

Soccer industry continues to marginalize ethnically diverse coaches

November 15 2022



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A new study has found that the language and terminology used in the soccer industry about race can reinforce, rather than eliminate, feelings of marginalization.

Researchers from Bournemouth University, University of Herfordshire and the University of Portsmouth carried out interviews with female

soccer coaches from a variety of backgrounds. Their findings, published in the journal *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, revealed the frustration and distress that can be caused by the BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) acronym.

Although the acronym was seen as preferable to overtly racist terms, the feeling from the coaches was that it caused discomfort and needed a grudging acceptance and "thick skin."

Many of the frustrations stemmed from the fact the acronym failed to reflect who they are as individuals and is used as a collective identity for anyone who is not white.

The researchers say this finding highlights that far from being color-blind, sports continues to highlight difference and to reinforce racial hierarchies.

It is common practice for soccer organizations to make use of positive action measures with an aim of reducing [racial inequality](#) but appointments based on race can reinforce racial power dynamics and leave underlying issues unaddressed.

Some of the coaches in this study spoke of fears about being recruited to "make up quotas" or "tick the right boxes," describing how this could impact on their sense of belonging in a job. The study team conclude that this reinforces the power base of the dominant groups that usually make these decisions, with access to employment positions and influence still controlled by [white males](#), even when, for all appearances, steps are being taken to address inequalities.

Lead author, Dr. Keith D. Parry, head of sports and event management at Bournemouth University, said, "Notions of Whiteness remain embedded in [football](#) [[soccer](#)], creating challenges for employees from

diverse backgrounds, particularly when they are women. Without either change to the current structures or to the culture of the organizations these issues will persist. Our findings provide another example of the need for work on racial equality in football.

"The study also found that tick boxes asking individuals to identify their ethnicity were a further source of distress. Rather, individuals should be able to describe their heritage and background to reflect the beautiful complexity that is present in a multicultural society."

Co-author Dr. Emma Kavanagh, senior lecturer in sports psychology and coaching sciences at Bournemouth University, added, "We recommend that the Football Association reflects on its use of language and recognizes that using classification systems and labeling individuals on the basis of their ethnicity can be deeply upsetting. It is time to reconsider the adoption of the BAME acronym and also the use of 'tick boxes' for ethnicity classification purposes."

More information: Keith D Parry et al, Ticking the right boxes: A critical examination of the perceptions and attitudes towards the black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) acronym in the UK, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/10126902221132802](https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902221132802)

Provided by Bournemouth University

Citation: Soccer industry continues to marginalize ethnically diverse coaches (2022, November 15) retrieved 18 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-11-soccer-industry-marginalize-ethnically-diverse.html>

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