomson, You, & Russell, 2000; Culp, 2013; Hodge, 2014), we believe the lack of commitment by mainstream physical education teacher education (PETE) is due to a value system that does not authentically value equity and social justice regarding race. To make progress in this matter, the community of physical education scholars must be aware of well-established theoretical orientations regarding race in education and throughout society.

Theoretical foundations have been used to explain the meaning of race and how it operates as a salient—yet socially constructed—facet of our society. In education scholarship, critical race theory (CRT) is arguably the most prevalent theory used to explain race and its function in society as it pertains to social justice and oppression. Hailing from legal scholarship, CRT is often credited to Derrick Bell (Tate, 1997), while it was popularized in education by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995). CRT can trace its roots as far back as preeminent scholars like W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1993)—the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University—and Carter G. Woodson—the father of Black history and also a Harvard graduate (Woodson, 1933).

Taken from the perspective that CRT originated from Du Bois, there is no question that its origins can be tied to education. This is clearly articulated throughout the *Souls of Black Folk* (1903/1993), Du Bois’s most popular piece of scholarship. In it, he addresses and critiques the education of African Americans in the third and fourth chapters “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” and “Of the Training of Black Men,” respectively (Washington & Barnes, 1968). Using a critical stance, Du Bois cleverly points out the successes of Black education, much of which is aimed at the development of teachers, while stridently criticizing the interest of White puppeteers in the education of Black Americans and the conservative stance of those Blacks who ascended to leadership (Du Bois, 1903/1993).

Evolving out of Du Bois’s epistemology of race, CRT rests on several tenets: (a) that racism is a normal everyday fact of American life (the salience of race and racism), (b) interest convergence or the notion that progress on behalf of people of color is only accomplished when it aligns with the interest of Whites, (c) the social construction of race, (d) differential racialization, meaning that the implications of race evolve to meet the needs of dominant society, (e) intersectionality and antiessentialism, and (f) the unique voices of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). While

some have deemed race and racism as nonexistent or irrelevant, CRT debunks these notions by uncovering hidden truths in society both historically and contemporarily.

### **CRT in education**

CRT was established in education because race had been undertheorized and unacknowledged beyond statistics that suggested students of color were not as successful as their White counterparts (Tate, 1997). Even Jonathan Kozols's impactful book *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (2012) had not delved deep into the impact of systemic racism, which impacted variances in the allocation of school resources (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theorists seek to "describe how both educational research and legal structures contribute to existing belief systems and to legitimating social frameworks and policy that result in educational inequities for people of color" (Tate, 1997, p. 197). Just as critical race theorists in legal studies use historical events and legal precedents to uncover hidden truths about racial progress (D. A. J. Bell, 1975, 1980; Dudziak, 1988, 2004), those in education do the same but also include educational theory (Tate, 1997). In one of the few examples where CRT is used in physical education scholarship in the United States, Burden, Harrison, and Hodge (2005) examined kinesiology faculty members' perceptions of working in predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Also using CRT, Kohli (2009) highlighted the voice of women of color as they reflected on their experiences as student teachers. Although the participants were not PETE majors, one reflected on her encounter with racial slurs used by physical education teachers to describe students of color as "hood rats" and "lazy." Unfortunately, thorough, in-depth, and critical study of race in physical education and PETE lags behind the broader education community of scholars by more than 20 years. For example, the application of CRT in physical education research and literature to examine disparities among participation in physical activities, opportunities to engage in physical activity throughout the school, and quality physical education have yet to be initiated.

In their initial introduction of CRT to education, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) argued for usage of such a theory based on three propositions: (a) Race is factor in the production of inequality in the United States, (b) the United States is based on property rights and not human rights, and (c) the intersection between property and race can be used to decipher how inequalities exist. The application of CRT in (physical) education is important for several reasons. Ladson-

Billings (1998) suggested CRT can be related to educational inequalities in five facets of education: curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation. She recognized that the official school curriculum is a White supremacist master script designed to perpetuate dominant power structures. Regarding instruction, she stated that there is a discourse about African American and other students of color that is rooted in deficit thinking (e.g., Payne, 2005). Similarly, critical race theorists assert that intelligence tests are mechanisms to ensure the maintenance of Blacks as a subordinate class. CRT also supports the notion that inequities in school funding are a function of institutional racism and structural inequalities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Lastly, echoing the tenet of interest convergence, critical race theorists in education agree that desegregation has not served as a panacea for social inequality but has furthered the advantages of Whites (D. A. J. Bell, 1980). Each of the aforementioned positions is relevant to the training of physical education teachers considering that the majority of current and preservice teachers are representatives of the dominant racial class.

The principle of interest convergence may also be used to gain an understanding of the dearth of diversity within the teaching pipeline. For instance, as a result of the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision, many Black teachers and administrators lost jobs and were replaced with White teachers in the midst of the closure of many Black schools. This experience has been echoed in the adapted physical education scholarship by Hodge (2012) in an autobiographical narrative where he and two friends without prompting integrated his middle school, which eventually led to school closures and the firing of Black faculty and administrators. Education became a less viable profession for a group of people who were establishing a labor history in education (Anderson, 1988; Du Bois, 1903/1993; Washington & Barnes, 1968).

CRT in education developed as a means to challenge the cooption of multicultural education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995):

We argue that the current multicultural paradigm functions in a manner similar to civil rights law. Instead of creating radically new paradigms that ensure justice, multicultural reforms are routinely "sucked back into the system" and just as traditional civil rights law is based on a foundation of human rights, the current multicultural paradigm is mired in liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order. (p. 62)

Thus, CRT in education offers a post-multicultural paradigm that seeks to offer more than an additive cure to racial inequalities in education. Critical race theorists in education argue that the efforts of multiculturalists

have led to token representations of carefully selected and (re)created racial icons. This argument is made explicit by Dennis Carlson in “Troubling Heroes: Of Rosa Parks, Multicultural Education, and Critical Pedagogy” (2003) whereby he explains that heroines such as Rosa Parks and Sojourner Truth are often reimagined by media, political pundits, and authors of history to suit their own needs and agendas in the race toward racial progress or harmony. Concerning physical education, icons like Leroy T. Walker—the first Black president of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD, now SHAPE America)—and Aaron Molineaux Hewlett—an African American and the first African American to hold an academic position in the profession—represent significant progress within physical education but have yet to be included in the professional lexicon with great significance (Gaddy, 1998; Hodge & Wiggins, 2010).

Within education, critical race theorists are specific in their intentions and do not seek to accommodate every group, but rather to liberate individuals within specific racial spheres. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) stated: “[T]hus, as critical race theory scholars we unabashedly reject a paradigm that attempts to be everything to everyone and consequently becomes nothing for anyone, allowing the status quo to prevail” (p. 52).

### **LatCrit in education**

As mentioned before, CRT is an interdisciplinary tool (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), but it is not intended to satisfy or appease all groups within education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Hence, it is no surprise that the original writings about CRT in education are about Black people, because the founding scholars were themselves Black. However, CRT has also been used to support the social justice agendas of those outside of the Black community. For example, Latina/o CRT, or LatCrit, has been used to privilege the voice and perspectives of those in the Latin@/Mestiza/Chicano community. Latino/a researchers using CRT have used it to center the “outsider, *mestiza*, transgressive knowledges” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). LatCrit scholars have extended critical race beyond Black and White binaries, which have limited its impact on communities that are not Black (Arriola, 1996; Hernandez-Truyol, 1996; Stefancic, 1997). The usefulness of CRT beyond the Black community was made clear by Richard Delgado (1989), who stated: “Along with the tradition of storytelling in [B]lack culture there exist the Spanish tradition of picaresque novel or story, which tells of humble folk piquing the pompous or powerful and bringing them down to more human levels” (p. 2414).

In two studies utilizing CRT, one about the experiences of Chicana/o scholars and the other about racial stereotyping in teacher education, Daniel Solorzano (1997, 1998) stated that there are five themes that form the foundational perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of CRT in education, much of which parallels or is derived from past conceptualization of CRT in education: (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective. Using these five pillars, Tara Yosso (2002) purposed a critical race curriculum to challenge the traditional school curriculum that operates with an unacknowledged political agenda, implicitly designed to privilege Whites.

Perhaps CRT’s biggest contribution to social justice in teacher education is that it intimates cultural nationalism—not in the sense that cultural and racial minorities will seek to secede from the nation, but rather that there are specific learning environments, perspectives, and pedagogies that students of color need to thrive in society (Tate, 1997).

### **Whiteness**

Along with the need to acknowledge the salience of race, within physical education, ample exploration of Whiteness is also necessary. Much like CRT, the concept of Whiteness, as property, is an analytical tool to examine and uncover the salience of race, with an acute emphasis on Whiteness. The conceptual foundations of Whiteness as property are rooted in the truth of American history whereby African Americans were enslaved as the property of Whites and Native Americans were the victims of conquest, removal, and genocide while having their land occupied in a legal system that validated the ownership by Whites (Harris, 1993). But “[W]hiteness is not simply and solely a legally recognized property interest. It is simultaneously an aspect of self-identity and of person-hood, and its relation to the law of property is complex” (Harris, 1993, p. 1725). In other words Whiteness is not confined to legal matters; it functions as an identity and privilege whereby it impacts one’s personal and psychological state and is a means to bolster one’s reputation (Harris, 1993). Some of the property functions of Whiteness include *right to use and enjoy*, meaning that while Whiteness is an identity, it can also be deployed to exercise one’s will and power. “Whiteness as the embodiment of [W]hite privilege transcended mere belief or preference; it became usable property, the subject of the law’s regard and protection. In this respect [W]hiteness, as an active property, has been used and

enjoyed” (Harris, 1993, p. 1734). Another function is *reputation and status*, meaning that there is recognized value and reputational interest in being White. In short, Whiteness is a form of status property (Harris, 1993). Perhaps the most impactful property function is the *absolute right to exclude*. Theorists have postulated that primary characteristics of property include the exclusive right to use and exclude. With regard to Whiteness, being White is not defined by inherent characteristics, but rather by the exclusion of those who are not White.

In physical education, Whiteness as property can be a valuable tool of analysis given the history of exclusion within physical education whereby many state-level organizations marginalized physical educators of color in the shadow of silence cast by SHAPE America (then known as AAHPERD; Hodge & Wiggins, 2010). Various manuscripts have presented the lack of inclusion and access in PETE graduate programs at PWIs, thereby paralleling the right to exclude, reputation, and right to use as functions of Whiteness (Brooks, Harrison, Norris, & Norwood, 2013; Gregory-Bass et al., 2013; Hodge, Brooks, & Harrison, 2013; Hodge, Cervantes, Vigo-Valentín, Canabal-Torres, & Ortiz-Castillo, 2012; Hodge & Corbett, 2013; Hodge & Wiggins, 2010; Rudisill, 2013). Specific to the rights of exclusion and reputation, scholars from historically Black colleges that have applied for positions within prestigious PETE programs have been dismissed as viable candidates without thorough inspection of their qualification (Harrison & Hodge, 2010). Exclusion occurred because historically Black colleges and universities do not possess the same reputations as PWIs.

The persistence of the exclusion and marginalization of people of color in physical education is evident in the White dominance in the teaching force and the number of PETE professors in high-status positions (Hodge et al., 2012). Recent research indicates that the vast majority of the K–12 teaching force (81.9%) are White. Moreover, latest statistics of doctoral degrees conferred in PETE-related fields show that Whites are the vast majority of degree earners in 2010–2011 (more than 63.4%) with Blacks, Hispanics, Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans, American Indians/Alaska Natives, people of more than one race, and non-U.S. residents representing approximately 7.4%, 1.9%, 0%, 2.3%, 0.038%, 0.038%, and 24%, respectively (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). Given the statistics presented, it would be difficult to argue that physical education, by and large, is not the property of Whiteness.

The implications of Whiteness in the gymnasium and other physical activity arenas were articulated by Azzarito (2009), who found that high school students identified ideal active female bodies as White. Azzarito also argued that physical education could become a site of resistance

against the idealization of White-gendered bodies, but only if schools seek to empower students appropriately—a key function of social justice.

### ***Social justice in physical education and physical education teacher education demographics***

Swiftly shifting demographics are one of the driving forces for social justice in all areas of education—including physical education. While the student population is swiftly increasing in diversity, the teacher demographic has remained relatively stagnant. According to U.S. Department of Education data (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012), the percentage of White students enrolled in elementary and secondary public schools decreased from 64.7% in 1995 to 51.4% in 2012 and is projected to decrease to 47.7% in 2021. This pronounced trend is not reflected in the teaching population that consists mainly of White, middle-class women, who make up about 76% of the teaching force (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

The lack of cultural congruence is likely a source of disconnect between teachers and some students that can make the already arduous task of teaching even more demanding. A monocultural teacher preparation program can exacerbate this situation even more and can therefore construct a socially unjust environment for prospective teachers. Lack of diversity in teacher preparation programs privileges the dominant cultures’ perspectives and devalues frank multiple-perspective discussions of the value of diversity, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and privilege (Hodge, 2014; Zeichner, 2009). Though many support the goal of making the U.S. teaching force more diverse, the more immediate and important objective is to pursue social justice through developing the cultural competency of all teachers (Harrison et al., 2010).

The development of culturally responsive teachers can foster a pedagogical lens that seeks to empower students socially, politically, and emotionally, as well as physically and intellectually. Teachers who are culturally adept and responsive to their students make use of their cultural knowledge and skills to reform curriculum so that it entrenches the knowledge and skills that will enable student success while maintaining the important connections to their culture. Instead of ignoring or critiquing cultural differences, the culturally responsive teacher utilizes their knowledge of the students’ culture and their knowledge of the dominant culture to construct intercultural bridges that acknowledge differences without shining the deficit light on students’ cultural knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In her study of effective teachers for Black students, Ladson-Billings

(2009) found that both Black and White teachers were effective in their teaching because they maintained high expectations of students, fostered the development of a critical consciousness, and sought to maintain their students' cultural identities (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In physical education, social justice mandates that physical education teachers become aware of their own and prevailing stereotypic conceptions of students of color and students' proclivities toward physical activities. Teachers must also become aware of real differences between their own and their students' ideas and attitudes toward physical activity. Physical educators with distorted perceptions of their students because of limited cultural competency can easily become unwary perpetrators of purposeless and unsuccessfully negotiated curriculums that foster frustration for both teachers and students (Ennis, 1995).

### ***Physical activity in people of color: Perception versus reality***

The performance of bodies of color, especially Black bodies, seems to be a fascination for mainstream America. In the top revenue-producing sports at the amateur, collegiate, and professional levels, the masses are entertained by performing Black bodies that also serve to distort the reality of the Black masses. Clark, Smith, and Harrison (2014) noted:

Ironically, while popular images of Black bodies propagate misconceptions of their superiority, however, Black Americans are likely to be obese, overweight and suffer from preventable diseases caused by unhealthy eating and lack of exercise. The paradoxical circumstances are what we have coined "The Contradiction of the Black Body," the false notion that people of African descent are superior athletically, yet remain in a reality of marginalization with regard to their physical health. (p. 84)

The image of the fit and healthy Black basketball or football athlete or Latino soccer player conceals the health realities of the Black and Brown masses. Even if the fallacious ideas of physically superior athletes of color were true, elite athletes are not representative of entire populations. A view of reality reveals evidence to the contrary with chronic diseases such as hypertension, type II diabetes, and obesity—conditions that respond positively to physical activity—being significantly more prevalent Black and Brown populations (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013).

A culturally responsive physical educator would be cognizant of these alarming health disparities and seek not only to increase physical activity in these populations, but empower and equip them with the necessary knowledge to exert positive personal, familial, and

community impact. The astute physical educator will accomplish this not by employing a deficit attitude, perspective, or language, but by embracing the student's culture, stimulating a critical analysis of the causes for the health disparities, and empowering students explore culturally congruent ways in which to accomplish the desired goals (Flory & McCaughtry, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

### ***Culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogy: The vehicle of social justice***

Within the extant physical education literature, there have been documented attempts at culturally relevant approaches to education. For example, Hastie, Martin, and Buchanan (2006) conducted a study where Anglo teachers facilitated a dance curriculum for African American students based upon Step—a traditional dance form performed by African Americans. In another example, Flory and McCaughtry (2011) utilized the cycle of cultural relevance to inform the application of culturally relevant physical education in urban schools. The cycle consists of (a) knowing how community dynamics influence educational processes and (b) implementing strategies that reflect cultural knowledge of the community. Each of these examples provides worthwhile attempts to conceptualize culturally relevant physical education in schools.

While these efforts failed to include Ladson-Billings's (1995) tenants of maintenance of culturally identity, academic achievement, and the development of critical consciousness, they represent progress in a culturally relevant direction. Unfortunately, few of the teachers in Flory and McCaughtry's (2011) study actually enacted the proposed cycle completely. The authors cited reactions from several teachers to their culturally different students as deficit orientations and making disparaging comments reflective of a lack of cultural competence or cultural responsiveness. Those few teachers who exhibited culturally responsive teaching practices developed teaching environments that were conducive to learning and students who were courteous to teachers and peers and who were inspired to learn.

Even though the Ladson-Billings conceptualization has been the scholarly standard of culturally relevant approaches to teaching, there have been more contemporary conceptualizations that have garnered similar respect. Culturally sustaining pedagogy has been deemed a remix to the foundational culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Paris (2012) stated the following about culturally sustaining pedagogy:

... requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of

young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. (p. 95)

Whether called culturally relevant, sustaining, or responsive, a physical education class that espouses the ideals of social justice needs to be anchored in culturally responsive teaching. To ensure the development of this kind of class, it must be taught by a culturally competent educator who trusts in the efficacy of social justice.

### **Conclusion: How can social justice address the inequities in physical education and physical activity?**

To inspire the infusion of social justice in the realm of race as it pertains to physical education and physical activity, an acknowledgement of the salience of race, racism, privilege, Whiteness, and inequity is necessary throughout the PETE ecosystem. The pervasiveness of racialized thinking warrants sustained analyses of the way student (dis)abilities are viewed and the persistent deficit orientations educators take when considering students of color (Ladson-Billings, 2012). While these issues have been frequently examined in general educational spheres, it is time to focus the social justice lens on physical education. Barriers to the development of physical literacy among students of color should be examined in light of the research indicating disparities in physical activity and obvious health consequences (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013).

As the United States becomes an increasingly ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse nation, teacher educators must be cognizant of racialized disparities in quality physical education and opportunities to engage in physical activity. This awareness should inform research and pedagogical practices that are utilized to engage students and prepare preservice teachers to teach a variety of students in a multicultural context. Research has found that one of the ways to raise this awareness is to provide service learning, field experiences, and student-teaching opportunities in communities of color (Domangue & Carson, 2008). However, it may be difficult to achieve this goal while simultaneously ensuring that entrenched stereotypes are not reinforced in the process. These opportunities can dispel myths about marginalized people of color and can inform teaching practices, which expand opportunities to participate in physical activities that go beyond stereotypical prescriptions. Given that many schools that service students of color often limit the time students spend participating in physical education, these schools should be targeted for the implementation of compre-

hensive school physical activity programs (Clark et al., 2014) that emphasize opportunities for increased physical activity and education. For physical education to be relevant in a 21st-century America, it must account for the legacy race and racism, which influence current inequities in education and physical activity. As the country becomes more dynamic and diverse, professionals within the PETE ecosystem must employ creative means to alleviate historical injustices. Physical educators and physical education teacher educators must come to realize that moving toward social justice in physical education as in other areas will alleviate many of the social ills that plague our society. A socially just society that benefits the least of us will ultimately benefit all of us.

### **What does this article add?**

Our purpose is to stimulate meaningful self-reflection and critical thought on the role of social justice, with regard to race, in physical education. Unfortunately, tragic events in our society bring issues of social justice and race to the forefront of discussion. The investigation of racial issues in the shadow of such tragic events often elicits emotional and impassioned responses that veil the important issues and make meaningful investigation difficult. Furthermore, the topic of race in the United States is such a sensitive topic that many researchers steer clear for fear of being labeled bigots. Therefore, race and other delicate issues are left to be examined mostly by those who are often most marginalized. Thus, the research itself becomes marginalized and deemed inconsequential to the mainstream research agenda.

Physical educators and physical education teacher educators must realize that before students and prospective teachers are able to write lesson plans, evaluate fitness levels, plan meaningful physical activities, and the like, they must first consider their students. Teachers must first become students of their students—that is, they must learn who they are and the context in which these students live to be effective in physically educating them. A consistent and meaningful examination of all of the tenants of social justice, including race, can serve to keep us mindful of the ways and means through which we engage our students and each other in our quest to develop physically literate individuals and improve the health status of all.

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