While no individual is immune from the processes of socialization or inheritance of racial biases, Americans are subject to the adoption of assumptions, stereotypes, and racialized attitudes of previous societal generations. The intriguing part of this process is that it occurs within the backdrop of a societal ethnocentrism that was created and institutionalized for generations of Whites to benefit – albeit without express accord or knowledge – in terms of economic, political, and social capital (Taylor, 2016). Moreover, this typically occurs on a relatively unconscious level, which ultimately becomes challenging in the sense that Whites are either unwilling or unable to perceive themselves as racial beings (Sue & Sue, 2003). Given the institutional context, Whites may be exposed and henceforth forced to acknowledge and reconcile these unconscious racial assumptions and biases, the awareness of which may compel individuals to deny not only their own racial identity, but also the racial reality of people of color (Sue, 2011). This realization serves to highlight the extent to which Whites, as dominant social group members, fail to understand or subject themselves to the unique experiences or viewpoints of people of color.

Important here is narrative, or rather an understanding of agency in the sense that normativity is proximal to the narratives of Whites and distal to those of communities of color. For instance, knowledge can be conceived in the absence of a particular narrative, such that its construction is dictated by those whose “experiences and…positions within particular social, economic, and political systems and structures of a society” (Banks, 1993, p. 5) are positioned as normal. As per Taylor (2016), it is at this point that positionality transcends everyday convention and works to reflect “the frame of reference in which researchers, practitioners, and policy makers present their data, interpretations, and analysis” (pp. 6-7). It then becomes of necessity for positionality to become salient, in particular for those who conduct research concerning issues of race and racism.

Positionality ensures that researchers identify the normative assumptions, frames of reference, and ideological positions through which they present their analyses, interpretations, and instruction (Ellsworth, 1989; Harding, 1991). Of importance is whether a researcher either possesses or is in active pursuit of a cultural and racial knowledge that concerns both themselves and the community (or individuals) under scrutiny (Milner, 2007). Serving as an enterprise of knowledge construction, research is “an active process that requires scrutiny, reflection, and interrogation of the data, the researcher, the participants, and the context that they inhabit” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274), such that reality is a social construction and knowledge is situationally based according to context and history (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). It is upon these notions that reflexivity is premised, and therefore requires the researcher to engage in “a process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). Thus, it is the positionality of and willingness to engage in reflexive research, as well as the subjectivities that allow further insight into the biases, intentions, and motivations that inform their research (McCorkel & Myers, 2003).

In this paper, we offer a framework to direct researchers toward a realized cultural and racial consciousness in their continued research within the discipline of sport management and sport-related studies. This framework seeks to ensure that research processes are cultivated and fostered whereby researchers are not detached as a result of either disregarding or minimizing their positionality. Moreover, this framework encourages researchers to recognize their work as a political act, and when conducting research where issues of race and racism are concerned, one must hold oneself responsible in understanding their position as an engaged political actor (Lincoln, 2000). Researchers will be made cognizant of the varying explicit, implicit, and/or unanticipated challenges and pitfalls that can arise as a result of decisions, both made and unmade, in conducting research. When researchers are unaware of not only their own, but of others’ positionality and racialized narratives, risks emerge in the form of gross assumptions and misinformation that disproportionately impact communities (and individuals) of color. In order to conduct and produce accountable cultural and racial knowledge “requires analytic means of looking at the processes of knowledge.
production, rather than bracketing these or dismissing them as of no importance in epistemological terms” (Stanley, 2004, p. 13), wherein the researcher must acknowledge, accept, and integrate a certain level of reflexivity that accounts for the power dynamic that may exist between researcher and participant.

In challenging researchers in sport management to embrace and engage through a more nuanced race-based, critical methodological lens, Singer (2005) posits that “sport management scholars and practitioners must not devalue, omit, or misinterpret and misrepresent the histories, experiences, cultures, and languages of people of color in sport (e.g., athletes, coaches, spectators, employees, citizens, managers, and administrators) when studying the impact that the cultures and structures of sport organizations have on their experiences” (p. 475). For these reasons, a framework is needed to extend the dialogue on the positionality and reflexivity of researchers, as well as to assist researchers in holding themselves accountable to the communities (and individuals) with whom and on which their research is predicated. This framework will attempt to allow researchers in positions of conceptual, empirical, and methodological, as well as cultural and racial power to work toward a meaningful and nuanced point of consciousness in conducting sport management research. As such, a nonlinear, yet interchangeable framework is offered that focuses on various interrelated qualities: understanding personal assumptions of biases toward communities of color, taking the time to internally reflect upon personal motivations behind research, practice humility and be understanding of those who may challenge the findings of said research, the relative impact of research approach and findings upon these communities of inquiry, and examine communities from a lens devoid of a monolithic perspective, to name a few.