We don't see colour!" How executive coaching can help leaders to create inclusive corporate cultures by acknowledging structural racism in its ecosystem

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Introduction

While leaders are scrambling to take up the issue of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) in the context of the heightened consciousness of systemic and structural racism prompted by the Black Lives Matter campaign, the world of coaching has been slow to engage with the issue of racial justice. This year-long qualitative study responds to a gap in coaching literature which is currently silent on the impact of systemic racism on coaching practice. In this paper we focus on the views and experiences of coaches who identify as "Black," "Indigenous," or "Persons of Color" (BIPOC). The coaches are from five countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, Kenya, South Africa, and New Zealand (NZ), offering a global perspective on how this issue shows up in coaching. Focus groups were convened virtually with coaches from each region. We asked the question "What would need to change in the world of coaching for it to adopt an antiracist approach?" The data analyzed using thematic analysis revealed that the BIPOC coaches in this study experience the world of coaching as a white space in which color blindness reinforces and reproduces the power dynamics of structural racism. The BIPOC coaches' testimonies suggests that an antiracist approach oriented toward decoloniality could be much more effective in breaking the patterns of underrepresentation and exclusion at senior leadership levels across organizations.

What's It Mean? Implications for Consulting Psychology
This unique study found that coaching research, practice, and training is affected by systemic racism seen in (a) its relative silence on race, (b) its tendency to reproduce the power dynamics of racism not challenge them, and (c) its pattern of underrepresentation of BIPOC coaches, reproducing many of the structural inequalities seen in wider society for example, pay disparities, exclusion from leadership. More research is needed to determine the scale of the challenge and the impact of recommendations for change.

The issue of racial justice has become more and more marked since the Black Lives Matter social movement in 2020 reignited the issue of structural and systemic racism. Although race and racism has been a constant feature in the discourse of many disciplines, there has been a gap in the public discourse and research in coaching. Since 2020 the first few ripples have started to emerge that promise to end the silence (Maltbia, 2021a, 2021b; Roche, 2021). These are part of a concerted effort by coaching practitioners and thought leaders to place this issue on the agenda for executive coaching. The present research sought to explore the experiences of race across the executive coaching ecosystem, to more deeply understanding the perspectives of key stakeholders.

An initial review of the coaching industry suggests that color blindness found in many aspects of professional life extends throughout the coaching profession. Professional artefacts, such as professional association reports, coach competency frameworks, training syllabuses, ignore racial identity and racism as a factor. Taking one example, the International Coaching Federation, which is based in the United States and has

35,000 members worldwide, revised its coaching competency framework in December 2019. The new framework invites coaches to be "sensitive to client's identity, environment, experiences, values, beliefs" (ICF, 2019). However, there is no explicit discussion about race. Such competency frameworks form a cornerstone for coaching training.

While the ICF, a U.S.-based professional association, is one example, a review of digital media and online documentation from the other two global coaching professional associations, the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) and the Association for Coaching (AC), reveal a similar level of "color-blindness." A second example may serve to reinforce this perception. Although data are collected on gender, language, and country of residence, none of the professional bodies in 2020 collected data on ethnicity or identity, in their membership applications, in research studies or annual surveys. Without such data it is impossible to say whether, or by how much, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) are underrepresented in executive coaching, in which countries, counties, or cities does under representation occur, or through this data, to develop mechanisms to address the inequalities which may exist and monitor progress. This neglect of ethnic and racial data may be considered to emerge from a position of "racial ignorance," a position which seeks to obscure the importance of racialized structures, despite the strong and enduring empirical global evidence that these structural effects blight lives, communities, and whole populations (Christian et al., 2019, p. 3).

At this point it may be helpful to define what we mean by executive coaching. While a host of definitions have been debated (see Passmore & Lai, 2019 for a review of coaching definitions), in this article we use Kilburg's 1996 definition:

"*Executive coaching is defined as a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization*". (Kilburg's 1996, p. 142)

It is important to note that this definition applies to work that is not normally commissioned by the coachee but by the organization in which they work. For this reason, the dynamics around who and what the coaching is serving can be complex, even more so in the racialized workplace.

Literature Review

A review of the literature revealed 30 studies and books that explicitly studied race in coaching. This small number of studies explored the systemic and structural factors that influence the relational field between coach and coachee and examine the potential for creating inclusive workplace cultures and breaking patterns of exclusion, under-performance and under representation (Berstien, 2019; Bocala & Holman, 2021; Bragg

et al., 2019; Khunou, 2019; Tapela & le Sueur, 2018; McPherson, 2007; Stout-Rostron, 2017; Washington et al., 2020; Williams, 2017), all making the point, in a range of contexts, that race matters (Pennington, 2009).

A representative sample is characteristic of the remaining literature which ignores racism and its interrelatedness with culture and ethnicity, using terms such as multiculturism, cultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, cross culturalism, and diversity (Anandlal, 2017; O'Flaherty & Everson, 2013; Passmore, 2010; van Nieuwerburgh, 2017). As a result, coaching could be seen to reinforce and reproduce the structures of systemic racism rather than attempt to change them (Bocala & Holman, 2021). Where racialization and racism are acknowledged the role of the coach is often presented as being about supporting the adaptation of the Black coachee to the dominant culture (Cornish, 2009).

Yet "coaching has a terrific potential as a methodology for exploring a wide range of issues related to intentional change on both individual and systemic levels." (Grant, 2017, p. 71.) This combined with the privileged access which executive coaches hold to senior leaders, executive coaching is in a unique position to be part of the solution, rather than being part of the problem. Although there is a small number of studies that explore the systemic and structural factors that influence the relational field between coach and coachee and the potential for social change and increased equity, there is an absence of critical analyses of the ways in which systemic and structural racism may play out in the coaching world itself. It is this gap which this study aims to explore.

Rajvinder Kaur Uppal (2018) argued that coaching exists in a world where the global majority consists of people of color. Further, countries where traditionally people of color represented a minority are becoming more diverse. Senior teams too are changing, reflecting growing globalization and pressure from governments and regulators in the United States and United Kingdom. Coaching, as an unregulated profession, remains behind this changing landscape. It too needs, Uppal (2018) argued "to be mindful of how it acknowledges and facilitates racial diversity: in areas of training, hiring, organizational practice, branding, marketing, workplace and service delivery" (Uppal, 2018). David Clutterbuck (2019) went further, arguing that the coaching industry has "prejudiced interactions" which are built into the fabric of the structure of the coaching profession.

The global profession is dominated by white coaches, predominantly women, with some 65% of coaches identifying as female (Passmore et al., 2017, 2019, 2021) and some 85% of coaches from the only global study to explore racial identity, identifying as 'white' (Passmore, 2021). However, the growth of coaching in African and Asia is witnessing a gradual change in the professional body membership, with growing members joining from these continents, but in Europe and the US black coaches are underrepresented as a portion of the population (Passmore, 2021).

As a result, power and influence remain in the hands of a global minority since "high status in the profession is a white preserve" because "coaching has much the same

problem" as global corporations when it comes to breaking the glass ceilings that prevent people of color and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups from becoming heard and valued (Clutterbuck, 2019). This directly reflects the failure of corporations, despite equal opportunities legislation and decades of D&I initiatives, to increase the numbers of BIPOC around the executive table at senior levels in the United States and United Kingdom (Guynn & Schrotenboer, 2021; Lee-Zogbessou, 2020). No research yet exists that explores the links between indigenous models of human development that may be associated with behaviors the West calls coaching. Coaching on the African continent and in New Zealand is predominantly defined by philosophies, models and approaches established in the West. To do more impactful work with BIPOC leaders in these contexts we need to understand how the dynamic plays out in executive coaching. In focusing on power, we will demonstrate that the issue goes far beyond the question of diversity alone.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has established that given the systemic and therefore every day, embedded, often invisible nature of the dynamics of structural racism, that being neutral, or nonracist or color blind, is not enough (Brooks, 2014; Corneau & Stergiopoulos, 2012). On the contrary it may do harm. CRT recognizes color blindness as a form of implicit racism (Apple, 1999; Atkins, 2019; West et al., 2021). To create more inclusive antiracist environments, the structures on which the system of racism is based need to be actively challenged and dismantled including within the field of executive coaching. Encountering this literature during our search influenced our choice of theoretical framework for analyzing the research data.

Another body of work which indicates the harms of color blindness is found in Racial Identity Theory (Helms, 1995). This work, and subsequent research untaken using this framework has found that a positive racial identity is strongly correlated with coping and empowerment strategies in racialized people (Hughes et al., 2015; Thompson, 2003, Thompson & Carter, 1997). This body of work emphasizes the necessity of integrating race and identity as a systemic component of human functioning recommending the infusion of racial identity theory with other psychological models.

Theorizing Racialization Within the Context of Executive/Leadership Development Coaching

From the standpoint of contextualizing coaching within specific dynamics of power, the dominant coaching models (such as GROW and its variations) become the focus of critiques from the perspective of CRT and decoloniality. This perspective situates the dominant coaching models as coming from a neoliberal, anglicized world view (Clutterbuck, 2019; Shoukry, 2017; Shoukry & Cox, 2018). In addition, it is recognized that these models are based on assumptions that do not necessarily hold in contexts where what is normalized by the dominant discourses and practices are experienced as oppressive by those outside of the norm. Hany Shoukry (2016), a pioneer in researching this field, developed Coaching for Emancipation and a theoretical framework, Coaching for Social Change (Shoukry, 2017), which sets the foundation for the decolonization of coaching (Roche, 2021). Models like GROW start with the

assumption that we are all free self-actualizing individuals with access to the resources we need for self-improvement and development. Because such these assumptions ignore the many systemic and structural barriers that exist in society, workplaces and the ways in which these become internalized in self-concept by those experiencing oppression. Shoukry's emancipatory or social change approach begins with the reality of oppression, of multiple, intersecting kinds (race, gender, class, sexuality etc.) and the ways in which the coachees are affected, how they may resist and find greater freedom. Shoukry draws largely on social, liberation psychology and pedagogy as opposed to the individualized psychological models of the Global North.

Further, he notes that coaches working in oppressive contexts for social change require a skillset that the coaching eco-system of training, accreditation and supervision and ongoing professional development is not currently set up to provide (Shoukry, 2016). This skillset would include:

- Social, cultural and political awareness – understanding how social structures and cultural norms affect the way we think and behave. In addition, understanding concepts like ideology, socialization and power commonly associated with cultural competency.
- Psychology of the oppressed—especially internalized oppression.
- Empowerment—dealing with feelings of powerlessness and self-victimization in contexts of real threats.
- Critical thinking or critical consciousness—be able to see, question and challenge norms; support critically reflective dialogues with their coachees helping them to understand how social processes have shaped their experiences.
- Facilitating action—enabling action by coachees to facilitate not only personal change but also social change through collaboration in diverse contexts which may involve challenging power structures.
- Self-reflectiveness—understanding how social context and power dynamics affect the coach and coachee relationship and the coaches' relationship to self.

Diversity handbooks (e.g., Passmore, 2010) for coaches working with BIPOC coachees, as a result, need a different lens if they are to be fit for purpose in a climate that is insisting on systemic change. Based on our reading of the literature we speculate that resistance to oppression may often bring about behaviors which lead BIPOC to be identified as under-performing in leadership roles. Guidance in a chapter on Coaching Black British Coachees (Cornish, 2009) reveals, for example, that failing to socialize and share details of one's home life can be seen as holding back a potential Black leader. The guidance encourages the coach to support the coachee in seeing this behavior as limiting and encouraging more openness which may in turn help the work colleagues understand him/her better. The "secretiveness" is seen as a feature of the black coachees "culture."

When viewed through the lens of decoloniality and antiracism this advice would be seen as encouraging the coachee to give up what may have developed as a protective

strategy in a hostile environment (Phillips et al, 2015). In this respect, coaching could be seen as "whitening" BIPOC coachees, making them fit into the prevailing norms about what is acceptable. Within the context of racialization, then, the workplace becomes a "whitespace" (Mitova, 2020) in which BIPOC are required to comply with norms they experience as oppressive. Kilburg's 1996 definition of executive coaching provided earlier, reinforces the role that coaching has come to play in the global economy, one of maximizing performance and "satisfaction" within the context of organizational effectiveness. Instead, a sharpened focus on racial equity and a deeper understanding of the power dynamics of the racialized workplace would require different guidance and coach interventions, potentially leading to better outcomes and decreased reliance on stereotypes. Further, the onus would shift from the need of coachees to adapt to organizations to leaders taking responsibility for creating inclusive cultures.

The research question, "What needs to change for the world of coaching to take an antiracist approach," is therefore based on a combination of the silence about race at a time when the corporate world coaching serves was being very vocal about it, as noted in our introduction, the abundant research which shows the limitations and harms of "color blindness," and the absence of coaching related research on the topic of systemic racism. The paper, Training for color blindness: white racial socialization (Bartoli et al., 2016), referencing an extensive literature in White Studies and CRT, sets out the case with clarity.

Their study revealed that young people consciously socialized by their parents to be color blind are unable to understand or intervene when they witness racism. When asked to explain examples of racial disparities in their communities, they revert to over generalizations and racial stereotypes (e.g., Black people do not care about academics). Their color blind, deracialized, nonracist analysis disarms them because they do not see the bigger picture of systemic, or pervasive historically racist processes and practices. Racism is also reduced to being only that which is overt and individual. Color blindness, as a strategy, allows racism to remain intact.

The fact that coaching as an "industry" has developed in the Global North and exported into the Global South is another dimension of the power dynamic. In drawing on CRT and Decoloniality our analysis exposing these processes to critical reflection, challenging them and thereby it is hoped, making change possible. The call for coaching to be decolonized is based on the body of antiracism research that recognizes some claims to forms of neutrality and universalism as being part of a discourse which hides relations of power and ideology by positioning them as natural and not as the result of power or domination (Arfken & Yen, 2014; Dunford, 2017; Lentin, 2008).

Defining Key Concepts and Terms

Epistemologically we have taken a critical realist approach (Collier, 1994; Gorski, 2013). Critical realist theory argues that the world has three domains:

1. Empirical Realism: There is an empirical reality that comes to us through our experience of real events.

2. Social Actualism: Social events and facts constitute actual experience
3. Philosophical Realism: there are real things behind our thoughts and feelings, and we can establish patterns of causality between them.

This epistemological stance has guided us in the way key terms are defined and used in this study. Wherever the terms "race," "racialization," and "racism" are used, they are understood to be the product of the very real historical processes of "Western colonialism, enslavement, state building, racial violence and genocide" that established a global hierarchy descending from whiteness to blackness, underpinning capitalist exploitation of land and bodies for labor and profit, (Christian, 2019, p. 174.) As such, the ideology of white supremacy and "whiteness" operate as a means of social control and oppression (Gillborn, 2006). "White supremacy" is defined as a "comprehensive condition whereby the interests and perceptions of white subjects are continually placed center stage and assumed as "normal" (Gillborn, 2006). It is a structure of domination. "Whiteness" is a discourse or symbolic meaning system (Gillborn,2006; Guess, 2006), which the sustains 21st hegemony of global capital, in a racially stratified form. For ease of reference, we have also summarized key definitions in Table 1.

Table 1: Definitions of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Antiracism	Antiracism can represent a social movement as well as a set of practices and discourses aimed at tackling the whole spectrum of ways and sites where racism is embodied. (Corneau & Stergiopoulos, 2012)
Colorblindness	Colorblindness is a belief that race, or skin color does or should not mat- ter. As such it is a conscious socialization strategy that denies or ignores the lived reality of a racialized society and its structural impacts in terms of disparities in education, employment, health, housing, and criminal justice systems, for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color. (Bartoli et al., 2016)
Racial Identity	An individual's sense of being defined, in part, by membership in a particular racial group. The strength of this sense depends on the extent to which an individual has processed and internalized the psychological, socio-political, cultural, and other contextual factors related to member- ship in the group. Given the socially constructed nature of racial categories, racial identifications can change over time in different contexts. For example, a mixed-race person might identify as mixed race in one context and Black in another. (APA Dictionary, 2022)
Systemic (includes structural and institutional) racism	The normalization and legitimization of the array of dynamics; historical, cultural institutional, and interpersonal, that routinely advantage people racialized as white while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity. (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004)
White supremacy	White supremacy is defined as a "comprehensive condition whereby the interests and perceptions of white subjects are continually placed center stage and assumed as 'normal.'" It is a structure of domination. (Gillborn, 2006)
Whiteness	"Whiteness" is a discourse or symbolic meaning system. (Gillborn, 2006; Guess, 2006)

Original Contribution

This study draws on the lived experience and professional practice of coaches who are drawn from the Global Majority (Campbell-Stephens, 2021), here categorized as BIPOC, who nonetheless are underrepresented and marginalized in terms of access, status, influence within the coaching profession, reflecting a pattern already well evidenced as one which arises in society and organizations as a direct result of systemic, structural racism. It focuses on data from five geographical territories: The United Kingdom, the United States, Kenya, South Africa, and New Zealand (NZ). The five locations were selected in recognition that issues of race have played out differently over the past 400 years in different locations and to include four continents from across the world, as opposed to focusing on a single national context.

Method

As a result, we selected the Global Critical Race and Racism Framework (GCRR; Christian, 2019) which incorporates Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Decoloniality (Christian, 2019).

Features of the framework:

- As a theoretical lens it helps to better understand and articulate the experiences of BIPOC people. The GCRR framework situates the issue of racism within the global capitalist system, within which coaching operates as a business.
- It brings this into relation with individualism which drives wider social discourses of progress and improvement in turn underpinning the dominant coaching discourse of self and continuous improvement. This ideological position is seen to marginalize worldviews that are more socially oriented.
- The CRT literature provides evidence of the economic cost of exclusion and marginalization; wide disparities in educational outcomes, and among those who do succeed to middle class occupations, there is underrepresentation at the highest levels of their professions. Furthermore, there are the psychological costs of having to navigate white spaces and whiteness and white supremacy cultures (Christian, 2019; Dar et al., 2020; Flemmen & Savage, 2017), all of which were a guide to recognizing patterns that might emerge in the data.
- There is a shift away from the North American-centric perspective on systemic racism. Providing, instead, an understanding of it as a "global project that takes shape differently in diverse structural and ideological forms across all geographies," while remaining based in "global white supremacy" (Christian, 2019, p. 169). As Christian notes white supremacy is, "globally connected" and "locally realized," (Christian, 2019, p. 181). This was important given the diversity of our research participants in terms of country of origin.
- Importantly, it also includes the unbroken tradition of resistance and anti-racist activism and scholarship that is being carried out by BIPOC people and researchers.

- The framework's delineation of the concept of whiteness and white spaces provides an analytic framework within which to explore the emotional, psychological, and physical costs to BIPOC people of having to navigate white spaces imbued with white supremacy cultures and systems of knowledge, power, and ways of being. Embrick & Moore (2020) argue that white spaces are "integral to racialized social systems and global anti-Black racism in ways that . . . normalize the existing racial and social order." In other words, they position whiteness as the norm.
- In the realm of psychology, a decolonizing approach to coping with oppression (Phillips et al., 2015) is drawn on to theorize the evidence drawn together from the interviews under the theme Coping and Empowerment. The coping and empowerment strategies demonstrated by the BIPOC coaches can be evaluated along a continuum from adaptive to libera- tory using this approach.

Objectives and Research Question

The central purpose of the study was to gain some insight and understanding of the lived experience of BIPOC coaches working in the industry to help inform thinking, training, and education programs. In addition, we hope to gain insights into approaches and interventions for working more effectively with BIPOC coachees.

Research Team Description and Participant Recruitment

The principal author for this article, is a Black British woman of Afro-Caribbean heritage and Jamaican birth, an accredited supervisor and executive coach, with a background in the U.K. education sector. The co-author is a British born White male, an accredited coach, and psychologist, but who has lived and worked Internationally during his career. The two researchers were supported by a team of academics, an advisory panel, drawn from the United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, Kenya, and New Zealand. The objective of this panel was to challenge and facilitate the researchers. The advisory panel included a mix of BIPOC and white academics and executive coaches. Participants were invited by the panel within their specific geographical location. None of the BIPOC participants outside of the United Kingdom were known to the interviewers, and only one of the participants from the U.K. group was known by the interviewer. U.K. BIPOC participants were recruited via LinkedIn.

Purposive sampling was used as a technique to ensure that all participants met the criterion for selection; the purpose of the research objective required that all participants were BIPOC. This study used a series of unstructured focus group discussions involving coaches who identify as BIPOC. Participants were invited to join location specific groups from the United Kingdom, United States, Kenya, South Africa, and New Zealand. A target of between five and 10 was decided for each group. We achieved a minimum group size of four and a maximum of seven.

The data were collected via Zoom during the period December 2020–March 2021. Each focus group session lasted for 90 minutes. Ethical approval was granted by Leeds Beckett University following its the procedures set up for Ph.D. researchers.

The unstructured focus group method was selected to allow themes to emerge as freely as possible from the interactions within each focus group in response to the research question, "What needs to change for the world of coaching to take an antiracist approach?" Although the interviewer had a working definition (see Table 1), this was not shared with the participants. Instead, we allowed what "antiracism" meant to the participants to emerge from the data and for that to be analyzed within the GCRR framework. The researcher participated in the focus group discussions as moderator shaping the flow of the conversation by drawing out emerging themes, drawing links between focus groups, and providing examples to stimulate or deepen discussion in relation to the emerging themes.

The data on identity were elicited by asking each participant to introduce themselves to their focus group members by answering the icebreaker question, how do you identify? This question was included in the design because it was anticipated that the conversation might trigger strong emotion linked to past and ongoing challenges stirred up by the twin events of global pandemic and the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. Strong racial identity has been found to be protective against trauma (Thompson & Carter, 1997).

Data Analysis

Each focus group discussion was transcribed and thematically analyzed following Braun and Clarke (2016) and Terry (2016) methodology. This approach allows for an organic, creative, iterative, and flexible approach to coding and theme development. The iterative process used followed the recommended six steps:

1. Data familiarization
2. Coding
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes and writing up
6. Summary of the client groups served by the participants of each focus group

Table 2: Who They Coach

Focus Groups	Characteristics
U.K. coaches	Corporate C-suite leaders and senior managers, entrepreneurs, and SME leaders Headteachers and CEOs – Primary and secondary sector NHS and charity leaders/managers
U.S. coaches	C-suite executives in leadership Emerging leaders, senior managers, women leaders Government officials Entrepreneurs in the non-profit space Executives and senior managers in large multinational corporate organizations (e.g., financial, oil, retail and pharmaceutical industries) Educators, including university lecturers, school principals, school heads of departments, school management teams. institutional/departmental development Private individuals All coach a mix of genders, ages, occupations, racial and ethnic groups Some focus on making coaching accessible to other people outside corporate
African coaches	C-suite executives in leadership Emerging leaders, senior managers, women leaders Government officials Entrepreneurs in the non-profit space Black or of mixed race with some white clients Executives and senior managers in large multinational corporate organizations (e.g., financial, oil, retail and pharmaceutical industries) Educators, including university lecturers, school principals, school heads of departments, school management teams. institutional/departmental development Private individuals Mix of genders, ages, occupations. Focus on making coaching accessible to other people outside corporate
New Zealand Maori coaches	Professional football/sports executives, coaches, players through media strategies, media operations practitioners, "breakthrough" graduates or aspirational event professionals. M"aori & Pasifika small business owners Staff working with high needs clients in the community Apprentices, youth mentoring, employee motivation & goal setting

Results

It was hypothesized that although structural racism is a global phenomenon, it might not show up in the same way in each context for specific historical reasons. What we found was that despite the geo- graphical differences very strong common themes emerged. The analysis of the data collected from each focus group which discussed the question "What needs to change for the world of coaching to take an antiracist approach?" revealed the myriad of ways in which systemic racism shows up in the lived experience and professional lives of BIPOC.

Four themes emerged from the data, plus recommendations (see Table 3). The writing-up stage produced four thematic maps and a map of the recommendations (not included) and a relational map representing the interpretation of the relationship between the four key themes developed from the data. Saturation was reached by the end of Focus Group 2, whereas each subsequent focus group contributed richness and detail generating new subthemes, no new themes emerged.

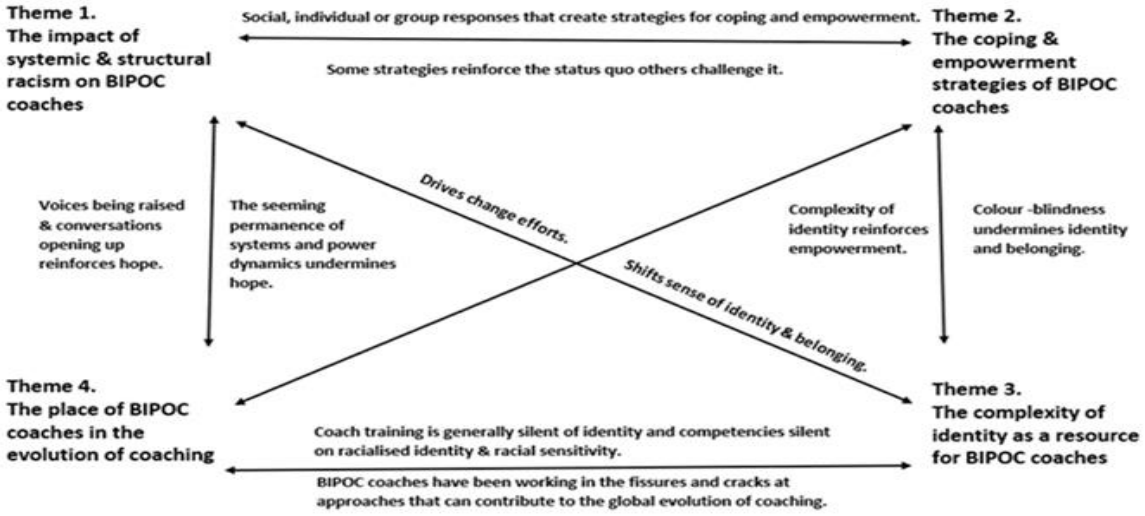
Table 3: Key Themes

1. The emotional and psychological impact of structural and systemic racism on BIPOC coaches. 2. The coping and empowerment strategies developed by BIPOC coaches. 3. The complexity of identity as a resource for BIPOC coaches. 4. The place of BIPOC coaches in the evolution of coaching.

Each focus group was asked to make specific recommendations for change. These are included in the recommendations section of this paper alongside those arising from our analysis of the data.

Figure 1 shows the four themes and the relationships between them. Figure 1 is a representation of the themes and the relationship between them. The recommendations that constitute theme 5 are presented at the end of the article and are not included in Figure 1. Each arrow represents patterns of reciprocity between the themes identified in the analysis as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Model



Arrow A represents the reciprocal relationship between the impacts of systemic racism identified by the coaches and the strategies they developed as a result to help them manage these impacts. Some are empowering and challenge systemic racism, while others promote survival but not thriving.

Arrow B represents the reciprocal relationship between empowerment and the theme of identity. The reciprocal relationship here is that while race consciousness empowers BIPOC coaches, giving them many resources as coaches (such as critical consciousness and awareness of systemic oppression and internalized oppression), color blindness, however, renders these resources invisible in the coaching world.

Arrow C represents the reciprocal relationship between our participant's understanding of the importance of the complexity of identity and how it impacts coaching with the limiting factor that identity is currently largely ignored as a factor in coach training. This reinforces further feelings of invisibility among BIPOC coaches and coachees.

Arrow D represents the reciprocal relationship between marginalization and innovation, in that BIPOC coaches have been inspired to do innovative work because they have been pushed out of the mainstream by their alienation from coaching as a "white space."

Arrow E represents the reciprocal relationship between the impact of systemic racism and the role this plays in forming identity. The reciprocal relationship appears to come

from the interplay between the trauma associated with systemic racism and the resilience required to overcome and heal from trauma. This is a stimulus for the formation of strong racial identity which we interpret as a form of resistance to internalized racism.

Arrow F represents the reciprocal relationship between the coping and empowerment and the place of BIPOC coaches in the evolution of coaching. The reciprocal relationship here is that BIPOC coaches, as suggested by the data we have collected, bring a lens of critical consciousness to their work and this has potential to drive change in mainstream coaching as it responds to the challenge of social movements.

Analysis of the Themes and Their Interrelationship

Theme 1 – The Impact of Systemic and Structural Racism on BIPOC Coaches

The impact of systemic racism on the lived experience and personal and professional life of our participants is the dominant theme in the data set. It is made up of four subthemes and a wide range of underlying ideas, feelings, or desires for change.

Subtheme 1.1: Racial Trauma.

The following representative quotes from each of the focus groups demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between past and present trauma and the immediate and urgent need for this lived experience to be acknowledged. Notably, despite the challenges presented by the lack of acknowledgment the coaches remain willing to work with the discomfort associated with opening conversations about racism. All this underpins this subtheme.

"[This] pain has a long tail to it . . . I do believe in intergenerational wounding . . . . "(UK; P1.1 Black British female coach)

"I really love what you (referring to another focus group participant) talked about in terms of generational trauma . . . I just see the polarization around the debate, especially since George Floyd was killed. It's really important to me to engage with this . . . how can we move forward? How do we honor the intergenerational trauma, and the history and the suffering and all of the rest of it? How do we move the conversation beyond where it is now and stuck?" (UK, P2. 1, British Kashmiri female coach)

This is echoed in the NZ Focus group.

[Participant speaking through tears]). "I do feel the pain of my ancestors". (NZ FG P21.1 Maori, Polynesian, NZ European, Australian European female coach)

The words pain, suffering, trauma, wound, resonate alongside a strong sense of the root causes of these emotion laden experiences which resonate across generations.

"You've got [inter] generational trauma around, you know, certain things that have happened, but essentially. . . how I understood what you're saying around the big issue of colonization, which essentially is where the root stem of a lot of our issues that we have today come from". (NZ FG P21.2 Maori, Polynesian, NZ European, Australian European female coach)

In the following quote from South Africa there is an added emphasis on the need for healing which links back to the quote from P2.1. when she talks about the conversation being stuck.

"What brought me here [to be involved in this research]? My failed relationships with white coaches . . . who just do not want to talk about and deal with the reality of race. My hope [is] for healing the trauma that sits in us from generations before". (South Africa FG; P16.1, Mixed Racial Heritage – Colored, female coach)

Interestingly trauma is not explicitly referenced in the U.S. FG; however, it infuses many of the testimonies and is horribly latent in this quote from participant 7 speaking about why he has volunteered to participate in this research:

"In America black men are certainly the subject (participant emphasis) of the conversation, but rarely leveraged as subject matter expertise around all those things that encounter us as black men . . . so we are subject, we are studied, we are hunted, we are feared and rarely are we intellectually probed" (probed = seen as a source of expertise; USA FG; P7.1 African American/Black, male coach)

When asked what would needs to change for coaching to take an antiracist approach, acknowledgment came very high on the list in all focus group discussions.

"[I]t will take them (the world of coaching) to be explicit about acknowledging what racism is, that it is a global system of hierarchy . . . It would take an explicit acknowledgement of both historic and contemporary resonances and legacy of the history". (UK FG; P3.1 African male coach)

For the following participant acknowledgment is a prerequisite to tackling the legacy of racialization and the power structures that reinforce it.

"Because . . . racism (and) constructs of, you know, the white world and white power and things like that . . . almost breaking it down to the basic levels . . . admitting that these things exist before we can actually even tackle the work that needs to be done". (South Africa FG; P15.1, Cape Malay Colored, female coach)

Existing coaching literature indicates that access to coaches of color is very important for providing emotional support to black and other leaders of color trying to adjust to working in white dominated corporate environments including a study focusing on Black Africans relocating from other countries on the continent to work in South Africa (Khunou, 2019). In addition to Khunou's findings regarding the empathy that Black

coaches can bring, our data would indicate that trauma awareness is a vital element of what BIPOC coaches are bringing to their work with these leaders because they can provide this acknowledgment of the lived experience of the emotional and psychological impacts of systemic racism.

Subtheme 1.2: Exclusion and Its Financial Penalty.

Exclusion from corporate coaching pools shows up in this subtheme as the most visible aspects of structural racism in the coaching industry and while some movement has already been seen in the form of corporate gatekeepers seeking to make these pools more diverse (as reported in Roche, 2021), they remain predominantly white spaces.

"So, the experiences that I have of the corporate is that in most of the panels that I'm on as a coach, I'm out- numbered, you know, 90 to one, you know, I'm one out of many white coaches". (South Africa FG; P13.1, African female coach)

There were no black males in the coaching pool (until he arrived). (U.S.A. FG; P7.2 African American/ Black, male coach)

Participant 5 emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between structural underrepresentation and antiracism as a proactive stance to combat it, linking it also to opening up access and increased representation of BIPOC coaches in the industry.

"It's really important to encourage more people of color to go into the coaching profession, and for them to stay in the coaching profession. It is a very white profession. And lots of people in it would say they're definitely not racist, but I don't see it as an anti-racist profession, and lots of things that happen within it, I think quietly weed out people of color . . . we need to champion people of color coming into and staying in the profession and getting a foothold". (UK FG; P5.1 Indian, female coach)

Subtheme 1.3: Coaching and Coach Training as "White Spaces".

This subtheme reveals how the assumed neutrality in coaching is explicitly connected to "color blindness" which interacts with the attendant subtheme of relational challenges across racial identity lines when viewed through the lens of color blindness.

A participant from Focus group 3 describing her experience of discussing race with a white col- league delivering coach training, says:

"Well, [they said] I don't see color. Well [I respond], you can't not see color, 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 color' because they don't want to explore their discomfort. It's really about tiptoeing around white fragility". (South Africa FG; P16.2, Mixed Racial Heritage – Colored, female coach)

Another participant from the same focus group shares the dehumanizing impact of the practice of needing to be introduced into white corporate spaces by a white colleague which reinforces the ways in which race matters while being denied as in the above example.

"[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 African FG; P13.2 South Africa FG, African female coach.)

In the U.K. a coach talking about the embarrassed silences that follow her challenges to the lack of representation of coaches of color in coaching pools demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between the theme of systemic racism and resistance as a strategy of empowerment (Arrow A in Figure 1):

"I've asked people in big organizations 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 realize 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 FG; P5.2 Indian, female coach)

Drawing attention to the marginalization of BIPOC coaches in white spaces, this testimony also amplifies the relationship we draw later between the lack of BIPOC coaches and the mirror reflection in BIPOC underrepresentation in executive leadership roles.

Another participant makes the point that diversifying white spaces is not enough as a focus for change, inclusion needs to mean more than having a seat at the table. Cultures and systems need to change so that BIPOC can show up with greater authenticity.

"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 color, black people, and people of color present in the industry but aren't bringing their true selves to the industry, but people who are showing up as they really are". (USA FG; P11.1, Black/African American, female coach.)

The following quote demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between Theme 2, coping and empowerment strategies and the drive for change represented by Theme 3 (Arrow F in Figure 1). Note the links to community development and the language of liberation.

"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". (USA FG; P11.2, Black/African American, female coach)

The following extended quotation builds up a complex picture of this interplay between the systemic barriers to diversity and inclusion work being offered by BIPOC coaches, the satisfaction and sense of purpose they get from the work, and the exhaustion that can come from repeatedly working against the grain of structural racism and resistance to change.

And with a Ghanaian woman, "I have been trying to go into organizations and coach talented, non-white people to get them into senior leadership positions . . . it was an interesting foray into what [it is] like to be a non-white coach, going to speak to predominantly white people about brown people and black people . . . it started me thinking about the system of coaching, and what is doing it all points to quietly weed out people who are not white . . . I've been very interested to see who else is also thinking about this as a systemic issue and was interested in forming a community to think about this and to do what we can to influence the system . . . I also feel that because I'm interested in it . . . I can advocate, or I can talk about it. And that way, people see pennies dropping. And interestingly, for me, I've had a lot more excitement for myself in terms of enjoying those conversations and enjoying seeing those light bulbs happening for people. But I also agree that it can be very depressing, doing this stuff, because effectively my non-whiteness is the thing that's on show all the time and it's a subject of conversation . . . So, I'll finish there. I'm seeing lots of nods". (UK FG; P5.3 Indian, female coach)

Subtheme 1.4: Alienation in Coach Training.

This subtheme demonstrated another dimension of the reciprocal relationship between Theme 1 and Theme 4, shown in Figure 1 (Arrow D). Where coach training is not responding the needs of diverse cohorts' coaches are nudged into doing it for themselves, innovating and creating their own programs in collaboration with other BIPOC coaches. It could be said that by so doing they are also beginning to define wider purposes for executive coaching.

"I love coaching, but I noticed pretty quickly, because I was in a program that was run by a white woman with many other white participants that it was (a considered pause that leaves the sentence hanging). I enjoyed the coaching side of things, but it wasn't exactly in line for me culturally, it felt like things were missing. Definitely that benign neutrality, that you mentioned earlier, was present and I noticed it, it was palpable (picking up her previous point before the pause) So to continue with [what I was saying about] the program. I enjoyed it . . . But over the summer, I actually decided myself, and a woman who was in the same program that I was in, to partner to create a program specifically for coaching African Americans . . . We just always felt going through the program we attended, that there was something missing for us that there were things

that were sort of left unsaid and that our needs and the needs of other African Americans weren't necessarily going to be served completely based on the way that we were taught. So, 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". (USA FG; P11.3 Black/African American, female coach.)

Participant 19 reinforces this and so strong is the drive for change here that these quotes could equally appear under theme 4 as under Theme 1 exemplifying the generative rather than retarding or limiting tendencies represented by Arrow D:

"I look at all these academic models, and I kind of am cynical about them . . . I don't think it's necessarily what the academic models, say, as a coach because it does not serve the material reality of oppressed and marginalized peoples". (NZ FG; P19.1, NZ Maori female coach)

To seamlessly connect this continuation to their prior commentary:

"You know, they have, as you say, models. With the world the way it's changing right now with the #metoos and the Black Lives Matter, and all of that, I mean, surely, it's a coach's responsibility . . . . to pass on the ability to see through and to make/not make, judgments and to understand holistically and fully each individual situation". (NZ FG; P19.2, NZ Maori female coach.)

This exchange between two of the U.K. focus group participants reinforces this interpretation.

"John Whitmore who people kind of like, you know, state as the kind of Guru around coaching, whatever, I think we need to sort of almost go back to base one. What, what are we kind of like investing in as coaching? How much of that has been shaped by Western male paradigms? How much of what we accept as the norm? Is it really? And like, you know, we do so much thinking about this, you know, Maslow's hierarchy of needs? Where does race and identity fit in all of that? We talk about self-actualization, but do we talk about other models of self-actualization of other ways of being? It feels to me that almost every- thing that we've accepted (around the) norms (of) coaching comes from a Western paradigm. I'm really questioning a lot of that at this present moment". (P1.1 Black British, female coach)

"I agree in terms of, you know, what is seen as coaching and who writes about coaching and constructs the frameworks. the issue around looking at racism within coaching, within relationships of the coach and that the whole issue is about, you know, when they request a coach, who are the coaches that they are (referred to). What people said early on, about the invisibility of people of color doing coaching, and that added value in terms of being able to navigate the perspectives and support people to find resolutions to what's happening to them in organizations, and that ought to be part of any coaching framework. Again, whatever your role is in an organization, you should understand

about the impact of racism and other forms of oppression. Obviously, in terms of intersectionality . . .." (P4.1 Black British Afro Caribbean, female coach)

The data suggest that the barrier to this happening is the lack of critical consciousness and acknowledgement among the current dominant, mainly "white" establishment. Cocreation across difference, taking an intersectional approach, with professional associations playing a key role, is posited as key to change by participant 2 in the following testimony:

"I feel coaching has a unique position to help move the conversation forward [by] applying the coaching approach to the industry itself, of self-inquiry, looking at your beliefs, all of those things, beliefs, assumptions and taking a real hard honest look . . . like the whole idea of Carl Jung and the shadow self within our- selves within society. [To] ... come up with a language and a framework to start having difficult conversations which we're just not having, and (look at) the inherent biases. Even with coaching, if you think like in terms of like chemistry sessions, or whatever it might be, building rapport, we like to work with people who are similar to us. And what's the inherent bias there? The whole likability factor people [prefer- ring] who look like us. Whatever it might be, it's starting to bring this more out to the fore and looking at the implications . . . and the industry and professional bodies having a hard look at themselves as well, in terms of, you know, some of the blind spots around some of these issues, bringing them to the fore, and have the conversations. That's going to be a co-creative . . . , but I feel they have an important role to play in holding the space and having the conversation and inviting people in". (P2.2, British Kashmiri, female coach.)

Summation.

The weight of this theme indicates that systemic racism does exist in coaching and has very real material and psychological impacts on BIPOC coaches. Some of the impacts are visible (under representation and exclusion), whereas others are less visible but no less harmful (the trauma associated with exclusion and marginalization). A desire for coaching to be actively used as a strategy to promote healing, facilitate conversations across difference comes across strongly; how- ever, this comes with a sense that this also needs an open and explicit acknowledgment of systemic racism as a foundation for progress. When we began our research, no data was collected by professional associations that would enable us to quantify disparities related to race. A survey, conducted in late 2021, of coaches from the United States and United Kingdom revealed that pay differentials also follow the color line, with white coaches being most highly paid, mixed race paid at an intermediate level and black coaches having the lowest average fee incomes: In essence, the whiter you are the more you earn, the darker the less you earn (Passmore, 2021). The fees earned from inclusion in corporate coaching pools are relatively high, it would therefore follow that this exclusion carries a financial penalty for BIPOC coaches

With regard to empowerment our participants experience of tackling systemic racism paradoxically comes across as a strength. It is an important aspect of identity that color

blindness is seen to negate. The skill set they claim corresponds to those detailed by Shoukry (2016) as required by coaches aspiring to coaching for social change. For example, some demonstrate social, cultural, and political awareness. Some show an understanding of whiteness as an ideology and the power of socialization in shaping consciousness and action and notice the lack of this in coach training. The term critical consciousness is mentioned a number of times as crucial in challenging racism. This is translated into action, from the coach challenging the lack of BIPOC coaches in corporate coaching pools to the coaches designing their own programs to fill perceived gaps in provision for BIPOC coachees. These coaches see an expansive purpose for coaching which goes from individual development to liberation and social transformation, this is a source of energy and purpose. Finally, references to the need to develop workplace cultures where BIPOC people can be their authentic self speaks to a move beyond inclusion to belonging as a goal for social change initiatives (Forbes, 2022).

Theme 2 – Coping and Empowerment Strategies Developed by BIPOC Coaches

The coping and empowerment strategies developed by BIPOC coaches are the key features of the data associated with this theme, empowerment as a subtheme shows up more strongly than coping. The significance of this is drawn out in the summation. This theme has two subthemes.

Subtheme 2.1: "The Talk".

This subtheme demonstrates the relationship between Theme 2 and Theme 4. Even though the majority of these coaches do their work with corporate clients, the evidence suggests that they associate the purposes with ideas that challenge or subvert the normative roots of executive coaching, as described by Grant (2016), in performance enhancement and individual workplace wellbeing or satisfaction.

"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". (UK FG, P4.1 Black woman of Caribbean heritage.)

Coaching here is associated with "collective empowerment" and "identity-based meaning and action" (Phillips et al., 2015, p. 375) and thereby, we argue, takes coaching into the realm of social change. This is how participant 10 describes her motivation for coaching BIPOC in organizations reinforcing the idea of empowerment:

"So, my interest in coaching was really in trying to help people of color 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". (USA FG; P10.1, Afro-Latina, female coach)

Subtheme 2.2: "Doing It for themselves".

For the coaches in this study cultural competence and cultural sensitivity, of which there is much already written about in the coaching literature, needs to be integrated with racial literacy and sensitivity. An ability to see race as one part of com- plex identities, not fixed but mobile and emergent, and context specific, is of high importance.

"[P]eople need to really be intentional about developing their cultural intelligence, and the cultural competence, right, which means the ability to read different people, read different cultures, get the contextual setting. But we need to be intentional, and requiring folks to do that, to be able to say I know who I am, for people to be able to see their multiple identities and other people's multiple identities, those are two different things. They need to do both, for coaches who are equipping themselves to develop that as well". (USA FG; P7.3, African American/Black, male coach)

This quote suggests that the coach's professional identity and ethical framework rest on the systemic awareness she uses "intentionally" to "read people" their complex identities and their context (Arrow F in Figure 1). Along with this intentionality comes transparency over purpose. She counter- poses two purposes, system maintenance "stuff" and system change "stuff" thereby exposing a tension exemplified by Arrow C in Figure 1. This tension has been identified in the data analysis as being ethical in nature. She suggests that to be ethical or authentic in one's practice there needs to be transparency of purpose. This reads as a direct challenge to coach neutrality, a norm of current dominant coaching approaches (P7.5).

"If you are doing system maintenance kind of stuff, you need to say that's who I am and where I'm coming from. And here is the limit. . . have that kind of integrity and transparency . . . [you can do that only] if you have those honest authentic capacities and insight to help people understand this change process". (USA FG; P11.4, Black/African American, female coach)

This change process is referred to in her testimony with these words:

"We are all going to be moving to an inclusive and diverse world, it's going to be anti-racist. I am talking about coaching as a social process. It has power in it, you're making a virtue of your behavior in the way you're engaging, you're making a choice and you're having an impact". (USA FG; P11.5, Black/African American, female coach)

Summation.

These coaches' understanding of race appears to empower them. For them, coaching as a social practice is associated with family and traditional interactions that serve as rites of passage into a world experienced as threatening and "dangerous" for black and

brown skinned people. This makes it distinct in their eyes from the focus on individualism and "self-actualization" promoted by mainstream coaching norms. Another dimension of this spirit is echoed and reinforced by the U.S. coach who compares coaching in organizations to "the talk," a phrase with particularly resonance in the U.S. racial context. The quote from participant 4.1, born and brought up in Europe, refers to the difficulty experienced as a migrant going into the corporate cultures of American organizations as a coach and HR professional. What is stark is the connection 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 risks of becoming a black casualty in white corporate spaces.

However, "The talk" would be seen by critical social psychology, as a problem-focused coping mechanism for dealing with oppression, and one of limited effectiveness (Phillips et al., 2015). This is because all the effort is focused on the individual subject to the oppressive practices in the organizational culture. Although this may promote some degree of survival, it may not in the long term promote thriving or address the systems that are the source of the problem. The high rates of attrition among BIPOC middle managers, and a failure to thrive and rise up the ranks, could be seen as evidence to support this analysis.

This theme and its subthemes brings conflicting tensions between all four themes together through direct and indirect reciprocal relationships: because of the reality of racism (Theme 1) our coaches develop coping and empowerment strategies (Theme 2), these strategies are protective against internalization of the trauma leading to reframing their racialized identities as positive and affirming of heritage and culture (Theme 3), and this empowerment pushes BIPOC toward creative solutions that in terms of coaching offer to extend and enrich the professional knowledge and practice (Theme 4).

Theme 3 - The Complexity of Identity as a Resource for BIPOC Coaches

Each focus group began with a recognition of identity and this theme infuses all the other themes abstracted from the data. This reinforces the recognition that grew out of the literature search, in the context of racial trauma, strong racial identity serves as a protective factor. The reciprocal relation- ship indicated by Arrows E and C are demonstrated through the three subthemes that follow:

Subtheme 3.1: Identity as a Resilient Response to Trauma. Racial identity is not an acceptance of race as a biological fact, it is an acceptance, as shown elsewhere in this analysis, of racialization as a historical and ongoing reality. Recognizing and acknowledging this is associated with ideas of justice.

[W]hen it comes down to the complexity of identity something that I have noticed . . . Was the avoidance of race in terms of the practice of it. And a real sort of erasure of that as a component of identity in that race can be a barrier in whatever a client is going through. So, I've noticed that with white [coaching] counterparts . . . It's sort of glossed over, it wasn't talked about, it's something that was ignored. . . . there is no

acknowledgement of . . . there's no real connection to what that means on a deeper level for people, what their lived experience is and how that can impact their ability to make progress, and the things that

they're coming up against, whether it's in the workplace or in their personal life. So, what I've notice in the practice of coaching is that there's almost this desire to see everyone as equal and, you know, every- one has the same access the same opportunities and, sort of like a kumbaya approach to things . . . [As a result] there are unique situations that go largely ignored, whether that's within corporations, or whether that's with one-on-one coaching of clients as well. (USA FG; P9.1, Black, African American, female coach)

The participant testimony suggests that BIPOC coaches, by bringing their positive racial identity to their work with BIPOC coaches have the potential to help them resist "erasure." This sense also infuses the Maori focus group discussion and the quote below gives one window into this dimension of identity and its reciprocal relationship with practices of community wellbeing and resilience.

It's knowing the pathway, it's knowing right back from the roots of where each individual person comes from understanding their story, understanding the picture, and not being judgmental. (NZ FG; P19.3, NZ Maori, female coach)

Building on previous testimony the quotes from the NZ Maori focus group form a powerful picture of resistance and generative feeling and thinking.

Subtheme 3.2 Identity as Resistance. This subtheme interrelates with the of positive racial identity as a resilient response to racism demonstrating the link between identity formation and the drive for change (Arrow F in Figure 1): This quote from the US focus group makes the link between the participant's identity forged in the civil rights movement and the values that resources her as a coach:

I identify as an African American, a black women . . . that's my very deep and grounded identity system [which comes out of] a social change context because I grew up in a civil rights movement family . . . and everything that I have done in terms of . . . moving the pipeline to opportunity structures within society in a way that advantages and supports everyone for thriving. (USA FG; P11.5, Black/African American, female coach)

Subtheme 3.3: Critical Consciousness. Critical consciousness appears to be a strong component of identity and is referred to as a resource, aptitude, or skillset and is another example of the relationship between themes represented by Arrow B in Figure 1. As a resource to BIPOC coaches critical consciousness and the systemic awareness it brings, is born from having to navigate daily the systems and structures of neo-colonialism and systemic racism. Critical Consciousness as a resource, aptitude, or skillset is another example of the relationship between themes represented by Arrow B in Figure 1.

I think the way that I'm bringing this more [into my work is in understanding] There is an individual level [of self] there's a social level, there is an organizational level, there is a collective level of identity. And if we're not focusing on all of those levels, we've got a blind spot. (South Africa FG; P16.3, Mixed Racial Heritage – Colored, female coach)

The language used by participant 16 in the quote above is one of many in the data that resounds with a sense of commitment to uplifting themselves and their communities, writing their own futures rather than waiting for concessions. There was a vital generative force in the conversations.

Summation. Empowerment as a subtheme is stronger in the data than coping strategies. Although no generalizations can be drawn from this to all BIPOC coaches in the industry, our sample of participants come across as resourceful, creative, and resilient. However, they also express with clarity the structures, practices, attitudes, and assumptions that undermine thriving. They identify avoidance of issues related to race, as collusive with systemic racism. It is also suggested that coaching as a space to acknowledge and talk about historical, intergenerational trauma is important. The Maori testimonies feature strongly in this theme speaking to their experience of marginalization, and

discrimination as a result of settler colonialism. For the Maori, the deep and extended sense of family with its strong spiritual dimension means that practices of "erasure" have historically cut indigenous people off from the cultural practices that form their community bond, their sense of wholeness and belonging (Fast, 2010). Coaching is seen as one way in which people can be reconnected to what has been submerged or lost. The link to socio-political and historical processes and events, and an under-standing of the psychology of oppression is strong in this theme. This adds to the sense already emerging that a high level of systemic awareness is a key feature of the way of being for these coaches in their work.

Theme 4 – The Place of BIPOC Coaches in the Evolution of Coaching

A strong generative force infuses the fourth theme which demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between the impacts of systemic racism, identity as a resource and the place of BIPOC coaches in the evolution of coaching (Arrows C and D in Figure 1). Each of the two subthemes gives testimony to this.

Subtheme 4.1: Pioneers. As a culmination of the analytical process theme four resonates with creative energy in ways that was clear in each focus group. However, as with the other themes there are limiting tensions that come from the reciprocal relationship between themes 4 and 1 exemplified by Arrow D in Figure 1. In the U.K. focus group, the coaches very much saw themselves as excluded from corporate spaces and as a result were inspired to create their own initiatives, pro- grams, and businesses to do their work.

In a sense we are often pioneers. Which is quite hard, I think, and I find it quite depressing and a lonely place to be. (UK FG; P5.4 Indian, female coach)

The above is participant 5, who earlier spoke about her attempts to set up a business run by BIPOC coaches offering a service for BIPOC coachees seeking to break through the glass ceiling in cooperate workplaces. She was relying on being hired into the organization and found her pioneering work fell on fallow ground, she ended up having to close her business. Following this she now focuses on associate work within the many businesses springing up to meet the demand for BIPOC coaches, in particular, working at the intersection of gender and race with BIPOC women seeking to break through the glass ceiling into leadership. It was not clear from her contribution whether these companies were owned by BIPOC.

Another coach working freelance took yet another approach:

I've created myself a bit of a niche working with SMEs, which are led by women . . . Many women experience trauma, severe challenges from men who are funders, or stakeholders or managers stuff . . . that men don't experience. I believe I [can] offer them ways of navigating that while remaining true to their vision for their businesses . . . I've cheated a bit . . . I've carved out a bit of a niche for myself working with women entrepreneurs and leaders of SME's. My starting point in working with them has always been but they will have experienced challenges that men don't, and that if they are black, which many of them are, they will experience challenges but white people don't, and that if they want to realize the same benefits they would if they were men they need to be explicit about acknowledging that and explicit about how they navigate that in terms of their own particular circumstances and priorities. (UK FG; P3.3 African male coach)

His approach may have been more successful because he did not have to go through a white gatekeeper to reach his coaching cohort, as participant 5 above had to. Participant 3 described the creation of this niche as a form of "cheating" because to him his work implied stepping away from coach neutrality. This is also an example of a male coach working at the intersection of gender and race. Acknowledging the intersection of gender and race and the associated trauma is key to this coach's approach. We could speculate that this might increasingly become a growth market for BIPOC coaches as coaching is put into service by organizations stepping up to the challenge of the need to meet the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB) agenda.

Subtheme 4.2: Finding a Voice. This subtheme brings together testimonies that demonstrate ways in which coaches are finding ways, in their practice, to forge new directions and challenge in- equality (client focused) and normative assumptions embedded in coaching practice.

A U.K. coach is contracting with her clients to leverage coaching in service of addressing the structural and systemic practices that drives the underperformance of

black pupils within education and as such is finding her voice in a strand of the data analysis that shows up the reciprocal relation- ship between Themes 1, 2, and 4.

93% of our school workforce particular leaders are white male. So, if white men have been ringing me to inquire about our services, particularly around coaching conversations around race, I've been quite blunt to be honest. And I've kind of said, you have to do the work, you have to bear responsibility for where we are now, and I have no qualms about being blunt and open about it. (UK FG; P1.2 Black British, female coach, UK)

In pushing the boundaries when contracting this coach gives herself the scope and agency to challenge those in power and authority in systems, like education, that are dominated by patterns of discrimination and exclusion, she is demonstrating the reciprocal relationship between the empowerment strategies emerging from her resistance to aspects of systemic racism, and the potential for challenging neutrality in coaching as an evolution in coaching practice (Arrows A and F).

Where I have been in a coaching relationship [a] white school leader, [because] they've put themselves in that position with me, because they've said they wanted to have the conversation . . . it's been a very deep and moving process, because I've really been able to challenge them about their own sense of agency as a white school leader in the sense of being whole and self-actualized. How can you be if you're in . . . fear about how to have the race conversation, of course I'm not as blunt [with them] as I'm being now. I'm asking coaching questions, but my coaching questions are all in that line around actually . . . it's a lie that you have let yourself believe that you are whole, that you're self-actualized, because you are at the top of the chain, far from it. (UK FG; P1.3 Black British, female coach)

A coach in the United States describes herself as a rebel, challenging the role that coaching and coaches can play in sustaining the status quo.

[As] the HR rebel I've always challenge systems that said, I want you to fit in. And I challenge people that it's really not about culture fit, it's about culture add, it's about your culture bringing something additional to your organization . . . that could benefit the environment that's changing around you. Some coaches tend to coach people around the best way to fit in . . . if you're going to change the dynamic off, you know, racism and coaching, we have to not necessarily coach people on how to fit . . . in a way that is positively disruptive.

Summation. This theme builds a picture of our participants as pioneers in the field of coaching revealing where we feel this research is charting new territory. The research promises to open up debate, leading the way in redefining executive coaching as more wholistic, humanizing, and supportive of equity and social justice, not merely focused narrowly on performativity and work- based wellbeing and satisfaction. However, this exists in a tension with the feelings of loneliness that comes with marginalization as coaches push against a myriad of structural barriers. The urgency for change, therefore,

has a dual character. By actively removing systemic barriers to full inclusion more space is made for the energy that drives the creativity the coaches in our study offer to bring the role coaching may serve in addressing social inequalities and inequity. We attempt to assess the prospects for significant and lasting change based on our analysis of the data in the next section.

Discussion

When asked what needs to change for the world of coaching to adopt an antiracist approach, participants in this research provided responses that challenge the current structures of power and dominance in coaching. The accounts given echo Christian's (2019) identification of "racist structure and racist ideology shaped by the history and current forms of transnational racialization" and the "production of deep and malleable whiteness" (p. 169). The concept of deep and malleable white- ness speaks to the history of how structural racism has evolved in more and more subtle forms to preserve the status quo. Color blindness has already been explained as one such evolution.

We are not suggesting that coaches or the coaching industry are consciously racist. Instead, we argue that the coaching industry in historically adopting a color blind approach to the issue of race, fails to acknowledge or challenge the reality and impacts of systemic racism (West, Greenland, & van Laar, 2021). As such it has bought into the myth of a post racial dispensation (post–Civil Rights United States, post-Apartheid South Africa, post equal rights legislation across Europe and the United Kingdom), which renders the industry and coaches who subscribe to the egalitarian myth that color does not matter blind to the very real impacts of racism as it affects coaches and coachees. As a result, we believe, it sends confusing messages because the reality as experienced by coaches', conflicts with this color blind position. Our findings suggest that the coaching profession, and the industry it serves, needs to begin with an acknowledgment of this reality to support clarity and integrity across the profession. The industry may then follow.

The racist structures in coaching are seen in the issues of representation and exclusion as well as in the training and credentialing of coaches which establish some of the dominant norms of coaching. Ideology and structure are interlinked since the former evolves to keep the latter in place. Color blindness as an ideology is subtle and indirect in that it hides systemic racism beneath a veneer of equality and neutrality on issues to do with race. However, since the period marked by the murder of George Floyd and the ongoing pandemic, many coaching associations have adopted the language of diversity and inclusion, added images to their websites which reflect this and are actively seeking to make BIPOC coaches more visible in their training offers, conferences and panels, as well as hosting discussions about racism. Vision statements and hashtags are proliferating. However, what we have not yet seen at the time of writing is any overt acknowledgment of the systemic racism in coaching.

The reference in the analysis to subtle practices of erasure, and a lack of acknowledgment of systemic racism are all presented by our participants as

symptomatic of color blindness in coaching. The concept of erasure and its associations is another aspect of the literature on race and antiracism that is evoked by the language our participants use in discussing their experiences within the context of how systemic racism shows up in coaching. It is an erasure of colonialism and its legacy of the systemic nature of racism, reducing it to the personal attitudes and bigotry of individuals, and an erasure of the tradition of antiracist activism reframing it as a form of oppression (a la Trump's narrative against ANTIFA—the American antifascist/antiracist movement as being reverse racism against White people) and scholarship. These accumulating erasures in wider society serve to deprive those who wish to take an antiracist stance of hope and agency (Christian, 2019; Fekete, 2020; Lentin, 2008) if they are allowed to pass unchallenged. The challenge is being clearly made to coaching through the voices BIPOC participants in this study.

Our participant's testimonies problematize the current focus on inclusion and diversity which does nothing to challenge the dominant discourse which centers "whiteness" as the domain from which BIPOC are excluded and therefore into which they can (or not) be granted greater access. Our participants identify whiteness itself as an oppressive context which needs to be de-centered. Their views about the roots and purposes of coaching as serving social and collective needs are at direct odds with the dominant language of personal fulfilment, enhanced performance, goal attainment, and individual well- being that dominates executive and life coaching as a western construct. Where executive coaching has served "social" needs, these have been the needs of business, organizational effectiveness, and efficiency (Grant, 2016). BIPOC participants in this study posit a very different vision, from community empowerment as particularly highlighted by our Maori participants, to the removal of systemic barriers to progress for BIPOC in wider society and the workplace as amplified by our South African, Kenyan, and U.K. participants. In so doing they draw on theories of identity formation very different from the individualistic, western psychological models of self-formation isolated from social and historical factors. It is recognized in the antiracism literature that "new forms of identity and belonging take shape which challenge racism and inequality" (Samanani, 2019, p. 7) foregrounding the power dynamics that keep structural racism in place is necessary for resistance (Bocala & Holman, 2021). The reduction of

systemic racism to the sphere of individual morality by over psychologizing it and thereby downplaying "racialized power" (Christian, 2019).

The concept of belonging as a measure of change emerged from the focus groups. BIPOC desire more than extra seats at the table; the table itself needs to be redesigned, and possibly the whole building. They have at least equal gifts to offer in the process of cocreation and possess greater awareness of the systems and practices that require disruption and redesign by virtue of having to navigate them daily. Coaching in this way becomes associated with "collective empowerment" and "identity-based meaning and action" (Phillips et al., 2015, p. 375) and thereby, we argue, take coaching into the realm of social change toward equity. These coaches' understanding of racism empowers them as actors who can foreground and disrupt the normalization of whiteness and its underlying structures of power.

Critical consciousness (Tapela & le Sueur, 2018; Roche & Passmore, 2021; Shoukry, 2016) is seen as key to antiracist work which challenges the status quo and is precisely what these coaches have to offer in terms of extending or revolutionizing the models and coaching approaches in ways that would make the process more meaningful and effective for BIPOC coachees. Because coaching is predominantly color blind in its approach to difference it is not able to comfortably navigate the history and presence of trauma that has contributed to the identities and coping and empowerment strategies of black coaches; we can speculate that the same may apply to the coaching of BIPOC leaders in the work- place. Silence about racism is associated with both prolonging and intensifying the trauma generated by racialization and the injustices associated with it, (Castagno, 2008). For those coachees who need this lens, access to BIPOC coaches who see it and can work with it is essential. In this sense diversification of coaching pools is essential but equally essential is a shift in the purpose of that coaching.

We conclude that to become antiracist, coaching needs to be more aligned to social change and equity rather than to a focus on helping coachees fit into existing systems. This adaptation can be experienced as a form of "whitening" (Christian, 2019) by BIPOC, designed to make them acceptable in cultures that seek to erase them. Coaching institutions need to be open to different perspectives through recruiting diverse faculty into training organizations, coaching pools, and leadership positions across coaching professional bodies with the power to shape and influence the form, con- tent, and cultures within which they and others work. BIPOC coaches too can embrace their role as pioneers and blaze a trail for others to follow, which includes engaging in research that extends the current boundaries of theory and practice in coaching.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn directly from the focus group discussions and are set out under four broad headings: acknowledgment and recognition, addressing underrepresentation, decolonizing the coaching curriculum, and defining and elaborating coaching for racial equity and social justice.

Acknowledgment and Recognition

Recognizing the importance our participants placed on an explicit acknowledgment of systemic racism in coaching as the beginning of a healing process we recommend:

1.1: An acknowledgment of the presence of systems and structures that effectively marginalize and exclude BIPOC within the coaching industry. This means that Diversity and Inclusion statements go beyond addressing individual coach responsibility for change to the responsibilities of leaders and managers across the coaching ecosystem.

Recognizing the Importance Placed by Our Participants on the Co-Creation of New/ Other Ways of Knowing how to Be a Coach We Recommend

1.2: Coaching organizations and their leaders commit to drawing on the expertise of BIPOC and other race conscious, social justice-oriented thought leaders and practitioners to develop a comprehensive vision and strategy to create racial justice, equity and belonging within the industry. To create a culture of transparency and accountability by publishing plans with specific milestones and progress updates against those milestones.

Improving Representation

Recognizing the current gaps in data collection highlighted by our literature review, we recommend: 2.1: Representation loomed large as an issue for our research participants. Without the data to give an accurate picture of the diversity of the professional it is impossible to respond meaningfully to demands for increased representation. We therefore recommend that professional associations and training institutions collect data on the diversity of their membership/student demographic and monitor this over time, taking action to create an inclusive and balanced community reflecting the population of the geographical areas in which they are based. Such data will also serve to target programs that will attract and retain coaches looking to enter the industry to provide services to communities that currently do not look to coaching for development. Recognizing the issue raised by our participants about the under representation of BIPOC in coaching pools we recommend:

2.2: Coach service providers engage in a process of review of recruitment to identify policies

and practices which may be unconsciously biased against talented individuals from diverse back- grounds and those specifically affected by systemic social exclusion based on class, race, gender, sexuality, physical ability, and neurodiversity and make relevant changes. Coach service providers can then meaningfully aim to employ more BIPOC associates and employees to address the growing call for access to a more diverse coaching pool and to promote racial justice as part of corporate social responsibility and sustainability agendas.

Decolonizing the Coaching Curriculum

Recognizing the findings that indicate the need to diversify what counts as coaching knowledge, in particular the importance of identity and the de-centering of Western approaches, we recommend:

3.1: Coach training institutions recruit more BIPOC subject experts to support program development that adds diverse perspectives including how racialization and other types of stereotyping affects the complexity of identity, bringing the lived experience of systemic inequality and systemic racism, to promote critical awareness, understanding and empathy among coach trainees.

3.2: Coach training institutions involve BIPOC subject experts in developing curriculum con- tent that integrate an understanding of racial identity theory, and trauma awareness (covering all forms of racial identity including white) into coach training as it is already used in the training of therapists, counsellors, psychologists, and supervisors within these professions to create coaching and coach supervision specific models of racial awareness training alongside gender, sexuality, ability, neurodiversity, and class.

Coaching for Social Change

Recognizing the findings that coaching is being called to serve wider purposes than improved performance and individual wellbeing or individual satisfaction in the workplace, we recommend:

4.1: BIPOC subject experts and established coach training institutions seek to provide coach training programs that speak to the social change aspirations expressed by the BIPOC coaches in this study; to meet the needs and aspirations of those who are disadvantaged and discriminated against by the systemic inequalities in society, including systemic racism, to attract a more diverse student cohort, and to speak more directly to the needs of BIPOC communities.

4.2: Much more research is needed to advance the aspirations expressed in this research by our participants for coaching to address antiracism and social justice. We encourage BIPOC coaches to engage in expanding and developing the ethics, philosophy, methods, tools, and techniques aligned with this purpose.

Research Limitations

Research Question

The phrasing of the research question was designed to attract participants with a particular view on the subject of race as it pertains to a contemporary debate taking within the coaching community. This could be regarded as a limitation to the range of views available to the researchers.

Research Sample

The sample could be regarded as having an inherent bias because of its focus on BIPOC coaches. Given that the research focus was to hear from the voices of the marginalized and excluded the choice of sample is internally consistent with the aims of the research.

Research Method

Qualitative research of this kind is not designed to produce findings that are generalizable across all applicable contexts and it is not claiming to be representative of the views of all BIPOC coaches. Further research would have to be conducted to

ascertain how widespread such views might be. However, the data collected does confirm existing theoretical and empirical studies concerning the nature and impacts of systemic racism.

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