

**** Football coaching and leadership: Experiences of minoritized coaches ****

Article. Bradbury & Conricode (2025). Racialisation and the inequitable experiences of racialised minority coaches in men's professional football club youth academies in England.

International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 60, 251277

Link: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690224126661>

Aim. Professional football in England prides itself on being a diverse sport, but a recent body of research reveals a significant problem behind the scenes: a lack of representation of minoritized ethnic coaches in key positions within youth academies. This isn't simply a matter of individual talent or merit; the research points to deeply ingrained racial biases and systemic inequalities that hold back qualified coaches from Black, South Asian, and mixed-heritage backgrounds.

Methods. Researchers interviewed coaches and academy managers, using a framework of Critical Race Theory to understand how racism operates within these institutions.

Key findings. While some managers believe the system is fair, many minoritized ethnic coaches experience subtle yet damaging discrimination. These coaches are often stereotyped – seen as physically gifted but lacking the strategic thinking or leadership skills needed for advancement. White coaching is often unconsciously seen as the 'norm', against which minoritized ethnic coaches are unfairly judged. Some managers even expressed doubts about the suitability of South Asian coaches, based on cultural assumptions. This leads to minoritized ethnic coaches being concentrated in lower-level roles with limited opportunities to progress. Diversity initiatives, when they exist, sometimes focus on how minoritized coaches can 'benefit' the academy, rather than ensuring equal opportunities.

This matters because it perpetuates a lack of diversity at the highest levels of the sport, denying talented individuals the chance to reach their full potential. It also means that football is missing out on the valuable perspectives and experiences that a more diverse coaching staff could bring. Addressing these issues isn't just about fairness; it's about improving the sport as a whole.

Limitations. The research focused specifically on men's professional football club youth academies in England, so the findings may not apply to other sports or countries. Still, the consistent themes emerging from the interviews strongly suggest that systemic change is needed to create a truly inclusive and equitable environment for all football coaches.