

Editorial: Black Lives Matter

Catherine Wilkinson, Saira Weiner and Lee McGowan

SPARK is a peer-reviewed journal providing space for Liverpool John Moores University EECS students to publish high quality undergraduate work. This is the first issue of SPARK in 2021 and the first issue under the new editorial board of staff editors Catherine Wilkinson and Saira Weiner and student editor Lee McGowan.

This special issue of SPARK on Black Lives Matter presents student work that aims either to promote the importance of Black lives or to challenge the systems that result in Black lives being treated inequitably. It is a collective endeavour to critique racial inequality.

As we write this editorial, the world is in the midst of the global Coronavirus pandemic. This pandemic has highlighted unjust differences in health and wellbeing between different groups of people. Evidence shows that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups in the UK are both at increased risk of infection and increased risk of mortality from Coronavirus. Whilst research is still being undertaken to determine why this is so, it is likely a combination of cultural and socioeconomic factors, as well as the high prevalence of co-morbidities in these populations.

In 2020, the same year the Coronavirus pandemic began, the world saw revival of the social and political Black Lives Matter movement, a campaign against violence and systemic racism towards Black people. This stemmed from the death of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man murdered by a member of the Minneapolis Police Department in the United States of America. The murder of George Floyd sparked a series of protests in the United States from people demanding policing reform. Protests also took place via social media using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter in what has been referred to as a contemporary human rights movement. Debate sparked about the importance of not only being 'not racist', but of actively

being 'anti-racist'. Language evolved following this, including anti-racist pedagogy, anti-racist practice and even anti-racist scholarship.

With both the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement reigniting debates on inequalities, this special issue is timely. Each member of the SPARK editorial board approaches this topic from a different lens.

Catherine's recent work explores global perspectives of intersectionality and difference, particularly in children and young people:

Intersectionality is concerned with the interconnected nature of different social categorisations including race, class and gender. In particular, I am concerned with narratives of everydayness and mundanity of difference as they are experienced through social structures and relationships, simultaneously recognising and critiquing notions of agency and power. Central to this is the notion of being 'othered', a phenomenon in which individuals or groups are labelled as not fitting in within the norm of a broader social group. I am concerned with how people perceive and treat those who are viewed as being part of so-called 'out-groups'. This label of out-groups considers identity as a system of categorisation in which boundaries are used to create binary distinctions between 'us' and 'others'. I advocate use of the concept 'hyperdiversity' to recognise and appreciate individual difference and to accommodate the multiplicity of difference that may cohere around any one person. Hyperdiversity underlines the necessity to look within the micropolitics of people and place to uncover more nuanced insights into intergroup identity and social interaction. In short, hyperdiversity is useful in enabling researchers to look at 'diversity within diversity' and to capture how people negotiate everyday diversity. I am committed to enhancing and promoting the connectivity of education and research and using my research on intersectionality and difference to inform teaching I deliver on the Education Studies and Early Childhood Studies programmes.

(Catherine Wilkinson, Staff Editor)

Saira is interested in decolonising the curriculum, political activism and structural class inequalities:

2020 was an awful year. In the midst of the pandemic, George Floyd was murdered by US police, and many other racist murders came to light. This wasn't a new phenomena, yet ignited a revolt that saw millions of people, Black and White, take to the streets of the US, and here in the UK, to protest against police brutality and racism. For me, to see young people out on the streets was inspirational. We have been repeatedly told that young people, our students, only act in self interest. This was proof (if any were needed) that this is not the case. This is evidenced from reports of many EECS students specifically addressing issues around race equality in lectures and seminars, and focusing on Black Lives Matters in assignments. For me, it has reminded me that Black authors and academics have been neglected in our curriculums for far too long. Having spent a long Sunday afternoon trying to find Black learning theorists, I was reminded of how deep the problem is. How it is not just "a moment" in our history, but a point at which we need as academics to strengthen our determination for disparate voices to be heard. Perhaps it is not only about access to academia for Black people. Perhaps it is also about what academia sees as valid theory. Perhaps it is time we reassessed not only who and why some people have been hidden from mainstream academia, but how we define academia. Is it still the hallowed halls of Oxbridge and Cambridge, or a wider engagement with ideas that challenge and change society? These questions directly flow from my interests in political activism, structural inequalities and reclaiming our rights to discuss not only what has to change, but how we can change it. As Marx said "Philosophers have interpreted the world, the point, however, is the change it".

(Saira Weiner, Staff Editor)

Lee is concerned with the representation of race in the media:

Black Lives Matter... Those three words bear a heavy weight, how in 2021 is it possible that a huge moment in our modern history is a movement bearing those three words. How is it that when a professional sportsman takes a knee during a national anthem in protest against an unlawful killing by law enforcement officers he is vilified by the President of that nation and banished from the sport that provided him the stage in which to make such a monumental stand. In response to this the #TakeAKnee movement across professional sport was born, with the likes of Jordan Henderson, Lebron James and Tom Brady all fully behind the movement. We are now seeing a monumental push from sport worldwide to break down barriers and actively eradicate racism and inequality from sport for both players and supporters. For myself, the Black Lives Matters movement is something I stand fully behind. Racism and inequality have no place in a civilised society, the colour of a person's skin should play no part in how they are treated in society, the opportunities they have access to or how they are treated by law enforcement, especially law enforcement who are there to keep us safe not cause people to fear for their safety and in many cases their lives.

This topic has impacted my own research when it comes to assignments during my degree. Examining the role of ethnic minority characters in children's media and the representation on screen is a particular area of interest for myself. This has been highlighted in the media of late due to the passing of Chadwick Boseman and the tidal wave of sadness that followed his passing, a community finally had a superhero who represented them, children now thrust forth into the main role when playing games on the playground had a role model who stood shoulder to shoulder with Captain America, Thor and Iron Man, and then he was gone. His legacy and that of the Black Panther will forever live on both on the screen and on the playground as new hero's such as Spiderman's Miles Morales now carry the torch and I

for one hope this has set the precedent for more superhero's who may feel overshadowed to step into the light.

(Lee McGowan, Student Editor)

The papers in this special issue cover diverse issues connected to Black Lives Matter and the promoting of equality.

Abigail Grierson addresses the question of whether early childhood education practitioners are equipped to promote Black Lives Matter education through anti-racist pedagogy.

Niamh Cotton presents a personal philosophy of education in which she considers Critical Race Theory and the relationship with Fundamental British Values.

Mallaidh Breen explores the underrepresentation of Black women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths careers and education, arguing that engineering would benefit from the inclusion of more women from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

Mia McDonald's poster presentation considers the evidence base around the Toxteth Riots, and Liverpool's history of involvement in the trading of human beings.

Lee McGowan considers the role and representation of ethnic minorities and women in educational mainstream media and concludes that understanding and utilisation of theories such as social constructivism and social learning theory will continue to play a crucial part in children's social and cultural development.

Alyssa Dalton uses Post-Colonial and Feminist theories to challenge stereotypes regarding the educational experiences of Irish Travellers and how they attempt to overcome racism and other barriers associated with "othering" of Gypsy Roma Traveller communities.

Many thanks to Billy Vitch, Black activist and photographer, who provided the image, taken at the first BLM protest in Liverpool in 2020 which we have been given permission to use on the cover of this Special Issue of Spark.

**Contact: Instagram @Billy_Vitch_Rock_Photography Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/BillyVitch?>**

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