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Exploring the Contradictions of Sportswashing in Sports Fandom and Sports Research

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Is it possible to remain a sports fan when prominent sports teams and events are utilized to “sportswash” human rights abuses and other controversies? Indeed, while there is an abundance of analyses critiquing different instances of sportswashing, the exploration of the role of sportswashing and its connection to the “sports fan” presents an essential and necessary area of investigation and theoretical inquiry. To unpick this dilemma, this article proposes the concept of “fetishistic disavowal” to help theorize the impact of sportswashing, as well as its relation to the sports fan and critical sports academic. This argues that, as spectators and fans of sport—and, moreover, as critical academics—we often acknowledge and accept that sport is used to perpetuate and even maintain a variety of social, economic, and political inequalities. While we are aware of such knowledge, we nonetheless remain fully capable of disavowing this very knowledge as an accepted part of sport. In this presentation, it will be argued that the fetishization of sport provides a suitable conduit for the fetishistic disavowal that sportswashing requires, with the concept offering a unique way of approaching sport’s inherent contradictions, while also theorizing how subjects relate to these contradictions as part of their sporting investment. Ultimately, this provides a theoretical lens through which analyses of sport, and its ethical significance, can be critiqued.

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Bio

Jack Black is Associate Professor of Culture, Media, and Sport at Sheffield Hallam University, where he is also Research Lead for the Anti-Racism Research Group. An interdisciplinary researcher, working across the disciplines of psychoanalysis, media and communications, cultural studies, and sport, Jack's research focuses on topics related to race/racism, digital media, and political ecology. He is the author of *The Psychosis of Race: A Lacanian Approach to Racism and Racialization* (Routledge, 2023), *Race, Racism and Political Correctness in Comedy – A Psychoanalytic Exploration* (Routledge, 2021) and co-editor of *Sport and Psychoanalysis: What Sport Reveals about Our Unconscious Desires, Fantasies, and Fears* (Lexington Books, 2024) and *Sport and Physical Activity in Catastrophic Environments* (Routledge, 2023). Jack is Associate Editor for the *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure and Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*.