



Recognising racism in community sport

A conversation guide for sporting organisations
and community sports clubs

Using this guide

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The intent of this resource is to provide real examples of different forms of racism in community sport and sporting organisations and build the capacity of people working in sport, including coaches, administrators, referees and club volunteers to identify racism.

This resource could be used as part of a wider program of education that your sporting organisation or club may be undertaking on racism and anti-racism.

Whilst most people are likely to be able to identify overt racism displayed through direct slurs, they may be less familiar with subtle acts of racism, or racism that exists within structures or processes.

It is the intention of this resource to help those involved in sport within clubs and sporting organisations identify and ultimately act and respond to all forms of racism that exist.

At the club level, your club could facilitate this conversation themselves or organise an external facilitator to support this type of discussion.

The below provides an outline of how you can use the guide to prompt discussions about racism in sport and build knowledge.

- **You can use pages 3-10 to guide your workshop.**
- **You can present pages 11-27 on a screen or as a handout.**
- **Workshop materials to print and hand out are on page 28 onward.**

Using this guide

1

Initially use the cards from 28 onward, outlining the different forms of racism – Interpersonal, Institutional and Internalised racism – and encourage participants to review these and discuss them.

You may wish to give your own example of each form of racism within a sport context.

2

Share the cards with the different experiences of racism on and ask participants to match these to the different forms of racism and discuss with a partner or small group why they think particular examples demonstrate the type of racism that they are linking it to.

3

Work through the different examples and encourage the group to share where they have assigned particular examples and why.

Initial questions to prompt reflection and deeper discussion

1

What forms of racism are easiest for you to recognise?
Which are harder to see, and why?

2

How might racism show up in places you don't expect?
Consider uniforms, images, team selection, food provision or facilities.

3

Why is it important to understand all forms of racism in sport and not just overt incidents?

Workshop/discussion progress

Initial questions

Interpersonal racism

Institutional racism

Impact mapping

Personal reflection

Summary discussion

Interpersonal racism

1

How might microaggressions (such as name mispronunciation) affect a player's confidence and sense of belonging over time?

2

How might racial stereotypes be damaging for culturally and racially minoritised and Indigenous players/coaches/or staff working in sporting organisations?

3

What actions might you take if you witness interpersonal racism and the microaggressions detailed in the examples?

Workshop/discussion progress

Initial questions

Interpersonal racism

Institutional racism

Impact mapping

Personal reflection

Summary discussion

Institutional racism

1

What systems or policies in sport might unintentionally disadvantage certain groups?
How could these be changed?

2

What are the risks of assuming racial inequity is about individuals not trying hard enough or having the right skills?

3

Why might clubs or sporting organisations resist changing processes to address institutional racism?

Workshop/discussion progress

Initial questions

Interpersonal racism

Institutional racism

Impact mapping

Personal reflection

Summary discussion

Impact mapping

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Pick 2-3 scenarios per pair or small group and consider what is the likely impact of the scenario outlined in the short term and longer term.

Workshop/discussion progress

Initial questions

Interpersonal racism

Institutional racism

Impact mapping

Personal reflection

Summary discussion

Personal reflection

1

When have you witnessed racism?
Did you recognise it as racism at the time?

2

How did you respond, and how might you respond differently now?

3

What might shape the way you notice (or miss) racism?

Workshop/discussion progress

Initial questions

Interpersonal racism

Institutional racism

Impact mapping

Personal reflection

Summary discussion

Summary discussion

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What are some actions that could be taken to address the different examples of racism detailed on the cards?

Who is responsible for taking that action?

Workshop/discussion progress

Initial questions

Interpersonal racism

Institutional racism

Impact mapping

Personal reflection

Summary discussion

Recognising racism in community sport

Racism can take many different forms in community sport and can sometimes be difficult to identify because it is subtle or embedded within systems or processes that have 'always been that way'.

Building our understanding of what racism can look like in community sport is essential to increase our ability to identify and address racism and promote anti-racist practices.

This guide provides examples of different forms of racism in community sport, including examples of institutional racism, interpersonal racism, and internalised racism (Elias et al., 2019).

These examples have been developed from experiences shared as part of the Enhancing the Capacity of Victorian Sport to Tackle Racism project.

Key terms

Racism

Racism includes prejudice, discrimination or hatred directed at someone because of their colour, ethnicity or national origin.

Racism may involve acts of abuse or harassment but doesn't always involve violent or intimidating behaviour.

Racism can be revealed through people's actions as well as their attitudes. It can also be reflected in systems and institutions that operate in ways that lead to unequal outcomes.

Racism is more than just words, beliefs and actions. It includes all the barriers that prevent people from enjoying dignity and equality because of their race. [Human Rights Commission](#).

Key terms

Race

Race is a social construct.

This means that race, as a concept, is shaped by social, political, and historical forces, not by innate or scientifically verifiable biological differences.

Claims of scientific racism, which falsely argued that members of one so-called race are biologically distinct from and inferior to those of another, have been disproven (Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Fuentes et al. 2019).

The perceived notion of race has real-world consequences. Ideas of race (and ideas that are racist) were foundational to the development of many of today's laws, cultures and society. These ideas have positioned some racial identities as superior and others as inferior, shaping power relations in enduring ways.

Today, race functions as a powerful social category that structures access to power, privilege, and resources across societies. [Racism. It Stops With Me.](#)

Different kinds of racism & examples in community sport



Interpersonal racism

Interpersonal racism refers to racism expressed between individuals, both within and intercultural racism that occurs across different communities. It includes overt acts, everyday racism, and so-called microaggressions, which often have a significant impact, regardless of intent.

Everyday racism, as defined by Essed (1991), highlights how racism is embedded in ordinary, routine interactions.

Racial microaggressions, a type of interpersonal racism, are casual expressions that perpetuate racist stereotypes and ideas.

Racial microaggressions in the workplace often take covert, subtle, or indirect forms; and are typically expressed through comments, behaviours, or assumptions that may appear harmless but carry underlying messages of exclusion, inferiority, or devaluation (Gatwiri, 2021).

People who directly experience racism (or other forms of discrimination) are typically much more aware of them. Microaggressions have a cumulative effect and can cause considerable psychological distress. [Racism It Stops with Me.](#)

Examples of interpersonal racism

“Our team has a mix of players from different African countries and they are competitive and talented. In one match, the girls were playing well and the opposition coach was getting upset that his team was losing. He kept saying they were being too aggressive towards his players. He was getting really animated about it so I tried to talk to him. He kept complaining that my team was being too aggressive. He said that ‘given their backgrounds’, this probably wasn’t surprising, but that shouldn’t be an excuse for them making hard tackles and intimidating his players.”

“My name can be hard to pronounce. I told my coach several times what my name is and how to pronounce it. He told me it was too hard though and he was just going to call me by an Anglo sounding name because it was easier for him to pronounce.”

Examples of interpersonal racism

“It was done as a joke but one of the girls was messing about in the changing rooms and she put a towel over her head and was pretending it was a hijab. She didn’t mean anything by it, she just didn’t understand that she was being quite offensive.”

“We play in a league where most of the teams consist of White players, whenever we turn up to play them as a mostly African team we just get stared at a lot but more than that, there’s an assumption that we will cause trouble. It feels like the other team and parents are watching us more closely because they think we will be a problem.”

“People make assumptions that I’ll be timid and won’t challenge things because I’m a woman and I’m Indian. Other people in the organisation find it difficult when I raise questions or want to debate why we are prioritising certain areas. They try to close me down quickly and I don’t feel my opinion is valued despite the fact that I have a lot of experience and I’m good at my job. I’ve also found it hard to convince people that I’ll be able to work well with sporting clubs; people in my organisation assume that I won’t be able to cope with difficult sporting clubs again because I’m a woman and I’m not White. I just find I am constantly stereotyped.”



Institutional racism

Institutional Racism refers to racism that occurs at a structural level.

Institutional racism manifests through the norms, policies, practices and procedures of settings in society (such as education, businesses and community groups) that systematically result in unequal outcomes or treatment for people based on their race.

It is different from individual racism in that it is embedded in the structure and operation of an organization, often without awareness by individuals that particular institutional practices

are racist. Institutional racism can be difficult to identify, particularly by those who are not impacted by it (Elias et al., 2019).

Acknowledging racism exists at an institutional level is important in recognising that the problem of racism is not only the result of individual behavior but manifests at the systems level of society and therefore requires more than a behavior level intervention to address.

[Human Rights Commission.](#)

Examples of institutional racism

“We have some games that are on a Friday night which is the Jewish Sabbath and as a club with a lot of Jewish players we are unable to fulfil fixtures on a Friday night. We’ve asked the league several times not to schedule us on a Friday night but they say that’s not fair to the other teams and if we can’t play on a Friday night we’ll just have to forfeit our games.”

“It’s hard to pinpoint, but my sons repeatedly have to prove that they are exceptional to be selected for their teams, particularly at the representative level. They have to show that they are much better than the White kids to have a chance of being selected. Then there are other things such as they consistently get less game time than the White kids, you could say it’s for other reasons but they are always treated differently in terms of expectations of them and the opportunities they get.”

“There’s just no other diversity on the board at all, so I find that I’m the only voice speaking out on issues of racism. I’m at the table, but my influence is limited because everyone else is White and they don’t see the issues in the way that I do, because they haven’t experienced that type of discrimination so it usually gets swept aside as not a major issue or I’m being overly sensitive.”

Examples of institutional racism

“ I remember watching how one of our teams had stacked all the African Australian players in attacking positions, rather than in central or leading positions. When I asked the coach why he did this, he responded that he felt those players were naturally talented for those positions because of their physicality and speed. Afterwards, I explained to him that placing the players only in certain positions was probably based on racial stereotypes.”

“ Every time we take the team into the stadium, there are pictures on the wall of White kids playing sport. How does that make our young African kids feel? They don't see themselves represented anywhere in any of the pictures in the building.”

“ I just get really frustrated that every time I apply for a role in a sporting organisation that outside of the diversity, equity, inclusion space, they always say I don't have enough experience for it and that I should consider other equity and inclusion roles or specific Multicultural participation positions that they have. I've done these roles for around 5 years already, and I want to progress into other opportunities, but I'm never considered to have the 'right' skill set for them.”

Examples of institutional racism

“ We decided to set up our own club as a group of us has had bad experiences with racism at a number of clubs so we decided to establish our own. It got really popular and we had a lot of girls for different cultural backgrounds join us quite quickly and we grew. However, when we tried to register with a league we weren't allowed and were told that we would be better joining the existing clubs. This was even after we explained to the league that we'd had a really bad experience at the clubs they were trying to get us to join. They were insistent we wouldn't be allowed to register our club with the league.”

“ As one of the few Indigenous staff working in my sporting organisation, I find that I constantly get asked to explain aspects of First Nations' culture or when there are any issues, I always have to provide advice and guidance. That's not part of my job, but it's just expected that I'll help because I have that knowledge and expertise. It's a significant cultural load that no one really recognises and it doesn't get rewarded because it's not part of my role or the KPIs I actually get measured on.”

“ We have a lot of very tall African girls within our team, at least 4 or 5 times a season an opposition team manager will challenge whether our team should be in the U12 age group and ask for proof of their ages. It doesn't happen to the tall White girls.”



Internalised racism

Internalised racism refers to the acceptance by members of a minoritised racial group of negative messages about their abilities and intrinsic worth.

It involves accepting limitations to one's own full humanity, including one's spectrum of dreams, one's right to self-determination, and one's range of allowable self-expression.

It can manifest in, for example, self-devaluation (racial slurs as nicknames; rejection of ancestral culture) or resignation, helplessness, and hopelessness (dropping out of school; engaging in risky health practices). (Jones 2002, p. 1213)

Examples of internalised racism

“ I just don't think I'd be very good at football, I've grown up being constantly told that Asians don't play football and we don't have the right physique to play and I think that's probably right. I'm not very big or coordinated so I don't think I'd be very good. I've always ended up doing sports like badminton because I think I'm better suited for those types of sports.

“ I've been working for about 7 years as an inclusion officer in my sporting organisation and I've applied a couple of times for a manager role but have not been successful. A couple of colleagues have said that I should have got the job and that I've got so much experience, particularly compared to the people they have appointed. One colleague has said she thinks it's because of my cultural background, I'm Chinese-Australian, but I think the decision is probably right. I'm probably not well equipped to do that role, I'm maybe not that well suited to that sort of leadership and responsibility.

“ I've never really wanted to progress into coaching, Africans make great soccer players but I know they aren't really that good at coaching and all the tactical aspects and having to lead a group of players. It's not really my strength and I don't think it's a role that I'd be good at. I think I'm better off sticking with playing which I can do well.

Workshop/discussion materials

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Each of the small cards maps to a different type of racism:

Interpersonal racism – W F B J H

Institutional racism – A D M E G Y C I K

Internalised racism – L O S

“ Our team has a mix of players from different African countries and they are competitive and talented. In one match, the girls were playing well and the opposition coach was getting upset that his team was losing. He kept saying they were being too aggressive towards his players. He was getting really animated about it so I tried to talk to him. He kept complaining that my team was being too aggressive. He said that ‘given their backgrounds’, this probably wasn’t surprising, but that shouldn’t be an excuse for them making hard tackles and intimidating his players.”

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