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Racialisation and the inequitable experiences of racialised minority coaches in men's professional football club youth academies in England

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Abstract

This article offers an empirical and theoretical examination of racialisation and the inequitable experiences of racialised minority coaches in men's professional football club youth academies in England. More specifically, it examines the ways in which the normative application of racialised ideologies, discourses and practices has engendered some inequitable interactions, representations, evaluations and outcomes for racialised minority coaches in the sports coaching context under review. In doing so, it draws on semi-structured interviews with racialised minority academy coaches ($n = 26$) and academy managers ($n = 10$) from dominant and marginalised ethnicities to ascertain their experiences and reflections on four inter-related areas of focus: firstly, club academies as racialised spaces; secondly, club academies and racialised stereotypes; thirdly, club academies and racialised assessments; fourthly, club academies and racialised outcomes. The article contextualises these findings from a Critical Race Theory perspective and draws clear linkages between the processes, experiences and outcomes of racialisation in club academies, and the ideological, definitional and discursive power of whiteness and racialised meaning making embedded in elite sports coaching contexts more broadly. The article concludes by outlining some operational implications for club academies and proposed educational activities designed to challenge racialised assumptions and encourage stronger cultural reflection amongst club academy staff.

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Introduction: Racialisation, elite sports, and sports coaching

The social and cultural arena of elite-level professional sport (hereafter referred to as elite sport) is often held up in public and mediated discourse as a post-racial, meritocratic and egalitarian space where 'race' no longer matters and racialised inequities are a thing of the past (Carrington, 2010; Hartmann, 2000). Such popular assumptions draw heavily on the successful endeavours of high profile sports performers from racialised minority[1] backgrounds, and are often posited as evidence of the inclusivity of elite sport systems. However, it has been argued by some critical scholars that neoliberalist narratives of this kind promulgate the apolitical, meritocratic and integrative myth of sporting modernity, and overplay the extent to which opportunities, experiences and outcomes for racialised minority groups remain unencumbered by wider limits and pressures (Bradbury et al., 2021; Carrington, 2010; Van Sterkenburg et al., 2019). From this more critical perspective, the organisation and practice of elite sport is understood to be informed by a series of historically inscribed and racialised power relations embedded in the societies in which it takes place (Carrington, 2010), and which have become manifest at the macro (societal), meso (organisational) and micro (individual) level (Cunningham, 2021).

From this more critical perspective, elite sport is also a site in which a multiplicity of systemic, institutional and inter-personal racism impinges upon and is generated by its practice and encounters (Bradbury, 2013; Hylton, 2009). In particular, at the micro level, through the subtle enactment of racialised microaggressions embedded in everyday interactions between people from dominant and marginalised ethnicities. For Sue et al., racialised microaggressions constitute '*brief and commonplace daily behavioural and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or groups*' (Sue et al., 2007: 273). Such microaggressions have been argued to be conveyed and experienced in different ways as microassaults, microinsults and microinvalidations, and to impact negatively on the psychological well-being and lived experiences of racialised minority groups across a range of societal and sporting contexts (Burdsey, 2011; Hylton, 2016; Sue and Spanierman, 2020). They have also been argued to reflect and sustain more systemic forms of racism and hierarchical systems of racialised oppression at a societal level (Perez Huber and Solorzano, 2015; Skinner-Dorkenoo et al., 2021). For some scholars, whilst racisms of this kind differ in their character and intent, they nonetheless shape the parameters of racialised inclusion and exclusion in comparable and different ways for differently racialised minority groups and have become normalised to the point of invisibility in elite sports contexts over time (Bradbury, 2013; Hylton, 2009).

In this respect, elite sport can also be understood as a 'racial formation' within which racialised structures, ideologies and knowledge have become (re)articulated and (re)produced, and where socio-historical processes of racialised categorisation have been created, inhabited, negotiated and contested over time (Carrington, 2010; Omi and

Winant, 2002). From this perspective, elite sport is constitutive of a series of historically situated 'racial projects' within which structures, discourses, populations and spaces have become racialised, and in such ways as to privilege dominant white groups and disadvantage racialised minority groups (Hylton, 2009). Assertions as to the racialisation of the elite sports landscape draw on anti-realist conceptualisations which posit that 'race' as a socially constructed (rather than biological) category is informed by white situated processes of meaning making and representation (Blum, 2020; Garcia, 2003; Hochman, 2019). Such processes have been argued to have led to the '*signification of human biological characteristics in such ways as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities*' (Miles, 1989:5), and the structuring of social relations along racial, ethnic and cultural lines. For some scholars, this has resulted in the tiered allocation of racialised social status and limited opportunities for racialised minority groups to gain access, acceptance and reward in societal and sporting domains (Burdsey, 2007; Harrison, 2013; Hochman, 2020).

Central to the racialisation of elite sports has been the historical production and application of pseudo-scientific and popular(ist) narratives that purport to the notion of 'race logic', and which offer an essentialist account of real and perceived differences in the athletic propensities and character traits of sports performers from differently racialised backgrounds (Hylton, 2019; McDonald, 2016; St Louis, 2004). In this respect, elite sport is a prime site in which '*the history of racial thinking is being piled up in the present*' (Back et al., 2001:5) and where the inscription of social meanings at the bodily and cultural level has enabled the production and reaffirmation of racialised ideologies and beliefs to persist over time (Hextrum, 2020a). For some scholars, this has been enacted through a process of 'white racial framing' whereby dominant white groups draw on collective memories, histories and experiences to make sense of issues pertaining to racial matters, and offer a series of white situated 'sincere fictions' to rationalise racialised inequities in societal and sporting domains (Feagin, 2010; Burdsey, 2014).

Relatedly, Hylton (2019) draws on Fields and Fields (2012) notion of 'racecraft' to illustrate the ways in which the relationship between racialised ideas, discourse and practice maintains some resilience and continues to be operationalised in elite sports settings, whilst simultaneously obfuscating the racialised systems of oppression which inform and sustain them. In particular, through the utilisation of racialised stereotypes and the cultural 'othering' of racialised minority groups against unquestioned white norms and standards. For some scholars, whilst the cognitive activation and application of racialised stereotypes can be both conscious and unconscious, they nonetheless reduce the myriad idiosyncrasies of diverse individuals into simple representational units (Devine, 1989). Further, such stereotypes have been argued to sustain a series of hierarchy enhancing legitimising myths which accord less value and social worth to racialised minority groups (Sidanius and Pratto, 2001).

More specifically, for some scholars, racialised stereotypes in elite sports have been constructed and naturalised through mediated discourse and representation (Azzarito and Harrison, 2008; Farrington et al., 2012). Such processes have been argued to have become exacerbated in recent years by the tendencies towards over-simplification and generalisation engendered by the speed-driven production processes and unreflexive

white spaces of modern sports journalism (Van Sterkenburg et al., 2021). In particular, such mediated representations have drawn on white crafted ideological tropes and framed racialised minority, especially, black athletes, as a hyper-visible metaphor for physical performance, but as different to and less than their white peers at the cerebral and behavioural level (Buffington and Fraley, 2008; Comeaux, 2018; Ferrucci and Tandoc, 2017; Harrison, 2001; Hextrum, 2020a; Mercurio and Filak, 2010; Parry et al., 2020). Further, these essentialist representations have become internalised by players, talent scouts and coaches from dominant and marginalised ethnicities over time, and maintain some residual permanence within elite sports contexts (Adair and Stronach, 2011; Khomutova, 2016; McDonald and Spaaij, 2021).

More recently, racialised ideologies, discourses and practices have been argued to have become rearticulated and transposed from the playing to the coaching tiers of elite sports (Bradbury et al., 2021). For some scholars, this has led to the 'white racial framing' of racialised minority, especially, black coaches, as possessing significant physical capital, but lacking the requisite organisational, analytical and intellectual acumen to be considered for head coaching positions at elite sports clubs (Apofis et al., 2017; Bradbury et al., 2018; Heim et al., 2021; Regan and Feagin, 2017). Further, coaches from a range of differently racialised minority backgrounds have been argued to have become conceptualised as exhibiting 'problematic' attitudes, behaviours and temperament, and/or to have limited abilities or aptitudes towards coaching in elite sports (Bradbury, 2018; Kilvington, 2019; Van Sterkenburg, 2021). For Bradbury et al. (2018) this has led to racialised minority coaches being adversely conceptualised in terms of their perceived ethnic and cultural traits, rather than experiencing a more reflexive evaluation of their actualised experiential and technical competencies.

Some scholars have also drawn attention to the often inequitable interactional spaces of elite sports coaching contexts, and the continued existence of subtle, coded, inferential racisms and processes of cultural 'othering' (Bradbury et al., 2018; Kilvington, 2019; Van Sterkenburg, 2021). In particular, with respect to the enactment of racialised microaggressions and incivilities, and the use of culturally inappropriate language and behaviours by some white coach educators and senior coaching staff (Bradbury et al., 2018; Cunningham et al., 2012; Gearity and Henderson Metzger, 2017). In this respect, racialised minority coaches have been argued to experience additional psychological pressures to build confidence, prove competence and gain acceptance in some coach education and occupational settings in elite sports (Bradbury, 2018). Further, such stressors have been argued to be exacerbated for racialised minority women and men experiencing and negotiating multiple and overlocking forms of racialised, religious and gendered marginalisation within sports coaching contexts more broadly (Borland and Bruening, 2010; Carter-Francique and Olushola, 2016; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017b, 2019). In particular in the UK, with respect to the differential treatment, interrogation of presence and lower worth accorded to the competencies of South Asian women and men, and subsequent felt pressures to deprioritise and mask aspects of racial, religious and gendered identities within the normatively white male spaces of sports coaching contexts (Kilvington, 2021; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017b, 2019).

The (re)articulation and (re)production of racialised ideologies, discourses and practices in elite sports coaching contexts have also been argued to have engendered

deleterious experiences and outcomes for racialised minority coaches (Bradbury et al., 2021). In particular, in framing their 'suitability' for head coaching positions in terms of 'risk', and limiting opportunities for career progression across a range of national and sporting contexts (Apofis et al., 2017; Bradbury, 2021; Braddock et al., 2012; Day, 2015). For some scholars, this is felt to be especially the case at elite sports clubs which operate networks-based approaches to coach recruitment, and which militate against racialised minority coaches positioned outside of the dominant white social and cultural insider networks of the sports coaching industry (Bradbury et al., 2018). Further, such thinking and practices have also been argued to have sustained patterns of white homologous reproduction and the under-representation of racialised minority groups in the sports coaching workforce in elite sports over time (Cunningham, 2021; Lapchick, 2022). For some scholars, these representational disparities are underscored by the relational, definitional and discursive power of whiteness within the senior decision-making tiers of elite sports bodies (Bradbury et al., 2018; Rankin-Wright et al., 2016). This has been argued to have enabled institutional forms of racism and disadvantage to be effortlessly reproduced and perpetuated, and for the white hegemonic structures and cultures which underpin them to remain unchallenged and unchanged over time (Hylton, 2009).

This article builds on and extends prior scholarly work in this field to offer an empirical and theoretical examination of racialisation and the inequitable experiences of racialised minority coaches in the previously under-researched area of men's professional football club youth academies in England. More specifically, it examines the extent and ways in which the normative application of racialised ideologies, discourses and practices has engendered some inequitable interactions, representations, evaluations and outcomes for racialised minority coaches in the sports coaching context under review. In doing so, it draws on semi-structured interviews with racialised minority academy coaches ($n = 26$) and club academy managers ($n = 10$) drawn from dominant and marginalised ethnicities to ascertain their experiences and reflections on four inter-related areas of focus: firstly, club academies as racialised spaces; secondly, club academies and racialised stereotypes; thirdly, club academies and racialised assessments; fourthly, club academies and racialised outcomes. The article contextualises these findings from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective and draws clear linkages between the processes, experiences and outcomes of racialisation in club academies, and the ideological, definitional and discursive power of whiteness and racialised meaning making embedded in elite sports coaching contexts more broadly. The article concludes by outlining some operational implications for club academies and proposed educational activities designed to challenge racialised assumptions and encourage stronger cultural reflection amongst club academy staff.

The men's professional football club youth academy context

The empirical focus of this article is men's professional football club youth academies in England (hereafter referred to as 'club academies'). All club academies in England are operationally aligned with each of the 92 men's professional clubs competing in the English Premier League (EPL) and English Football League (EFL), and are subject to

the regulations of the national Elite Player Performance Plan: a comprehensive strategic approach to elite youth football development established by the EPL and Football Association (Premier League, 2024).

In particular, they are concerned with the development of elite young players aged between 9 and 21 years old across three tiered age phases (e.g. foundation 9–12 years, youth 12–16 years and professional development 16–21 years), with the aim of enabling pathways into the men's professional game. Club academies are also awarded one of three hierarchical category rankings in relation to measurable quality assurance criteria (Academy Football, 2024). Further, each academy operates a broadly comparable coaching infrastructure in which coaches are employed in a range of senior-level operational roles (e.g. academy managers and heads of coaching), middle-level age-phase lead roles (e.g. foundation, youth and professional development phase leads) and lower-level age-specific coaches (e.g. under 11s, 12s, 13s, etc.). Whilst senior- and middle-level positions tend to be full-time permanent roles, lower-level coaches tend to be employed on a part-time/sessional basis. Further, whilst the recruitment and management of senior-level academy staff is undertaken by professional club operations teams, the recruitment and management of middle- and lower-level coaching staff is undertaken by senior-level academy managers with oversight for academy operations.

Recent research has indicated that whilst the representation of racialised minority coaches at the first team level of men's professional clubs in England has remained consistently low at around 4% of the coaching workforce (SPTT, 2017; Symanski, 2022), around 17% of coaches at club academies are from racialised minority backgrounds (Bradbury and Conricode, 2021). However, further analysis indicates some patterns of occupational segregation within academy contexts. For example, just 5% of senior-level academy managers and 6% of middle-level phase leads are from racialised minority backgrounds. Further, 73% of all racialised minority coaches at club academies hold lower-level age-specific roles with limited occupational permanence or opportunities for career advancement (Conricode and Bradbury, 2021). These patterns of coach representation also compare unfavourably with academy players where around 30% are drawn from racialised minority backgrounds. This latter figure is heightened at some clubs situated in urban, multi-cultural locales, in London and the Midlands of England, and is lower at clubs situated in other locales, where the surrounding population is less ethnically diverse.

Theoretical framework

The presentation and analysis of findings in this article are informed by and draw upon key tenets of CRT. This theoretical framework provides a useful conceptual and analytical toolkit to critically examine the relationship between 'race', racialisation, sport and sports coaching (Bradbury, 2021; Hylton, 2010). In particular, with respect to the ways in which racialised structures, ideologies, discourses and practices can engender exclusionary impacts and outcomes for racialised minority groups across a range of sporting and sports coaching contexts (Hylton, 2005; Van Sterkenburg, 2021). In the context of this article, it is argued that CRT does this in three ways.

Firstly, in critiquing dominant liberal ideologies of meritocracy, objectivity and race-neutrality which fail to recognise the existence of racisms unless manifest in their most egregious forms. Further, which refute the salience of 'race' as a key factor in shaping the parameters of inclusion and exclusion for racialised minority groups across a range of societal, sporting and sports coaching contexts (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Hylton, 2010; Conricode and Bradbury, 2021). In particular, such ideologies have been argued by some CRT scholars to present an individualised and deracialised account of social relations within which the lived experiences and realisation of vocational mobility amongst racialised minority groups are extricated from the racially inequitable sporting and sports coaching contexts in which it occurs (Bradbury, 2021; Hylton, 2018). They are also informed by an adherence to dominant colour-blind ideologies which provide an interpretative framework and discursive repertoire to ignore and dismiss more systemic and institutionalised forms of racialised exclusion in societal, sporting and sports coaching contexts (Bimper, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Giroux, 2008; Rankin-Wright et al., 2019). In particular, in enabling proponents to draw on frames of abstract liberalism, naturalisation, cultural racism and minimisation, to rationalise evidenced racialised inequities as resulting from individual and cultural deficit rather than as being created and sustained by racialised structures and the practices of dominant individuals and institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). This has been argued by some CRT scholars to be especially the case in coach education and occupational settings where powerful stakeholders have drawn on a colour-blind package of racial understandings to problematise racialised minority coaches, and frame sports coaching as a site of operational and cultural impartiality (Bradbury, 2018; Bradbury and Conricode, 2021; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017a).

Secondly, in centralising 'race' and ethnicity as the primary organising principle of social and sporting life in conjunction with other intersectional forms of oppression, and in considering the ways in which multifarious forms of systemic, institutional and inter-personal racisms constitute an endemic feature of the lived experiences of racialised minority groups (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Hylton, 2010). In particular, with respect to the existence of culturally codified racisms and racialised microaggressions, and the enactment of racialised stereotypes which draw on essentialist assumptions as to the perceived characteristics and aptitudes of racialised minority groups. The application of such discourses in sporting and sports coaching contexts has been argued by some CRT scholars to result in the inscription of racialised meanings and the cultural 'othering' of racialised minority groups in comparable and different ways, across intersections of ethnicity, culture and religious affiliation (Bradbury et al., 2018; McDonald, 2016; Hylton, 2019). This has been argued to have led to the bodily and cultural signification of racialised minority coaches in terms of their assumed ethnic and cultural traits, and as less competent and 'other than' their white peers (Bradbury, 2018; Kilvington, 2021; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017b).

Thirdly, in drawing scholarly attention to Whiteness as a powerful structural, cultural and discursive practice through which hierarchical systems of racial domination and oppression have been created and reproduced over time, and the institutionalised advantages of white privilege framed as the cultural norm (Frankenburg, 1999; McIntosh, 1990). The power of Whiteness and its corollary white privilege has been argued to be

underscored and sustained by its normative and normalised presence within all aspects of social relations, including sport and sports coaching (Bradbury, 2021; Hylton, 2010). Further, it has been argued that whiteness remains invisible to those (white) groups who possess and benefit from its routinised operation across a range of societal, sporting and sports coaching contexts (Leonardo, 2009; Hylton, 2010; Rankin-Wright et al., 2016. This has been argued by some CRT scholars to have enabled some white sporting and sports coaching stakeholders to view their own identities as 'raceless', and to consider their attitudes and actions as devoid of racial bias (Burdsey, 2011; Long and Hylton, 2002; Van Sterkenburg, 2021). In this respect, Whiteness can be understood as '*a set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices that places the interests and perspectives of white people at the centre of what is considered normal and everyday*' (Gillborn, 2015: 278). Also as a white situated process of meaning making through which racialised minority groups in sports and sports coaching have become signified and evaluated against unquestioned and idealised white norms and behaviours (Bradbury et al., 2018; Hylton, 2019).

Study and methods

The findings in this article are drawn from two separate but overlapping studies examining the experiences of racialised minority coaches in men's professional football club youth academies and coach development contexts. The studies involved conducting semi-structured interviews with racialised minority coaches ($n = 26$) from Black ($n = 14$), South Asian ($n = 5$) and Mixed-Ethnicity ($n = 7$) backgrounds, with experience of working as coaches at club academies. One study also involved conducting semi-structured interviews with club academy managers ($n = 10$) from dominant and marginalised ethnicities, including from White ($n = 7$), Black ($n = 2$) and South Asian ($n = 1$) backgrounds. All of the research participants were men. Each of the interviews lasted for between 45 and 75 minutes and took place at mutually agreed venues, including training facilities and office spaces. The purpose of the interviews was to examine the career development aspirations, trajectories and experiences of racialised minority coaches, and the racial inclusivity and/or exclusivity of men's professional football coach academies and coach education contexts. In this respect, the development of interview guides was informed by the central aims of the studies, relevant empirical studies and the prior scholarly knowledge of the authors. Ethical approval for the studies was granted by the University Ethics Committee, and included a full adherence to ethical procedures, and the production of an informed consent and participant information form which outlined steps taken to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality. This latter issue was deemed especially important given the numerically limited representation of racialised minority academy coaches and racialised minority and white academy managers at men's professional football clubs nationally, and the heightened potential for identification. This also underpins our decision in the findings section of this article to refer to quoted participants as white or racialised minority, rather than by more specific nomenclature as Black, South Asian or Mixed Ethnicity.

The authors undertook a rigorous and systematic approach to thematic analysis which included a hybrid inductive–deductive orientation to generating, developing and

categorising themes and sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This enabled the authors to develop a more thematically measured coding process premised on the conjunctive consideration of the emergent qualitative insights of research participants, our own analytical capacities and scholarly adherence to the central tenets of CRT. This encouraged a thematic analytical approach which foregrounded the centrality of 'race' and racialisation as a key organising principle of the lived experiences of racialised minority groups and the club academy contexts under review. Further, it enabled the authors to capture and configure the ways in which the normative application of racialised ideologies, discourses and practices has engendered some inequitable interactions, representations, evaluations and outcomes for racialised minority coaches. This process of interpretation and analysis has been argued to provide a useful means to conjoin theoretically informed analysis and reflection with the essence of data elicited from qualitative research of this kind. Also, to represent the perceptions and experiences of research participants in a coherent and accessible way for scholarly and stakeholder audiences (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Sparkes and Smith, 2014).

Central to this qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was the strong emphasis placed on the vocationally and culturally informed experiential knowledge of interviewees, and efforts to position them as the 'primary knowers' within this interactive discourse. From a CRT perspective, this approach is felt to be an especially important means to illuminate the testimonies of racialised minority groups, whose experiences and perspectives have traditionally been excluded from, but remain subject to, dominant majoritarian narratives as to the realities of 'race' and racisms in sports (Hylton, 2005). This approach is strengthened in this article by the inclusion of academy managers from marginalised and dominant ethnicities whose lived experiences and perceptions of racialised inequities in the coaching contexts under review reflect some commonalities and differences with one another and racialised minority coaches. This helped to broaden the diversity of discourses and insights drawn upon, generate overlapping and competing perspectives, and engender a more holistic and critical account of the processes of racialisation under review.

The authors recognise that the qualitative techniques of data collection and analysis used in this study do not constitute a set of (race)neutral methodological procedures, but are informed by the racialised locations and epistemological and ontological assumptions of the authors, and quest to exercise greater critical reflexivity in research and the real-world settings under review (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Fletcher, 2014; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). As such, the authors remain cognisant of the inherent power imbalance embedded in the social and cultural distance between our own white identities and that of racialised minority interviewees, and the privilege this imbues in relation to reporting on rather than directly experiencing racialised exclusions. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge that the racialised power relations and normativity of whiteness embedded within the coaching contexts under review cannot be fully separated from those which exist in the research process, and that as a result, we may at times draw unconsciously on white situated discourses in our analysis and presentation of findings (Frankenberg, 2004; Sin, 2007). However, we contend that such influence is neither fixed nor definitive and that our theoretically informed and lived engagement with the practice of critical (and cultural) reflexivity has provided us with a useful epistemological

tool to reflect on and contest the impact of whiteness on our scholarship. In particular, in encouraging us to better consider our racialised selves and the ways in which they are perceived by others, and in helping to avoid writing in ways that are congruent with dominant hegemonic discourses (Fletcher and Hylton, 2017). This process was supported by a series of critically reflexive discussions between the authors and other white and racialised minority colleagues as to the scholarly and social justice motivations and intentions of the studies, and the impact of our racialised selves on the data collection and analysis (Hylton, 2009). Such an approach is promoted by Vadeboncoeur et al. (2020) who suggest that white researchers must reflect on and make known their rationales for engaging in 'race' based research.

This critically reflexive approach has also enabled us to clarify the conceptual particularity of the research and our positionality as researchers, and to foreground rather than deny the inevitability of racialised subjectivities impacting the research process. From this perspective, whilst acknowledging the contextual validity of arguments which prioritise 'identity symmetry' in the qualitative research process, we contend that the quest to uncover a singular 'authentic' racial truth is reliant on problematic essentialist assumptions and homogenising tendencies. In particular, such totalising principles arguably overplay the rigidity of racialised insider/outsider binaries, and underplay the multiplicity of identity constructions, experiences and perspectives of researchers that are researched across a range of structural and cultural intersections (Berry and Clair, 2011; Carrington, 2008; Fletcher, 2014).

This was evident in the interactional research encounters underpinning this study, in which authors and interviewees from a range of dominant and differently marginalised ethnicities and vocational backgrounds adopted fluid identity positionings in order to establish and maintain connectivity and discourse. For example, through prioritising and foregrounding 'valuable commonalities' (Fletcher, 2014: 253) of gender, age, geographical identity and sporting capital and interests in pre-interview 'water cooler' talk and the process of building rapport with research participants. Further, in utilising our own white identities, professional status and 'known' public efforts to challenge racialised inequities in sports coaching as a means to negotiate and blur our racialised and/ or contextual insider/outsider status, and to elicit insightful and meaningful responses from research participants from dominant and marginalised ethnicities. Taken together, this reflexive approach has enabled the authors to access and reflect on a series of contextually and culturally situated narratives, and to present a holistically informed account of the processes, experiences and impacts of racialisation in the club academy coaching contexts under review. It is to these accounts to which we now turn.

Findings

Club academies as racialised spaces

Interview findings indicated some differing perceptions as to the existence and application of racialised ideologies, discourses and practices in club academies. For example, some white academy manager interviewees conceptualised the academy landscape as an egalitarian space characterised by operational and cultural impartiality. These

perceptions were underscored by a strong adherence to dominant liberal notions of meritocracy, objectivity and uncritically self-proclaimed colour-blindness, and the view that targeted efforts to engender a culturally diverse workforce were antithetical to the everyday operational concerns of club academies. Whilst these perceptions seemed most apparent amongst interviewees at academies with few racialised minority young players and coaches, such 'race-neutral' discourses have been argued to constitute a normative feature of high performance coaching environments more broadly. In particular, in framing issues of racialised diversity and inclusion in coaching as irrelevant to and incompatible with notions of sporting excellence (Rankin-Wright et al., 2017a). Two white academy managers articulate these positions further:

> For me, it's not about you have to have diversity, I don't think we do, I don't think that's important in my opinion, I think what is important is we have the right people in the right places who can do the jobs. (Interviewee 3, White Academy Manager)

> I don't look at the staff and think 'oh we've got a blondie, we've got a ginger, we've got a black, we've got an Asian'. I look at them as characters, as individuals, as people. (Interviewee 7, White Academy Manager)

In contrast, a smaller number of more 'race-conscious' academy managers from dominant and marginalised ethnicities and almost all racialised minority coach interviewees exhibited a stronger recognition of the existence of systemic and institutionalised barriers experienced by racialised minority coaches in academy contexts. This was especially the case amongst staff at club academies in urban locales with significant numbers of racialised minority players and coaches, for whom the everyday lived and occupational experience of multi-culturalism was the norm. Whilst racialised barriers were considered as resulting from the continued reliance on racially inequitable networks-based methods of coach recruitment at some club academies, attention was also drawn to the presence of racialised ideologies, discourses and practices within academy settings. In particular, with respect to the geographically and temporally uneven but embedded normativity of racialised thinking, categorisation and stereotyping at an organisational and interactional level. For example:

> Ethnic minority people face racism and stereotypes every day, in all walks of life. Football is no different. I mean, it's more obvious in terms of playing, and there's a long history of it, but it happens in coaching as well. In academies. Not so much at [Club 1], but at [Club 2]. Yeah, definitely. I mean, that's more of a less diverse area, and so you do pick up some comments. (Interviewee 31, Racialised Minority Coach)

> A lot of this stuff, it's not wilful, it's not intended. Just lazy stuff, you know, about how they think black people are. You know, the other coaches, the sports science guys, analysis guys, whoever. Not everyone, not all the time. But it's always there. Kind of small everyday stuff, just in conversation or interactions with certain people. (Interviewee 17, Racialised Minority Coach)

In this latter respect, club academies were conceptualised by some racialised minority coach interviewees as distinctly racialised spaces. Within which the subtle, nuanced and

codified enactment of inferential racisms and racialised microaggressions were considered a normative and normalised feature of occupational discourse and interactions In particular through the use of racialised language, behaviours and 'humour'. Such actions engendered micro-insults and conveyed cultural insensitivities with respect to heritage and identity, and micro-invalidations which questioned the vocational and experiential competencies of racialised minority coaches (Gearity and Henderson Metzger, 2017; Sue et al., 2007). For example, some racialised minority coach interviewees referred to being viewed with 'scepticism' and being spoken to differently in tone and content by some white senior-level academy staff. Findings here allude to the ways in which racialised identities have become constructed, naturalised and signified within the vocational spaces of sports coaching, and the inequitable impact on micro-level discourse and interactions within such settings (Bradbury, 2018; Burdsey, 2011; Harrison, 2013). One racialised minority academy manager reflects on some personal experiences on this score:

> I go to coaching events and its full of academy people, coaches, phase leads, managers and so on, and they are surprised. They double take. You can see them asking themselves 'should he be here, is he in the right place'. You get that feeling, by the way they look at you. It's not blatant in your face, like in the past, but it's still there. You still feel it. (Interviewee 10, Racialised Minority Academy Manager)

Club academies and racialised stereotypes

Despite the reticence of some white academy managers to recognise the existence of racialised ideologies, discourses and practices in club academies, there was a strong consensus amongst racialised minority academy managers and coach interviewees that racialised stereotypes had become rearticulated and transposed from the playing to academy coaching tiers of the sport. In particular, in extending commonplace sporting stereotypes which have framed black players as possessing 'natural' athleticism but as instinctual and unthinking, towards a review of black coaches as lacking the organisational and analytical acumen to be considered for promotion or to excel in senior coaching positions. These latter assertions chime with prior scholarly analysis which has alluded to the existence and application of bodily and cerebral stereotypes in sports coaching across a range of national and sporting contexts (Apofis et al., 2017; Bradbury, 2021; Cunningham and Bopp, 2010). Further, for such racialised perceptions to be exacerbated in elite team sports which feature hierarchical and organisationally complex coaching infrastructures (Collins, 2007). Two racialised minority coaches comment further in this respect:

> So, the stereotypes would be like, 'oh they're not very clever'. We as coaches are going through what the players in the 1960s and 1970s were going through. Brains were never seen to be something that we would be able to possess and that was a stereotype of how it was. Definitely we're still going through that right now. (Interviewee 23, Racialised Minority Coach)

> When it comes to intelligence or ability, sometimes the fact that you're a good footballer, people just look at that, 'yeah, you can play football but you're not going to be a good coach'. Like it

might not be said to your face but like that's what's perceived. A culture of you're not as intelligent as us mate. You're not quite as worthy. (Interviewee 19, Racialised Minority Coach)

Some racialised minority interviewees also drew attention to stereotypes at the attitudinal and behavioural level. Such stereotypes have been argued to have a common currency within elite sports settings. In particular, in framing racialised minorities, especially black and Aboriginal athletes, as primitive, backward and lacking the attitudinal temperament and social etiquette to contribute positively to the sporting environments in which they perform (Adair, 2016; Agergaard and Sorenson, 2009; Apofis et al., 2017). For some racialised minority interviewees, such stereotypes were also apparent in club academy contexts and were felt to have framed some racialised minority coaches as exhibiting 'difficult' and 'challenging' conduct and to be 'individualistic' rather than 'collectivist' in their outlook. These findings reflect and extend prior research undertaken in England, the Netherlands and the US. In particular, that which has drawn attention to the ways in which the behaviours of racialised minority athletes and coaches are differently monitored, regulated and measured unfavourably against imagined white norms and idealised standards of social and sporting acceptability (Bradbury et al., 2018; Comeaux, 2018; Hextrum, 2020b; Hylton and Lawrence, 2016). Two racialised minority interviewees comment further in this respect:

Before they've even met you or have seen you coach, there can be stereotypes of where you're from and what kind of attitude you'll have as a coach based on the name you've got. (Interviewee 26, Racialised Minority Coach)

100% there's stereotypes. Too laid back, sometimes maybe too aggressive, maybe not what they want at that club. (Interviewee 14, Racialised Minority Coach)

Relatedly, academy managers from both dominant and marginalised ethnicities drew on a series of cultural stereotypes to frame some racialised minority coaches as lacking the commitment, aspirations and dispositions to engage with and excel in academy coaching contexts. In doing so, these interviewees utilised and sustained powerful and pervasive forms of white-situated thinking and discourse to rationalise representational disparities in the club academy coaching workforce. This was especially the case with regard to the under-representation of coaches from South Asian backgrounds. In this respect, both white and black academy managers invoked hierarchical registers of ethnic, cultural and religious differentiation to position such groups as lacking cultural interest in or vocational inclination towards football coaching. Findings here reflect and extend the work of scholars who have asserted that South Asian populations in the UK have been doubly marginalised by their lack of professional playing capital and negatively conceptualised cultural and religious distinctiveness.In particular, whose presence within the normative cultural spaces of elite sports has been considered paradoxical to perceptions of sports coaching as a white domain (Bradbury et al., 2018; Kilvington, 2021; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017b). Two academy managers below draw on some culturally uninformed perceptions of this kind:

I think they want the opportunity at professional clubs. I don't know if ethnic coaches are pushing themselves enough to do that. (Interviewee 6, White Academy Manager)

I guess why maybe other ethnicities aren't represented is probably around culture… football's not their main sport, they might find other hobbies and they don't want to follow it through. (Interviewee 8, Racialised Minority Academy Manager)

Club academies and racialised assessments

Interview findings indicated that the existence and application of racialised stereotypes had also engendered some racialised assessments as to the perceived aptitude and abilities of racialised minority coaches in some club academies. In this respect, some racialised minority academy managers and coach interviewees referred to the tendency of senior-level academy staff to draw on subjective and particularistic evaluations of the social and vocational skill sets of racialised minority coaches. In particular,of which adversely conceptualised them in terms of imagined and negatively perceived ethnic and cultural traits, rather than offering a considered and culturally reflexive appraisal their technical and experiential competencies. Such findings reflect the scholarly focus of work in the UK and US, and also draw attention to the lack of comparable scrutiny afforded to the review of white coaches for whom experiences of vocational evaluation remain unencumbered by their own (invisible, white) racialised identities (Bradbury, 2021; Day, 2015; Singer et al., 2010). One racialised minority interviewee offers some personal reflections on this score:

When someone looks at me for the first time, they might not necessarily think that I'm a nice person. I've got dreadlocks, I've got gold teeth, my face is kind of hard looking at times, if I'm not smiling. Sometimes people think I'm upset, and I'm fine, I'm just not smiling. But then if someone spoke to me, they'd realise, 'oh this guy's actually a good guy, he loves football, he's dedicated about football, football's his life'. If you spoke to me, they will realise that 'this guy's really passionate, he's the kind of guy I want'. (Interviewee 11, Racialised Minority Coach)

Beyond the adverse racialised assessment of coaches identified above, some racialised minority coach interviewees also referred to processes of racialised evaluation and institutional closure embedded in the hiring process. In particular, with respect to the exclusion of applicants with 'non-English' sounding names. In this respect, interviewees alluded to the implicit bias and extended marginalisation experienced by South Asian heritage coaches, and the preference of some senior-level club academy staff to recruit white coaches from 'culturally favoured' backgrounds. Findings here correlate with scholarly analysis which has also asserted that in the absence of diverse selection and interview panels, prejudicial practices of racialised evaluation and exclusion have been left unchecked and unchallenged in professional football coaching domains (Kilvington, 2019). One racialised minority interviewee articulates further:

I think in certain areas the name doesn't help, in the sense that you can apply for jobs and as much as the FA are trying to make it inclusive and make it easier for people to apply for jobs, it's still a

hindrance to a certain extent, because you have my [South Asian] name on a CV and you have someone else's who's sort of more a White British name. They may go for them just because it's easier, they may think they know them a bit better. (Interviewee 27, Racialised Minority Coach)

In contrast, a number of interviewees drawn from dominant and marginalised ethnicities offered more positive, but, arguably, still, deeply racialised assessments as to the aptitude and abilities of racialised minority coaches. In this respect, some interviewees drew on dominant 'business case' rationales and related managerialist discourses which suggest the enhanced functionality and effectiveness of establishing an ethnically diverse sports workforce (Spaaij et al., 2014). In particular, in framing racialised minority coaches as a positive pedagogical and intercultural 'resource' through which to better extend and diversify the 'cultural options' and operational capacities of club academies (Conricode and Bradbury, 2021). In this respect, interviewees referred to the increased potential to engender 'cultural connectivity' with and better support the social and technical development of young players from racialised minority backgrounds. Also, to facilitate an enhanced understanding of diversity and inclusion and better enable more culturally reflexive coaching practice amongst white coaches in academy settings. Two white academy managers below articulate further:

It's fantastic if we can get a real mix because for example a black coach from inner-city [location] may have had some different experiences that he can share with us as staff that can help us get better and better understand the kind of black inner-city areas of [location]. It broadens our horizons and allows us to have more options and more capabilities. (Interviewee 5, White Academy Manager)

We do believe in role models for the boys and particularly in our club. Some of our [young] black players have a different relationship with some of our black coaches than with our other coaches, not on every single case, but I think there's definitely a pattern. (Interviewee 4, White Academy Manager)

It is argued here that such conceptualisations might reflect a partial positive operational turn in shifting the equality and diversity landscape within some club academies. They arguably also draw on similar ideological tropes and processes of racialised thinking and categorisation to that which has previously positioned racialised minority coaches disadvantageously within career progression pathways and coaching labour markets. In particular, in proffering evaluation of racialised minority coaches as 'other than' and 'differently abled' to their white counterparts. Also in subsequently positioning them as 'better suited' to developmental rather than high performance coaching roles in elite sports settings.

Club academies and racialised outcomes

As a result of the definitional power of the racialised ideologies, stereotypes and assessment identified above, there was a strong consensus amongst racialised minority interviewees that this had engendered some deleterious occupational outcomes for racialised

minority coaches. In particular, with respect to the largely unchallenged tendencies of some senior-level academy staff to question the assumed cultural 'fit' and 'suitability' of racialised minority coaches, and to equate their appointment to or promotion within club academies in terms of operational risk. This was felt to have led some white senior-level staff to normatively sanction the appointment or promotion of white coaches with whom they had cultural familiarity and comfort. Relatedly, to have sustained patterns of white homologous reproduction and racialised minority under-representation in club academies over time. These latter assertions correlate with and extend studies which have examined representational disparities in men's (adult) professional football in Europe (Bradbury et al., 2018; Van Sterkenburg, 2021). In particular, in drawing attention to the parallel enactment of racialised preference and related adoption of informal and unregulated methods of coach recruitment in club academy youth settings. Two racialised minority coaches reflect on these racialised outcomes below:

> *It means they're not giving opportunities to the potential right candidate because they have these stereotypical views that a black and ethnic minority individual hasn't got the skillsets to man manage a group of people.* (Interviewee 34, Racialised Minority Coach)

> *There's talk of the racism in football that people don't sit back and call themselves racist, but actually when it comes to looking at how they recruit and how they vet people for roles and responsibilities they don't actually realise they are being racist. When it comes to selecting someone for a job they look at people slightly different, by the colour of their skin.* (Interviewee 18, Racialised Minority Coach)

In addition to outlining some overarching representational outcomes, some racialised minority interviewees also referred to the existence of differentiated career opportunities and mobility pathways within academy contexts across fissures of ethnicity. This was felt to be especially the case where the perceived vocational and cultural attributes of racialised minority coaches had been accorded greater or lesser relevance to the existing operational agendas, demographic populations and coaching activities at club academies. In this respect, interviewees indicated this had led to the uneven occupational distribution of racialised minority coaches. In particular in lower-level age-phase and part-time coaching positions, which feature a strong emphasis on providing social and cultural support for young racialised minority players as a means to aid their technical development. These qualitative assertions illuminate prior quantitative analysis which has indicated some representational disparities in levels of seniority and coaching focus at club academies in England (Conricode and Bradbury, 2021). Also in US-based statistical studies which identify similarly racialised occupational patterns in some elite and college sports coaching contexts (Braddock et al., 2012; Cunningham, 2021; Lapchick, 2022). One racialised minority coach illustrates this racialised distribution of labour below:

> *Within the foundation development phase, you'll see a lot of black coaches but then when you go up to the youth development phase, the upper age groups of the youth development phase, which is like 16, that's the highest of it, and then into like the professional development phase, you don't tend to see as many black or BAME coaches.* (Interviewee 31, Racialised Minority Coach)

Taken together, the findings above share some conceptual commonalities with prior scholarly research which has examined the ways in which the internalisation of racialised ideas and 'stereotype threat' has impacted on athletic intention, performance and evaluation (Stone et al., 1999). Such racialised thinking has been argued to have informed the 'channelling' of athletes from dominant and marginalised ethnicities towards or away from specific sports or events. Also, to have contributed to the 'stacking' of athletes in match-play positions commensurate with the assumed fit between positional requirements and racialised beliefs around athleticism and/or decision-making capacities (Ferrucci and Tandoc, 2017; Hextrum, 2020a; Hylton, 2019). In this respect, the findings here strongly support the assertion that such processes of 'racialised stacking' have been transposed, rearticulated and reproduced in the coaching tiers of the club academy contexts under review. Further, that the resultant hierarchical patterns of occupational distribution are similarly underscored by the embeddedness of racialised ideologies, discourses and practices, such as to '*organise [human] resources along racial lines in seemingly natural ways*' (Hylton, 2010:340). One racialised minority coach below draws on his extensive experience of academy settings to summarise these themes further:

> *I've worked at three academies now, at [Club 1, Club 2, Club 3], all in the West Midlands, and what you see is loads of black coaches coming in and coaching…. Especially with the younger kids. But as you go up the age ranges, through the phases, there's less and less. The balance tips the other way, it goes the other way. There's less black coaches the further you go up.* (Interviewee 12, Racialised Minority Coach)

Discussion

This article has drawn on the experientially informed narratives of racialised minority coaches with experience of working in men's professional football club youth academies, and academy managers drawn from dominant and marginalised ethnicities. In particular, to examine the ways in which the normative application of racialised ideologies, discourses and practices has engendered inequitable interactions, representations, evaluations and outcomes for racialised minority coaches in such settings. In doing so, the article has highlighted four key themes. They are: (i) club academies as racialised spaces, (ii) club academies and racialised stereotypes, (iii) club academies and racialised assessments, and (iv) club academies and racialised outcomes.

In the first instance, the findings indicated a tendency amongst some white academy manager interviewees to perceive the club academy landscape as an egalitarian and deracialised space characterised by cultural impartiality. Within which the potential benefits of establishing a more ethnically diverse workforce were perceived as possessing little value to operational priorities within such settings. From a CRT perspective, such perceptions have been argued to constitute a normative feature of the club academy and high performance sports coaching landscape more broadly (Rankin-Wright et al., 2017a). Further, to be underscored by an uncritical adherence to dominant liberal ideologies of meritocracy, objectivity, race-neutrality and colour-blindness on the part of senior decision makers (Bradbury and Conricode, 2021; Hylton, 2010). In particular, in this

study, as evidenced in academy manager narratives which drew on colour-blind frames of abstract liberalism and minimisation which claim an ideological and operational adherence to principles of 'fairness' and 'merit'. Whilst simultaneously dislocating the inequitable experiential realities of racialised minority groups from the 'assumed innocence' of the sports coaching contexts in which they occur (Bimper, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Bradbury, 2021; Rankin-Wright et al., 2016).

In contrast, other more 'race-conscious' interviewees drawn from (some) dominant and (mainly) marginalised ethnicities perceived the club academy landscape as a *racialised space*. Within which a series of white-situated ideologies, discourses and practices were felt to have shaped the parameters of inclusion and exclusion of differently racialised minority coaches in comparable and different ways (Bradbury et al., 2018; Hylton, 2019). In particular, through the enactment of culturally differentiated inferential racisms and racialised microaggressions at an interactional level (Gearity and Henderson Metzger, 2017; Sue and Spanierman, 2020). Also, via the bodily and cultural signification of racialised minority coaches in such ways as to mark their presence within the normative monocultural spaces of academy coaching as both conspicuous and paradoxical to perceptions of coaching as a white domain (Bradbury et al., 2018; Kilvington, 2021). Such processes of racialisation allude to the ways in which racialised minorities are compelled to consciously negotiate specific sporting geographies of exclusion (Sibley, 1995; Rankin-Wright et al., 2017b). Also, to the related concept of racial spatiality which Harrison asserts is '*founded on the perception that certain racialised bodies are expected to occupy certain social spaces and, complimentarily, that the presence of other bodies creates social disruption, moral unbalance, and/or demands explanation*' (Harrison, 2013:317). From a CRT perspective, within such racialised spaces, the existence and application of myriad multi-levelled racisms and racialised meaning making have been argued to constitute a routinised feature of the lived experiences of racialised minority groups. Further, such practices reflect and sustain more systemic forms of racialised oppression and structures of white supremacy in societal and sporting realms (Hylton and Lawrence, 2018; Perez Huber and Solorzano, 2015).

In the second instance, the findings indicated a strong consensus amongst racialised minority interviewees that within the racialised spaces of club academy settings, dominant processes of white situated thinking, categorisation and discourse had become operationalised through the production and promulgation of a series of *racialised stereotypes*. From a CRT perspective, the academy coaching contexts under review and elite sport more broadly are both receptive to and productive of a series of powerful racialised ideologies, narratives and meanings which purport to the notion of 'race logic'. The application of this logic has led to the signification and problematisation of racialised bodies and identities across a range of elite sporting and sports coaching contexts (Carrington, 2010; Comeaux, 2018; McDonald, 2016; Hylton, 2019). In this study, via the rearticulation and transposition of white crafted ideological tropes and racialised categorisations which seek to essentialise and naturalise the perceived ethnic, cultural and religious differences of racialised minority coaches. In particular, at the physical/cognitive, behavioural/attitudinal and cultural/aspirational levels. The findings in this study also reflect the ideological and discursive power of whiteness and related concept of 'white racial framing' (Feagin, 2010). This is where dominant white groups draw on collective

memories, histories and experiences to construct racialised meanings and make sense of racial matters in societal and sporting realms through a distinctly colour-blind lens, and in accordance with conventional white situated schema (Burdsey, 2014; Lusted et al., 2021).

In the third instance, the utilisation of such frames of racialised convenience was especially evident in this study in the subjective *racialised assessments* of the abilities and aptitudes of differently racialised minority coaches. In particular, in the ways in which negatively assumed ethnic and cultural traits were unproblematically accorded and measured unfavourably against imagined and idealised white norms and standards of coaching and leadership excellence. In this respect, the definitional power of whiteness and its corollary process of white racial framing lies in its ability to attribute and sustain a series of hierarchy enhancing or attenuating myths (Sidanius and Pratto, 2001). Further, in its capacity to act as '*a powerful ideology that serves to rationalise, legalize, and legitimise the meaning of and value ascribed to those who are defined as white, and those who are not*' (Goldstein Hode and Meisenbach, 2017: 4). Such processes were also evident amongst more 'race conscious' interviewees, who drew on dominant managerialist discourses of organisational effectiveness to frame racialised minority coaches as a positive pedagogical and intercultural resource. In particular, to enable greater connectivity with young players from ethnically diverse backgrounds and encourage culturally reflexive coaching practice amongst white coaches. Such instrumental 'business case' diversity rationales reflect a developing consensus amongst some national sports and equity stakeholders in the UK (UK Sport, 2021; Turconi and Shaw, 2023) and might engender a partial progressive operational turn in shifting the equality and diversity landscape in club academies and other sports coaching contexts over time. However, they arguably also draw on similar white crafted ideologies, discourses and processes of categorisation to that which has led to the signification of racialised minority coaches as 'other than' and 'differently abled' to their white peers. In particular, in positioning them as possessing abilities deemed relevant to youth development rather than high performance coaching roles. Further, in viewing racialised minority coaches through a commodified costbenefit lens of high performing (and by proxy, low performing) diversity and competitive advantage (Spaaij et al., 2014), such perceptions arguably also reflect how the processes of inclusion and exclusion are underscored by racialised evaluations undertaken by powerful white stakeholders. In particular, with respect to the assumed utility and value of racialised bodies to meet white expectations and benefit white interests in sports coaching contexts (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012; Hage, 2000).

In the fourth instance, the findings indicated that the definitional power of racialised ideologies, discourses, stereotypes and assessment identified above had engendered a series of deleterious occupational and distinctly *racialised outcomes* for racialised minority coaches. In particular, in limiting opportunities for appointment and/or promotion, sustaining patterns of under-representation and white homologous reproduction, and providing vocationally narrow and culturally differentiated career progression pathways within academy settings. From a CRT perspective, these representational and distributional disparities allude to the normativity of whiteness as a powerful structural, cultural and discursive process. Through which hierarchical systems of white supremacy, entitlement, status and related systems of racial domination are created and sustained over time across a range of societal and sporting contexts, including sports coaching (Bradbury,

2021; Gillborn, 2008; Long and Hylton, 2002). In this study, in positioning whiteness as 'raceless' and invisible to those who possess and benefit from the unearned institutionalised advantages of white privilege and its normative association with coaching and leadership excellence (McIntosh, 1990; Leonardo, 2009; Van Sterkenburg, 2021). From this powerful hegemonic position, within the club academy settings under review, apparent representational and distributional inequities were primarily framed as resulting from the perceived cerebral and cultural shortcomings of racialised minority coaches. In contrast, the everyday lived experiences of coaching and career mobility of white coaches remained unencumbered by similar social scrutiny and racialised evaluation. Within the dominant white situated cultures of club academies, such perceptions positioned racialised minority coaches outside of the narrowly conceptualised cultural preferences of powerful white stakeholders. This further enabled the naturalisation and legitimisation of hierarchical patterns of occupational representation and distribution to persist unchallenged and unchanged. Not least of all as a result of the invisible centrality of whiteness in such environs (Bradbury et al., 2018), and the subsequent lack of critical reflection and recognition as to the ways in which racialised ideologies, discourses and practices have created and sustained this inequitable malaise over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is the authors` CRT-informed contention that efforts to address racialised inequities in sports coaching more broadly should recognise the multi-layered complexity and interconnectedness of racialised exclusions and be interventionist and transformational in their operational focus and scope (Bradbury and Conricode, 2021). More specifically, the authors contend that efforts to address the inequitable interactions, representations, evaluations and outcomes experienced by racialised minority coaches in club academies need to challenge and disrupt the normative application of racialised ideologies, discourses and practices in such settings. In this respect, the authors' intention in this conclusion is to draw attention to some specific pedagogical considerations and actions which might be enacted as part of a more holistic and overarching policy-orientated approach in club academy settings. In particular, with respect to the development and delivery of formalised educational activities targeting key stakeholders with operational responsibility for the recruitment, promotion and development of coaching staff at club academies. It is argued here that such pedagogical efforts might engender important ideological and attitudinal reflection and related behavioural change. It also might stimulate some reformation of the structural and cultural conditions through which equality of opportunities, experiences and outcomes for racialised minority coaches and more inclusive academy coaching environments might be realised. In this respect, the proposed educational activities below are also likely to have significant transferability beyond the men's professional football club youth academy contexts under review to a range of sports coaching contexts more broadly.

Firstly, educational activities should engender a CRT-informed critique of – and encourage a perceptual shift amongst key stakeholders away from – dominant liberal notions of meritocracy, 'race-neutrality' and colour-blindness. Such notions have arguably sustained and naturalised rather than redressed racialised inequities and

disadvantages in club academy settings and sports coaching contexts more broadly. In doing so, such activities should pay attention to identifying and outlining the ways in which inferential racisms and racialised microaggressions represent a normative and psychologically damaging feature of occupational discourse and interactions for racialised minority coaches. Further, they should encourage stakeholders to make an explicit anti-racist commitment that discriminatory language and behaviours at a conscious and unconscious level will not be tolerated and will engender disciplinary action for perpetrators.

Secondly, educational activities should stimulate critical reflection amongst stakeholders as to the ways in which racialised thinking, categorisation and the operationalisation of stereotypes have led to the signification and problematisation of differently racialised minority coaches in comparable and different ways. In doing so, such activities should challenge, deconstruct and dismantle the racialised assumptions of stakeholders as to the perceived competencies of racialised minority coaches at the bodily/cerebral, attitudinal/behavioural and cultural/aspirational levels. Further, they should critique the ways in which the definitional and discursive power of whiteness has enabled processes of racialised meaning making to inhibit the potential for a more considered appraisal of the vocational attributes of racialised minority coaches.

Thirdly, educational activities should encourage key stakeholders to reflect critically on the conjunctive relationship between processes of racialised reification and the growing adherence to dominant 'business case' diversity rationales at club academies. In doing so, such activities should draw attention to the differential framing of racialised minority coaches as possessing specific social and pedagogical value and utility to the multi-cultural impulses and operational agendas at some club academies. Relatedly, to the ways in which such conceptualisations might unconsciously essentialise the skill sets and attributes of racialised minority coaches and filter career pathways to youth development rather than high-performance coaching roles. Activities should also encourage key stakeholders to reconceptualise operational motivations towards the ethnic diversification of the academy coaching workforce (where such motivations exist at all). In particular, towards a strongly social justice-orientated rationale, within which the equitable and inclusive treatment of racialised minority coaches and developmental support for preferred career pathways should be prioritised.

Fourthly, and finally, educational activities should encourage stakeholders to critically reflect on the mutually reinforcing relationship between the aforementioned racialisation processes and the operation of inequitable practices of coach recruitment, promotion and role allocation at club academies. In doing so, such activity should promote the implementation of a racial diversity and inclusion occupational mapping exercise and encourage qualitative insights from racialised minority coaches. In particular, to ascertain the extent and ways in which patterns of occupational representation and distribution are underscored by residual racialised ideologies, discourses and practices in club academy settings. Further, they should also ensure that the demographics and lived experiences of selection and promotion panel members are reflective of the ethnically diverse coaching candidate pool. In particular, to promote greater cultural reflexivity and understanding as to the routinised operation and institutionalised

advantages of whiteness in the hiring and promotion process, and its influence on the racialised predilections and preferences for appointment amongst key stakeholders.

Taken together, it is argued here that the CRT-informed pedagogical considerations and actions outlined above might stimulate a stronger and more culturally reflexive appreciation amongst key stakeholders as to the underlying causes of racialised inequities in sports coaching. With particular respect to the ways in which racialised ideologies, discourse and practices have engendered inequitable interactions, representations, evaluations and outcomes for racialised minority coaches in club academies. Further, they might also provide a pedagogical platform to challenge, disrupt and dismantle the everyday racialised assumptions and processes of white privilege embedded within such environs. Such an approach might also complement and underpin related rationales for the implementation of positive action measures to address racialised inequities in such settings, to the benefit of coaches, club academies and the sports coaching landscape more broadly.

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Note

1. The term 'racialised minority' is used in this article to primarily refer to first, second and third generation Black-African, Black-Caribbean, South Asian and Mixed-Ethnicity football coaches in England. More broadly, the term is also used to encompass Indigenous peoples and historically settled and newer migrant populations of non-European heritage residents in countries in the Global North, in which they make up a numerical (and cultural) minority. In particular, the term is adopted here to acknowledge the social construction of 'race', and the ideological, definitional and discursive 'racialisation' of people of colour. This has resulted in 'racialised minority' groups having less power or representation compared to (white) groups across a range of societal and sporting contexts. In this respect, the term is intended to constitute a form of resistance to whiteness and the structures, cultures and discourses of hegemonic power which underpin its operation in practice. In using the term 'racialised minority' the authors remain cognisant that categorisations which seek to capture the commonalities and specificities of differently racialised minority identities and their varied and overlapping experiences remain conceptually limited. Nonetheless, the authors proceed with some scholarly caution (and no small amount of theoretical and practical utility) in using the term as a means to identify and analyse the perceptions and experiences of 'racialised minority' coaches in this study. For further information on terminology see: https://blackbritishacademics.co.uk/about/racial-categorisation-and-terminology/

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