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Anti-racism in coaching: a global call to action

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on original qualitative research involving key stakeholders from across the coaching eco-system and advances a call to action inspired by a growing vanguard of coaching practitioners, researchers and thought leaders seeking to deploy coaching in support of the global movement for racial justice and equity. The research, using focus group discussions and one to one interviews, gives primacy to the marginalised voices of Black, Indigenous and Other People of Colour (BIPOC) who work as coaches in the industry and their communities. This research is the result of a global collaboration with participants from the U.S.A., U.K., Kenya, South Africa and New Zealand (Māori). Our findings confirm that colour-blindness dominates across the coaching eco-system, and we argue for a shift to a colour/race-conscious stance that is the prerequisite to adopting an anti-racist approach. We take as our point of departure for analysing the data the Global Critical Race and Racism Framework which contextualises our research participants within the legacies of imperial colonialism, and the history of resistance against it. The article presents a 14-point manifesto drawn from analysis of the data, as a call to action to the coaching professionals and the industry they serve.

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Systemic racism; anti-racism; decoloniality; racial justice; anti-racism manifesto

Implications for practitioners

Coaches and mentors can commit to:

- Deepening understanding of the complexity of racial identity and how socialisation plays a role.
- Developing deeper understanding of Racial Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (RJEDI&B) and the system and structures that oppress, specifically of how ideology and historical practices affect personal, interpersonal, social, organisational, economic and political dynamics.
- Becoming increasingly sensitive to issues of race and be willing to support and challenge clients in developing spaces, at work, home and in leisure, which are anti-oppressive.

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1. Introduction

Not being able to see race and the power dynamics associated with it reinforces the status quo. (Bocala & Holman, 2021)

A critical discourse is developing in coaching. Prompted by the coincidence of a global pandemic with the murder of George Floyd on 25 May 2020, many have been moved to face a great deal of emotional discomfort to address the ways in which systemic racism shows up in global, national, organisational and social relations. Amongst this ‘many’ are coaches of different ethnicities and shades of skin, from black to white. There is a feeling amongst these practitioners that there is a gap, a silence, a blind spot in our profession when it comes to race. The findings from our research give substance to this feeling and map out a path to addressing the impacts of this silence.

Psychology (Henwood, 2012; Richards, 1997; Yee, 1993) and a range of therapeutic practices are already developing a rich base, of research, training and practice guides (Millville, 2016; Neville, 2001), with some utilising Critical Race Theory (Campbell, 2014) and racial identity theory (Carter, 1995). Trauma informed training and professional practice includes understanding the impact of race-related trauma (Campbell, 2014; Comas-Díaz, 2016; McGoldrick, 2019). Sports Coaching has a well-developed research base of studies into the impact of systemic racism as it affects the coach–coachee relationship and the sports industry, to cite just a few: (Bradbury et al., 2020; Rankin-Wright et al., 2015; Sartore & Cunningham, 2006). We have a lot of catching up to do.

Since 2020 the first few ripples of a discourse on race in coaching have started to emerge (Maltbia, 2021a, 2021b; Roche, 2021, 2021). These are part of a concerted effort to place the issue of race on the agenda for executive coaching.

Our review of professional artefacts conducted by searching professional association websites, such as professional body reports, coach competency frameworks, training syllabuses and statements on diversity and inclusion, ignore race as a factor. Competency frameworks of the main bodies have no explicit discussion about race, yet these competency frameworks form the cornerstone for coaching training.

While data is collected on gender, language and country of residence, at the time of writing, no data is collected on racial identity or ethnicity by any of the professional bodies. Without such data it becomes impossible to say whether, or by how much, Black, Indigenous and Other People of Colour (BIPOC) are under-represented in executive coaching, or to develop evidence-based mechanisms to address inequalities.

In summary, this article will share the results of our review of the literature which led to the identification of our research question, ‘What needs to change for the world of coaching to take an anti-racist approach?’. We then lay out the definition of key terms for the analysis of the data, which came from two sources. Source 1: BIPOC Coach Focus Groups. Source 2: Professional Association CEOs/Directors/Executive Board Members. We then explain how the data was collected and analysed by the principal author on this project. Finally, we set out a series of recommendations presented in the form of a manifesto drawn from the recommendations for change made by our participants before presenting our conclusions.

2. Literature review

Our literature review identified 30 publications, including peer-reviewed articles and books, through a search conducted using Leeds Beckett University search facility Discover with access to 419 databases spanning the globe. The key search terms used were 'race in coaching', 'racism in coaching', 'coaching and anti-racism', 'race, executive coaching, and leadership'. Nine of these 30 publications dealt explicitly with race. This small number of studies explore the role of coaching in creating inclusive workplace cultures and breaking patterns of exclusion, underperformance and underrepresentation (Bernstein, 2019; Bocala & Holman, 2021; Bragg et al., 2019; Khunou, 2019; le Sueur, 2018; McPherson, 2007; Pennington, 2009; Stout-Rostron, 2017; Washington et al., 2020; Williams, 2017), with the remaining literature exploring culture and ethnicity (Anandlal, 2017; Nieuwerburgh, 2017; O'Flaherty & Everson, 2013; Passmore, 2010).

The coaching literature largely ignores the power dynamics inherent in racialisation and how this shows up in life and organisational contexts for either coaches or coachees. In this way indirectly, reinforcing and reproducing the structures of systemic racism that exist rather than attempting to at least illuminate or challenge them (Bocala & Holman, 2021). Where race was acknowledged, the role of the coach was often presented as supporting the adaptation of the black coachee to the dominant culture (Cornish, 2009), dismissing race as any longer being a determining factor (Stout-Rostron, 2017). Bernstein's PhD thesis (2019) highlights the issue that white coaches, out of fear of being seen as racist, fail to challenge Black coachees to improve and thereby do not serve them as well as they do white coachees. Again, the issue remains at the level of individual or group attitude, prejudice, or bias, on the need to adapt to dominant cultures rather than to challenge and change systemic barriers, or hidden assumptions embedded in policies and practices. This may connect with the fact that coaching research, reflective practice, including supervision and coaching methodology (outside of team coaching) tends to focus on individual interactions missing systemic and contextual factors and power dynamics in particular (Shoukry, 2018; Roche, 2022). This research is mainly conducted from the standpoint of coaches.

While a small number of studies explore the potential for coaching to increase BIPOC representation at leadership level in organisations there is an absence of critical analysis of how systemic racism might affect the coaching world itself. It is this gap which our research set out to explore through the question, what needs to change for the world of coaching to take an anti-racist approach? Why is this important? There is ample evidence that decades of D&I work have not resulted in improved diversity and inclusion in leadership, in fact, it is declining. Since coaching has been deployed as part of the D&I strategy throughout this period, what have we to learn about how we could deploy coaching to better effect principally by exploring the perspective of BIPOC coaches?

2.1. Epistemology and methodology

Epistemologically a critical realist approach (Collier, 1994; Gorski, 2013) has been taken when selecting the definition of key terms and choice of theoretical lens for the analysis of the data. Critical realism is based around 3 dimensions that constitute reality: (1) Reality

Table 1. Key definitions (Roche & Passmore 2022).

	Key definitions
Race, racism and racialisation	Wherever we use the terms 'race', 'racialisation' and 'racism' they are understood to describe the historical processes of 'Western colonialism, enslavement, state building, racial violence and genocide' that established a worldwide hierarchy descending from whiteness to blackness, underpinning capitalist exploitation of land and bodies for labour and profit (Christian, 2019, p. 174.).
Systemic (structural & Institutional) racism	This term refers to the reality of systemic racism that is embodied in everyday, embedded, often 'invisible' patterns of beliefs, habits, policies and social, economic political practices that are inherently disadvantageous to Black, Latino, Asian Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people (Kirkinis et al., 2021).
Colour-blindness	Colour-blindness is a process of socialisation and associated system of beliefs that sends the message that race, or skin colour does or should not matter. While the intent may be well-meaning, in practice it denies/ignores the lived reality for BIPOC most affected by the disparities in education, employment, health, housing and criminal justice systems, for Black, Indigenous and Other People of Colour, that result from systemic racism (Bartoli et al., 2016).
Colour consciousness	While rejecting a scientific basis for the racial categorisation of human beings, race consciousness is an acknowledgement of the lived reality of racialisation and consequent racial injustices.
Anti-racism	The active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, organisational structures, policies and practices to end the disparities in education, employment, health, wellbeing, housing and criminal justice systems.
Whiteness	Whiteness needs to be understood as more than a social identity. It is a structuring property of the social world, which functions to reproduce the system of white supremacy. It is an ideology and way of being in the world, a site of advantages and power that remains largely invisible to people racialised as white and highly visible to people racialised as 'non-white'.
Critical Race Theory (CRT)	CRT: born in the U.S.A. to explain how the law and legal institutions are inherently racist and function to create and maintain social, economic and political inequalities between whites and non-whites.
Decoloniality	Decoloniality: A critical theory and way of being that challenges the power structures of class, race, gender and cis-gender heteronormative domination that are seen to originate from European colonialism.

consists of real events that exist independently of our experience of them. (2) Empirical reality comes to us through our experiences of real events; however, we will interpret these experiences differently based on our context, socialisation, status in society, world view and values etc. (3) Philosophically critical realism sees real events/processes as being represented in our thoughts and feelings, and we can establish patterns of causality between how we feel and think and real events.

As a result, historical processes and the terms used to refer to them and the phenomenon called systemic racism and allied processes e.g., racialisation, used in this article, are regarded as empirical realities, or reflections and responses to empirical realities, even though *interpretations* of that reality may be contested. This extends, therefore, to our use of key terms as shown in [Table 1](#) and to our treatment of the interview data.

3. Research methodology and design

Research question: What needs to change for the world of coaching to take an anti-racist approach? This paper uses data from two sources:

Source 1. Central to the study are voices of BIPOC coaches working in the industry. We recruited four separate focus groups made of BIPOC coaches from U.K., U.S.A., Kenya, South Africa and New Zealand (Māori coaches) giving the study a global perspective.

The Focus Group was chosen as the data collection method for this qualitative study because it is well suited to the exploration of contentious social issues that are the subject of public debate (Krueger, 2002). Given that the topic of anti-racism was everywhere in the media at this point the focus group gave access to how these coaches as part of a professional community was making sense of an emerging phenomenon i.e., the issue of race/antiracism in coaching. Additionally, focus group methodology has proven economy (Parker, 2006) enhanced by being able to bring together participants from geographically dispersed locations using an online video conferencing facility. The research took place during the early months of the COVID19 Pandemic, and this was regarded as both safe and cost-effective in terms of time. We had a short window for the data collection (October 2020–March 2021). Focus groups enabled us to maximise the number of coaches who could be involved. Considerable work went into designing the protocols and shape of the sessions to ensure a sense of safety enough to share what was anticipated to be potentially triggering and sensitive information, thoughts and feelings.

Source 2. Consists of data collected from our one-to-one interview with coaching professional association representatives (PAs) who between them represent coaches across the globe. While we initially thought that one focus group could be convened for the Professional Associations it turned out that issues around anonymity and confidentiality meant that we were only able to gain the consent for participants in this group by interviewing them one to one. This indicates the sensitivities or vulnerability our mainly white participants (out of the four one was a Black male, one a white male and two were white females) may have felt around discussing the issue of race.

Our aim was to develop a programme for change which could be implemented across the coaching eco-system from coach education delivered by universities and private coaching schools to professional bodies through to executive coaches.

4. Data analysis method

The data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2016). This approach allowed for an organic, creative, iterative, and flexible approach to coding and thematic development. The iterative process used followed the recommended 6 steps:

- (1) Data analysis
- (2) Coding
- (3) Searching for themes
- (4) Reviewing themes
- (5) Defining and naming themes
- (6) Writing up.

The writing up stage produced 5 thematic maps, number 5 being a map of the recommendations made by participants and a relational map representing the interpretation of the relationship between the four key themes developed from the data analysis. These are presented in Figure 1 (which does not include Theme 5, presented later in the form of a manifesto). Saturation was reached by the end of Focus group 2, while each subsequent focus group contributed richness and detail generating new subthemes, no new themes emerged.

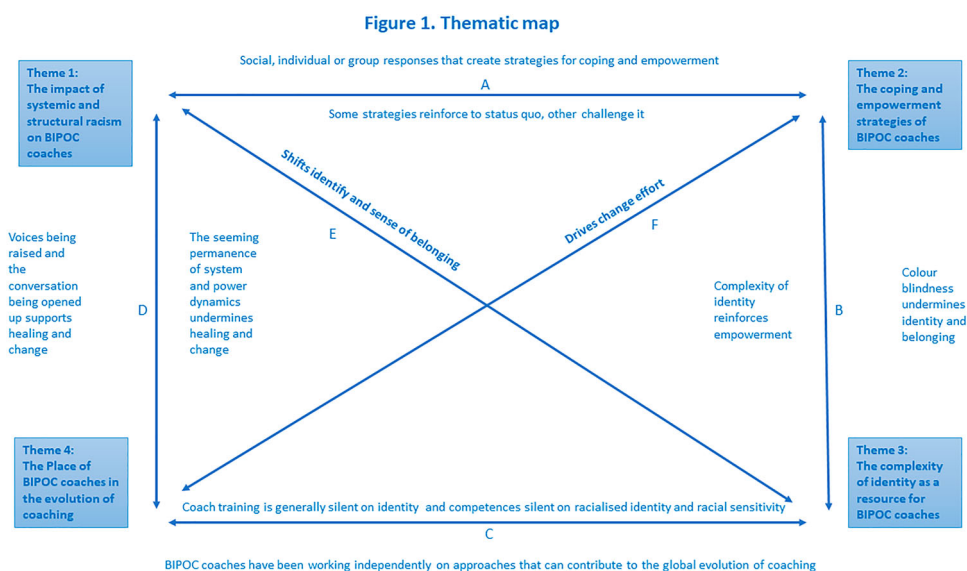


Figure 1. Thematic map (Roche & Passmore 2022).

5. Findings

Commentary: Each arrow represents reciprocal interdependent relationships between the themes.

Arrow A is the tension between the impacts of systemic racism identified by the coaches and the strategies they developed to help them manage these impacts. Some are empowering and challenge systemic racism while others promote survival but not thriving.

Arrow B represents the relationship between empowerment and the theme of identity. The tension here is that race consciousness empowers BIPOC coaches giving them many resources as coaches, however, colour-blindness renders these resources invisible in the mainstream coaching world.

Arrow C represents the understanding of the importance of the complexity of identity and how it impacts coaching as an impetus for the evolution of coaching as it responds to social movements. This is a strength our coaches have which mainstream coach training currently ignores.

Arrow D represents the limiting factor of systemic racism in the coaching ecosystem on role BIPOC coaches could play in the evolution of coaching while recognising that they continue to develop their approaches outside of the mainstream.

Arrow E represents the role the reality of systemic racism plays in forming identity while at the same time strong racial identity operates as a form of resistance to internalised racism.

Arrow F represents the empowerment BIPOC coaches get from working critically within and outside of mainstream coaching providing the potential to contribute to the evolution of mainstream coaching which is being challenged by social movements to change.

6. Source 1. Analysis and discussion

Please note that all participant descriptions are in their own words.

6.1. Theme 1: how systemic racism shows up in coaching

6.1.1. Exclusion and under-representation

Exclusion from corporate coaching pools and coaching providers is one of the most visible aspects of structural racism in the coaching industry.

This participant describes her experience of challenging this aspect of exclusion:

I've asked people in big organisations; how many non-white coaches have you got on your panel? There's a sort of embarrassed silence, they try and flick through the coaches they know, and they realise that they actually probably don't have any on their panel. And then I say to them, so when you use big coach providers, how many non-white coaches have they got on their panel? Again, there's a sort of embarrassed silence. And when I say, well, when you put forward three coaches for the coach to choose from, do you have a look and make sure that there's a diverse group of people? Again, it's a kind of embarrassed silence. (UK, Indian, female, coach)

This participant was also engaged in offering her services as a coach to companies with BIPOC employees, her challenges were being made to highlight a need for coaches like her to be engaged to help make leadership more diverse. As a result of this lack of diversity in coaching pools and the link drawn by this participant with her failure to get answers, we speculate that there may be a direct link between the underrepresentation of BIPOC coaches and the failure of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) work to increase the number of BIPOC senior executives.

However, D&I is more complex than just numbers. One of our participants makes the point that simply adding more 'colour', does not create inclusive cultures in which BIPOC people can be authentic and thrive.

Something that I think is probably one of the most important parts of making the practice, as well as the study, of coaching antiracist is representation. I think that just has to be at the forefront of it ... authentic representation, not you know, physically people of colour, black people and people of colour present in the industry but aren't bringing their true selves to the industry, but people who are showing up as they really are. (U.S.A., Black/African American, female, coach)

The findings indicate that the presence of more coaches of colour in the industry could be a lever to greater success for leaders of colour because coaches of colour recognise and acknowledge the trauma associated with working in organisations that alienate or are hostile to BIPOC in ways not accepted as real or valid by the dominant culture.

Coaching, it's almost going to be a key tool for liberation for us and also connectivity of our community. Because I think that coaching really handles your ability to create, to produce, to be your best self to show up fully. (U.S.A., Black/African American, female, coach)

6.1.2. Coaching and coach training as 'white spaces'

The assumed neutrality in coaching is explicitly connected to 'colour-blindness' by a participant.

Well, [the trainer said] I don't see colour. Well [participant responds], you can't not see colour, it's a part of who I am. So, what you are saying [is] you don't see a part of me. People use that 'I don't see colour' because they don't want to explore their discomfort. (South Africa, Mixed Racial Heritage – Coloured, female, coach)

Colour-blindness is viewed as rendering the participant unseen and disempowered; it is named as a form of denial and a barrier to relationship building.

6.1.3. Corporate gatekeeping

Practices which contribute to the feelings of exclusion serve to maintain the emotions associated with intergenerational trauma caused by systemic racism. The following quote from a South African participant shows how dehumanising the seemingly neutral practice of introducing a Black colleague into a white organisation can be experienced.

[If] I'm looking for a training or a coaching job in a white corporate, I need to take my white colleague, because they'll listen to me only because he or she's there and she's white, they can hear more a white person than they can hear a black person. [This] makes it very hard as a Black professional to get jobs in these corporates ... because you must, kind of be introduced by a white person to go in. (South Africa, African female, coach)

While this might be explained away by the fact that white coaches have been around in the business longer than black coaches, in the context of the continuing inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa such normative practices need to be recognised as oppressive to the indigenous majority and discussions opened up which aim to remove the need for such gatekeeping.

6.1.4. Alienation

There is evidence that BIPOC coaches can find coach training alienating:

it [the training programme] wasn't exactly in line for me culturally ... if we followed the exact formula that we were taught, and the exact ICF markers of coaching, staying neutral being one of them, that our clients, especially African American clients, and clients of other African descent, would not be fully served. (U.S.A., Black/African American, female, coach)

The response developed by these coaches was to develop their own, alternative programmes and or approaches, something our U.K., South African and Māori coaches also spoke about.

6.2. Themes 2 and 3: identity and empowerment

Each focus group opened with a recognition of identity. Strong racial identity is positively correlated with well-being and resilience to race-related stress/trauma (Hurst, 2011). It was anticipated that the conversation might trigger strong emotion linked to past or ongoing challenges related to structural racism and the focus on identity was seen as a protective factor. It also served to open a rich seam of evidence.

6.2.1. *How the themes of identity and empowerment show up in the data*

The evidence indicates that for the coaches in this study the practice of coaching is associated with family and traditional interactions that serve as rites of passage into a world experienced as threatening and dangerous for BIPOC.

I believe I am who I am because of the coaching, as I now call it, I got from my grandparents in terms of managing the difficulties that they had inherited, and so that we could probably manage them slightly differently. The constant conversations that happen in the room and around the table. (U.K., Black woman of Caribbean heritage)

This indicates that for this participant coaching provides ‘collective empowerment’ and ‘identity-based meaning and action’ (Phillips et al., 2015, p. 375). Another participant reinforces this reading of the data.

So, my interest in coaching was really in trying to help people of colour or minorities, to understand, to give them ‘the talk’, as it pertained to navigating corporate culture, because a lot of the times, they didn’t get it, they just had to navigate the unwritten rules and all of the underlying land mines that they would invariably step on. [I wanted to help them] understand why they crashed and burned or washed out of the organization, or really got stuck with no way of advancing. (U.S.A., Afro-Latina, female, coach)

A stark connection is made here between ‘the talk’, which has become a rite of passage for every American teenager who is initiated into the life and death risk of being stopped by the police, to the risk of becoming a black casualty in white corporate spaces. The limitations of ‘the talk’ as a strategy is marked by the murder of George Floyd. The suggestion here that there needs to be a corporate equivalent is startling in this context.

6.3. *Theme 4: driving the evolution of coaching*

For the coaches in this study cultural competence and cultural sensitivity, needs to be integrated with racial literacy and racial sensitivity. An additional level of understanding is the history of the impact of colonisation.

If you’re looking at the context of Māori or Indigenous peoples, I don’t know that you could have the best coaching of those peoples without being one of them. We have [in mainstream attitudes] this false sense of understanding, the Jesus complex or White saviour complex. We [Māori] don’t need saving; we need someone to walk on that journey with us. (Female, Māori coach)

For this Māori coach the individualism at the centre of most coach training reinforces the negative impacts of colonialism.

How do you care for people on a collective level? [If] you go back to our ancestors, we lived in a collective environment ... [now] we are living as individuals, and you can see why we are suffering. When it comes to coaching it’s almost like we’re on the back foot because we’re trying to really replace the collective. (Female, Māori coach)

A coach training curriculum which values ancestral and collective ways of being of indigenous people, their heritage, values, beliefs, and spirituality, is what she calls for in an anti-racist approach.

7. Source 2: analysis and discussion

The professional association (PA) representatives were asked the same question as the BIPOC, what needs to change for the world of coaching to take an anti-racist approach? Since these interviews also took place after the BIPOC data had been analysed it was possible to share the headline findings with the representatives as part of the conversations with them.

Professional Association representatives are seen as key to influencing the agenda for change implied by the research question. Given the global structure of the industry our representatives came predominantly from countries of the Global North. One representative came from a continent in the Global South. We have presented the results from each category separately.

Our overall finding was that while all the representatives were supportive of the idea of change, they expressed being uncomfortable, in different ways, with it being explicitly linked to race or anti-racism. The themes of discomfort, denial and acknowledgement emerged from the responses of the Global North representatives. The kind of change supported was largely related to opening access to coaching for the disadvantaged generally (based on disparities in income across the globe) while rejecting the need or desirability of singling out race as an issue. The response of the representative from the Global South revealed acceptance of the legacy of colonialism but rejected systemic racism as a cause; the ambiguity of this response is discussed in more detail below.

7.1. PA perspective from the Global North

The PA responses show up as discomfort with the idea of anti-racism when compared to those of the coaches quoted above.

Because one can easily say, coaching is anti-racist anyway. So, you know, why did you come up with this question? What evidence do you have to suggest that there is any impact or any trace of [*sic*] anti-racism or racism in coaching? Rep 1

This statement sounded as if it was refuting an accusation that coaches, and coaching is racist. Our reading of the CRT literature interprets this response as defensiveness and denial, since no such accusation was made or implied. This was made clear in discussion with this representative. The defensiveness is associated in the literature with a limited understanding of racism, seeing it only as relating to individual, personal attitudes and beliefs. In our view, it demonstrates that there is a need for greater understanding within the coaching establishment about what is meant by systemic racism and how it operates.

7.2. The following quotes reveal a set of assumptions we identified as limiting

These quotes were taken from the section of the conversation which followed the sharing of headline findings from the BIPOC coaches. The issues of Black coaches being introduced into white corporates already quoted above was responded to by a representative as follows:

... is it [the dominance of white coaches in the industry] a question of race or is it the question of maturity of coaching market? Rep 2

While it may be true that coaching as an industry was ‘imported’ into Africa from the West, recently the number of trained BIPOC coaches, as represented in ICF chapter membership, now outnumbers white coaches (Passmore, 2021). Yet the response from this representative normalises the gatekeeping practice highlighted above. The evidence from the coaches in our study raises questions as to whether the power dynamics that exist in practices such as this are seen as being something that needs to be addressed because of its *impact*. We argue that a colourblind approach makes the implications of this practice invisible to the representative. One must ask: Is it right to pass off the fact of White dominance in this way as simply one of supply? Note also that the issue of underrepresentation of BIPOC in coaching Leadership was also met with denial.

I don't think it's accurate (that leadership is largely white) ... Also, from the race perspective, again, we tend to look into diversity (rather than race alone). Rep 2

We argue that if the associations are to claim that leadership is racially diverse then they could also accept some responsibility to create an evidence base to support this. Coaching is seen by our BIPOC participants as a predominantly white profession, racially as well as ideologically. Current PAs do not collect the data that would show that the claim made here is any more correct than that made by the coaches.

I am very grateful to those coaches who are making trouble and making noise because sometimes we have to be kicked in the head to gain that awareness ... associations cannot be deaf to social progress, to what's surrounding them, and how we prepare our members to be successful. Our mission and vision call for thriving society, society cannot thrive when people are being oppressed. Rep 3

In our view, this quote demonstrates how a lack of a proactive anti-racist approach within the system puts the onus on those most affected by systemic racism to do the emotional labour of ‘making noise’ and ‘causing trouble’. There was an acknowledgement in the conversation with one representative that neutrality in the profession may be an issue:

I also understand that being anti-racist does not necessarily mean that it's [coaching's] racist right now. It may be a little bit too neutral ... Rep 3

This representative went on to emphasise the importance of creating forums for discussion, debate and learning about systemic racism. She acknowledged that her own journey on this road had only just started. All representatives spoke of the importance of addressing inequalities and disadvantage in generalised terms which would add up to a campaign for the democratisation of coaching, which cannot be seen as the same as confronting systemic racism. Representatives 1 and 2 were at the defensive end of a spectrum in their responses, Representative 3 was more open to acknowledging the issue of race at a systemic level.

7.3. PA perspective from the Global South

The representative from the Global South comes closer to the contributions made by the BIPOC coaches in our study in that he sees the potential of coaching to be used in service of addressing the legacies of globalised neo-imperialism, but there is a seeming contradiction in the response that called for exploration.

Traditionally, coaching has been a white dominated profession ... even today, for every 20 white coaches, there would be two coaches of colour, blacks in particular. So that domination is still there. Does that amount to systemic racism [in the African context]? I don't think so.
Rep 4

At first sight, this might appear to align with Rep 2's assertion that the imbalance is due to market immaturity. However, what follows on directly from the Rep 4's words put a question mark over that interpretation.

... positive thinking comes up. And positive thinking says, I might be Black, but I equally have the potential to do what a white person will do. So that is positive thinking. Again, I think we are expected as Black coaches to be assertive enough in what we do. We cannot afford a situation where I feel powerless by virtue of my colour. Rep 4

The representative here seems to be invoking the call for resistance to internalised racial oppression understood within the context of the Black Consciousness movement.

This interpretation is supported by what was said immediately following the above:

I believe that African leaders need a lot of coaching. Let me go on record again, as saying that the majority of the so called first world countries, they are where they are because of the resources that came from Africa. And Africa needs to start ... Because what do we do at the moment, we export a lot of raw materials and in the process, creating employment outside Africa, when we should be processing those raw materials in Africa, and creating employment in Africa. So, I say Africa shall rise. As soon as the leaders are capacitated. Rep 4

There is a clear recognition here of systemic racism in the form of the neo-imperialist economic structures that have hard wired the global economic inequalities seen between the countries of the Global North and Global South. It is consistent with a decoloniality perspective.

7.4. Theme 5: recommendations for change-manifesto for racial justice, equity and belonging in coaching

The recommendations, set out in the form of a manifesto, are drawn directly from the focus group discussions and our analysis of them which were brought together within four subthemes:

- (A) *Acknowledgement and recognition*
- (B) *Decolonising the coaching curriculum*
- (C) *Addressing underrepresentation*
- (D) *Defining and elaborating coaching for racial equity & social Justice*

Each section directs recommendations to the relevant stakeholder group within the coaching ecosystem. Committing to implementing this manifesto is only the starting point of an ongoing, evolving process of acknowledgement, collaboration, and exchange. Our participants stressed the need to avoid quick fixes and tick box responses to this process of change. We concur and offer this in that spirit. The need to actively engage with BIPOC who are at the leading edge of this issue is emphasised by a Māori participant:

What would need to change for the world of coaching to take an anti-racist approach? Well, you need 'the people' ... to help support that ... I don't know how many times we have had

this issue [where they say], 'let's have a meeting, let's create a solution for 'the people'. But you didn't even ask the people. Māori Research Participant

The manifesto sets out 14 commitments, an invitation for the industry and profession to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world calling for increased attention to racial justice. For our participants, acknowledgement is the starting point of healing and change.

(A) *Acknowledgement and recognition*

- (1) Recognising the reality of systemic racism and its impact: Professional Bodies, Coach Training Institutions and Coach Providers commit to active engagement with a vision and strategy for Racial Justice, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (RJDEI&B) with BIPOC scholars, practitioners and thought leaders contributing as pioneers and equal partners.

(B) *Decolonising the curriculum*

- (2) Recognising the paucity of professional guides and theoretical frameworks to support ethical practice in coaching around race and systemic racism: Professional associations will commission further research to build on our understanding of how systemic racism and the intersection with other forms of inequality are reflected in the world of coaching.
- (3) Recognising the need to diversify the coach training faculties: Education providers commit to developing recruitment and retention plans to attract BIPOC staff and students in proportion approximately equal to the country, city or region from which they recruit.
- (4) Recognising the need to diversify the coaching curriculum: Education providers commit to reviewing course materials to include non-western approaches to coaching and integrate an understanding of racial identity theory, practice and race-based trauma awareness (covering all forms of racial identity including white) into coach training.

(C) *Increasing representation and opening access*

- (5) Recognising the income disparities that disproportionately impact BIPOC: Education providers commit to providing bursaries or low-cost courses for socially disadvantaged groups.
- (6) Recognising the Higher Education awarding gap affecting outcomes for BIPOC: Education providers commit to creating mentoring schemes within their programmes for all students. These schemes will focus on systemic barriers as well as the internalised psychological barriers to attainment.
- (7) Recognising that what we measure is what we notice: Professional bodies commit to collecting data on the diversity of their membership, including racial/ethnic identity, and monitor this over time, taking action to create an inclusive and balanced membership reflecting the population of country, city or region that they cover.
- (8) Recognising the need to raise the profile for RJEDI&B: Professional bodies commit to championing an anti-racist approach to diversity and inclusion at both a global and local level, reflecting this in conferences, events programmes, and all materials, from websites to accreditation and competency frameworks.

- (9) Recognising the structural barriers for some BIPOC populations of the costs of coach training and accreditation: Professional associations commit to collaborating toward a recognition of each other's coach and supervision training and accreditation, setting up approved prior learning schemes.
 - (10) Recognising the underrepresentation of BIPOC in coaching pools and the racial bias that affects recruitment: Coaching service providers commit to reviewing recruitment procedures and criteria when seeking to employ talented BIPOC associates and employees in proportion approximately equal to the countries, cities, or regions in which they are based.
- (D) *Defining and elaborating coaching for racial justice, equity and belonging*
- (11) Recognising the need to develop systemic understanding of racism: Coaches, mentors and supervisors commit to developing and deepening their understanding of anti-racism and the system and structures that oppress, and specifically become more aware of how ideology and historical practices affect personal, interpersonal, social, organisational, economic, and political dynamics.
 - (12) Recognising the way in which systemic racism is internalised via socialisation: Coaches, mentors and supervisors will develop their understanding and sensitivity to how power differentials in society and organisations show up in the self-concept and identity of their clients; in policies, practices, and relationships; they will both support and challenge clients to create humanising cultures that are inclusive for all at work, home and in leisure.
 - (13) Recognising the pioneering role BIPOC play in developing approaches outside of the mainstream: Courses and programmes developed and facilitated by them which focus on racial and social justice, intersectionality and the power dynamics of systemic inequalities will be commissioned and resources developed to elaborate a coaching evidence base for this work.
 - (14) Recognising the need for authentic progress over tick box measures: We all commit to creating a culture of accountability for these intentions. Individuals, organisations and professional bodies will support each other in developing action plans, measuring and reporting on progress, to fulfil existing or new, RJEDI&B vision statements.

8. Conclusion

A synergy between Critical Race Theory and Decoloniality was used to make sense of our data, this approach was informed by The Global Race and Racism Framework (Christian, 2019) which in turn informed the key terms and definitions selected and set out in Table 1 providing the reference points for our analysis. The interviews with the BIPOC coaches indicate that exclusion and underrepresentation, typical impacts of structural racism, are as much a feature of the coaching industry as of any other. We would argue that not only do they compromise the economic success of BIPOC coaches but also the success of their counterparts who aspire to senior leadership in business and public service organisations. This is due not only to the underrepresentation of coaches in coaching pools but also the cultural assumptions embedded and normalised within coaching mainstream practice.

We conclude that BIPOC coaches have not remained passive victims of this process but have actively sought to fill the gaps by developing programmes and alternative ways of working from which mainstream coaching could benefit if it became more inclusive, diverse, and pluralistic in all aspects of its eco-system. Professional identity for these coaches is shaped by their lived experiences in a racialised world with its associated systemic disadvantages but also systems of resistance.

The interviews with the representatives from the Global North highlight the need for, when viewed against the widely differing perceptions of the coaches we interviewed, critical reflection on the assumptions underpinning professional identity as a coach and those who are custodians of this identity. It is interesting that while agreeing that some change was needed, they appear to reject anti-racism as a legitimate rationale for such change. They were all comfortable talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion in terms of generalised disadvantage but were not comfortable when it came to talking about race. This colourblind approach hinders progress for BIPOC because their specific experiences and needs go ignored and creates questions about the efficacy of statements put up on websites under the D&I banner of the associations led by these representatives.

The position of the representative from the Global South is more ambiguous and would appear to tend toward a call to focus more on creating an Afro-centric model of coaching that empowers Black leaders rather than focusing on making a specifically anti-racist call. This would speak to the emphasis decoloniality puts on developing alternative sources of power captured in the concept of 'fugitivity' (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014) rather than attempting to force one's way into the existing, exclusive citadels of 'white' power. This tension is reflected in the 'manifesto', time will tell which of these approaches creates the most progress. More research is required to further understand the dynamics at play.

Based on the research evidence collected here, we conclude that an approach which opens to scrutiny structures that exclude and marginalise, as well as an approach that develops alternatives bases of power driven by BIPOC, is necessary. Decoloniality sees a common thread holding together neo-colonialism in countries with a Black majority (e.g., South Africa and Kenya) or where they have been minoritised (e.g., UK, America, and New Zealand). All are denied, even those from the continent of Africa, the centrality of being seen as part of a global majority (Campbell-Stephens, 2021). The term global majority is being popularised by decolonial scholarship as a decentring of 'whiteness' as a performance of power and as part of racist narratives. That common thread is capitalism and its counterpart coloniality, which reproduces economic, political, epistemic dominance based on a racial hierarchy which marginalises the ways of knowing and being of 'non-white' peoples. More research is required to explore how decoloniality and critical theories of whiteness might support systemic awareness in coaching.

Despite the unifying factor of globalisation, the ways in which our recommendations for change are implemented would need to take local context into consideration. For example, one of our participants stated that the leadership coaching industry in Kenya remains dominated by coach providers who rely on exporting coaches from the U.S.A. and Europe, despite the availability of indigenous coaches. The training institutions, predominantly the business school, has a monopoly on coach training with its Western-dominated assumptions embedded in the curriculum and global coach accreditation

pathways. A research study looking at why this pattern persists in majority Black countries would be an interesting extension of this study.

Central to understanding systemic racism is the fact that it is not always explicit or overt. It works through socialisation, systems, assumptions and practices. Drawing on the expertise of BIPOC coaches could shift this dynamic. The biggest factor slowing progress is the dark side of Arrow D, the seeming 'permanence' of systemic racism seen as 'permanent' due to its malleability (Christian, 2019). Might the power of the professional associations of the Global North, who appear to remain resistant, be the biggest drag on change? The danger is that 'D&I' becomes the new form of avoiding the core issues around equalising power. This study provides the benchmark against which future studies might delve deeper and more extensively into the questions raised here.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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