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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Allyship as activism: advancing social change in global sport through transformational allyship

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ABSTRACT

As the world is racing to find a cure to save lives and economies amidst a global pandemic, COVID-19 has inadvertently caused a shift of focus towards the inequities and injustices plaguing society economically, politically, and socially. In response, athletes, coaches, managers, and other change agents with institutional power in sport organisations across the globe have begun to utilise their platforms to champion social justice generally, and racial justice in particular, in solidarity. Historically, in concert with trends in neoliberal and neocolonial hegemonic societies, sport has reproduced various oppressive ideologies, discourses, and systems grounded in racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, homophobia, xenophobia and related systemically oppressive forces. Given the visibility of sport in the global marketplace, racialized groups have used sport as a site of resistance and activism for social justice. Since the athlete activist has re-emerged as an important change agent in the public consciousness, an increasing number of supporters holding privileged identities, within and beyond sport, have backed social justice movements through their allyship. However, scholarship has focussed largely on the allyship of athletes. Perhaps more problematically, the ambiguity of allyship has resulted in instances of decentring the core targets or victims of oppressive systems, who are best positioned to lead social movements. In an effort to cultivate a deeper understanding of allyship and how allies can optimise social movements, the purpose of this conceptual paper is to call for more intentional, critically reflexive, and culturally conscious allyship that is reflective of a transformation of allyship from reactive advocacy to proactive activism for long-term substantive gains. The authors posit that transformational allyship is allyship as activism on both individual and institutional levels. Allyship as activism should consist of *intentionality to centre the core targets and victims of oppression, critical reflexivity of the relationship between ally and core activist, the presence of a clear opposition, a challenge or disruption to hegemonic systems,* and *a connection to a broader social movement*. Implications for coaches, administrators, sport managers, and athletes are discussed.

KEYWORDS
Social justice; athlete activism; allyship; inclusion

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Introduction

Globally, the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has exposed and exacerbated inequalities and inequities that exist both within and between countries. People of lower socio-economic status as well as racially minoritized groups, such as Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC)[1], have been disproportionately impacted by the virus (Bushana et al., 2020). Overrepresentation in essential jobs, lack of ability to work from home or take paid time off, and limited access to quality healthcare, insurance, and transportation are just a few of the nuanced systemic barriers BIPOC face that have been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Compounding the aforementioned oppressive social structures with historic reports of medical abuse, neglect, and the exploitation of Black and Brown bodies has produced generations of mistrust in health care systems, both in America and abroad (Dula, 1994). While COVID-19 continues to devastate lives and economies, months of quarantine and economic shutdowns have warranted increased attention to a second, more persistent public health crisis: systemic racism. Media outlets, such as sports broadcast networks, have used their platforms to shine light on instances of police brutality and anti-Black violence. The video-recorded murder of George Floyd by law enforcement in the U.S. sparked worldwide movements for racial and social justice. Nations across the globe, including those located in North America, Europe, Australia, and Africa protested in solidarity for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Say Her Name Movements, rendering racial and social injustice a human rights issue of global impact.

Historically, sport has revealed and reinforced the social, political, and economic systems that create worldviews that undermine equity and serve as a barrier to social justice (Goodman, 2011). Interestingly, the interplay of the current global crises (the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism) has led to a powerful new wave of athlete activism at various levels and has centred the need for anti-racist advocacy/activism in the public (White) consciousness (Cooper et al., 2019). The *athlete-activist*, which we define as any sport participant who intentionally challenges hegemonic structures or systems of oppression, has re-emerged as athletes and teams have begun using their social capital to directly call attention to society's social ills. For instance, the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) Council on Racial and Social Justice called on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to amend their controversial IOC Rule 50, which prohibits athletes from protesting during the Games, in ways that would allow Olympic and Paralympic athletes to protest in support of racial and social justice—a step that led the USOPC to no longer sanction athletes who used the Games as a platform to promote racial and social justice. Despite positive support for athlete activism by the USOPC and other National Olympic Committees, the IOC recently declared that Rule 50 will be maintained and athlete protests and political messages/propaganda will continue to be banned and subject to disciplinary action during the Olympic Games (Quayle, 2021). In a move targeting racial justice athlete activists specifically, the IOC also made clear that athletes are prohibited from wearing 'Black Lives Matter' apparel (Wilson, 2021). Moreover, during the 2020 season of the Women's and Men's National Basketball Association (WNBA/NBA), players advocated for their organisations to stand in unity for racial justice. Their games featured signage promoting Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name, and players were given the

autonomy to place slogans, names, and other verbiage on their jerseys in support of those movements. Additionally, boycotts, walkouts and kneeling across other global professional sport leagues, such as the English Premier League (EPL), Netball South Africa, Australian Football League, and Indian Premier League have positioned sport as a powerful tool to bring awareness to global social inequities.

Similarly, in the context of 2020 global racial unrest, the re-emergence of athlete activism in such a powerfully visible wave has garnered much attention on micro (individual), meso (community), and macro (institutional) levels. In fact, Martin Luther King III, eldest son of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., praised the leadership of Black athletes in the continued fight for racial justice (King III, 2020). King III, strikingly, also highlights the fact that the Black athletes' causes 'are being supported, in many cases, by White teammates, coaches and fans' (para. 7). Indeed, the significance of these current movements for racial and social justice is elevated by the increased presence of athletes and sport stakeholders holding privileged identities, within and beyond sport, using their platforms for allyship in support of those facing oppression and systemic discrimination. While efforts of allyship are commendable, the ambiguity of allyship has resulted in instances of decentring[2] the core targets or victims of oppressive systems.

In this conceptual essay, we posit that allyship needs to rely on centralising practices of transformation. In doing so, we assert that intentional, culturally conscious, and critically reflexive allyship as activism on an individual and institutional level will further enhance social justice movements by reducing the decentring of oppressed voices. Drawing from social identity theory (Tajfel, 1959; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and a resistance typology (Cooper, 2021; Cooper et al., 2019), we propose strategies for allyship to move from being reactive advocacy to transformational allyship as activism. Contrary to previous literature that centres and prioritises athletes' involvement in activism and allyship (e.g. Coombs & Cassilo, 2017; Fuller & Agyemang, 2018; Kluch, 2020; Smith et al., 2016), we seek to highlight the vital role of sportspersons beyond athletes who can utilise their agency and resources to activate allyship as a form of activism. We call for transformational allyship as activism, drawing from allyship on an individual and institutional level, to ensure the elimination of social injustice in, though, and beyond the social and cultural institution of sport. While this manuscript emphasises racialized discourses within the U.S. sport context, we highlight nuanced experiences of other oppressed groups—such as women and LGBTQ + individuals—and recognise activism and justice across global sport settings.

As such, the purpose of this conceptual essay is to provide a deeper understanding of allyship within the Western sport context and remove the burden of social change from athletes with oppressed identities alone by placing it on change agents with privileged identities and institutional power—such as coaches, administrators, sport brands and marketers. The organisational structure of this paper is as follows: Section two examines the historical and contemporary significance of sport as a platform for athlete activism to drive social change. Section three discusses the theoretical framework for the proposed model of transformational allyship. Section four further examines transformational allyship by exploring the various forms of allyship for social justice in sport on individual and institutional levels: (a) allyship as agency, (b) allyship as advocacy, and (c) allyship as activism. Section five provides best practices and

suggestions for allies with privileged identities to amplify the voices of oppressed individuals. Recommendations are proposed for individuals and institutions to drive long term substantial change. We close this essay in section six with a summary of implications of transformational allyship within sport.

Sport as an arena for global social change

Historically, sport has served as a site for both the promises and limitations of driving positive social change. On an individual level, scholars have looked extensively at how athletes from minoritized groups have served as barrier breakers in and beyond sport (Boykoff & Carrington, 2019; Coombs & Cassilo, 2017; Gorsevski & Butterworth, 2011; Ruffin, 2014; Welty Peachey, 2015). Historically, athletes such as Jesse Owens, Althea Gibson, Wilma Rudolph, Muhammad Ali, Martina Navratilova, Billie Jean King, Kathrine Switzer, and Peter Norman have successfully utilised the platform of sport to call attention to systemic barriers to social justice and elevate social movements such as the Women's Rights movement or the Civil Rights movement. For example, Jackie Robinson broke the colour barrier in Major League Baseball which called into question the very premise of racial segregation in the U.S. at the time (Welty Peachey, 2015). Similarly, Muhammad Ali's rhetoric on issues related to social justice, as Gorsevski and Butterworth (2011) have argued, 'played a pivotal role in the radicalization of the Civil Rights movement as it (d)evolved into the twin forces of the Black Power movement and the anti-Vietnam war movement' (p. 52). Pelak (2005)), focussing on the power of athletes on a regional level, used the example of South African women's participation in netball post-apartheid to show that historical racial boundaries can be redefined through sport, as 'through daily interactions within teams and the promotion of new symbols, the image of netball has shifted from 'a White sport' to 'a racially diverse sport'' in South Africa (p. 74).

While athletes have rightfully been celebrated as change agents in sport, scholars have also identified ways in which the institution of sport continues to create systemic barriers to social change both in the U.S. and globally. Indeed, the sport industry continues to lack diversity at the leadership level, which makes it difficult for minoritized and underrepresented populations to navigate a predominantly White, male space that often lacks leaders' buy-in for institutional social change (Spaaij et al., 2018). This is particularly problematic given that research indicates that institutional change cannot be achieved without the support from high level management in sport (Cunningham, 2008). For systemic barriers related to diversity and inclusion to be successful, initiatives addressing both need to be proactive and aimed at creating an inclusive environment (Fink et al., 2003). In Western contexts, this resistance to diversifying the sport workforce continues to be a dominant theme, as Spaaij and colleagues (2020) found in their study of diversity in recreational sport clubs in Australia. They argued that the resistance to diversity at the leadership level is multifaceted and relies, among other discursive practices, on discourses of colour- and gender-blindness, the myth of meritocracy, the marginalisation of minoritized identities, and the othering minoritized populations (Spaaij et al., 2020).

With the (re)emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in the 2010s, athletes have utilised more strategic approaches to achieving social change that takes into account the institutional barriers that prevent systemic change. LeBron James, for example, has shown a more cautious and deliberate approach to activism that relies on careful messaging and strategic community engagement (Coombs & Cassilo, 2017). Throughout 2020 specifically, athletes, allies (e.g. coaches, fans), and sport brands alike have spoken up in a year in which intersecting crises revealed persistent global inequities. For example, days after George Floyd's killing, Adidas (2020) took to social media via Twitter to say, 'Together is how we move forward. Together is how we make change.' While such apolitical and conventional language disguises the true issue at hand (in this case, systemic racism), statements like these represent a new-found commitment to engage in social justice work. While these statements may be performative in nature and motivated by a need for social desirability (Alimo, 2012), they do offer change agents in sport a tool for accountability, increased social awareness, and an outlet for allyship with the potential for systemic social change.

Theoretical underpinnings of the transformational allyship model

The model proposed in this conceptual essay draws from social identity theory (Tajfel, 1959; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and resistance typology (Cooper, 2021; Cooper et al., 2019) to argue that true transformational allyship exists at the intersection of individual and institutional activism. Below we outline each of the theoretical underpinnings informing the Transformational Allyship Model.

Social identity theory

To better understand the social psychology of intergroup motivations, relations, and the social self, we utilise *social identity theory (SIT)* (Tajfel,1959, 1969; Tajfel & Turner,1979; Turner et al.,1987), which captures the idea that a social category (e.g. race, sports team) into which one falls, and to which one feels they belong to, provides a definition of who they are in terms of the defining characteristics of the category (Hogg et al., 1995). SIT is pivotal to understanding social justice because it acknowledges the meanings communities of people construct for themselves within greater society (Papa et al., 2006). As such, a richer understanding of mutual community ties, beliefs, behaviours, and norms are defined through SIT. On a macro level, the theory illuminates the power structures of which individuals fall within society. In analysing impermeable social identities (race, gender, sexual orientation), Huse (2020) found that marginalised individuals choose to disassociate themselves from the group to maintain positive self-concept and acceptance. The salience of social identities to which one belongs varies in relative importance of self-concept in a given moment in time; and salience is subject to change. Each category an individual self-prescribes themself to describes the desired attributes and characteristics a member of that group should possess, which includes how a group member should think or behave. Anything deviating from the ingroup standard becomes outgroup stereotypical behaviour and is subject to competitive and discriminatory relations. Thus, groups and their

members are strongly motivated to adopt behavioural strategies to achieve or maintain favour in the ingroup/self, which can often cause tensions between the ingroup and outgroups. For example, when minority activists against anti-Black violence or police brutality believe that White law enforcement disproportionately targets and attacks BIPOC (Hirschfield, 2020), their impression of unwarranted aggression from law enforcement is projected onto all law enforcement officials (e.g. police, security, other authority figures), thus contributing to high tensions between the ingroup (minority activists) and outgroup (law enforcement).

Moreover, SIT explains processes of *self-categorization* in the context of allyship, which show how people can represent themselves as an individual (personal thoughts & ideas), a group member (thoughts & ideas of in-group), or a larger group (shared thoughts & interests of both ingroup and outgroup) (Turner et al.,1987). Defining a group as marginalised in position to the ally may limit the empowerment of that group and normalise dominant and subordinate roles (Mizock & Page, 2016). Radke and colleagues (2020) suggest that the inclusion of privileged and advantaged group members in social justice movements can cause tension, as the motivations to take action for disadvantaged groups vary from outgroup-focussed and ingroup-focussed motivations to personal motivations and those linked to morality. For instance, in Russell's (2011) study of heterosexual allies to the LGBTQI + community, he identified a hierarchical drift where heterosexual allies began asserting power in subtle ways over the LGBTQI + individuals in their ally work. We posit that this reinforcement of domination within movements for social justice is inherent for those in the ally position (outgroup), which can allow the reinforcement of power inequities across groups and disempower or decentre the oppressed group (ingroup). As such, increased awareness and agency for allies (outgroup) can provide them with tools and knowledge necessary to further centre the oppressed group (ingroup)—it, thus, provides a promising framework for mapping allyship at the individual level as a tool for activism.

Resistance typology

While SIT provides insights into allyship between individuals and groups, we draw from Cooper's (2021) African American Resistance Typology (AART) to illuminate how individuals can use allyship and activism at the institutional level to drive systemic change. Cooper's AART provides a framework for identifying and amplifying heterogeneous forms of resistance focussed on igniting positive social change, both temporally and in perpetuity. While focussed on the racial discourses of African American resistance originally, Cooper's AART can be applied to other social groups seeking equality and social justice. According to Cooper (2021), *agency* refers to actions driven by personal or group conviction that seek to influence social realities and in the case of social justice efforts, foster the establishment of a more just and equitable society. Within the context of social justice, *pioneering* refers to the breaking of barriers as the first of one's social identity or identities to achieve a specific feat (Cooper, 2021). *Advocacy* refers to 'intentional actions taken by an individual, group, organisation, or institution to generate awareness of social injustices, stimulate critical reflection, and

offer support for addressing specific detrimental issues and/or conditions' (p. 86). *Revolutions* refer to cumulative disruptive actions that result in social, cultural, political, and economic transformation within a given milieu (Cooper, 2021). *Sustained cultural empowerment* refers to the abolishment of oppressive realities and the establishment of an equitable societal orientation (Cooper, 2021). Most important for the proposed model of transformational allyship, Cooper (2021) argues that *hybrid resistance* allows individuals and entities to exhibit multiple social justice-oriented actions across time, space, and context including *agency*, *pioneering*, *advocacy*, *allyship*, *activism*, *social movements*, *revolutions/social transformations*, and/or *sustained empowerment*. Transformational allyship, as conceptualised in this essay, is one such form of hybrid resistance that relies on activism at both the individual and institutional level to drive strategic and systemic social change.

Notwithstanding these notable features, it is worth noting recent sport literature asserts interpreting equality through the lenses of formal equality (basic human rights), liberal equality (equal opportunities), and radical equality (equal conditions or outcomes) (Lusted, 2017). The differences between these three approaches are akin to the distinctions between teleological, deontological, and existentialism/virtue ethics whereby perceptions of what is moral, ethical, and good is contingent upon whether one's orientation is grounded in consequentialism or non-consequentialism (DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2003). According to Lusted (2017), formal approaches to equality focus on individualism, which is connected to the mainstream neoliberal ideology in twenty-first century capitalist societies including the sporting spaces within these milieus. Within these contexts, even social justice initiatives are evaluated based upon values of individualism, meritocracy, materialism, competition, and achievement (Beyer & Hannah, 2000). In contrast, the liberal approach to equality focuses on differential treatment across groups for the purpose of ensuring equality in opportunities, which accounts for historical harms and impediment (Lusted, 2017). Thus, structural inequalities are acknowledged and accounted for within liberal approaches, but meritocracy remains important once equal opportunities are afforded to different groups (Lusted, 2017). The radical approach to equality extends beyond the liberal approach because it involves '… calls for redistribution—of rights, power, status, influence, as well as wealth …' (Lusted, 2017, p. 51). The radical approach to equality is associated with socialist ideologies, which represent a stark opposition to capitalistic beliefs and systems. In summary, Lusted's (2017) analysis highlights the differential discourses and structural inequalities between social groups and broader society, which further informs the proposed Transformational Allyship Model to institute substantial and sustainable positive social change.

Advancing allyship towards activism

While all forms of allyship are important and have the potential to stimulate change at the micro (individual), meso (organisational), and macro (structural and institutional) levels, we argue that allyship is most transformational as a form of resistance when it moves beyond agency and advocacy (less disruptive to the hegemonic status quo) to being activism (more disruptive of the hegemonic status quo). Lee and Cunningham

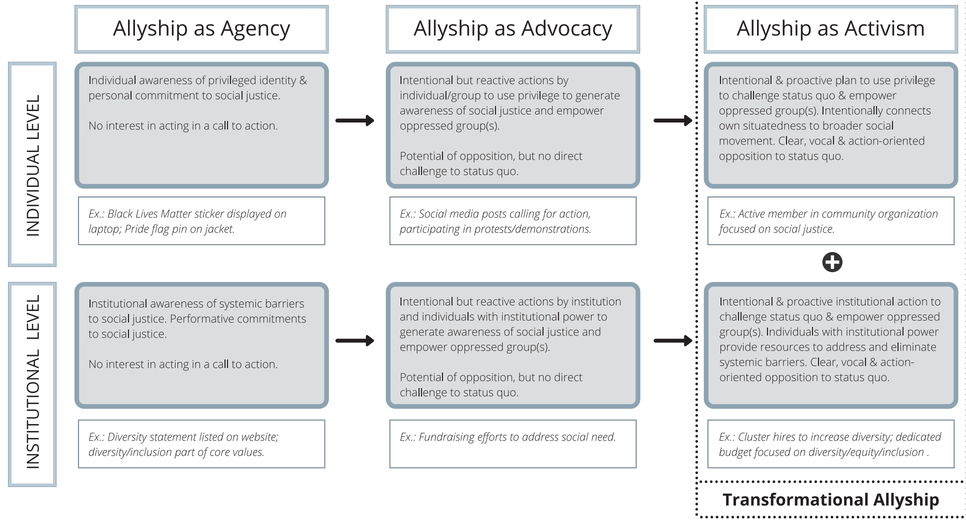

Figure 1. Transformational Allyship Model

(2019) posit that activism and advocacy are often used interchangeably but carry unique meanings and positioning for the individual. The same can be said about agency. Other researchers support the notion of advocacy and activism being uniquely defined based on individual perspective and experience (see Cunningham et al., 2021; Kluch, 2020; Mac Intosh et al., 2020; Melton, 2015). It is important to recognise that sport organisations function as multi-level institutions, in which practices and beliefs on one level can influence those at other levels (Melton, 2015). As such, though we define each facet of allyship separately, all three forms are interrelated and have the potential to influence allyship at other levels. Depicted in our Transformational Allyship Model (Figure 1), at the individual level, one has to develop a conscious, intentional plan to utilise their privileged identity (or identities) to challenge hegemonic structures and empower oppressed groups. Similarly, at the institutional level, individuals in an organisation have to create a methodical and strategic action plan to use their institutional power to challenge the status quo and deconstruct systemic barriers that undermine equality and equity. We posit that while there is power in individual allyship as activism that can drive institutional change, a combination of individual and institutional activism is needed for allyship to be transformational. A comprehensive description of the different levels of allyship, and the progression from allyship as agency to activism at the individual and institutional level, is outlined below. We focus on examples beyond athletes to show how individuals in the community of sport can utilise their individual and institutional power to drive change without burdening the athletes themselves with being the only (or driving) forces for change.

Allyship as agency

Allyship, at its most basic level, starts with awareness of social injustice that provides an ally with agency to drive social change. In a recent study of the interrelatedness of allyship within a gender equity program at a postsecondary institution in the Midwestern U.

S., Anicha et al. (2018) define allyship as the act of 'entering relationships to pursue shared goals' (p. 154). Within their analysis, they argue allyship (along with advocacy and accountability) is a central feature of social justice efforts. Similarly, Teetzel (2020) asserted that allyship inherently involves personal risk. Moreover, Taylor (2015), founder of Athlete Ally (a non-profit organisation promoting inclusivity through sport globally, with an emphasis on championing LGBTQI + inclusion), presented the following nuanced definition adopted by their organisation: 'Allyship is not an identity; it is a philosophy that requires a person to act against all forms of bullying, bias, and discrimination' (p. 42).

Building off of this framework and applying allyship to a broader concept of social justice in sport, we posit that an *ally* is an institution or individual of an advantaged social group (in many cases an out-group to a specific disadvantaged in-group), either within or beyond sport, who utilises their awareness of social privileges to intentionally disrupt and challenge systemic and institutionalised inequities impacting the lives of members in historically disadvantaged, oppressed, or minoritized groups. Applying Solórzano and Yosso (2002) and Cooper's (2021) model of resistance, we argue traditional allyship as agency expresses individual or institutional awareness and concern; while it may consist of personal commitments to social justice, it does not posit opposition to or challenge of status quo.

At the individual level, the past year has seen multiple White athletes, coaches, and sport organisations participate in forms of performative activism aimed at raising awareness. For example, Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Tom Brady, arguably one of the athletes with the most power in the sport of American football, participated in the #BlackoutTuesday campaign by posting a black square to his Instagram account (CBS Boston, 2020). Brady also retweeted a post by the Players Coalition and signed a letter written by the Coalition urging to properly investigate the murder of Ahmaud Arbery (CBS Boston, 2020). In European soccer, additionally, athletes in Norway, Germany, and the Netherlands have recently utilised apparel to call attention to human rights violations in Qatar, the host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup (McVitie, 2021). For instance, the Norwegian national team wore t-shirts stating 'Human rights on and off the pitch' in their qualifying matches for the World Cup (McVitie, 2021).

While these athletes certainly signalled a form of social awareness as allyship, what was missing from such performative acts is a sincere commitment to action for social change at the personal (e.g. by posting specific commitments to social justice) or institutional levels (e.g. by holding sports organisation accountable in contributing to social justice efforts). Ahmed (2012) posits that this type of activism through speech can be read as performative because it creates the illusion of working towards a common good and being successful. To provide a second example at the institutional level, Electronic Arts-Sports, the world's second-largest gaming company, illustrated what institutional awareness of systemic barriers to social justice can look like by adding a performative statement in support of racial justice to their website following the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests (Wilson, 2020).

Allyship as advocacy

Similar to Cooper's (2021) resistance typology, Anicha and colleagues (2018) stated advocacy involves 'taking action in support of a cause' (p. 154), which provides a clear

step beyond awareness. Advocacy often occurs in response to an acknowledgement of voices of resistance against oppressive structures. Building off of the liberalism and liberal equality ideologies (van Wyk, 2002; Sen, 1995; Rawls, 1985, 1993, 1999), we suggest advocacy consists of intentional, but often reactive, actions by an individual or group to use their privilege for the generation of awareness and the empowerment of oppressed groups. Though advocacy can signify one's courage and conviction towards igniting positive change within a given milieu, it is grounded in conformist resistance and can be reactionary in behaviour. Conformist resistance is motivated by social justice, but lacks critical consciousness (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). While allyship as agency and advocacy often reflect support for counter-hegemonic actions, it is only when these actions involve concrete demands, challenge a clear opposition, ignite concrete disruption, and explicitly connect with a broader social movement that they challenge the status quo (Cooper, 2021; Cooper et al., 2019; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

NBA player Kyle Korver of the Utah Jazz provides an apt example for allyship as advocacy at the individual level. Korver, a white player in a predominantly Black league, took to *The Players Tribune* to reflect on his whiteness and the privileges the colour of his skin afforded him compared to his Black peers. In the essay, titled 'Privileged,' Korver (2019) calls on his white peers reminding them that 'we have to be active. We have to be *actively* supporting causes of those who've been marginalised—precisely because they've been marginalised' (para. 53). As such, Korver's allyship is action-oriented, yet reactive in nature and falls short of providing a more pro-active plan for challenging the status quo. At the institutional level, the English Premier League's Rainbow Laces campaign exemplifies allyship as advocacy. The campaign, which is a three-year partnership with Stonewall, has been supported by the institutional power of the league to battle homophobia in British sport (Rainbow laces, n.d.). While the attempt to challenge the status quo through an awareness campaign is to be applauded, there is no research indicating that the campaign has succeeded at challenging the status quo. Arguably, it can be implied that the organisation in fact did not intend to confront the status quo at all, but instead adopted cues of neo-liberal interpretations of social justice that seek to protect personal property and advantages (team brand name/image). Finally, an incident involving the San Diego Loyal soccer team provides an apt illustration of individual and institutional allyship as advocacy. In their September 30, 2020, game against the Phoenix Rising FC, Collin Martin, an openly gay player on the Loyal's team, was called a homophobic slur by one of the players on the opposing team. Loyal SC manager, Landon Donovan, refused to play the game unless the Phoenix player was taken off the field—which led to Loyal SC's eventual forfeit of the game (France, 2020). As such, Donovan's decision to forfeit showed an intentional action of an individual with institutional power reactively generating awareness of the experiences of a minoritized group in sport.

Allyship as activism: transformational allyship

The most disruptive social justice action one can take is activism. Cooper et al. (2019) posited that activism is different from other resistance actions such as those based on agency and advocacy. According to the authors, activism meets the following four

criteria: '(1) a clear opposition; (2) concrete disruption and challenging (as opposed to reinforcing) of hegemonic structures, norms, and mental processes; (3) specific goals and objectives (often in the form of demands) to assess progress; and (4) a connection to broader social justice movements' (p. 154). When allyship functions as a form of individual and institutional activism (i.e. intentional promotion of awareness and disruption of hegemonic norms, oppression, and opposition), it is transformational and proactive resistance. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) have shown that transformational resistance includes actions that embody both critical consciousness and motivation by social justice and that 'transformative resistance necessitates liberatory changes to the system' (p. 610). Hence, allyship as activism must involve confrontation with *systems of oppression* rather than a sole focus on incidents of discrimination.

In concert with Solórzano and Yosso (2002), we argue allyship as activism reflects a more disruptive and direct critique of and counteract to oppressive realities and conditions (e.g. systems, practices, beliefs, norms), especially when comparing them to non-activist forms of allyship and advocacy that fall short of being transformational resistance. For example, to go back to the example of Loyal SC team manager Donovan, while Donovan's allyship to call out homophobic practices in the sport of soccer represents a challenge to the status quo, it remains an isolated incident that does not proactively identify strategies to break and alter hegemonic norms. However, if Donovan were to use the incident to develop organisational structures that institutionalise his approach to the incident (e.g. by introducing a policy that provides clear guidelines for similar incidents in the future), his activism would be an example of what we conceptualise as transformational allyship. To provide another example of institutional activism likely inspired by critical consciousness at the individual level, global sport drink company Gatorade has released a robust diversity hiring plan to increase racial and gender diversity in managerial roles in the company by 2025. As such, the brand took a proactive approach to increasing representation of underrepresented populations and, as such, dismantling systemic barriers for marginalised individuals.

Propositions for transformational allyship

There are numerous ways to foster and embody transformational allyship. To start, individual and institutional allies need to acknowledge and accept the privileged identities and power they possess (see Black & Stone, 2005; Lucal,1996; McIntosh, 1992), as denial of their existence is a stark barrier to change (Johnson, 2018)). Understanding how people of privileged identities can inadvertently contribute to oppressive systems is vital to using that privilege to amplify and support historically underrepresented and marginalised voices. Once acknowledged, we recommend allies commit to doing their due diligence by researching systems of oppression for personal understanding and critical reflexivity. Allies can take personal accountability in challenging institutional barriers that impact marginalised communities by reading or listening to articles, books, blogs, podcasts, and examining publicly accessible information to better understand the historical contexts of oppression. Engaging in transformational allyship means recognising how systemic injustices, such as those rooted in racism and capitalism, work in tandem with social institutions to create adverse and inequitable

experiences for historically marginalised groups (Cooper et al., 2020). As such, in a review of culturally responsive programming for racially marginalised athletes at U.S. institutions of higher education, Jolly and colleagues (2020) found that individuals with privileged identities (coaches, managers, and stakeholders) who lead with an inclusive cultural consciousness have positive outcomes of success and fostered holistic development in the marginalised populations they support.

Because awareness alone is not enough for allyship to be transformational, we posit allies must engage in and promote social justice action by outlining specific demands, goals, or aims for concerted actions. For example, as a transformational ally for LGBTQI + athletes, individual efforts can focus on generating awareness and raising funds via campaigns, whereas institutional efforts can prioritise developing specific policies and practices that should be adopted to ensure fair and humane treatment and support for all athletes regardless of their identities. Another best practice for stimulating transformational allyship is a persistent focus on systemic issues and their interconnections to lived experiences and outcomes. Scholars have noted how activism (Cooper, 2021), liberation (Freire, 1974/2014), and transformational resistance (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) must involve changes in oppressive systems. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) explained how traditional reform efforts (conformist and reactionary) fail to change systems, but they aim to modify aspects of unjust systems rather than dismantle and replace them altogether –as is the case with transformational resistance. Hence, transformational allyship moves beyond a primary focus on micro and meso level issues, but rather seeks to disrupt and replace macro level systems.

Another proposition for transformational allyship is to engage in a lifelong commitment to positive social change—especially when it comes to utilising one's institutional power. Cooper et al. (2020) outlined multiple ways to engage in activism ranging from symbolic activism, scholarly activism, grassroots activism, sport-based activism, and economic activism. Extending their argument, we propose that transformational allyship involves hybrid resistance (Cooper, 2021) over a sustained period of time in an effort to ignite positive change. Taylor (2015) mentioned allyship involves personal risk and we add that transformational allyship requires heightened levels of risks compared to less disruptive forms of allyship such as those suggested by Anicha et al. (2018) and Solórzano and Yosso (2002) (i.e. conformist, reactionary, or self-defeating resistance). In terms of benefits for non-allies, there is ample sport management research that has noted the material (i.e. financial viability), social (i.e. expansive cross-cultural reputational gains in an increasingly globalised economy), and political (i.e. support from diverse racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic groups) benefits of creating workplaces of diversity, equity, and inclusion (Cooper et al., 2020; Cunningham, 2019; Jolly et al., 2020). Relatedly, critical theorists including historians have highlighted how societies and institutions rooted in inequity and oppression do not persist and eventually a tipping point is reached where oppressed groups galvanise their resources to upend said conditions (Freire, 1974/2014; Horne, 1999). Thus, we encourage non-allies to consider the implications of inaction and complicity as current and future consequences could be significant (e.g. competitive disadvantages compared to competitors who adopt more equity-minded inclusive practices, negative

reputations as elitist and exclusionary, outright dissolution as a result of ineffective evolutionary/adaptive practices, etc.).

Finally, to facilitate intuitional change we recommend organisations adopt and/or adapt Fay and Wolff (2009) organisational continuum of governance. According to the authors, the framework enhances an organisation's ability to 'evaluate and access the progression and regression from highly discriminatory and segregationist practices to more equity-based and inclusionary practices' (Fay & Wolff, 2009, p. 239). Although their model focuses on addressing ableism in sport and society, we surmise the framework is applicable to redressing other -*isms* such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism. Hence, the adoption or adaptation of this framework could amplify transformational allyship along with other impactful forms of resistance at the individual and institutional levels.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, we present the concept of transformational allyship to identify and acknowledge the various forms of allyship for social justice within sport. In doing so, our intent is to expand the conversation surrounding allyship within the sport context in hopes of calling for intentional, culturally conscious, and courageous allyship as activism at both individual and institutional levels. We posit that transformational allyship is achieved when both individual and institutional structures work in tandem in ways that strategically and proactively address systemic barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion. While all forms of allyship presented in this essay are acceptable, we suggest that transformational allyship acknowledges the power in utilising one's privileged identities to facilitate long-term substantial gains of social justice movements in, through, and beyond sport. While the fight for social justice is far from over, we argue that the burden to achieve social change in a system engrained with power imbalances should not be placed on marginalised groups who historically possessed little power. Instead, we charge allies with privileged identities to confront those power imbalances and strengthen the voices of oppressed groups—for only then positive social change can be achieved.

Notes

1. BIPOC is used as an acronym to reference "Black, Indigenous, (and) people of Color". The term aims to emphasize the historic oppression of Black and Indigenous people at the collective level. It also highlights the unique relationship to whiteness that Indigenous and Black people have, which shapes their experiences and perceptions of white supremacy for all people of Color across regional contexts.
2. The term decentering is used to describe the displacement or shift of attention away from the experiences of oppressed groups towards the perspectives of privileged groups.

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