

Ticking the right boxes: A critical examination of the perceptions and attitudes towards the black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) acronym in the UK

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Abstract

The Black Lives Matter movement and coronavirus pandemic have raised awareness of society's categorisation of non-white people and institutional language used. We add to contemporary debate on the BAME acronym (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) by providing a critical examination of the perceptions and attitudes towards it in the UK. Drawing on in-depth interviews with women from these communities who were working in the hyper-masculinised and white-dominated sporting industry, we privilege the voices of those who traditionally have been omitted.

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Adopting a Critical Race Theory approach and an intersectional lens three overarching themes were identified: rejection and indifference towards the BAME acronym; filling in the form – inadequacies of the system; and, making up the quota – perpetuating (work-related) insecurity(ies). The findings provide analytical insight into institutional language and highlight the potential for the BAME acronym to cause distress and alienation while preserving the concept of Whiteness.

Keywords

BAME terminology, race, gender, critical race theory, intersectionality

Introduction

In the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US), it is suggested that a Eurocentric or white-centric worldview exists. Following Ray's (2019) assertion that organisations are racial structures, this worldview will be perpetuated within major organisations (Kilvington, 2019); Whiteness is the norm against which all others are measured, with anyone from different backgrounds classed as 'others'. King (2005: 399) states how Whiteness is "a complex, often contradictory, construction: ubiquitous, yet invisible; normalized and normative; universal, but always localized; unmarked, yet privileged". The white skin of an individual is rarely highlighted (and is essentially invisible), whereas the skin colour of those considered to be non-white continues to be cited (albeit possibly unconsciously) as a determining factor of ability and status (Wilson, 2010). Thus, skin colour continues to play a greater role in the lives of those from non-white backgrounds when compared to individuals who are white (Bhatia, 2020).

Another colonial hangover is the (in)appropriateness of language used within societies. In particular, legislative terminology that categorises members of society based on their ethnicity can often be a tool for exclusion and/or privilege. BAME has become the catch-all term in the UK for anyone from Black, Asian or 'minority ethnic' communities. While there has been a recent push to embrace the term Global Majority in recognition that those placed on the 'other' side of the racial dichotomy outnumber the privileged, white, Western minority (Campbell-Stephens, 2021) and even with an independent report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (2021) recommending that aggregated terms such as BAME should not be used, they remain in widespread use. In other contexts, a variety of terminology is adopted that also presents race as a dichotomy. In the US, the use of Person/People of Colour (POC) conflates many diverse populations and silences their voices (Al-Yagout, 2017). Similarly problematic is the term 'visible minority', which has been adopted by government in Canada (Bauer et al., 2020). Even the individual terms within the acronym, such as Black and Asian cannot capture a multiplicity of experiences both within and across very different peoples (Rankin-Wright and Hylton, 2020).

In 2020 two global 'events' have refocussed attention on social inequalities felt by BAME communities that stem from the colonial past of Whiteness. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has led to widespread protests against structural and societal injustice and resulted in questions around the suitability of various symbols and traditions that are linked to colonialism. Second, the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted non-white

communities to a greater extent in terms of both the number of cases and mortality rates when compared to the white local population (Bhatia, 2020), giving rise to questions around the systemic subordination of those from BAME communities. Such acronyms group disparate experiences together for administrative purposes and there has been increased media debate around the suitability of the term (see Malik, 2020), but surprisingly researchers have yet to empirically explore individuals' views on the BAME acronym. There is frequently a disjuncture between the terminology adopted by communities to describe themselves and that imposed on them by institutions and those outside the communities. Aspinall (2020a: 1) describes "racial/ethnic terminology" as "contested, contentious, dynamic, and slippery". Therefore, the aim of the present study was to critically examine perceptions and attitudes towards the BAME acronym. We adopted Critical Race Theory (CRT) and an intersectional lens to evaluate 15 semi-structured interviews with women from these communities who worked as coaches in Association football - an industry that has traditionally been hyper-masculinised and white-dominated, particularly in terms of leadership positions (Burton, 2015) and, if we accept that organisations are racial structures, a site where daily, routine organisational processes connect racial schemas to material and social resources (Ray, 2019). Through giving voice to these counterstories, we expose "how lived experiences are shaped by, but also challenge and resist authoritative discourses" around institutional language (Crump, 2014: 213). Such narratives, which detail the experiences of institutionalised racism through the voices of the oppressed, are important as they both humanise structural inequality and further challenge dominant ideologies and master narratives (Han and Price, 2015).

Language of categorisation

In a UK setting, ethno-racial classifications were first recorded in the 1991 Census (Aspinall, 2009). According to Aspinall (2010) the state has long categorised and classified of people, as a function of the bureaucratic practices of modern government, with political agendas underpinning the need to divide the population into distinct communities (Aspinall, 2009). This practice draws on homogenising tendencies and essentialises what is also an ethnically diverse population with strong (and often oppositional) national and regional identities in the UK. Although official classification systems may lack validity (Song, 2012), they are frequently used "for the monitoring and implementation of anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation, and the acknowledgment that being a non-white minority entails a number of potential disadvantages" (Song, 2012: 568). These categories indiscriminately combine communities from a variety of social, geographical, behavioural, and cultural backgrounds and are problematic as they serve to homogenise and group people together who vary greatly, often with an emphasis placed on skin colour (Milner and Jumbe, 2020). Unsurprisingly, few of those that these acronyms are used to describe identify with them, with repeated calls for them to be abandoned in favour of "accurate description to delineate the ethnic minority (or minority ethnic) population in terms of the constituent groups" (Aspinall, 2020b: 812). However, use of BAME has grown with the

Covid-19 pandemic accelerating its adoption, particularly by government and health agencies (Aspinall, 2020a).

In the 1970s and 80s, the term Black began to replace the earlier-favoured 'coloured', in reference to people of African, Caribbean and South Asian heritage – essentially all non-white minorities (Modood, 2020) – to convey the commonality in experiences and to provide solidarity against overt racism (Song, 2004). Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) first appeared within the lexicon of the UK government in 1987 (Aspinall, 2020a) but it was extended to make reference to 'Asian' and has been supplanted by BAME. A 'Mixed' race category was first included in the England and Wales 2001 Census (Aspinall, 2009) with three options (White and Black Caribbean, White and Asian, White and Black African) plus the ability to describe an alternative background (Song, 2010b). It is one of the fastest growing populations in the UK (Song, 2010b) and Song (2010a: 265) argues that this growth is evidence against the existence of "distinct, 'natural' races amongst people in multiethnic societies".

Rigid, racialised notions and societal norms, not to mention classification systems, can highly constrain mixed race individuals. While some may have a preferred identity option and adopt a singular racial identification, others reject this imposed system and instead opt for either a blended, mixed identity or contest classifications and racial boundaries altogether (Song, 2010a). Song and Aspinall (2012) note that misidentification of mixed race people can result in feeling either misrecognised, positive about the mismatch, or indifferent to how they are racially categorised. Furthermore, as the UK's classification system generally only allows for dual backgrounds, it fails to capture the complexity of multiple backgrounds (Song, 2012). These systems are also typically based on the assumption that ethnic minority status is intrinsically linked to what Song (2020: 1) terms "an unambiguously non-white appearance". However, in changing and diversifying multiethnic societies, this may no longer be the case and there are growing numbers of 'mixed race' people who can look racially ambiguous or white (Song, 2020).

In sport, government-funded bodies such as Sport England and UK Sport have also adopted BAME terminology. As part of their monitoring of equality and diversity, these bodies monitor BAME participation rates and board membership of the bodies that they fund. The terminology has also been adopted by national governing bodies, such as the English Football Association (FA). They state that they adopt

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic classifications to refer to members of communities who identify as being Black, Asian, from Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups or from other Ethnic Groups as per the England and Wales Census ethnicity classifications. This is consistent with the Oxford English dictionary definition of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and the ONS definition of Ethnic Minority. (FA, 2022)

The use of this acronym by these bodies is noted and challenged in a report into racism and racial inequality in sport that was funded by UK Sport and the Home Country Sport Councils (Sport Industry Research Centre, 2021). Nevertheless, its use persists.

Whiteness in the UK

Whiteness has been defined as “institutionalized discourses and exclusionary practices seeking social, cultural, economic and psychic advantage for those bodies racially marked as white” (McDonald, 2020: 9). These practices have emerged as “conservative reaction to political and cultural threats to white male hegemony: a clinging to the vestiges of the previously unchallenged (material and symbolic) spaces of privilege reserved for white males” (Newman, 2007: 317). These privileged spaces are historically constructed and grounded in colonial-era notions of masculinity and racial superiority that provided the ideological basis for conquest and slavery (Harris, 1993). The social processes involved with Whiteness are, therefore, designed to reinforce the dominant ideologies and privileges that these historical acts have afforded to whites and ensures that those who are white are not at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy (Harris, 1993; Cleland et al., 2022).

Gunstone (2009: 1) describes how Whiteness “involves the marginalization, discrimination and oppression of non-white groups and individuals”. White power and privilege is demonstrated through individuals’ and societies’ attitudes and ideologies that extend social inequalities through racial exclusion, helping to construct and reinforce Whiteness as normal in the everyday practice of individuals (Cleland et al., 2022). These dominant racial ideologies have been referred to as ‘colour-blind racism’ as they minimize discussions on racism, providing “‘raceless’ explanations for all sort of race-related affairs” (Bonilla-Silva, 2015: 1364). Thus, any inequalities are, essentially, blamed on those who are subjugated (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). The Covid-19 pandemic has proved to be yet another example of how indirect, subtle racism has become institutionalized to mask inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2022).

In the specific context for this study, the football (coaching) workforce in the UK is not reflective of the increasingly racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse population (Conricode and Bradbury, 2020). In sport, Whiteness has also been viewed as the ‘normal’ with “major structures, power processes, White supremacy, racism and (in) equality within sport organisations that have consistently been ignored by both practitioners and mainstream theorists” (Rankin-Wright et al., 2019: 616). As such, race continues to limit the opportunities of those that fall outside the privileged (White male) norm (Fletcher et al., 2021). As an example, in a study into the experiences of British South Asians working in managerial or governance positions in football, Lawrence et al. (2022) found that participants faced multiple barriers to acceptance and inclusion.

It was also noted that the term BAME was rejected by a number of these participants. While women, generally, are underrepresented in leadership and coaching positions in British sport, this becomes even more marked for women from diverse backgrounds (Rankin-Wright and Hylton, 2020). Significantly, Rankin-Wright and Hylton (2020: 130) identify Black women coaches as one of the ‘silenced’ voices in sport; while critiquing scholarship in this field for failing to “speak to, with, and for [this] diverse group of women”.

As stated previously, classification systems such as BAME further reinforce Whiteness and keeps people who are not white on the periphery. Therefore, Whiteness goes far beyond a racial identity and should be seen as both an *ideology*

and *institution* (Harris, 1993) and so CRT, which views racism as the “normal order of things” in society (Ladson-Billings, 2013: 37), provides a framework to understand this issue (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

Critical race theory

Recently, Meghji (2021) has argued that, despite its critics, CRT has the conceptual flexibility needed to study British society in contexts other than education where it has initially been employed. As such, Meghji calls for greater use of CRT in the British context and as a social theory. The interdisciplinary nature of CRT means that it has been applied to other social contexts, including sport, with the goal of understanding, critiquing, and challenging racial inequality and prejudice, with an emphasis on transformative social change. This paper, thus, answers both of these calls.

Vass (2015: 377) asserts:

CRT is an approach that focuses on exploring the social (re)construction of race in ways that have material impacts on the lives of people. Race helps with explaining how and why power and influence are distributed in ways that privilege White interests, while concurrently and relationally discriminating against non-White interests.

Thus, CRT can be considered a “multi-disciplinary approach that combines social activism with a critique of the fundamental role played by White racism in shaping contemporary [Western] societies” (Gillborn and Ladson-Billings, 2020: 341). Cleland et al. (2022: 81) state that CRT “examines the manifestations of ‘race’ and racism in society where whiteness is privileged, whilst marginalizing Others on the grounds of their ‘race’”.

Stovall (2010) and Hylton (2018) identify the key tenets of CRT as: the centrality of race and racism; challenging the dominant ideology of Whiteness, meritocracy, race neutrality, and ahistoricism; a commitment to social justice and the disruption of negative racial relations; and centralising the experiential knowledge and ‘voice’ of people of colour. It makes clear that ‘race’ is a powerful social construct (Rankin-Wright et al., 2019) and focusses on the racialised processes, formations, meanings, and consequences that are a major factor in the lived experiences of people of colour; shedding light on the racism, racial disparities, and inequalities that remain commonplace in everyday interactions (Hylton, 2018). In saying this, we should be clear that racism is not a random, isolated act of individuals behaving badly. Whiteness has shaped many western societies and permeates their major institutions (Pérez Huber and Solorzano, 2015). Indeed, Ray (2019) goes further and argues that organisations play a key role in the social construction of race. Therefore, it is important that institutional structures and processes are interrogated in relation to their attitudes towards BAME communities and not just the actions of individuals.

CRT has a strong tradition of use to study the US legal system (e.g., Mills and Unsworth, 2018) with an aim of “understanding the contours and nuances of race, racism, and White supremacy” in order to change the bond that “stubbornly persists” between this (and other) system(s) and racial power and privilege (Oshiro et al., 2020:

4). Stemming from a frustration at the failure of the civil rights legal debates to result in significant or meaningful racial reform, CRT aims to drive transformation. As Mills and Unsworth (2018: 314) detail, it has

uncovered the endemic nature of racism in society, applying transformative ideals that aim to ameliorate the subordination of others based on race, gender, sexuality, age, economic or social status, and other multilayered identities, confronting dehumanising societal structures.

Given that sport “surreptitiously reinforces positions on ‘race’ and dispositions to racism” (Hylton, 2018: 108) it is clearly a suitable context for CRT studies and Fletcher and Hylton (2016) posit that there has now been a noticeable number that have applied CRT in a sporting context. Of particular relevance, Rankin-Wright et al. (2019) used a CRT approach to study the experiences of Black men and women coaches in the UK, albeit in non-football contexts. They claim that CRT was particularly useful in privileging the voices that sport, a gendered and racialised institution often marginalises. Similarly, Bradbury et al. (2018: 330) employed CRT in their study of “minority ethnic” male coaches across three European countries in order to give voice to this group; identifying institutional racism that was “underpinned by the invisibility, centrality and normativity of hegemonic Whiteness embedded within the senior organizational tiers of the professional football industry”. However, while CRT can be used to give voice to the marginalised, prior analyses have not examined the role that language plays in privileging Whiteness in a sport setting.

Crump (2014: 207-8) has proposed Critical Language and Race Theory (LangCrit) as a framework “to look for ways in which race, racism, and racialization intersect with issues of language, belonging, and identity”. Yet while this framework recognizes how audible and visual language shape being and belonging and are useful for examining linguistic identities and their intersection with racial identities, it focuses on the ability of a particular language to subordinate those for whom it is not a native tongue. Novel to this study, we aim to understand how institutional, legislative language also empowers Whiteness. As such, we explore whether CRT and LangCrit are suitable tools to adopt in this instance.

Methodology

The study design was informed by ontological relativism (i.e., multiple, subjective realities exist) and epistemological interpretivism (i.e., knowledge is socially situated in each participant’s reality). Accordingly, a semi-structured interview design was adopted to elicit participants’ thoughts and feelings about the BAME acronym.

The findings presented in this article are drawn from a wider study into the UK workplace experiences of women football coaches. We draw on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 women who were recruited based on their self-identification of race and ethnicity. This sample was initially identified from the team’s experiences in football, with further participants recruited based on their contacts and suggestions. As this small population are often high profile and visible members of their communities, we have broadly classified participants to protect their anonymity as follows: Black (6),

Asian, (5), Mixed (4). Although none of the research team identify with these communities, we have all worked in a professional capacity within women's football and have extensive knowledge and experience of sport coaching. In addition, the interviews were conducted by women researchers. Thus, while we cannot be considered as insiders, we attempted to minimize distance between researchers and participants.

Data collection

As part of the wider study into the under-representation of BAME women coaches in the football workplace, the interview guide initially asked participants about their experiences as a BAME woman coach. Discussions around the BAME acronym at times arose organically within the first few interviews. We reflected on the apparent importance of this topic to participants and the interview guide was subsequently amended to include a question on the acronym. Interviews were conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic via video or phone calls, lasting between 30 and 115 min. Once transcribed verbatim, participants were sent copies of their transcription to verify accuracy, with no changes necessary. At this stage, participants were asked to select a pseudonym to confer their anonymity. We consciously chose nuanced and meaningful engagement with research participants in this process, moving away from the tendency for paternalistic researchers to own pseudonym choices (Allen and Wiles, 2016). Moreover, as a team, we acknowledge our privileged position as both academics in a white-dominated profession and as predominantly white researchers. However, by centralising the experiential knowledge of our participants and through faithful reproduction of interview transcripts we privilege the voice of marginalised and often unheard communities.

Data analysis

A deductive thematic analysis was conducted (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Two members of the research team independently analysed the data and inductively co-created initial codes that were then discussed and developed into themes in order to ensure consistency. There were no disagreements, however the process of coding was checked and agreed by all authors. Following data reduction, three main themes were identified, described and refined.

Although we drew on both CRT and LangCrit, with a focus on race, during analysis we employed an intersectional lens, mindful of the importance of accounting for the intertwining of race/ethnicity and gender (Juan et al., 2016) of our participants. The adoption of an intersectional lens in data analysis afforded insight into how participants articulated their complex and multiple identities and lived experiences. In doing so we can examine the multiple social identities of our participants not through the traditional additive model (gender + race + ethnicity), which assumes that each identity has a separate and mutually exclusive but summative impact on the individual (Shields, 2008), but instead through highlighting how they interact in multiplicity. Thus, intersectionality as a tool of analysis allows researchers to examine "crosscutting relationships" (Collins, 2000: 44) and the simultaneous overlapping of multiple forms of oppression.

Results and discussion

Rejection of and indifference towards the BAME acronym

Novel to this research, our first theme provides empirical evidence for individuals' views on the BAME acronym. Participants expressed their unease with the use of it. Two initial frustrations were that it failed to reflect who they are or resonate with them as individuals (Ebony states that "when it's used to describe me as a person, as an individual, that's what I take issue with") and that BAME is frequently used as a collective identity for anyone who was not identified as white. This frustration was at the level of the acronym, which reduces multiple identities into one homogenous group and with the term Black, Asian and Minority ethnic, which, although it has evolved over time, still reduces the majority of the global population to a narrow definition. Both of these practices lose what Holly describes as "all those little identities"; essentially complexities that make someone an individual. The below anecdotal counterstory illustrates the complexities involved with the term and the potential for distress that it can create by 'othering' individuals (Rasool and Ahmed, 2020):

Even when I'm watching a couple of (TV) programmes and I think one of the programmes where it hit me the hardest is when a 12 year old...on a programme who was not of a Black or Asian background, said, well, I'm not other. Why call me other, I'm not an other, which is a very fair comment. Like, you're definitely not an other. (Ebony)

Even when the term itself is not rejected, it was then viewed as a 'necessary evil' to avoid confusion or as preferential ahead of the other terms that have, both historically and societally, been used. Rupa claimed that offensive terms, "like the N-word or well, for example, like the P word...look, for the purpose of this I will use the terms... like the word nigger or the word paki", were no longer widely used but pointed out that "people from those communities [targeted by the terms] will say that it was never acceptable". Sadly, Bush stated that there were "worse terms that's out there [that] get used within the footballing community" therefore she didn't complain about the use of BAME. Indeed, participants spoke of the need to have 'thick skin' when working in football and to live with offensive and insensitive terms. Here, despite claims that sport is now colour-blind, the lived experience of these participants belies these claims and provides evidence that race and racism remains a significant aspect of football coaching, as CRT identifies (Hylton, 2018). These comments also provide indication of how significant language is as a performative expression of racialised identity (Crump, 2014).

Our participants were increasingly questioning the appropriateness of the BAME acronym as they witnessed greater dialogue and discussion around racial equality. Emily saw the increased media discussion of race as a positive outcome for the BLM movement but also wanted to "see what does happen". Dayna stated that "during this whole BLM, the amount of difficult questions I've had...trying to educate people around their perceptions and their views". She suggested that it was now possible to:

have a voice to be able to, even more so say that we can hold people to account for using these [inappropriate] words, although you had a voice to say it was wrong. We couldn't hold people to account then...because of the laws and unfortunately, just the way it was.

With these and other more gradual changes in society, there was also evidence that our participants now question the efficacy of the acronym in addition to challenging earlier terms. Holly discussed being on a “journey” due to being “mixed race”:

To be honest, because I guess I’ve always grown up as being mixed race. That’s what I’ve been called when I went through university and I kind of learnt about race as a social construct. I then started projecting that. I would happily call myself brown, but that’s not really a thing.

She continued by, again, stressing that the imposed nature of the term meant that intricate identities were ignored and Whiteness was prioritised:

So I guess politically I identify best as Black but I really reject BAME. Because it just puts everybody that’s not white into one bracket that’s so easy to do and then lose all those little identities. And it’s all very well that that pocket may be majority Black Afro Caribbean, it may be the majority African and it may be whatever but there might be just one Asian person or one person from Turkey for goodness sake who doesn’t fit in the white bracket and they just get completely overlooked. So I really reject that.

For Mya, her journey with the term was somewhat more immediate. Her reflection on the term as she was speaking suggests her discomfort and a move towards challenging it:

For me I’m happy with being identified as a Black female coach, that’s ok because that’s a description of what I look like and who I am... Within the term BAME I haven’t really got any negative feelings towards it so at the moment I’m ok with it really...I’m starting to sway to disliking it, but I’m alright with it at the moment.

One of our participants gave voice to the inherent institutional racism that is associated with the term BAME and provides insight into the issues that are generated through this institutionally imposed and hierarchically laden term:

And it’s ironic that all the acronyms are for people of colour, race, whatever you want to put it. And I think that just doesn’t do it a disservice, because if you look at white, you’ve got white British, white Irish, white Scottish, white Welsh, that’s been expanded and it feels like... You feel like, you’re not appreciated. Or respected, you are respected to some extent but you’re not valued enough. I think it’s about the personal values. And that’s quite sad. So would I use it, I don’t use it, there’s sometimes now I’m quite flippant, I don’t highlight the BAME selection on the application forms that you fill up. Or I don’t answer it because I don’t need to. You can tell by my bloody name. (Serena)

Similarly, the inwardly focussed, Brit-centric nature of the term, which is a feature of former colonial powers, was pinpointed in the employment of the word ‘minority’. Its legitimacy was questioned for two reasons. The first reason was that:

...Black is not a minority in the world. Asian is not a minority in the world. Maybe so in England, but not in the world. And which I know it is in some people’s view of it, obviously being kind of segregated as a minority. (Dayna)

Second, it was highlighted that there are negative connotations with the word that carry much significance for those it describes. Ebony's comments echo the concerns with the term 'minority' that Campbell-Stephens (2021) has detailed. She further states that for her it implies that she is lower on the social hierarchy:

... when I say it out loud I don't like the word minority. Now I understand why the word minority is in there in that if you look at the UK population, Black, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds, are less than white backgrounds. So I understand the context behind the word minority, what many people look at that word and don't see it as in terms of percentage there's less. They see it as you're a minority. You as an individual are less important. And that's almost like a bit of, it's become a bit of an unconscious bias. So people don't actually realise actually that the meanings have been changed. So within that is just the minority word. And maybe it's just re-educating people about what that minority word means. Where it originally came from was just the percentage, it was a percentage thing, it's been now taken a bit out of contexts and a lot of people see it as you're less than me, sort of thing.

There was clearly also a feeling that the term had been imposed from above and shows a lack of understanding of those it supposedly describes. Naomi, who initially thought that the term was referring to the character Bane from the *Batman* comics, spoke of her confusion at how the acronym has been chosen:

And I'm like no I'm not Bane. Oh, it's BAME. Oh, it was too much I was like my head's spinning ... How did they come up this? It's like ohh, was that one person? Was it a small collective? Did you actually go out and do some research to find out? What do people of colour or what did Black people. Indian people. Oriental people. What did they want to be called? Did someone really come out with that feedback that we want to be called BAME?

Here, the acronym leaves those that it categorises disempowered and at fault for not fitting within the acronym and hence White privileged institutions, as would be expected with colour-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Filling in the form – inadequacies of the system

Participants spoke of their discomfort when asked to identify their backgrounds on forms, such as job applications. In this instance, the narrow categories used on official documents and by the FA, which are driven by central government advice as noted earlier and as we discuss below, fail to reflect the complexity and rich diversity of contemporary society. Participants not only spoke of their frustrations at being forced to tick a box but eloquently described the distress that the process caused, which we argue is unlikely to be considered when such classification systems are devised. The following extract speaks to the issues:

...well that's a barrier itself, just filling in one form. It's ridiculous isn't it, like, one question. I can't even figure out what the answer is. And it's not even a hard one, really, but it kind of is if you really delve into it completely...I know it sounds silly doesn't it. Even when I'm filling in questionnaires I just don't know what to put... that's it it is it is all about the ticking the right

boxes, you know... Could it not just be a box of where you from? Where were you born, that's it. (Ebony)

It is worth bearing in mind that it was white European scientists who, in the eighteenth century, began to define the concept of race and, in a subjective manner, "placed boundaries around populations and territories as casually as moving pieces on a chess board" (Saini, 2019: 6). However, while the process may have been arbitrary, a hierarchy was/is defined, with white Europeans firmly at the top and for two centuries scientists actively sought to find genetic differences to preserve this order and used this racial hierarchy to justify 50 million deaths around the world (Tatz, 2009). Based on the information posted on its website, the FA uses definitions/classifications that are drawn from the England and Wales Census, the Oxford English dictionary, and the Office for National Statistics. Therefore, drawing on Bonilla-Silva's (2014) colour-blind frames, the use of institutional language policies by the governing body of football in England will reinforce racial hierarchies, thus creating barriers for our participants.

The colonial history of Britain means that this hierarchy is still evident in ethnic/racial classification systems, and hence within those organisations that adopt these. In recognition of the increase in ethnic diversity in the UK, the 2021 Census of England and Wales was updated to include 19 ethnic groups, with these now listed in alphabetical order rather than beginning with the *White* category as in previous versions (Gov.uk, 2022). Five categories relate to white ethnic groups and, within the first of these, participants can identify which of the individual nations within the British Isles they come from. Irish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, Roma, and "Any other White background" are other options in this wider category. The sub section titled *Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups* includes White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, and Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background. Perhaps tellingly, Whiteness is again at the forefront of each of these and there is no option to select a mixed heritage that does not include a white background. In the *Asian / Asian British* category the subsections are Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Any other Asian background. These categories were identified as restrictive by not allowing multiple identities to be selected as Eveline stated: "I'd say I'm Asian, British, Indian... But I mean, I was born here, so on those forms I tend to just put Asian, British, Indian". In one of our interviews, Serena pointed towards the inherent White privilege involved:

I never liked the word [BAME], cos am I an acronym? I'm known as an acronym that means I'm not valued enough or they can't afford to have another line for just South Asian.

Next, *Black / African / Caribbean / Black British* is broken down into African, Caribbean, and Any other Black / African / Caribbean background. Again, the lack of depth in this category was identified by Mya: "Within Black there's so many different categories in that... a Black Caribbean family is completely different to a Black African family". The final 'Other ethnic' group only offers Arab or Any other ethnic group. Holly expressed her dissatisfaction at this limited selection and stated that she wanted to select "Brown if there were more people who also identify as Brown. Otherwise, it's just that I'm put myself in a little box on my own". Here there is a

tension between wanting to be recognised as an individual, with the various elements that make up one's identity but also not wanting to draw attention to oneself as being different, an 'other'. Holly drew out some of these frustrations:

I mean, perhaps previously as a teenager I would have said, I don't want any of it. I don't want an identity that makes me stand out. Whereas as an adult, I can acknowledge that these things are parts of me and they're important. And I am a woman and I'm a grown woman. And those things are really important. And I want to keep them as part of my identity rather than just try to hide in amongst the crowd.

The social construction of these racial categories and the extent to which they are embedded within institutional and social practices can be examined via CRT. The order and depth of sub-categories provides a subtle yet significant indicator of the dominance of the mono-cultural white core of British culture and the indifference towards and insignificance afforded to those from non-white backgrounds. As Bashi (1998) asserts, these categories fit into a hierarchical, racialised social structure and provides another example of a practice that marginalises and oppresses non-white groups and promotes Whiteness as the norm.

Participants highlighted deficiencies in the typical division of the mixed / multiple backgrounds category. As noted above, foregrounding Whiteness is in itself problematic and speaks to the institutionalised and endemic nature of Whiteness and actually is a central support of systemic racism (des Neiges Léonard, 2014). Such a system fails to capture adequately the fluidity of identity and the ways that those from diverse background learn to adapt their identity to different situations or change how they racially self-identify over time (Song, 2012; DeFina and Hannon, 2016). Dayna referred to herself as a "chameleon", to be able to adapt to the group that she was in. The following quote also exemplifies the tensions that can arise from these classification systems, which are not experienced by those in the dominant, white cultural core of British society:

I'm mixed race. I'm half Jamaican, I'm half English. I'm Black some days. Some days I'm white. Like, I'm a bit I'm everything. So sometimes, you know, it depends who the crowd is and who I'm around, you know, obviously when I'm teaching, I'm working with young like the young Black boys, obviously, which is so prevalent right now. I'm Black, around them I'm Black. Because for them, that's familiar for them, that's that gains their acceptance to then be able to get what I need from them in a sense. And so, yeah, potentially manipulate it to suit the situation I'm in. (Dayna)

It is evident from our interviews that these limited categories typically available to select from presented multiple issues. In many instances, participants pointed to a mix of heritages that would not fit within these categories. For instance, Rupa stated that she was "South Asian of Indian descent" and yet there is no possibility for her to indicate her heritage. Similarly, Sarah pointed to the complexity of modern Britain:

I always struggled to tick a box for, well you don't have to, but for your ethnicity because I guess ultimately I'm mixed white and Asian, because my Dad's Indian, my Mum's half Italian but Italian is still considered Caucasian, isn't it? So I'm basically mixed white and Indian ... So

sometimes I describe myself as Indalian but obviously that's not an actual ethnicity box that I can check. Maybe I should just check other and then write Indalian.

The need to categorise people into 'boxes', forcing them to conform to an institutional system, creates a problem as these soon become solidified and then do not enable movement or evolution as society adapts or as institutional language evolves. Eveline stated, "...it's nicer when I can say Asian, British, Indian as opposed to just...I guess I normally have to tick Indian, Asian-Indian or whatever... I think it's nicer when you can say the whole thing, Asian, British, Indian". Song (2004) notes significant differences within broad panethnic categories such as 'Asian' and Emily also spoke of the challenge she faced with classification systems and highlighted the insecurity that can be caused:

I wouldn't know what category to put me in either, when you say Asian now, Asian refers to Indian ... So I'm not classed as Asian anymore because I'd be Indian but I'm thinking, well, if you're from Asia, surely you're Asian but that's not quite how it works. So, I have no idea.

Aspinall (2007) identifies that classifications are often mapped onto ethnic/racial stereotypes resulting in either resistance from those being categorised or the internalising of the identity when such labelling happens in an institutional setting. Ahmed (2012) notes that institutions are often slow to respond to societal changes and are not reflective of modern Britain – they end up playing catch up. The UK government's categories of ethnicity and, given their adoption of these the FA are, therefore, yet to catch up with the multicultural nature of British society. Moreover, given the "stubbornly persistent" bond between the legal system and racial power and privilege (Oshiro et al., 2020) it is unsurprising that a similar relationship exists in other aspects of the legislative system and institutional language. Furthermore, earlier terms continue to carry weight and it takes time for new racial categories to be included by officialdom when they emerge (Bashi, 1998). Given that sporting organizations frequently lag behind social movements (Parry et al., 2021), it may be some time before football adopts new racial categories.

Making up the quota - perpetuating (work-related) insecurity(ies)

Anxiety linked to thoughts about how race affected job selection or recruitment was evident across the interviews. Due to the historical underrepresentation of diverse populations in football coaching (Bradbury et al., 2016; Hylton, 2018), a range of 'positive action' measures have been introduced by governing bodies in professional football to support minoritized coaches to achieve advanced coaching qualifications (Bradbury and Conricode, 2021), such as 'BAME Coach Bursaries' (Bradbury and Conricode, 2020). Recently, the launch in 2021 of the FA's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2024, *A Game For All* (FA, 2021) saw targets set for the proportion of "People from Black, Asian, Mixed and Other Ethnic backgrounds" coaches (and other roles within football). The use of such positive actions is permitted through Section 158 and 159 of the 2010 UK Equality Act and also encouraged in principle by some National Governing Bodies of sports and the UK Sports Council. However, Bradbury

and Conricode (2021) note that adopting individualised deficit-based approaches to racialised inequalities rather than reforming the cultures, practices, and normative institutional arrangements may have limited impact. At an individual level, the effectiveness of these approaches can also be questioned. Participants spoke of fears surrounding being recruited in order to ‘make up the quota’ of BAME employees or to ‘tick the box’ and described how this added an additional layer of thought to job selection, retainment and sense of belonging when in a job role. Ebony had been labelled as the “BAME coach” on a mentoring programme; a move that she felt “was used in that context to marginalise me and single me out”. LangCrit recognizes the intersections of audible and visible identity and argues that language is socially and locally constructed (Crump, 2014). Therefore, it is important to identify that Ebony’s labelling not only draws attention to her visible identity but it situates her within a racialized hierarchy steeped in historical and cultural discrimination – imposing a subjugated identity upon her.

Participants noted how multiple proponents of their identities collided and resulted in the feeling of being appointed for reasons other than their football qualifications, professional reputation, or ability to successfully execute a job role; which served to promote insecurity. For these women, there was a need to prove themselves beyond their male and/or white counterparts and to assert themselves and justify their place in the already competitive football industry. Participants spoke of anxiety and insecurities in their roles, as captured by Serena:

I know I’m also {an} ideal person to be branded, someone to use a person’s club marketing brand as well. So I think I’m really cautious of where I apply to because I think, A, are they hiring me because they need statistics. B, are they hiring me ‘cause I’m known in the industry. C, are they hiring me because I’m known to the media and the accolades, or D, are they hiring me because they genuinely care.

She further went on to say

It’s made me double think. Absolutely made me double think. And. But then I think the industry has made me more cynical, ‘cause I know what people think, I got on my [qualification] because of statistics and stuff, but I know damn well I haven’t. I know I haven’t. But, I can’t stop second guessing.

The above account, alongside other participant voices, highlights how the stigma attached to racialised identities, particularly when tied to recruitment of those from identified BAME backgrounds can cause disruption; leading them to question their location or place in their roles, challenging their sense of belonging in football on multiple levels. So, although the introduction of positive action measures can be viewed as a positive step, the employment of institutional language to denote these is counterproductive as it serves reinforce the supremacy of Whiteness.

Scholars in non-sporting areas highlight the need to consider the analytical concept of insecurity and related concepts such as uncertainty, anxiety, fear, and neuroticism, which can be perpetuated for multiple reasons in the workplace (e.g., Knights and Clarke, 2014; Pullen and Rhodes, 2018). Collinson (2003: 529) suggests that insecurity at work can

take many overlapping forms (existential, social, economic, psychological): insecurities may intersect and operate simultaneously to (re)produce power relations, anxieties, and 'survival strategies' in individuals occupying workplaces where they are constantly under scrutiny, measurement, and assessment. We now apply this concept to the UK football industry. The intersection of these insecurities is articulated by Mya:

I've heard other people say, well, she's only got that role because she's Black or she's able to get onto that [coaching] course [as] she's a female. And even within the establishment of organisations I've been a part of, it has been a case of well you're only here because you tick the right boxes, not because you're good enough.

The extract captures how in her role as a coach, gender and/or identification as BAME operated to challenge her place and security; they did so separately but can also operate in combination at the intersection of these colliding elements. This was echoed in the following extract:

I think there's a real lack of [opportunity] particularly around coaching and management there for women. And then you've got minority women on top of that. There's not that many jobs to begin with, especially in the pro game, there isn't many full-time jobs... Because unfortunately, because we're such a minority so as women, but also as ethnic minority women, you get labelled with the same brush. And it shouldn't be like that, but it is like that. So, you know, there's some of those saying that they're not any good in their jobs. (Rupa)

Cooky et al. (2010) suggest that these interlocking sources of identity should be adopted to understand oppression or subordination, which is better understood in multiplicity because of the layered impact it can have, as a woman and a woman of colour. Hylton (2018) asserts that CRT does not present oppressions in a hierarchy but rather centralises intersecting forms of oppressions such as race and gender. Here these intersections create an eroding effect on confidence that occurs due to the conscious and subconscious thinking and the singling out effect that being labelled as BAME has. As Crump argues, LangCrit also embraces intersectionality and labelling (employing language to shape identities) clearly continues to create issues (Aspinall, 2007) as it not only serves to cause disruption in the moment but can have a damaging effect on pathways to upward mobility within coaching; resulting in precariousness in job role (Shams, 2020).

Directly linked to the insecurities, the women described how being located in traditionally white, male sporting spaces reinforced feelings of otherness. In these spaces their racial identities and the BAME acronym could be further used in order to promote difference and thus make them stand out from the dominant group:

So there was a time when I was on a mentoring programme with [governing body] and the [organisation] send out a pack to the parents and the players prior and it lists all the staff. And on there you had head coach and the name, you had an assistant coach and a name, you had the physio and the name, then you had BAME coach Ebony. And I was like, oh, that doesn't seem right. I don't want to be seen as the BAME coach Ebony. Like call me the mentee coach I'm happy with calling me the mentee coach, that's why I'm there, I'm there

as a mentee. So when it was used in that context to marginalise me and single me out, I had an issue with it. (Ebony)

Azzarito and Solomon (2005) note how ‘othering’ serves to maintain a person’s status as an outsider, as such, the ‘other’ not only functions as a way to maintain the interlocking systems of race, gender, and class, but also to reproduce social moral order, in which people are positioned at the margins; the difference of the marginalised ‘other’ maintains the mainstreamed centre, the norm. In both football, sport more broadly, and wider institutions within the UK, governance and power positions are dominated by white individuals who are inclined to make decisions that legitimises what Feigin (2013) terms the *white racial frame*, which is embedded in society’s structures in such a way that it benefits whites. Control over appointments, as is shown above, creates feelings of insecurity and anxiety which serves to both subjugate and to control those that are ‘othered’, while further empowering Whiteness. The process of recruiting to fill ‘BAME quotas’ or to tick boxes is, thus, evidence of the use of insecurity and anxiety as a ‘tactic’ of control by those in positions of power within football (Bradbury, 2013) – suggesting that the concept of insecurity is applicable in this setting too. Dayna gave voice to the impact of this process:

I’ve never felt with any of my coaching qualifications that I’ve got funding because I’m a good coach because I’ve always felt like it’s because I tick a box, because I meet the requirements. It’s because I’m Black. It’s because I’m female. It’s because I’m gay. Not because of anything else. And it’s hard because it’s you know, you don’t want to play into the system and accept the funding, but you can’t justify [paying] four and a half grand [the price of a qualification] either for a job that, you know, I don’t even make that in the year.

Conclusion

We have provided analytical insight into institutional language within football coaching and shed new light onto the tensions and discomforts that arise from its use to distinguish between individuals on the basis of race. Although the BAME acronym was seen as preferable to overtly racist terms, it caused discomfort for our participants and had, until recently, necessitated a grudging acceptance and ‘thick skin’. This finding highlights that far from being colour-blind, sport continues to highlight difference and to reinforce racial hierarchies. By adopting institutional language, football organizations continue to privilege Whiteness. Furthermore, given that our participants were women working in a traditionally male-dominated industry, the potential for marginalisation is increased due to the intersectionality of race and gender.

Positive action measures enacted by organizations offer potential for reducing racial inequality but they require careful consideration. The use of labelling to identify individuals in BAME-specific employment positions in football was shown to impact on their confidence and create additional layers of anxiety. In this instance, the language used created intersections of audible and visible identity, which highlights difference; difference that specifically reinforces social and historical notions of supremacy based on race. This insecurity serves to further position these individuals as others and weakens

their sense of belonging within the football industry, thus reinforcing the power base of the dominant groups that invariably make these decisions. As such, access to employment positions and related influence remains controlled by white males, legitimising the white racial frame, even when, for all appearances, steps are being taken to address inequalities.

Hegemonic Whiteness is at present embedded within the senior organizational tiers of the football industry – without either change to the current structures or to the culture of the organizations these issues will persist. That said, change at a micro level could be realised by football (and other sporting) organizations being mindful of current practices. In light of our findings, we provide two recommendations for change. First, the FA should reflect on their use of language and recognise that the classification systems that are typically used are historical formations that may no longer be suitable. We recommend moving away from using the BAME acronym. They should be proactive in jettisoning racialised institutional language and develop a system that allows individuals to self-identify. As such, the use of ‘tick boxes’ for ethnicity classification purposes should be replaced by an option for participants to describe their heritage and background, recognising and embracing the beautiful complexity that is present in multicultural societies. Second, football organizations should be mindful that appointments based on race, which are often used to provide ‘happy stories of diversity’ (Ahmed, 2007), actually serve to reinforce racial power dynamics and institutions would be better placed to examine the institutional habits that create the issues. Adopting positive action measures should be carefully planned with the involvement (and hence empowerment) of those they are designed to serve.

Finally, as a call for further research and theorisation in this area, we note that although LangCrit has proved useful in language studies at a general level, a more suitable theory (we suggest the Critical Study of Institutional Language) is needed for institutional communication to capture the nuanced yet significant and ongoing influence of Whiteness in creating structural inequalities.


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