The under-representation and experiences of elite level minority coaches in professional football in England, France and the Netherlands [presentation]

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The under-representation and experiences of elite level minority coaches in professional football in England, France and the Netherlands

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The context

- Sport popularly perceived as a ‘post-racial’, meritocratic, egalitarian space
  - ‘Race’ no longer matters, racial inequalities a thing of the past
    - ‘evidenced’ in achievements of high profile minority sports stars

- Sport not divorced from social, cultural, political contexts
  - Reflective of and reflects back on racialized power relations
    - development, organisation, practice of sport a ‘racial formation’ (Carrington 2009)

- Sport as a site of multiple racisms and receptive to/productive of racial meanings
  - Impact of different minorities, in different ways, across different levels of sport
    - minority experiences of sports mediated by racisms (Long et al 2009, Hylton 2010)

- Relevance to professional football and ‘race’ in Western Europe
  - Minimal throughput of minority players (25%) into coaching (4%), leadership (1%)
    - minorities as ‘fit for doing’ but not ‘fit for organising’ football (Bradbury et al 2016)
The study

- Research aims
  - To examine the key factors which have enabled or constrained the progression of minorities across the transition from playing to coaching in the professional game
    - Processes, practices and experiences of coach education and coach employment

- Research methods
  - Semi-structured interviews with elite level minority coaches in England, France, Netherlands (n=40)

- Research participants
  - Range of diverse, but, targeted, demographic, playing, coaching backgrounds

- Research findings
  - Full account provided in:
The findings

1. Limited access to and negative experiences of high level coach education

Factors:

- Minorities positioned outside of ‘insider’ football networks
  - Outside employment and marginalised within culturally narrow club environments
    - Limited opportunities for identification, selection, mentoring, financial support for HLCE

- Intentional and unintentional racisms amongst coach educators and ex-players
  - Subtle, nuanced, codified racisms and racially inequitable treatment
    - Heightened cultural isolation, additional pressures: confidence, competence, acceptance

Impact:

- Slowed the pace of developmental progression of minorities
  - ‘Catch-up’ (achieving qualifications) and ‘catch 22’ (qualifications and experiences)
    - Competitive disadvantage against white peers in coaching marketplace
The findings

2. Racisms and stereotypes within the professional coaching workplace

Factors:

- Continued existence of subtle, nuanced, codified racisms
  - Inappropriate language/behaviours/interactions and racially inequitable treatment
    - Processes of racialised ‘othering’ and professional/cultural marginalisation

- Continued existence of racialised stereotypes amongst key power brokers
  - ‘Unproblematic’ transference of misplaced assumptions from playing to coaching
    - Question aspirations, attitudes, behaviours, intellect, suitability, authority, competence

Impact:

- Focus on assumed ‘racial self’ rather than actual ‘professional self’ of minorities
  - Minorities framed in terms of ‘risk’ and ‘uncertainty’ by decision makers
    - Fall back on ‘safety option’ of White coaches – cultural familiarity and social comfort
3. Over-reliance on networks based methods of coach recruitment

Factors:

- Limited operation of open, qualifications based, framework for recruitment
  - Recruitment based on personal recommendation, sponsored mobility, patronage

- Cumulative impact of stereotypes, centrality, and ‘captain to coach’ pathways
  - Opportunities to exhibit leadership skills, and build contacts with key power brokers

- Unconscious racial bias of sports media, frame appointments in ‘white’ terms
  - Focus on assumed merits of white coaches, minorities absent from narratives

Impact:

- Minorities positioned outside consciousness/preferences of key power brokers
  - Tendency to recruit ‘known’ coaches within white social/cultural insider networks
    - Minority coaches fewer opportunities, peripheral to professional coaching workplace
The conclusions

- Multifarious application and experience of racisms and racialised exclusions
  - Different racisms, different ways, different contexts, different stages of career
    - Shifting shape/scope of racisms/stereotypes, diverse cultural identities, playing histories

- Individual and systemic bias constitute a form of institutional racism
  - Mostly unintentional, unconscious, ‘embodied’, but deeply negative outcomes
    - Limiting career progression and maintaining low levels of minority coaches

- Institutional racism underpinned by hegemonic whiteness
  - Whiteness positioned as optimal status criterion in examination of ‘race’ and racism
    - Sport reflective of/reflects power relations, receptive to/productive of racial meanings
    - E.g., definitional/relational power to problematize/overlook abilities of minorities

- Power of whiteness: frames white privilege as cultural norm
  - Lack of critical self-reflection as to beneficial membership of white networks
    - Under-rep as result of societal exclusions, not everyday practices of dominant groups
    - E.g., institutionally closed recruitment practices, reproduction of racialised power relations
Thank-you for listening

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