

Privilege and Unconscious Bias in Sports Coaching

Creating an Inclusive Culture

Most qualified coaches within UK governing bodies of sport are white (99%) and male (82%), according to our research.

How can we change the cultures of sports coaching organisations to foster greater equality? Focusing on the individuals or groups who are excluded from them is not the answer.

I think if I was someone that was white and male, it would have been a different experience than what it was for myself. I think, in terms of just fitting in, that would be the massive one for me, just feeling like I could slot in and that it would be the same as it was for everybody else.

Seema, Level 1 coach

Unconscious Bias

We all have perceptions that influence our behaviour and actions – for example, attitudes based on a stereotype of a particular group – that we may not be consciously aware of. Unconscious bias is when these stereotypical assumptions affect our decisions, like those regarding coach recruitment, development and promotion. For instance, we may recruit a coach who we feel more 'comfortable' with. Social networks (the kinds of people and groups we have relationships and interactions with) and status may also play a role when there is no transparent and open system for appointing coaches.

I've always said they prefer their own kind, and that's the way it is. But when it's so blatant, when perhaps you've got the same qualifications as someone and you are possibly better than that person and it's given to that person, then you question it.

Frank, Level 4 coach

Privilege in Sport

Privilege refers to the unearned advantages held by the dominant groups within sport in relation to factors like their skin colour, gender, ethnic status and religion. For example, individuals within the dominant white group of sport coaches have the privilege of just 'fitting in' with the other delegates and tutors on a coaching course. These privileges are not guaranteed for coaches in minority groups.

The characteristics and needs of the dominant groups often become the 'norm' and determine the policies, guidelines and coaching development structures of governing bodies of sport.

We need to discuss the power and privilege that individuals have. It can be uncomfortable, but it will lead to far greater understanding of organisational structures and relations within sport.

On any coaching course I attend, I will find myself (my ethnicity) represented in the other coaches attending the course and the tutors leading the course.



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Recommendations for Sports Organisations and Governing Bodies of Sport

It's time for all sports organisations and governing bodies of sport to take responsibility and create environments for coaches that are free from discrimination and are welcoming to all.

We need to acknowledge that every coach is an individual and will face different barriers when entering and progressing through coaching. An awareness of privilege and unconscious bias within your coaching workforce is vital in being able to change the culture.

- Monitor coach equality characteristics, specifically ethnicity and gender, for every coaching course, using an online database. After each coaching course, follow up with the coaches to support them with coaching opportunities, links to clubs and further qualifications. This is particularly necessary if the coaches are from an under-represented group and may lack the informal networks and support (they don't know 'the right people') to progress within coaching.
- Consult coaches from under-represented groups across your coaching workforce at all levels for their experiences and views on inclusive practice. As in our research, black and minority ethnic coaches can offer their insights based on their everyday experiences of being in the minority on coach education courses and sessions. Create a safe and non-judgemental environment for these discussions.
- Seek out new ways to diversify the coaching workforce with transparent systems for recruitment and development, rather than using social networks to appoint 'the same type of people' to positions.
- Provide mentors or 'buddies' to all newly qualified coaches to offer opportunities to shadow coach sessions and gain advice on coach development. Ensure coaching mentors represent a diverse coaching workforce.
- Embed equality and diversity training throughout coaching courses, particularly Level 1 and 2 courses, not as a separate module.
- Advocate equality and diversity training for all staff on a regular basis, and include education activities on privilege and unconscious bias.
- Review and update your current resources to include guidance on behaviour and expectations, to create an inclusive and professional culture across all stages of the coaching pathway.
- Remember, creating an inclusive culture is **everybody's** responsibility. All coaching team members should communicate regularly with equality leads through meetings and collaboration on projects.
- Celebrate diversity within your coaching workforce!

Basically, the people who go out to recruit coaches, they know who they are looking for to begin with, and it's the same type of people that are being recruited over and over again.

Governing Body of Sport Equality Lead



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Further Resources/References

Rankin-Wright, A. (2015) 'Racial and Gender Equality and Diversity in Sport Coaching in the United Kingdom' (PhD thesis), Leeds: Leeds Beckett University.

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