



Changing the Culture: Football

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Introduction

As we have learned throughout this course and living our everyday lives, racism surrounds us every day. Whether it is the shows we watch on television, the advertisements we see on billboards, or the communication we have with our friends, you can always find some sort of oppression or oppressive thought in everything around us. Unfortunately, it is usually ourselves that are being the oppressor's. Every encounter we have, we always pass judgment, think negative thoughts about someone, or assume something about another individual. Sad to say, this is the "American way" (Scheurich & Young, 1997).

To change the ways of the misunderstood world, we need to begin by acknowledging the sociocultural consciousness in society today. The sociocultural consciousness is a way to understand how people think and behave which is influenced by their race/ethnicity, social class, and language (Banks, 1996) (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 22). The first thing we need to do to change the world is look at ourselves in the mirror and work hard to truly understand racism at an individual level. We need to acknowledge that the racism is around us every day, and it will not be changed overnight. As our eyes are opened up to the individual level of racism, we will also begin to see it appear at the institutional, societal and civilizational levels. Scheurich and Young (1997) explain:

The first two categories of racism we shall discuss – overt and covert racism – are typically defined as operating at the individual level; the next two are organizational and social categories – institutional and societal racism – and, in effect, create the social context for the prior two categories. The final one is a civilizational category, and it, we will contend, creates or constitutes the possibility for all of the prior four categories...All of these four sit, in a hierarchy of smaller to larger and broader, inside the largest and broadest category, the civilizational level. (p. 4)

Knowing this, we must learn about racism and help the country understand racism at each level and work towards a racism free culture.

Background

Racism is defined as "an individual's negative prejudicial attitude or discriminatory behavior toward people of a given race or institutional personnel, policies, practices, and structures (even if not motivated by prejudice) that subordinate people of a given race" (Waller, 1998, p. 47) (Singer, 2005). Racism can be looked at in four epistemological levels, individual, institutional, societal, and civilizational.

The first level of racism to look at is the individual level. The individual level breaks down to two categories overt and covert racism. Overt racism is when, in the public, an individual of one race makes a mindful, planned act against a person from another race with the intent to damage the second person because of their race.

Covert racism also occurs at the individual level. Covert and overt racism are the exact same thing. The only difference is that covert racism is kept private and not put out in the public like overt racism.

Once we have helped ourselves understand the world at an individual level, we need to look at it from an institutional level. Scheurich and Young (1997) say it best:

Institutional racism exists when institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relation to members of the dominant race. Institutional racism also exists when institutional or organizational cultures, rules, habits or symbols have the same biasing effect. For example, if an institution's procedures or culture favor Whites for promotion, such as promotion to a full professorship or to a principalship, over persons of color, this is institutional racism. (p. 5)

The third level of racism in our world is at the Societal Level. Societal racism is comparable to institutional racism, but it appears in a wider range. Societal racism reaches further across society, yet receives less attention than institutional racism (Scheurich & Young, 1997).

The final level of racism is civilizational racism. Scheurich & Young along with others define this level perfectly.

The civilizational level is the level of broad civilizational assumptions, assumptions that, though they construct the nature of our world and our experience of it, are not typically conscious to most members of a civilization (Foucault, 1979, 1988) (Scheurich & Young, 1997). These assumptions are deeply embedded in how those members think and in what they name “the world” or “the Real” through various categories or concepts (Said, 1979; Stanfield, 1985, 1994).

With these types of racism listed here for us, it should trigger thought about each of the types and how they are around you in your life every day. Racism is a topic that American’s tend to shy away from and don’t want to discuss. Racism is demonstrated in many of the public institutions in the United States (Powell, 1992) (Singer, 2005).

Still today, African American student-athletes are the group of college students who have had to combat and continue to overcome racism in predominately White institutions (PWI’s) (Singer, 2005). In college sports today, African American athletes are a huge part of the high profile, money making college sports scene. In football, African American’s make up about 46% of the athletes, in men’s basketball they make up nearly 60% and in women’s basketball they make up about 47% of the athletes (Lapchick et al., 2009) (Agyemang, et al., 2010).

With this staggering representation of African-Americans in sports, we still see many signs of racism in our lives, as well as in sports on a daily basis. An example of overt racism has been experienced in the actions of the Los Angeles Clippers (NBA team) owner Donald Sterling. Sterling made racist comments to his girlfriend and they were recorded and released to the public. He said when talking about his girlfriend bringing people to the Clippers games, “Don’t bring black people” (Wagner, 2014). He continued on making many other overtly racist comments. This is a shame that one of the most prominent men in the country makes comments about another American, especially in a workforce that is predominately African-American. This example along with the ones that I see as a football

coach at the college level has prompted me to attempt to make a change in the football culture, regarding racism.

“Football is the ultimate team sport” according to Daryl Johnston (2005). In football each player must do his job on the play to help execute the play as a whole. Therefore in order to have a successful play, each individual must trust and understand the person lining up next to him. To gain this trust in the person next to you, we must have complete confidence in each other to be able to do our job while the person next to us is doing the same. These are lessons that will help the players their entire lives.

As a coach, I believe that this trust is built far before we ever step on the field to begin to play this great game. It starts at the core of getting to know the person next to you outside of football, and learning what makes them smile, what makes them laugh, what makes them sad, what makes them mad, etc. Knowing each other will give each player full confidence in each other not leaving them worrying and questioning what the player is doing on that play.

When developing this true understanding of each other, we must also look into racism to recognize that it is around us every day in the locker room, and in society. Each player comes in with a variety of cultures in their lives and different understandings of everything that goes on around them including each individuals understanding of racism. Regardless, the players come into this football culture and still do not truly understand racism.

The question is what is the process to help us create this full trust in each other and create the tight bond between our teammates to form the ultimate team?

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) and sociocultural consciousness are the theories put into place that need to be used to overcome racism at all four levels of epistemology. Critical race theory, described by Kevin Hylton (2010), tells us that:

Critical race theory is a framework established to challenge these racialized inequalities and racism in society and has some utility for anti-racism in sport. CRT’s focus on social justice and transformation are two areas of coverage between critical race theorists and anti-racists. Of the many nuanced and pernicious forms of racism, one of the most obvious and commonly reported forms of racism in sport, racial abuse, has been described as a kind of dehumanizing process (Gardiner, 2003, Hylton, 2010).

Athletes presented to this type of environment certainly are not going to be able to perform at the highest levels of competition, against the top athletes in the world, with these types of scenarios hanging over their heads.

“Critical race theory is introduced as an important theoretical tool for anti-racists in sport. CRT has emerged out of radical developments in critical legal studies and education in North America, but now contributes to other areas such as history, disability studies, critical race feminism, whiteness studies, and sport and leisure studies (Solorzano and Yosso, 2001, 2002). CRT presents anti-racists with a framework to challenge orthodoxies, narrow ‘race’ thinking and under-theorized approaches in sport, and thus to enable their praxis to be strengthened in what critical race theorists view as a fundamentally racist world (Creshaw et al., 1995; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2009; Hylton, 2009) (Hylton, 2010).

With this understanding of the critical race theory, and its value to society, it has become a leader in setting the framework to object racism. Racism is the central idea to any theory or mediation on the topic. With our understanding that racism is spread through our entire culture at all four levels of epistemology, and we may not agree with the idea of racism, but critical race theory acknowledges its presence. “CRT is effectively a series of critiques seeking to positively disrupt and transform racialized power relations regardless of the actors involved” (Hylton, 2010).

The other theory, sociocultural consciousness, as mentioned earlier, is when an individual understands “people’s ways of thinking, behaving, and being are deeply influenced by such factors as race/ethnicity, social class, and language” (Banks, 1996) (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). For coaches to understand their players, and players to understand each other, they each must understand their own sociocultural identities first (Banks, 1991; Bennett, 1995; Zeichner & Hoeft, 1996) (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). They need to examine the different cultures they are a part of in their lives to truly understand themselves and those around them (Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Initiating and Contributing to Change

To inspire change, we must create a realization that racism is around us every day, especially in higher education. Pliner and Johnson (2010) point out that:

Although institutes of higher education serve an increasingly diverse student body, they have traditionally been resistant to change, especially in

accommodating the needs of students marked as “minorities” because of race, class, ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, nationality, or sexual identification or orientation. After 150 years of status quo preservation, the creation of higher education environments that are accepting and supportive of students with diverse needs is a formidable task that requires a major cultural transformation. (p. 478)

Fully dedicated to implementing a plan of action and using the supportive research findings about racism in society, I am recommending a plan to help coaches and players overcome and change the racist football culture. The organization and ideas of my plan are outlined in the following sections.

Plan of Action

Population

The population to implement this plan is a college football team (any team or group) that is trying to come together to accomplish a goal. The plan will involve the coaches (managers) and the players (workers) of the organization.

Goals

The overall goal of this plan is to change the football culture. I would like to help the individual’s breakdown the barriers of the racism on the team, and in their personal lives, to help them grow into the ultimate team.

The main goal is for the players to understand the four epistemological levels of racism that are in our lives every day. With this understanding, they will be able to recognize racism at the individual, institutional, societal and civilizational levels.

The next goal is to teach the players and coaches about racism. The team members will be able to identify racism as it occurs around them every day. With this recognition, they will cognitively analyze how they use these actions and be able to promote an anti-racist society and lead by example. This process will help the team members grow into mature adults ready for any situation presented to them in life.

The third goal is to help the individuals learn about themselves to understand who they truly are. The individuals will analyze the different cultures they are a part of in their life, understand how they became a part of these cultures, and know themselves completely in and out, which is the foundation to help them understand others.

The final goal, once they understand themselves, is to learn about their teammates around them. By knowing

and understanding each other, they will be able to trust each other on each play were eleven men are working as one to reach the ultimate goal of executing a successful play in football.

Proposed Plan

When you first begin as a college athlete, you are an individual. You know nothing about your teammates, except that they play football, and skills and academics to become a college athlete. With the thought of the ultimate team being created and helping these athletes grow into adults, I have a plan of helping these individuals grow into a team. The plan consists of an educational aspect, then a neighboring concept.

Education.

The educational aspect requires the hiring of a professional to come in and teach the players and coaches about racism and the four levels of epistemology. This will be a 1-week course during the first week of May for the coaches that will meet three times (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) that week. The players will take the same 1-week course during the second week of June meeting on those same days, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Each class over the two-week period will meet at 10 am and last about 2 hours.

The professional will be asked to use their expertise to develop applicable slide shows, activities, group discussions, etc. to keep the players and coaches engaged in the course while learning about the topic. I believe the professional will use a lot of the same activities, materials and examples that we used in this course to help the coaches and players connect with racism.

The coaches will run through the course first to allow the professional to have a test run for the course. The coaches will reflect on the course and work with the professional to make sure the course will be relevant and applicable for the players. The professional will have three weeks between the end of the coach's course, and the beginning of the player's course to have it ready for the players.

Once the coaches have completed the course, it is their responsibility to begin to promote and live by the new goals and standards set by the course. The coaches are expected to mention and hype up the course to get the players excited. This excitement and anticipation will create a buzz from the players about the course. The players will experience the course and also be able to recognize the racism in our culture. If we think of the

football team as an entire civilization, these two groups of learning will be at the societal level of epistemology.

Upon the completion of the player's course on Friday, the coaches and players will come together to have a group discussion on the next Monday. The professional will be the leader of the discussion asking leading questions to create a great conversation to help the players and coaches understand the topic at a deeper level. This civilized discussion will help the players understand the four levels of epistemology better, and begin the process of understanding the coaches and their teammates.

With a better understanding of racism, the players will now break into their position groups to learn about themselves and each other. Each player and coach will now be expected to examine five cultures that they are a part of outside of football. The players and coaches will create a Cultural People Bag which will contain five items, with each item representing one of the five cultures they are a part of outside of football. One player will present to their respective position group before each meeting. The coach will be the first to go to help the players to learn more about him, and to show them how the people bags and presentations will work.

Throughout this cultural people bag, the players will be expected to take notes on each speaker. They will be required to write one thing they found interesting about the individual, one thing new they learned about the individual, and one thing that they have in common with the individual from listening to their presentation. With each individual sharing about themselves, and listening to the others, an understanding of who each of them are as a person will begin to develop.

Neighboring.

Neighboring is a 4-week concept that was introduced to me by Pastor Johnny Square, the chaplain for our football team. Each level will be worked on for one week during the process. Neighboring is a concept to help you to take the steps to cross over and understand the viewpoints of the others. Neighboring will also help you to break down any social, economic or cultural barriers that exist in a group. This is a four-step process that will help the player to build a deeper relationship with their teammate at each level of the process.

The concept of neighboring will be used in the locker room which is a place where players spend time with each other without the coaches around. In neighboring, you will get to know your neighbor at a deeper level each day through the process. When you get to know your neighbor at a deeper level, you will

understand who they are, where they came from, what offends them, what matters to them, etc. This will help to build that trust and bond within the team.

At the first level (Acquaintance), you will have four questions to ask the five neighbors around your locker. These questions are: Where are you from? Do you have a nickname? What is your favorite song? What is your favorite food?

These are non-threatening questions to begin to open the lines of communication and learn the basics about your neighbor. You want to write down the information, but you do not want to look too deep into the responses, or assume anything about the individual. You are gathering information to understand the individual as a whole down the road.

The second level (Casual) will have three questions associated with it. What is your favorite hobby outside of football? If you had an all-expense paid trip to anywhere in the world, where would you go? What is your greatest life achievement outside of athletics?

These questions help to build a common ground between you and each of your neighbors. You may learn something that you have in common with the individual, or learn something about an experience that you have never had, but the individual is willing to share the experience with you because of the bond you are building.

The third level (Close) will have two questions. What have you learned about me that is most impactful to you? If you could change something about yourself, what would it be?

The fourth level (Intimacy) has one question. What is your purpose in life?

At each level, you gain more understanding of your neighbor. As you can see, the questions at the third and fourth level are quite deep. In the end, with the answers to these questions, you have the information to understand the person at the deepest level. The simple goal of this exercise according to Pastor Square is for "Everybody to just love their neighbor."

Limitations

The first limitation I see is hiring the perfect professional to run the course to teach the coaches about racism properly. Even though I imagine we can have all of these ideas covered in this short period of time, I know that we will not be able to cover the entire topic of racism and have everyone understand it at the same level. I cannot require the players and coaches to use the information taught in the course. I cannot guarantee that all of the coaches and players will be in attendance each

day. In the end, I hope that each of the players and coaches will learn one thing or idea from this experience, and be able to apply it to make us a better team and make a difference in the world.

Obstacles

The biggest obstacle I see is having all of the players and coaches buy into the idea that racism is a problem that needs to be fixed. I will need support from the coaches to show the enthusiasm and passion about the topic to the players to have them buy in. Once the players and coaches have bought in, I have to make sure that the professional is able to talk at a level to help the players and coaches understand racism in a timely manner. I need to make sure that the course keeps the players and coaches attentive throughout the course. Finally, I need to make sure that we allow enough time for the idea of racism to sink into our culture.

Plans for Sustainability

To keep this new culture in football, I will need the support of everyone involved to continue to live by the learned and applied racism-free attitude. It will be the responsibility of each player and coach to live by and up to the standards set for the culture. The players and coaches will have the contact information of the professional who built the foundation of the new culture to get in touch with them when necessary. Everyone will be able to keep all the materials, activities, slide shows used to reflect back on the topic. Players and coaches will have to continually reflect on an individual level to make sure they are maintaining the goals set in the course. When they begin to run into problems, or struggle maintaining this new lifestyle, I will have a professional on staff to be able to discuss the issues they are having, and help them to overcome the situation. Lastly, we will have the course run each year, during the same time period to refresh the minds of the veterans, who are leaders on the team, and they help the freshman develop into young men that fit into our culture.

Assessment

Assessment will be done in three stages. The first stage will be a meeting as a whole team to discuss the process of the program, with an open question and answer session. The second stage will be a five question online survey, required to be done by each player and coach. Three of the questions will be on a multiple choice rating scale, and two questions will be open ended. The third stage will be a private meeting between the coaches to discuss the good and bad of the racism

program to be able to make adjustments for the next year. All of the information gathered in these three stages will be looked over and adjustments will be made to the racism program as necessary.

Summary

I firmly believe in this theory into action plan to educate and create a neighboring environment. Each step in the process will help to build the ultimate team in any group or organization I am a part of in my life. With this bond created through the racism program, the bond created between each other and the breaking down of the racism barrier, a foundation will be set to begin building a team preparing for this season, and seasons to come. It is a daunting task to understand and apply change in each of the four levels of epistemology, but let's see if I can use this racism program in the future to change the "American way," and not allow us to fall into the oppressive grips of our society.

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