

****Coaching and leadership and the underrepresentation of minoritized coaches****

Article: Bradbury, Van Sterkenburg & Mignon (2018). The under-representation and experiences of elite level minority coaches in professional football in England, France and the Netherlands. International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 53, 313-334

Link: [The under-representation and experiences of elite level minority coaches in professional football in England, France and the Netherlands - Steven Bradbury, Jacco van Sterkenburg, Patrick Mignon, 2018](#)

Aim and method. Despite increasing diversity among players, professional football in England, France, and the Netherlands remains overwhelmingly White at the coaching level. This research aimed to understand the barriers preventing talented minority coaches from progressing in their careers. The researchers interviewed 40 coaches from diverse ethnic backgrounds in England, France, and the Netherlands, who had experience playing and/or coaching professionally, exploring their experiences with training, racism, and the overall professional environment.

Key findings. The study revealed three key obstacles for minoritized coaches to climb the ladder. First, they often face difficulties accessing high-quality coach training programs, sometimes due to financial constraints or lack of connections. Second, many reported experiencing both overt and subtle forms of racism in the workplace, including being overlooked or treated with suspicion. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, clubs frequently rely on personal networks – ‘who you know’ – rather than qualifications when hiring, effectively excluding those outside of established circles. This reliance on existing networks perpetuates a cycle of exclusion, favoring White coaches and their support staff. Underlying these issues are broader patterns of racial inequality and the dominance of White culture within the sport, including biases in team dynamics and media representations. The research highlights the systemic nature of the problem, showing that it’s not simply about individual instances of discrimination, but about deeply ingrained structures that disadvantage minoritized coaches. Understanding these barriers is crucial for creating a more equitable and inclusive sport. Addressing the problem requires proactive change, according to the researchers; Football organizations need to actively dismantle structural and cultural barriers, promote diversity, and implement policies like the ‘Rooney Rule’ to ensure fair consideration of minority candidates.

Limitations. One of the limitations of the study is that it included only male coaches, meaning the findings may not fully represent the experiences of all minoritized coaches, particularly women. The researchers, being White themselves, also acknowledge that their perspective may have influenced how the data were interpreted. Findings don’t offer a single ‘truth’, but they do provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by minoritized coaches striving for success in professional football.