International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring
2022, S16, pp.40-54. DOI: 10.24384/AJWW-CE78

Academic Paper

Conceptualising Allyship for Coaching to Promote Social Change

Lou W.Y. Chiu

Abstract

This conceptual study contributes to the increasing interest in coaching for social change. Despite growing interest amongst aligned helping professions, rarely mentioned in coaching is allyship. Though well placed to disrupt social and epistemic injustice, coaching's seemingly politically neutral stance might cause more harm than intended. I conducted a Critical Interpretive Synthesis of literature from coaching, mentoring, social justice, social epistemology, and aligned helping professions, informed by an anti-oppressive research paradigm, to conceptualise allyship for coaching. The result is an argument that allyship-informed coaching can elevate beyond individual interventions to social change by utilising its greatest political resource, its privilege.

Keywords

coaching, allyship, social change, epistemic injustice, intersectionality

Article history

Accepted for publication: 19 May 2022
Published online: 01 June 2022

© the Author(s)
Published by Oxford Brookes University

Introduction

This research reflects upon a critical incident early in my coaching practice. Whilst working with a young, working-class, Black female students' union leader, she disclosed the microaggressions, the low-level but persistent discriminatory behaviours, she experienced at work. As a coach, I have the individual and their resourcefulness at the forefront of the interaction. As a woman-of-colour, who has also experienced class, race and gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and ageism within the Education sector, this was an all too familiar and recurring story. This example was the first of many, highlighting an embedded paradox within coaching: how do we work with individuals while acknowledging the structural power dynamics within systems of oppression, such as colonialism, patriarchy, ableism, and heteronormativity?

International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring
2022, S16, pp.40-54. DOI: 10.24384/AJWW-CE78

Coaching and Social Responsibility

The literature demonstrates a growing appetite for and interest in social responsibility and change in coaching (Shoukry, 2016; Einzig, 2017; Shoukry & Cox, 2018; Western, 2018; Filsinger, 2021; Gannon, 2021). This focus moves away from a previously narrow focus on race and ethnicity in culture and diversity coaching. This interest poses the question, "[i]s it tenable to persist in the traditional coaching stance of moral neutrality – the Switzerland of the helping professions?" (Einzig, 2017, p. 43). Exploring this further would require incorporating more comprehensive concepts from philosophy, sociology, and politics to provide new opportunities for the sector (Gannon, 2021) that liberates coaching from its Western-centric, corporate origins (Shoukry & Cox, 2018; Filsinger, 2021). However, the application of allyship was resoundingly absent in existing coaching literature. Meanwhile, aligned helping professions, namely in therapy and mental health (Sennott & Smith, 2011); education and development (Johnson et al., 2019; Bettencourt, 2020); and organisational psychology (Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019; Minei et al., 2020) are showing increasing interest in the impact of allyship in their fields.

Allyship

The literature on coaching and social justice suggests that we do not have the same awareness or confidence when working with someone different from ourselves (Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012; Milner et al., 2013; Shoukry & Cox, 2018; Ghama & Spence, 2020). Allies are "dominantly situated members of society [who] rectify societal ills by becoming informed and working for positive social change" (Sullivan-Clarke, 2020, p. 179). Allies are proactive in addressing systems of oppression, using their awareness of our collective social, historical, economic, cultural, biological, relational, and political contexts. My main research question was: assuming coaches cannot be politically neutral, what can coaches learn from allyship about resisting and challenging social, systemic, and epistemic injustice? This study conceptualises allyship as means of elevating coaching practices to resist and challenge to systemic and epistemic injustice.

Epistemic Injustice

Where systemic injustice describes the embedded behaviours and beliefs developed from systems of oppression, epistemic injustice refers to the "persistent epistemic exclusion that hinders one's contribution to knowledge production" (Dotson, 2014, p. 115). Through the unequal distribution of epistemic resources "such as language, concepts, and criteria" (Pohlhaus, 2012, p. 718), communities marginalised within systems of oppression do not have the same opportunities or authority to make sense of or describe their experiences. Our main currency as coaches is language; we use words, visuals, audio, and symbols to support coachees' growing awareness and understanding of who they are, aspirations, and sense-making. This conceptual study adopted an anti-oppressive research paradigm to explore the types of epistemic resources and coaching tools that an allyship-informed coach might access and use.

I used Critical Interpretative Synthesis (CIS) to consolidate and interrogate 160 interdisciplinary sources to conceptualise a concept of allyship for coaching, focused on resisting epistemic injustice. I argue that by incorporating a foundational knowledge of epistemic injustice into our practice, we can begin to "accept that 'the political is personal' and abandon our insistence that 'the personal is political" (Strega, 2005, p. 221). Suppose we do not acknowledge and disrupt epistemic injustice. In that case, we remain complicit in perpetuating injustice for "profit, goals and performance, with little reflection on its wider impact on the social, economic or political sphere" (Western, 2012, pp. 28-29). At best, the impact is that this limits the coach's ability to help; at worst, the coach unwittingly and pervasively does harm. This article concludes with a discussion of the implications on the broader sector.

International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring
2022, S16, pp.40-54. DOI: 10.24384/AJWW-CE78

Social Justice, Diversity and Coaching Literature

The literature recognises that "[c]oaching practitioners do not work in a social or theoretical vacuum" (Western, 2012, p. 224), where there is potential to be "open and adaptable to serve different purposes" (Shoukry, 2016, p. 16). However, the context of the literature is representative of the existing biases within the profession, based on the recent International Coaching Federations' (ICF) Global Coaching Study: Executive Summary (2020).

Bias in Coaching Research

North American perspectives far outnumber other regions; 43 out of 70 sources in this literature review and 32% of 22,457 responses in the ICF study were from North America. Business Coaching was participants' primary speciality, more so if they were male (74% compared to 61% of female coaches), reflected in the number of studies that focus on migration, professional nomads, working in global organisations, leadership and professional development. Cross-cultural coaching almost exclusively refers to race and ethnicity, specifically nationality, rather than diaspora identities. More recent studies consider the experiences of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex and asexual/aromantic (LGBTQIA+) communities (Willging et al., 2016; Ghama & Spence, 2020; Christensen et al., 2021), individuals who are neurodiverse (Doyle & McDowall, 2015) and the homeless community (Holmes & Burgess, 2021). These are in the contexts of mental health and welfare outreach programmes, business and performance coaching, and secondary and further education. The topics ranged from coaches' competencies, establishing cultural frameworks, and developing emotional, cultural and diversity intelligence.

Equity Coaching and Coaching for Emancipation

The literature offers insight into the emergence of equity coaching (Blaisdell, 2018; Day, 2018; Gregory et al., 2019) and coaching for emancipation (Shoukry, 2016; Shoukry & Cox, 2018). Equity coaching is defined generally as seeking "to empower coachees, through a combination of instructional and cognitive coaching (Blaisdell, 2018, p. 164), by promoting self-responsibility, where "one can locate and use the energy of equality to promote equality and equity for others" (Day, 2018, p. 57). These contexts include primary, secondary, and higher education and performance coaching in the US.

These studies explore the impact of hyper/visibility on the coaching relationship, be it the assumptions either party makes based on their observation or how the coach or coachee raises the discussion of identity, if at all. By seeking someone who 'is like them', the coachee is looking to minimise the risk of taking on the emotional and mental load should the coach be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with an aspect of their identity. Carr and Seto (2013) found that is not an unwarranted concern. In their study, "coaches wrote about successful coaching experiences where they had a similar cultural preference to their client" (p.104), presenting less challenge and discomfort for the coach and coachee. However, remaining in these comfort zones perpetuates systemic and epistemic injustice by continuing our collective state of hermeneutical darkness. Put simply, we will continue not to know what we don't know.

A Paradox in Coaching?

The use of epistemic resources in coaching can only do so much without critically considering the nature of the coaching relationship and the context in which it takes place. In Carr and Seto's (2013) study, coaches questioned the underlying bias of the profession, where there is a disconnect between the "future-focused, self-actualizing, and action-oriented" (p. 107) stance of coaching and the "possible organizational realities of inherent barriers to change, hierarchy, politics and power" (pp. 107-8). Holmes and Burgess (2021, p.14) pose that:

International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring
2022, S16, pp.40-54. DOI: 10.24384/AJWW-CE78

> *coaching risks falling into the trap of presenting precarity as a crisis embedded in the individual choices (or morality) and behaviours of those most affected by inequality*

The individualistic nature of coaching presents an interesting dilemma in practitioners' and the sector's pursuit of social justice within interlocking systems of oppression.

Methodology

Jaworsky (2019), among others, reflects on the Foucauldian notion that "[k]nowledge is political, and by extension, so is research" (p. 2). As such, I adopted an anti-oppressive paradigm, where the ontological assumption is that knowledge is specific, dialogical, fluid and anti-oppressive, and epistemologically, knowledge is partial, multiple, situated and subjugated (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Coaching is well-suited to incorporate broader disciplines since it draws from "psychology, neuroscience, anthropology and the management sciences, amongst others" (Van Der Horst & Albertyn, 2018, p. 3). If the literature highlighted coaching's hermeneutical darkness around allyship, then looking to other disciplines could provide meaningful insights into how allyship in coaching could address systemic and epistemic injustices.

Though I initially considered Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for their interdisciplinary scope, I opted to use Critical Interpretive Synthesis (CIS). Informed by grounded theory, CIS utilises critical interpretivism to synthesise a large body of interdisciplinary, multi-method data sources rather than the aggregative nature more commonly found in systematic reviews (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006). The appeal of CIS was its congruence with anti-oppressive approaches, where the iterative search process combined with theory building offers opportunities to deconstruct "research traditions or theoretical assumptions as a means of contextualising findings" (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006, p. 4). I identified 2927 potential sources before longlisting 239 based on their contribution to the emerging conceptual framework. After a further appraisal, 160 journals, reports, book chapters, and alternative media sources were critically interpreted and synthesised into the following conceptualisation and argument for allyship in coaching. For clarity, I will use the data to refer to the literature used within CIS, whilst the literature refers to those used in the literature review.

Discussion: Conceptualising Coaching for Allyship

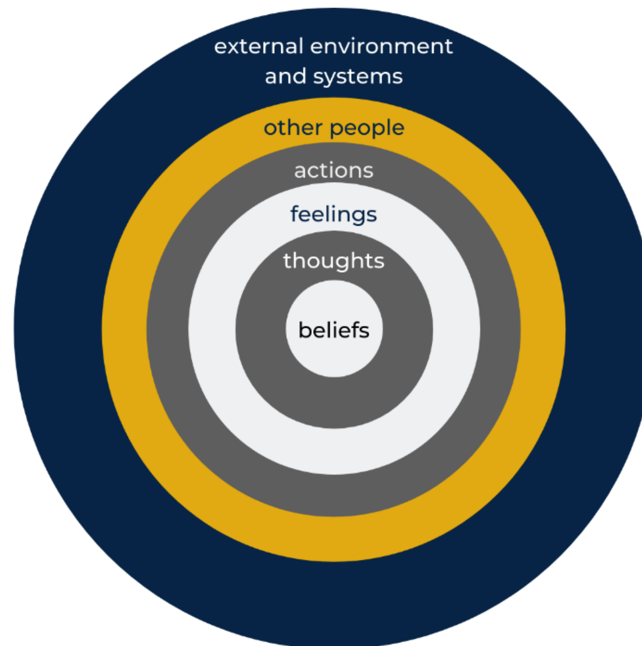
The "stereotype of the angry social activist: somebody who joins rallies, argues with those who do not share their point of view or composes negative tweets" (Kushlev et al., 2020, p. 468) can feel inaccessible to some. The wider definition of allyship embraces that "the political is personal" (Strega, 2005, p. 221). Here, allies are people who acknowledge and use their advantages and resources to challenge social and structural inequalities experienced by communities outside of their own (Sennott & Smith, 2011; Curtin et al., 2016; Droogendyk et al., 2016; Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019; Bettencourt, 2020). This definition enables alternative approaches to activism, alternatives that are more relevant to coaching.

Social Constructionist Foundations

Unsurprisingly, social constructionism is the most common paradigm used in the data since "critical and person-centred approaches are inspired by the phenomenological school of thought" (Van Puyenbroeck & Maes, 2008, p. 56). Thorn (2021) reminds us that these constructs were formed to serve a purpose, usually as a means of organising and sharing knowledge. The purpose itself is allocated and informed by the underlying beliefs held by the community that assigns them. Figure 1

illustrates individual meaning-making within a social constructionist paradigm. We both absorb from and project onto our external environment, constantly negotiating between internalisation and reinforcement of social messages and constructs.

Figure 1: INDIVIDUAL SENSE-MAKING BASED ON SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM



As coaches, we work with coachees on how their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs motivate and affect their actions. We use a range of coaching and epistemic tools to enable the coachee to find solutions to the barriers preventing them from meeting their goals. The data and the literature have highlighted the importance of awareness, critical consciousness, and reflexivity in social change. The data also highlights how difficult this is in practice. It is "a journey without a defined destination. There's no ally badge to earn" (Suyemoto et al., 2020, p. 10). In a goal-orientated profession, the lack of an endpoint can be incredibly challenging.

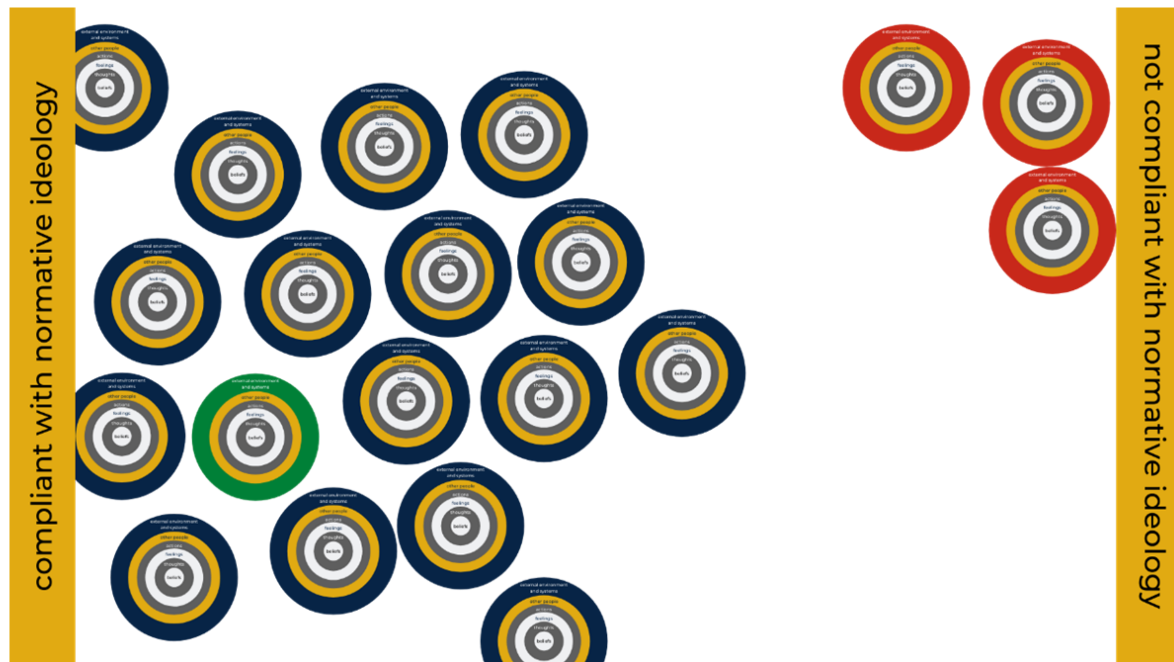
Furthermore, the data does not propose the types of tangible intervention that an aspiring ally or coach might want. A checklist of actions seems too simplistic to solve complex, historical, and systemic issues. The resulting framework details the challenges coaches might face in their own sense-making whilst understanding their coachees' sources of discomfort from their social positions.

Allyship Stage One: Immaturity

Whilst over-simplified, this framework attempts to address the need to "understand how social relationality structures the human individual's personal and social identity as well as agency" (Donati, 2016). Figure 2 illustrates how our social positioning impacts how we interpret the world around us, what Pohlhaus (2012) calls our 'situatedness'. Our subject, the aspiring ally in green, will be called Sam for ease.

Situated within the expectations of the social norm, let's say as a person of White ethnicity, Sam's identity fits with the ideologies of colonialism and White Supremacy. Here, their immediate concerns and views will be shaped by those around them (in blue), also compliant with the dominant discourse. The group in red represents those whose identities do not conform to the expectations of that system of oppression, in this example, communities from the global majority.

Figure 2: ALLYSHIP IN ITS INFANCY



Invisibility

In this position, Sam might understand social injustices on a conceptual level but not on an empathetic, experiential level. Media representation, social justice movements and socio-political contexts might make them more aware of these experiences in their hermeneutical darkness, but not necessarily enough to elicit empathy or motivate allyship, as it feels so distanced from their own experience. This distance renders microaggressions, intentional or otherwise, invisible (Lee et al., 2018, p. 232). Our own experiences do not support these alternative narratives. According to the data, the exception is that if someone close to us experiences discrimination, we might intervene, addressing the individual perpetrator or incident, and treating it as an anomaly.

Performative Allyship and Identity Safety Cues

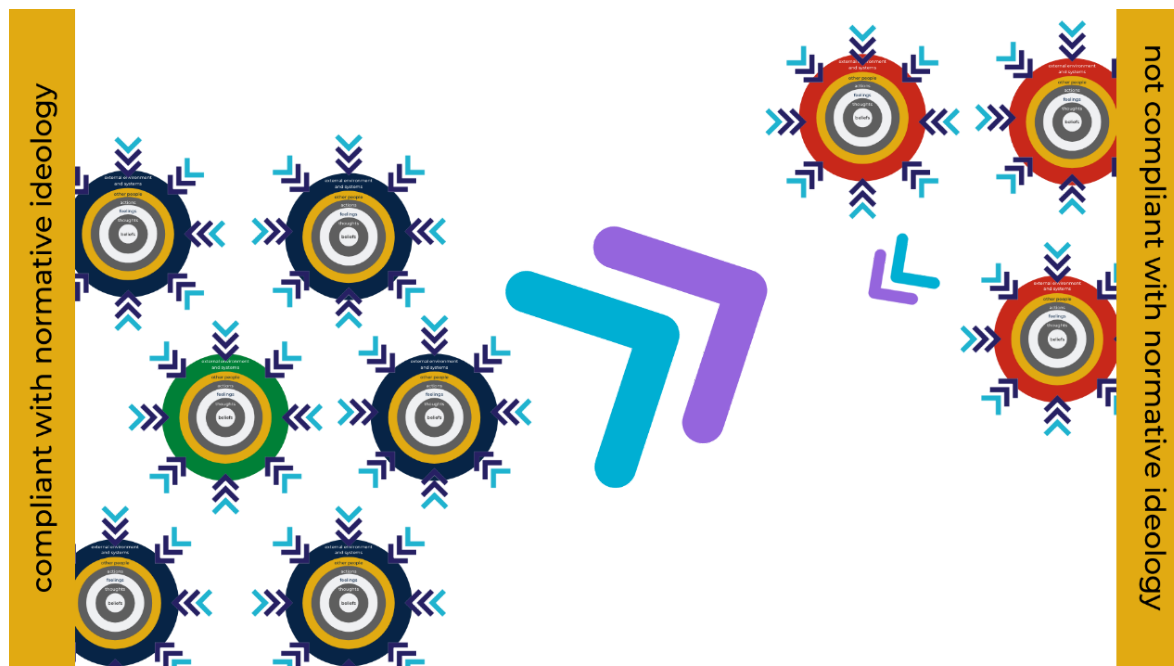
The ally in their infancy might worry about being seen as disruptive or has personal motivations, like gaining status or being perceived to be doing the right thing. Their performative actions do not intend to resist social and epistemic injustices. Instead, they are motivated by "being a hero or rescuer and the praise that comes with that role" (Edwards, 2007, p. 48) with negligible personal or social risks. The danger of performative allyship is that it avoids the "difficult conversations necessary to address root causes that actually bring change" (Kalina, 2020, p. 479). Public statements, waving flags, or donning apparel, in isolation, are not only unhelpful but can be damaging, trivialising the topic, or capitalising on particular movements.

For coaching and aligned helping professions, symbols of solidarity or identity safety cues are essential means for potential coachees to determine if this relationship, or coaching generally, is a good option for them (Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Peretz, 2020). In practice, identity safety cues include pronouns and inclusive, person-first language in their marketing and communications; to ensure that their physical and virtual spaces are accessible and safe (Kinavey & Cool, 2019, p. 125). It can be challenging to reconcile the nuance between identity safety cues and performative allyship. The distinction is the commitment and consistency of the coach. If, upon researching and meeting the coach, the coachee realises that these signals were performative, it can feel like a betrayal and rupture the trust between the coach and, perhaps, the profession.

Allyship Stage Two: Adolescence

At this stage, the aspiring ally is more aware of the experiences of others outside of their immediate position. As they continue to explore the vast implications of systemic oppression, allies in this adolescent stage experience high levels of emotion, such as moral outrage, frustration, or collective pain. Whilst aware of the suffering of marginalised communities, the adolescent ally can be conflicted by the moral beliefs they ascribe to and the difficulties that arise from disrupting both the external manifestations and internalisations of the system of oppression that they have benefitted. Figure 3 demonstrates that systems of oppression affect everyone; our experiences will differ based on our situatedness.

Figure 3: ALLYSHIP IN ITS ADOLESCENCE



This time, Sam is a cis-gendered male[1] within a patriarchal, heteronormative society. From this position, Sam would not have experienced the misogyny, homophobia, or transphobia that other people might have (in red). However, Sam may have felt the pressure to conform to masculine ideals under patriarchal expectations. If he has not, Sam's social positioning renders his privilege invisible to him; that is the injustices his social position spares him from and the unjust enrichment he benefits from (Blum, 2008). From here, he may reject or resist narratives from marginalised communities, challenging or gaslighting their experiences, or choose wilful ignorance.

As Sam embarks further on his allyship journey, he may find acknowledging his privilege incredibly difficult, as it "appears to call into question the legitimacy of one's position, one's accomplishments, and perhaps even one's integrity" (Droogendyk et al., 2016, pp. 12-13). To overcome this conflict requires an understanding that privilege, in this context, is not personal but the acceptance that the systems of oppression were built and maintained to benefit someone like them. For aspiring allies to overcome their barriers and make space in their beliefs for un/learning requires a great deal of challenge, compassion, and Existential inquiry, that an allyship-informed coach could support.

The adolescent ally chooses public actions that resist and demonise individuals or groups upholding the hegemonic norms, such as political extremists or controversial public figures. Whilst this might risk relationships within their social positions, it is also likely that the adolescent allies may face scorn or rejection from some members of disadvantaged communities (Droogendyk et al., 2016). Here, the adolescent ally is "working for members of the target group" (Edwards, 2007,

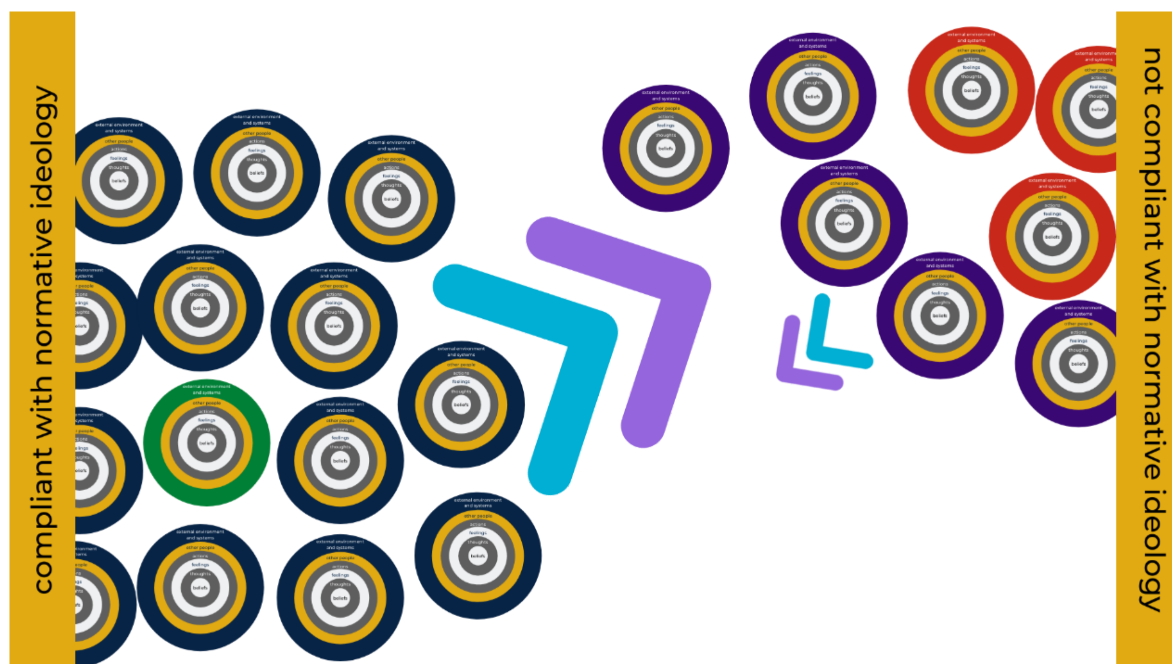
p. 47- emphasis in original), where marginalised communities are considered victims or in need of saving. Awareness of this saviourship mentality can result in inaction. Allies can become paralysed by the fear "that they might unintentionally say something offensive or be perceived as 'political'" (Rodriguez & Freeman, 2016, p. 73) but continue to feel guilty since they recognise that inaction is itself being complicit within systems of oppression. Without these private acts of reflection, to reconcile their own internalised privilege and related emotions, adolescent allies are in danger of inadvertently reinforcing the hegemonic discourse through their inaction or misguided actions.

Allyship Stage Three: Maturity

For Edwards (2007), it is here that the subject moves from self-interest and altruistic motivations to allyship for social justice, where they are "working with members of the target group" (p. 47- emphasis in original). Whilst working with marginalised communities, the mature ally acknowledges their accountability and commits to challenging and interpreting their own internalised privilege. The mature ally believes that, though wilful ignorance is less emotionally demanding and socially risky, to succumb to it means remaining complicit within these systems.

This time, Sam, as an educated White woman, is negotiating her own identity with her increased understanding of global and historical race inequality. She takes time to learn from various perspectives and experiences, taking responsibility for her own re/education. Even if it causes her discomfort or for others, Sam begins to disrupt behaviours and narratives that replicate the values of systemic racism.

Figure 4: ALLYSHIP IN ITS MATURITY



She engages in difficult dialogue with her peers. She uses the resources and opportunities afforded to her to elevate and advocate for communities marginalised by systems of oppression. She welcomes and takes feedback from the communities she is allied with to learn more about what 'she doesn't know she doesn't know' and critique or unlearn the internalised ideas of these systems of oppression.

Systems of oppression are not separate, external entities. Cultures, processes, and communities uphold them through the production and distribution of knowledge. The mature ally understands

how systems of oppression operate and how they resist changes to the status quo, illustrated in Figure 4. Mature allies recognise and reckon with the pedestal effect of their advantaged positions, the "gratuitous/unearned acclaim, attention, instant credibility, career help and mobility, and extra erotic/romantic attraction" (Peretz, 2020, p. 462). Their public and private acts of allyship are focused on disrupting the system of oppression.

The Mature Allyship-Informed Coach

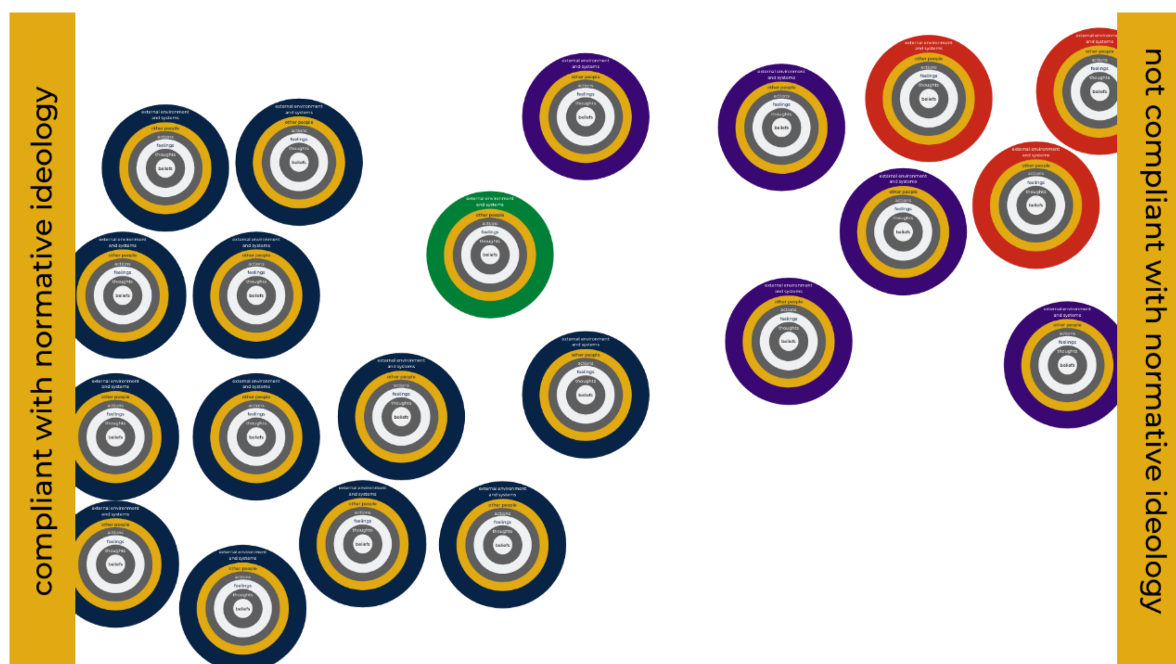
The literature focused on how coaches can better serve diverse and marginalised communities. On the other hand, the data suggest that allies can claim their privilege as sources of power and opportunities. Speaking on his White privilege, Blaisdell (2018, p.176) reflects that
[c]oaches like myself must also help the white educators we work with to do the same so that we do not re-establish whiteness as the dominant discourse

For coaches with privileged identities and experiences, re/educating themselves and learning from marginalised communities becomes an essential and ongoing process. Only when we emerge from our hermeneutical darkness and understand how systems of oppression work can we, as coaches, be resourced in supporting our coachees to resist and challenge these systems and helping those subjected to oppression heal.

Allyship Stage Four: In Solidarity

To enact socio-historical shifts is beyond the capability of individual heroes and saviours. The mature ally recognises that solidarity is "everyone work[ing] together to build momentum toward a shared end goal of large-scale societal change" (Edwards, 2020, p. 4). They begin to reposition closer to the marginalised community, though it's most likely symbolic rather than a radical identity change. However, the ally may draw on their own intersecting identities to help with this repositioning. The definition of intersectionality is the impact of overlapping systems of oppression on individuals who have multiple marginalised identities. The combination of those systems of oppression means that it is experienced differently by individuals. As such, each of us simultaneously has advantages and disadvantages (Curtin et al., 2016), challenging the dichotomy of oppressed and oppressor.

Figure 5: ALLYSHIP IN SOLIDARITY



Here, Sam is a non-disabled female looking to become a better ally for those with physical disabilities. Whilst she accepts that she cannot truly know the experience of systemic ableism on those with a visible disability, she can draw on her experiences as a neurodiverse woman to understand how ableism operates and empathise with the wider community. She applies this knowledge to notice the social, political, and cultural manifestations of ableism and uses her privilege as a non-disabled person to disrupt and challenge them. Her own experiences help her recognise that it is the system that needs to change rather than a community that needs saving.

Intersectionality offers opportunities for connection whilst simultaneously complicating the discourse. It recognises that communities are not homogenous; how we make sense of the world is unique to our combination of social positionings, identities and experiences of being-in-the-world. Dialogue is an essential intervention for epistemic justice, allyship, and coaching. It helps us navigate through the unfamiliar territory of the political is personal. Coaching can be a form of support for aspiring allies (Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019) but requires coaches to be aware of their own social positionings and the systems they and their coachee operate. It presents professional hypocrisy if we coaches are unwilling to go through the discomfort of transformation that we ask of our coachees.

Activist Self-Care

If we recognise that allyship and the pursuit of epistemic and social justice are ongoing, resilience becomes an important aspect of our practice. In their acts of solidarity, allies share in the emotional and psychological burdens marginalised communities carry. Ashley-Binge and Cousins (2020) identify that this can present as compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma. As such, "activist self-care can also serve as radical political action when it supports deep and sustainable change" (Ahmed, 2021, p. 74). This resilience is crucial if the ally belongs to other marginalised communities. Working in solidarity with marginalised communities and other allies

> *protects us as individuals and makes our voices and impact stronger because we're working together in skilful ways that can only be possible if we attend to our differential privilege(Suyemoto et al., 2020, p. 23)*

For aspiring allies, having a diverse network that can hold them to account, share the emotional and psychological burden of resisting injustice, and offer comfort and reassurance during times of resistance, grief, and frustration, is an act of self-care. Influencing cultural and social change is too significant to be an individual endeavour.

An allyship-informed approach considers the impact of intersecting systems of oppression on the individual, naming it, accepting it, and negotiating a new relationship with it moving forward. Whilst not traditionally in coaching's domain, this can enable healing. It is an approach used in some therapeutic modalities to address collective and cultural trauma. Allyship-informed coaches supporting this identity and allyship development process can bridge the gap between self-introspection and making informed actions.

Conclusions

Of course, this is an oversimplification of a very complex situation. If we take identity constructions, such as gender, race and dis/ability, "we cannot ignore the fact that bodies inform this social construction" (Warner et al., 2020, p. 272). Therefore, we must recognise that when we discuss identities, whether theoretically, conceptually, or politically, we are talking about people and their personal lived experiences. Their sense of self has been profoundly shaped by both the invisibility and hypervisibility of their bodies. The reorientation of social justice as "their" problem to "ours" acknowledges that all our experiences are related. If the nature of knowledge acquisition and meaning-making is social and relational, then the coaching conversations we have and with who

become critical for our social consciousness. Allyship-informed coaches can better understand the political and personal contexts in which the coach and coachee/s operate from and within. It makes the difficulty of pursuing epistemic and social justice explicit by demystifying and deconstructing these difficult dialogues about identity, beliefs, and oppression. It offers how a critical understanding of "the identity formation process [can] provide unique entry points for coaching dialogue" (Skinner, 2014, p. 110) where difference feels too overwhelming a barrier.

Limitations

The literature and data informing this study were limited to my being-in-the-world, such as access to resources based on my fluency in other languages and educational privileges. A Western perspective dominates the literature and data, particularly from North America, and largely focuses on race, therefore under-representing the voices and experiences of other intersecting marginalised communities in their socio-political contexts. The prevalence of business and executive coaching means that its influences are widespread, from the development of training, research, and accessibility of services, as we have seen in the literature and data. We remain collectively in this hermeneutical darkness without a diverse representation from other communities, settings, or modalities.

The focus of this study has been on the coaching relationship, and a call to action for coaches from privileged positions to use their advantages to better support coachees from marginalised communities and enable other aspiring allies in their pursuits of epistemic and systemic justice. It was beyond the scope of this study, and my emotional capacity in the current socio-political climate, to seek coaches from marginalised communities' experiences, particularly how they resource themselves when working closely with narratives akin to their own.

Lastly, the findings and implications are conceptual while grounded in interdisciplinary empirical research. Without further investigation, the true impact of this study remains unseen. However, without more work that centres on the perspectives of marginalised communities, we collectively continue to perpetuate what Vaditya (2018) calls epistemic marginalisation. For example, the literature and data reflect the paternalistic nature of coaching. Practitioners from advantaged backgrounds supporting marginalised communities are the central dynamic explored in coaching relationships and aligned professions. Without difference-centred perspectives in research and the supporting systems around coaching, like accreditation, development, and supervision, the weight of representation and responsibility will continue to burden communities already under-represented in the sector.

Implications

With much coaching focused on Leadership, Executive and Business Coaching (ICF, 2020), as coaches, especially if we consider incorporating equity coaching or allyship into our practice, our collective interactions can contribute to the resistance to epistemic and systemic injustice. In the ICF Global 2020 study, 94% of their respondents offer clients additional services to coaching, such as consulting (60%), training (60%), and/or facilitation services (54%) (p. 16). This multi-service approach provides opportunities for where and how allyship-informed coaches can "draw on social capital as a means to engage in social justice actions" (Bourke, 2020, p. 185), leveraging their influence and privilege to disrupt injustices in the systems they operate.

For coaches to continue their journey, their supporting systems will also need to consider their social responsibilities. The findings of this study have implications for coaching training, development, accreditation, supervision, and research. A number of researchers, including more recently DeBlaere et al. (2019), Wang et al., (2019), Ashley-Binge and Cousins (2020), and Buchanan and Wiklund (2020), urge for supervision in aligned professions, such as social work, clinical psychology, and counselling, to recognise that "[s]urface-level discussions in supervision

often create distance between the supervisor and the supervisee" (Lipscomb & Ashley, 2017, p. 228). The dynamics between coach and coachee, in many cases, can translate to supervision dyads.

In the ICF Global Study (2020), 85% of respondents are accredited/ approved by a professional coaching organisation, and 8% are accredited/ approved by a university (p.14). The remainder received coach-specific training through non-accredited programs by a professional organisation or university, employer-developed programmes. Only 1% of respondents did not receive any coaching-specific training. Training that is delivered either too simplistically or too critically as an "isolated course and then fills [the rest of] the curriculum with information that supports White hegemony in most, if not all, other courses" (Spanierman & Smith, 2017, p. 732) confuses students. While decolonising the curriculum and providing epistemically safe teaching spaces (Anderson, 2021) can be incredibly taxing and daunting, the associated risks in not establishing them are too significant. Failure to do so not only perpetuates normative ideologies and an inability to provide psychological safety for coaching students, but we collectively fail to gain "insight into different models of practice could broaden the relevance of training to those from different cultures" (Eastwood, 2021, p. 4). Epistemic injustices are pervasive across all systems. At whatever stage in their professional and allyship development, coaches can only succeed if their supporting structures and networks are in the same pursuit of social and epistemic justice.

Final Remarks

This study intended to act as a catalyst for further discussion of the vital role of coaching in resisting and disrupting epistemic injustice. Intersecting systems of oppression affect each of us. By adopting an allyship-informed approach, coaches can interrogate their own hermeneutical darkness to inform their practice better, serve their coachees with more confidence and resources, and contribute to disrupting systems of oppression. Exploring epistemic injustice and allyship within the sector, across modalities and frameworks, and through the spectrum of coaching contexts is far too broad a scope for this study. My wish is that this study creates new lines of inquiry for coaching researchers who want to utilise their educational privilege.

The social constructionist approach to allyship and coaching are aligned in their optimism. Whilst not an easy endeavour, both are built on the premise that people, cultures, and systems can change. To fellow coaches, coaching educators, supervisors, professional bodies, and training providers, my question is, knowing what you know now, what will you do?

Endnotes

[1] ↩
Cis-gender refers to people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

References

Ahmed, Z. G. (2021). Leading from the inside Out: Contemplative Practice as Radical Self-care for BIPOC Activists. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 42(1), 73-90. DOI: 10.1080/1554477x.2021.1874186.

Anderson, D. (2021). An Epistemological Conception of Safe Spaces. *Social Epistemology*, 35(3), 285-311. DOI: 10.1080/02691728.2020.1855485.

Ashley-Binge, S., & Cousins, C. (2020). Individual and Organisational Practices Addressing Social Workers' Experiences of Vicarious Trauma. *Practice*, 32(3), 191-207. DOI: 10.1080/09503153.2019.1620201.

Bettencourt, G. M. (2020). "You Can't Be a Class Ally If You're An Upper-Class Person Because You Don't Understand": Working-Class Students' Definitions and Perceptions of Social Class Allyship. *Review of Higher Education*, 44(2), 265-291. DOI: 10.1353/rhe.2020.0041.

Blaisdell, B. (2018). Beyond discomfort? Equity coaching to disrupt whiteness. *Whiteness and Education*, 3(2), 162-181. DOI: 10.1080/23793406.2019.1569477.

Blum, L. (2008). `White privilege': A mild critique. *Theory and Research in Education*, 6(3), 309-321. DOI: 10.1177/1477878508095586.

Bourke, B. (2020). Leaving behind the rhetoric of allyship. *Whiteness and Education*, 5(2), 179-194. DOI: 10.1080/23793406.2020.1839786.

Brown, L., & Strega, S. (2005). *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous and Anti-Oppressive Approaches*. Toronto : Canadian Scholar's Press, Inc.

Buchanan, N. T., & Wiklund, L. O. (2020). Why Clinical Science Must Change or Die: Integrating Intersectionality and Social Justice. Women & Therapy, 43(3), 309-329. DOI: 10.1080/02703149.2020.1729470.

Carr, C., & Seto, L. (2013). An Action Research Study on Coaches' Cultural Awareness in the Public Sector. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 11(2), 94-111. Available at: https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/53be654a-d48b-412b-ae4d-933dbfd4cc67/1/.

Chapman, C. (2011). Resonance, Intersectionality, and Reflexivity in Critical Pedagogy (and Research Methodology). *Social Work Education*, 30(7), 723-744. DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2010.520120.

Chong, E. S. K., & Mohr, J. J. (2020). How far can stigma-based empathy reach? Effects of societal (in)equity of LGB people on their allyship with transgender and Black people. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 90(6), 760-771. DOI: 10.1037/ort0000510.

Christensen, J. E., Larson, K. E., & Dykes, F. O. (2021). Using a school-wide coaching framework to create safe and inclusive spaces for students who identify as LGBTQ. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 1-8. DOI: 10.1080/1045988x.2021.1925868.

Curtin, N., Kende, A., & Kende, J. (2016). Navigating Multiple Identities: The Simultaneous Influence of Advantaged and Disadvantaged Identities on Politicization and Activism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(2), 264-285. DOI: 10.1111/josi.12166.

Day, C. R. (2018). A Case Study: Claiming Equity Using Early Story and Metaphor. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 74(1), 55-74.

DeBlaere, C., Shodiya-Zeumalt, S., Hinger, C., Cobourne, L., Davis, D. E., Zelaya, D. G., Chadwick C.N., Zeligman, M., Hook, J.N., Owen, J. (2019). Cultural Humility with Religious and Spiritually Diverse Women of Color Clients: A Psychometric Analysis. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 47(2), 87-99. DOI: 10.1177/0091647119837016.

Dixon-Woods, M., Cavers, D., Agarwal, S., Annandale, E., Arthur, A., Harvey, J., Hsu, R., Katbamna, S., Olsen, R., Smith, L., Riley, R., Sutton, A. J. (2006). Conducting a critical interpretive synthesis of the literature on access to healthcare by vulnerable groups. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 6(1). DOI: 10.1186/1471-2288-6-35.

Donati, P. (2016). The 'Relational Subject' According to a Critical Realist Relational Sociology. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 15(4), 352-375. DOI: 10.1080/14767430.2016.1166728.

Dotson, K. (2014). Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression. *Social Epistemology*, 28(2), 115-138. DOI: 10.1080/02691728.2013.782585.

Doyle, N., & McDowall, A. (2015). Is coaching an effective adjustment for dyslexic adults? *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 8(2), 154-168. DOI: 10.1080/17521882.2015.1065894.

Droogendyk, L., Wright, S. C., Lubensky, M., & Louis, W. R. (2016). Acting in Solidarity: Cross-Group Contact between Disadvantaged Group Members and Advantaged Group Allies. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(2), 315-334. DOI: 10.1111/josi.12168.

Eastwood, C. (2021). White privilege and art therapy in the UK: are we doing the work? *International Journal of Art Therapy*, 1-9. DOI: 10.1080/17454832.2020.1856159.

Edwards, K. E. (2007). Aspiring Social Justice Ally Identity Development: A Conceptual Model. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 43(4). DOI: 10.2202/1949-6605.1722.

Edwards, S. (2020). Building Solidarity with Religious Minorities: A Reflective Practice for Aspiring Allies, Accomplices, and Coconspirators. *Religion & Education*, 1-21. DOI: 10.1080/15507394.2020.1815933.

Einzig, H. (2017). *The Future of Coaching : Vision, Leadership and Responsibility in a Transforming World*. Taylor & Francis.

Erskine, S. E., & Bilimoria, D. (2019). White Allyship of Afro-Diasporic Women in the Workplace: A Transformative Strategy for Organizational Change. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 26(3), 319-338. DOI: 10.1177/1548051819848993.

Filsinger, C. (2021). Diversity and Coaching. In M. Watts & I. Florance (Eds.), *Emerging Conversatins in Coaching and Coaching Psychology* (pp. 95-113). Abingdon: Routledge.

Gannon, J. M. (2021). Applying the Lens of Social Movements to Coaching and Mentoring. *Philosophy of Coaching: An International Journal*, 6(1), 5-29. DOI: 10.22316/poc/06.1.02.

Ghama, I., & Spence, G. B. (2020). 'Come out, come out, whoever you are!' Client perceptions of working alliance following imagined sexual identity disclosure in coaching. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 13(2), 146-162. DOI: 10.1080/17521882.2019.1656657.

Gregory, A., Ruzek, E. A., DeCoster, J., Mikami, A. Y., & Allen, J. P. (2019). Focused Classroom Coaching and Widespread Racial Equity in School Discipline. *AERA Open*, 5(4), 233285841989727. DOI: 10.1177/2332858419897274.

Holmes, H., & Burgess, G. (2021). Homelessness Prevention through One-To-One Coaching: The Relationship between Coaching, Class Stigma, and Self-Esteem. *Housing, Theory and Society*, 1-17. DOI: 10.1080/14036096.2021.1887348.

ICF. (2020). *2020 Global Coaching Study: Executive Summary*. Retrieved from Kentucky, USA Available at: https://coachingfederation.org/research/global-coaching-study.

Jaworsky, D. (2019). An allied research paradigm for epidemiology research with Indigenous peoples. *Archives of Public Health*, 77(1), 1-12. DOI: 10.1186/s13690-019-0353-1.

Johnson, I. R., Pietri, E. S., Fullilove, F., & Mowrer, S. (2019). Exploring Identity-Safety Cues and Allyship Among Black Women Students in STEM Environments. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 43(2), 131-150. DOI: 10.1177/0361684319830926.

Kalina, P. (2020). Performative Allyship. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 11, 478-481. DOI: 10.47577/tssj.v11i1.1518.

Kende, A. (2016). Separating Social Science Research on Activism from Social Science as Activism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(2), 399-412. DOI: 10.1111/josi.12172.

Kinavey, H., & Cool, C. (2019). The Broken Lens: How Anti-Fat Bias in Psychotherapy is Harming Our Clients and What To Do About It. *Women & Therapy*, 42(1-2), 116-130. DOI: 10.1080/02703149.2018.1524070.

Kushlev, K., Drummond, D. M., Heintzelman, S. J., & Diener, E. (2020). Do happy people care about society's problems? *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15(4), 467-477. DOI: 10.1080/17439760.2019.1639797.

Kutlaca, M., Radke, H. R. M., Iyer, A., & Becker, J. C. (2020). Understanding allies' participation in social change: A multiple perspectives approach. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(6), 1248-1258. DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2720.

Lee, E., Tsang, A. K. T., Bogo, M., Johnstone, M., & Herschman, J. (2018). Enactments of racial microaggression in everyday therapeutic encounters. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 88(3), 211-236. DOI: 10.1080/00377317.2018.1476646.

Lipscomb, A. E., & Ashley, W. (2017). Colorful Disclosures: Identifying Identity-Based Differences and Enhancing Critical Consciousness in Supervision. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 87(2-3), 220-237. DOI: 10.1080/00377317.2017.1324098.

Luke, M., & Goodrich, K. M. (2013). Investigating the LGBTQ Responsive Model for Supervision of Group Work. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 38(2), 121-145. DOI: 10.1080/01933922.2013.775207.

Milner, J., Ostmeier, E., & Franke, R. (2013). Critical Incidents in Cross-cultural Coaching: The View from German Coaches. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 11(2), 19-32. Available at: https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/d0f4c828-089d-417f-85be-249e31ba3547/1/.

Minei, E. M., Hastings, S. O., & Warren, S. (2020). LGBTQ+ Sensemaking: The Mental Load of Identifying Workplace Allies. *International Journal of Business Communication*. DOI: 10.1177/2329488420965667.

Moosa-Mitha, M. (2005). Situating Anti-Oppressive Theories within Critical and Difference-Centred Perspectives. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (pp. 38 - 72). Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press Inc.

Motsoaledi, L., & Cilliers, F. (2012). Executive coaching in diversity from the systems psychodynamic perspective : original research. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 38(2), 1-11. Available at: https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC89265.

Nixon, S. A. (2019). The coin model of privilege and critical allyship: implications for health. *BMC Public Health*, 19(1), 1637. DOI: 10.1186/s12889-019-7884-9.

Peretz, T. (2020). Seeing the Invisible Knapsack: Feminist Men's Strategic Responses to the Continuation of Male Privilege in Feminist Spaces. *Men and Masculinities*, 23(3-4), 447-475. DOI: 10.1177/1097184x18784990.

Peters, H. C. (2017). Multicultural Complexity: an Intersectional Lens for Clinical Supervision. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 39(2), 176-187. DOI: 10.1007/s10447-017-9290-2.

Pohlhaus, G. (2012). Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance. *Hypatia*, 27(4), 715-735. DOI: 10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01222.x.

Potts, K., & Brown, L. (2005). Becoming an Anti-Oppressive Researcher. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (pp. 255 - 286). Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press.

Potvin, L. (2021). It's not all rainbows and unicorns: Straight teacher allies reflect on privilege. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 18(3), 273-286. DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2020.1719952.

Razzante, R. J. (2018). Identifying Dominant Group Communication Strategies: A Phenomenological Study. *Communication Studies*, 69(4), 389-403. DOI: 10.1080/10510974.2018.1472116.

Rodriguez, J., & Freeman, K. J. (2016). 'Your focus on race is narrow and exclusive:' the derailment of anti-racist work through discourses of intersectionality and diversity. *Whiteness and Education*, 1(1), 69-82. DOI: 10.1080/23793406.2016.1162193.

Sennott, S. L., & Smith, T. M. S. W. (2011). Translating the Sex and Gender Continuums in Mental Health: A Transfeminist Approach to Client and Clinician Fears. *Journal of gay & lesbian mental health*, 15(2), 218-234. DOI: 10.1080/19359705.2011.553779.

Shoukry, H. (2016). Coaching for emancipation: A framework for coaching in oppressive environments. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 14(2), 15-30. Available at: https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/5d592ac5-2f54-4b23-bde2-8e279137f19f/1/.

Shoukry, H., & Cox, E. (2018). Coaching as a social process. *Management Learning*, 49(4), 413-428. DOI: 10.1177/1350507618762600.

Singh, A., & Burnes, T. (2010). Shifting the Counselor Role from Gatekeeping to Advocacy: Ten Strategies for Using the Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients for Individual and Social Change. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 4(3-4), 241-255. DOI: 10.1080/15538605.2010.525455.

Skinner, S. (2014). Understanding the importance of gender and leader identity formation in executive coaching for senior women. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 7(2), 102-114. DOI: 10.1080/17521882.2014.915864.

Spanierman, L. B., & Smith, L. (2017). Confronting White Hegemony: A Moral Imperative for the Helping Professions. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 45(5), 727-736. DOI: 10.1177/0011000017719550.

Strega, S. (2005). The View From the Poststructural Margins: Epistemology and Methodology Resistance. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds.), *Research as Resistance: Critcal, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (pp. 199 - 236). Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press.

Sullivan-Clarke, A. (2020). Decolonizing "Allyship" for Indian Country: Lessons from #NODAPL. *Hypatia*, 35(1), 178-189. DOI: 10.1017/hyp.2019.3.

Suyemoto, K. L., Hochman, A. L., Donovan, R. A., & Roemer, L. (2020). Becoming the Fostering Allies and Accomplices Through Authentic Relationships: Choosing Justice Over Comfort. *Research in Human Development*, 1-27. DOI: 10.1080/15427609.2020.1825905.

Thorn, A. (2021). Social Constructs | Philosophy Tube. *Philosophy Tube*. Available at: https://youtu.be/koud7hgGyQ8.

Vaditya, V. (2018). Social Domination and Epistemic Marginalisation: towards Methodology of the Oppressed. *Social Epistemology*, 32(4), 272-285. DOI: 10.1080/02691728.2018.1444111.

Van Der Horst, C. A., & Albertyn, R. M. (2018). The importance of metacognition and the experiential learning process within a cultural intelligence-based approach to cross-cultural coaching. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16. DOI: 10.4102/sajhrm.v16i0.951.

Van Puyenbroeck, J., & Maes, B. (2008). A Review of Critical, Person-centred and Clinical Approaches to Reminiscence Work for People with Intellectual Disabilities. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 55(1), 43-60. DOI: 10.1080/10349120701827979.

Wang, S. C., Hubbard, R. R., & Dorazio, C. (2019). Overcoming Racial Battle Fatigue Through Dialogue: Voices of Three Counseling Psychologist Trainees. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 14(4), 285-292. DOI: 10.1037/tep0000283.

Warner, L., Kurtiş, T. c. e., & Adya, A. (2020). Navigating Criticisms of Intersectional Approaches: Reclaiming Intersectionality for Global Social Justice and Well-Being. *Women & Therapy*, 43(3-4), 262-277. DOI: 10.1080/02703149.2020.1729477.

Watts-Jones, T. D. (2010). Location of self: opening the door to dialogue on intersectionality in the therapy process. *Family Process*, 49(3), 405-420. DOI: 10.1111/j.1545-5300.2010.01330.x.

Western, S. (2012). *Coaching and mentoring: a critical text*. Sage.

Willging, C. E., Israel, T., Ley, D., Trott, E. M., DeMaria, C., Joplin, A., & Smiley, V. (2016). Coaching mental health peer advocates for rural LGBTQ people. *Journal of gay & lesbian mental health*, 20(3), 214-236. DOI: 10.1080/19359705.2016.1166469.

About the authors

Lou Chiu (she/her) is a culture and relationships coach, specialising in supporting organisational and individual allies. She is a Consulting Fellow at Halpin and on the Research and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Teams at the Team Coaching Studio. Lou completed her MA in Coaching and Mentoring in 2022.