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Conference Theme - Race Forward (Professional Sport)
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)
Session: Live Q&A for Race Forward (Asynchronous)

Introduction

The double burden of racism and sexism has been argued to serve as an impenetrable barrier to keep BAME women in marginal positions (Borland & Bruening, 2010). Within English soccer, coaching research (e.g., Bradbury et al., 2018) has predominantly focused on the experiences of black men and issues of racism, leaving the BAME woman’s voice unheard. Indeed, much of the sports management research with regard to diversity in coaching has focused separately on race (e.g., Cunningham & Saga, 2004) or gender (e.g., Clarkson et al., 2019). Researchers have seldom investigated the experiences of BAME women specifically in soccer and the connections and complexities between ‘race’, ethnicity and gender in soccer coaching. Given the cultural significance of soccer in England and its deeply racist and masculinized histories (see. Williams, 2003), it is imperative that research focuses on the organizational and sociocultural contexts in which BAME women coaches in soccer operate.

An act of resistance can be classified as a reaction against confining social structures (Laghout, 2005). Organised resistance and overt challenges from society have been heavily studied (Ewick & Silbey, 2003), and thus researchers (e.g., Shaw et al., 2018) have recently called for greater scholarly attention towards understanding ‘everyday’ individual acts of resistance. At present, there exists scant knowledge about how BAME women coaches resist confined social structures in soccer. We wished to explore what factors affect their empowerment and ability to resist. In doing so, this study explored how BAME women coaches subtly transform the white and male dominated coaching landscape.

Methodology

Critical Race Theory and an intersectional lens were utilised in the evaluation of our data in an endeavour to privilege the voices of those that remain largely unheard in England. Through purposive snowball sampling, women soccer coaches were approached by the researcher team based on their coaching practices and the participants’ self-identification as being BAME. The coaches were highly visible in their communities, thus to protect their anonymity we broadly classified their cultural backgrounds as follows: Black (6), Asian (5), Mixed (4). All participants took part in individual interviews with two members of the research team, guided by a semi-structured interview guide and transcribed verbatim once recorded. An inductive thematic analysis was performed.

Results and Discussion

The stories presented demonstrate the BAME women coaches perform diverse acts of resistance that portray varying levels of resistance to the double burden of racism and sexism. Coaches employed direct/indirect, verbal/bodily, and instantaneous/delayed acts. Factors that affected their empowerment include: parental influence, coaching experience, qualifications, and confidence. Resistance served to (a) discount the validity of negative messages, (b) engage in positive self-talk, and (c) challenge the established discourses of gender and race in coaching. This article demonstrates that acts of resistance are a potent tool through which marginalised groups in English soccer coaching can challenge the status quo. Accordingly, it offers preliminary information for governing bodies of the need to offer greater support to coaches from diverse backgrounds and contribute to transformative change in this field.