Race Matters in Coaching: An Examination of Coaches’ Willingness to Have Difficult Conversations With Leaders of Color

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ABSTRACT

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Do executive coaches have the skill sets necessary for effective partnership with an increasingly diverse workforce? Such inquiry remains unexamined, yet research from similar disciplines casts doubt. Drawing on these findings, a between-subject experiment sampled 129 coaches and examined their willingness to have “difficult conversations” with Black clients. The study investigated two questions in particular: (1) Do coaches provide less critical feedback to Black clients than they do White clients? and (2) Do coaches engage in fewer diversity-based conversations with Black clients than with White clients? The study found that as hypothesized, Black clients received more support, yet less challenge, less constructive feedback, and less time devoted to areas of development than did otherwise identical White clients. Coaches were also twice as likely to provide diversity-related feedback to White executives than they were to Black executives. Put simply, coaches assigned to Black clients chose to sidestep conversations about diversity and development. Substantial implications hold for practitioners, clients, and the greater coaching community. Findings suggested that coaches’ reluctance to provide challenging cross-racial feedback may stem from concern about appearing prejudiced. The result is that leaders of color who receive coaching may be robbed of developmental opportunities offered to White organizational leaders. Thus, the impact of racial dynamics should receive greater attention from U.S.-based coaching certification programs. In particular, institutes should consider mandating coaching supervision as well as incorporating diversity intelligence within their list of core competencies.
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A. F. B.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Organizations across the world are becoming more diverse. With advances in technology and globalization, companies are more multicultural than ever before (Passmore, 2013). In addition, the percentage of Whites in the U.S. workforce has trended downward for several decades. After comprising 82% of the labor market in 1980 and 72% in 2000, it is reported that the proportion of Whites in organizations now sits at 63% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). In fact, census data suggest that by the year 2050, America will no longer maintain a clear racial or ethnic majority (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Such a shift has also coincided with organizational efforts to increase the number of people of color in positions of leadership. Many companies pursue racial minority advancement out of perceived fairness, citing it is their corporate social responsibility to ensure management pipelines mirror the demographic composition of the greater society. These intrinsic motivations seek to ensure equal opportunity (Anand & Winters, 2008), procedural fairness (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006), and ethical integrity (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2013). Yet diversity of leadership is not just morally good; it is also good for business. An inclusive workforce provides access to a larger pool of talent (O’Brien, Scheffer, van Nes, & van der Lee, 2015); improves public relations (Filbeck, Foster, Preece, & Zhao, 2017); and drives greater market share and financial revenue (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015). In all, organizational pursuit of diversity has become “ubiquitous” (Dobbin, 2011), with corporate investments now reaching a reported billion dollars annually (Chavez & Weisenger, 2008). Unfortunately, though, these initiatives have inspired modest impact for Black professionals. Within the largest companies the most powerful roles continue to be held almost exclusively by Whites: only four of the current Fortune 500...
companies employ a Black CEO (White, 2017). In fact, Fortune 100 and 500 companies have fewer Blacks sitting on their respective Boards of Directors in 2017 than they did nearly 20 years ago (Deloitte & Alliance for Board Diversity, 2017). While such stagnation continues to perplex organizations and academics alike (Apfelbaum, Stephens, & Reagans, 2016), the overall trend remains clear: businesses are more committed than ever to attracting, developing, and retaining racial minority talent.

Simultaneously, the leadership development practice of executive and managerial coaching has exploded within corporate America. The practice of coaching entails a partnership where a coach provides support to an executive in pursuit of improved management performance (Hamlin, Ellinger, & Beattie, 2009). Rooted in organizational goals, engagements are inherently collaborative—with coaches striving to elicit insights and facilitate behavioral change with their clients. The goals of coaching relationships often encompass workplace effectiveness and well-being; discussions may range from developing an openness to feedback, to improving managerial tactics, to enhancing presentation skills (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh, & Parker, 2010). Given that executives receive coaching for developmental purposes, the best coaches challenge their clients, pushing them beyond their comfort zones (Blakey & Day, 2012). Such challenge often comes in the form of feedback and engaging in potentially uncomfortable, yet crucial conversations (Gregory, Beck, & Carr, 2011). In this regard, coaching is akin to holding up a proverbial mirror, reflecting back what the client cannot see on his or her own.

The increased reliance on executive coaching can be traced to a shift in corporate philosophy. One such change is that organizations give more credence to leaders’ interpersonal skills than they did in generations past (Grant & Cavanagh, 2011). Another is the recognition that optimal executive development is achieved through custom-tailored rather than one-size-fits-
all approaches (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009). The result is that companies now invest a reported
$2 billion annually for leadership coaching (Blumberg, 2016). Practitioners are enlisted to
partner with C-suite executives, Fortune 500 leaders, entrepreneurs, and mid-level managers in
both private and not-for-profit spaces (Gatling, 2014). Ringing public endorsements from
business titans have also supported the industry. In 2009, then-Google CEO Eric Schmidt
announced the best advice he ever received was “Get a coach” (Fortune, 2009). Bill Gates
echoed a similar sentiment at the top of his 2013 Ted Talk. He began his speech—delivered to a
room full of educators and organizational leaders—by declaring, “Everyone needs a coach”
(Gates, 2013). Overall, a reported 93% of U.S.-based global companies use coaching services
(Grant et al., 2010). Academic interest has followed suit. A search of the database ProQuest
conducted in July 2017 using the keywords ‘executive coaching’ found a total of 1,039 peer-
reviewed citations. Such results are striking: a similar search of the 1990s yielded only 37
publications.

Even still, coaching research has not kept pace with its growth in practice. On one hand,
the extant literature indicates coaching engagements are worth the requisite time and cost. The
use of executive coaching has been associated with greater goal attainment (Fischer & Beimers,
2009; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007); self-awareness (Bozer, Sarros, & Santora, 2014; Prywes,
2012); managerial flexibility (Jones, Rafferty, & Griffin, 2006); and work-life balance (Sparrow,
2007). In addition, research has found these changes endure over time: 1-year post-engagement
recipients of coaching set more specific and challenging goals and experienced improved ratings
from both direct reports and supervisors (Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003). In
all, a recent meta-analysis revealed coaching is linked to improved individual skills and
organizational outcomes (Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2015).
On the other hand, the science on which these findings rely is limited. The field has witnessed relatively few experiments and even fewer that have implemented rigorous empirical designs (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). Many studies have measured success via unreliable self-report assessments from both coaches (Perkins, 2009) and coachees (Bowles, Cunningham, De La Rosa, & Picano, 2007; Thach, 2002). Others have assessed coaching outcomes between a line manager and employee, as well as engagements that transpired outside of an organizational context—neither of which holds adequate relevance to executive coaching (Theeboom, Beersma, & van Vianen, 2013). In fact, Jones and colleagues (2015) only examined 17 experiments in their aforementioned meta-analysis, claiming methodological concerns rendered dozens others ineligible for investigation. The result is a recent call among scholars that future research identify the variables most predictive of client change. Bachkirova and Smith (2015), for example, advocated for developing an agreed-upon set of core coaching competencies. Blumberg (2014) touted the importance of understanding how coaches develop over time. However, the loudest critiques of coaching research have centered on the field’s scarcity of randomized control experiments (Blackman, Moscardo, & Gray, 2016; Grant, 2016; Grant et al., 2010). The absence of well-designed empirical investigation, they argued, challenges our ability to pinpoint the science behind successful coaching.

One area that has received scholarly attention—yet scant empirical investigation—is the impact of diversity dynamics on coaching engagements (De Vries, Rock, & Engellau, 2016; Stout-Rostron, 2017). In other words, the intersection of the two aforementioned trends—an increasingly diverse workforce and a greater dependence on executive coaches—remains largely unexplored. Interestingly, the coaching industry does not require licensure or certification to self-identify as a practitioner (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013). The field additionally
lacks a regulatory body that monitors best practices. In essence, the barriers to entry remain “nonexistent” (Sherman & Freas, 2004). As a result, unlike other helping professionals such as teachers, counselors, and doctors, coaches—the vast majority of whom are White—need not complete ethical or sensitivity awareness training (Peltier, 2011). In fact, the International Coach Federation (ICF, 2017), a worldwide network of more than 25,000 coaches, makes no mention of culture, diversity, or difference in outlining its list of core competencies. With such little attention paid to multicultural awareness, a particular question looms large: Do coaches possess the skillsets necessary for effective partnership with an increasingly diverse contingent of managers and leaders?

Previous research from similar disciplines casts doubt. Working across demographic differences has evoked misunderstanding, bias, and discrimination from even well-intentioned White professionals working with clients of color. Such cultural missteps have been illustrated among teachers (Yeager et al., 2014); physicians (Burgess, Warren, Phelan, Dovidio, & Van Ryn, 2010); clinical therapists (Sue et al., 2008); mentors (Cohen & Steele, 2002); and counseling supervisors (Constantine & Sue, 2007). Whether a similar dynamic exists in coaching contexts remains unknown. However, the literature on interracial interactions provides cause for concern that White coaches may be ill suited to serve as effective thought partners for Black organizational leaders.

Cross-racial conversations are likely to pose unique challenges within the confines of coaching relationships. One reason is because race and racial dynamics are likely relevant issues for leaders of color. Black employees often perceive the office as a microcosm that perpetuates social inequities, inciting feelings of isolation and corresponding mental health impairments (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Wingfield, 2010). Related research has asserted that people associate
Whites with the concepts leader and manager, yet do not make the same associations of Blacks (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005). In all, scholars contend that stereotypes levied against ethnic minorities engender diminished organizational commitment, domain identification, and career aspirations—compromising both on-the-job performance and psychological well-being (Casad & Bryant, 2016). Another, and related, reason is that Whites often fear they will appear racist when interacting with people of color (Cohen & Steele, 2002; Toosi, Babbitt, Ambady, & Sommers, 2012). Such fear has been linked to apprehension engaging in potentially “difficult conversations.” The implications of such are far-reaching, yet two specific findings offer particular importance to coaches working with clients of color: (a) Whites’ inability to provide constructive feedback (Croft & Schmader, 2012; Harber, 1998, 2004, Harber et al., 2012); and (b) Whites’ reluctance to engage in racial dialogue (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012).

Therefore, this study sought to identify whether coaches are as effective working with Black clients as they are with White ones. The current investigation stands to be the first empirical inquiry of its kind and offers significant potential for understanding the impact diversity dynamics have on coaching conversations. In particular, two research questions guided the investigation: (1) Do coaches provide less critical feedback to Black clients than White clients? And (2) Do coaches engage in fewer race-based conversations with Black clients than with White clients? This research serves as a follow-up to Finch Bernstein’s (2017) pilot study, which revealed that 43 graduate students enrolled in an Executive Coaching course provided less constructive feedback to Black clients than they did to otherwise identical White ones. Participants were also twice as likely to initiate race-based conversations with White coachees than they were with Black ones. It should be noted that this latter finding trended toward, yet
failed to reach, statistical significance. Regardless, these results begin to shed light on the potential impact of bias within interracial conversations. While tempting to generalize such findings, caution is recommended in assuming comparable results with real-world coaches. First, no amount of course knowledge can overcome a deficit of experience. Second, Finch Bernstein’s (2017) sample was likely too small to reach generalizable conclusions. Therefore, the present research aimed to test more adequately how such interracial coaching dynamics generalize to a larger sample of seasoned coaching practitioners.

The purpose of this empirical investigation is threefold. First, the empirical rigor of the study will hopefully deepen our understanding of the antecedents inherent to effective executive coaching. Second, the research sought to identify whether coaches possess the skill sets necessary for effective partnership with Black organizational managers and leaders. Third, and related, the potential findings may serve as a call to action that the coaching community pay greater attention to the importance of multicultural knowledge and ability as core coaching competencies.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-racial interactions pose a difficult terrain to navigate. Many conversations between Blacks and Whites are uncomfortable and threatening for both parties (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Shelton & Richeson, 2005). The history of U.S. race relations, coupled with prejudices that continue to pervade social and corporate America (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011; Stephan et al., 2002), create a potential minefield of misstep and social sanction. Blacks have reported concern that their behavior will be viewed through the lens of negative social stereotypes (Crocker et al., 1998; Pinel, 1999; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Whites, meanwhile, often fear they will appear racist when interacting with people of color (Cohen & Steele, 2002; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005; Toosi et al., 2012).

Whites’ fear of demonstrating bias first manifests physiologically. Cross-racial interactions cause Whites to modulate their thoughts (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004), feelings (Richeson & Shelton, 2007), and behaviors (Plant & Devine, 1998), and experience heightened levels of stress (Littleford, Wright, & Sayoc-Parial, 2005; Mendes, Blascovich, Lickel, & Hunter, 2002). Such regulatory responses are cognitively demanding and have been associated with the recruitment—and subsequent depletion—of executive resources such as working memory, judgment, and attentional control (Richeson, Trawalter, & Shelton, 2005).

Unfortunately, these intrapersonal processes breed interpersonal consequences. Scholars in theoretically similar disciplines have uncovered a consistent pattern of ineffective cross-racial partnership. The implications of such are far-reaching, yet two particular findings, described
below, offer importance to coaches working with clients of color: (a) Whites’ reluctance to engage in racial dialogue, and (b) Whites’ reluctance to provide constructive feedback.

**Whites’ Reluctance to Engage in Diversity Dialogue**

Whites struggle to talk about race with ethnic minorities. Researchers have maintained that Whites’ difficulty engaging in race-based conversations emanates from concern that they will unintentionally—and unknowingly—say something offensive (Aberson & Ettlin, 2004; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Indeed, for many Whites, the uncertainty of knowing what to say or how to say it motivates them to sidestep conversations about race altogether. Scholars refer to this approach as *strategic colorblindness*: the avoidance of talking about race—or even acknowledging racial difference—in an effort to avoid the appearance of bias (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). The authors contended that those who evade racial dialogue are not “racists” seeking to withhold their malicious attitudes. Instead, they are likely well-intentioned individuals who believe colorblindness is a culturally sensitive approach to intergroup relations. At first glance, such a strategy seems to offer a simple solution to complex issues of race and racism in contemporary society: if we fail to notice race, the logic goes, then it would be impossible to act in a discriminatory manner.

However, science has demonstrated that colorblindness fails to guard against bias. Most notably, the capacity to “not see race” defies biology. Studies have shown that amid one-on-one interactions, race is among the quickest and most automatic dimensions on which people categorize others. In fact, perceptual differentiation of race occurs rapidly—in less than one-seventh of a second—and emerges as early as 6 months of age (Bar-Haim, Ziv, Lamy, & Hodes, 2006; Ito & Urland, 2003).
Beyond its implausibility, colorblindness offers several unintended drawbacks. In a series of experiments, Apfelbaum and colleagues (2008) presented White participants with photographs of both Black and White people. The authors then paired all participants with either a White or a Black interaction partner surreptitiously serving as a confederate. Participants were tasked with deciphering which photo their partner was holding by asking as few questions as possible. The research revealed that when assigned a Black interaction partner, respondents were significantly less likely to probe or mention race than when paired with a White interaction partner, a finding replicated in several similar studies (Apfelbaum et al., 2012; Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, & Ariely, 2006). Importantly, colorblind tactics predicted subsequent suboptimal behaviors. Compared to White participants who spoke openly about race, Whites who engaged in colorblindness exerted more cognitive resources; exhibited less friendly nonverbal behavior (as rated by naïve, independent judges); and, most strikingly, were experienced as more prejudiced by Black observers (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). Such findings signal that enacting colorblind behavior backfires in its attempt to distance oneself from conveying bias—and ultimately creates more problems than it solves.

**Whites’ Reluctance to Provide Constructive Feedback**

A colorblind philosophy has coincided with a dramatic decline over the past few decades in the expression of racial prejudice (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986, 2004; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Academics have maintained that such a shift in social tides reflects a move toward implicit or covert forms of bias more than they do true change in racial attitudes (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994; Monteith, Voils, & Ashburn-Nardo, 2001). In a world where bigotry is now social sin, many majority group members will go to great lengths to avoid accusations of prejudice. Such people, as a case in point, are likely to treat minorities with greater kindness and
compassion. Unfortunately, the desire to act nicely often overwhelms the simultaneous desire to act fairly. Whites’ efforts to evade wrongdoing drive them to “bend over backwards” (Dovidio, & Gaertner, 1981, p. 209) or provide overly lenient appraisals of minority members. This phenomenon may explain why people rate Black professionals as relatively “warm” and “competent,” when compared to other social groups (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002).

Similarly, a fairly extensive literature has highlighted that when their behavior can be attributed (either internally or externally) to racial preference, Whites actually discriminate in favor of Blacks. Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) found White participants provided greater evaluations and were more likely to extend job offers to highly qualified Black candidates than they were to similar White candidates. Norton, Vandello, and Darley (2004) discovered the same dynamic among fictitious applicants to Princeton University. Axt (2017) learned educators accepted Blacks into an academic honor society with greater leniency than they did Whites. Byrd, Hall, Roberts, and Soto (2015) learned that Black political candidates were deemed more intelligent, inspired greater confidence, and were more likely to win participant votes, as compared to White candidates with identical résumés. These results are particularly curious in light of the racial disparities seen across American workplaces, classrooms, and political offices. In all, a meta-analysis of 31 studies spanning multiple generations further corroborated that Whites’ self-image concerns impel them—consciously or not—to provide inflated evaluations of people of color (Aberson & Ettlin, 2004).

A compelling body of research on cross-racial feedback has illustrated a similar dynamic. Specifically, the motivation to appear non-racist impedes Whites’ capacity to deliver critical, albeit objective, feedback. In a series of now seminal experiments, Harber (1998) tasked participants with evaluating an essay purportedly written by either a Black or White student.
Respondents then provided feedback on the essay’s grammar, structure, and content. The essays were identical across conditions, yet the author’s race seemed to influence how the essays were perceived. The studies unearthed that participants writing to a Black author exhibited greater reluctance to provide criticism than in their critiques of essays presumably written by White authors. In the more than 20 years since, this finding has been replicated across several populations and contexts. Undergraduates (Harber, 1998, 2004), teacher trainees (Harber, Stafford, & Kennedy, 2010), and credentialed public school teachers (Harber et al., 2012) in the American Midwest and Northeast and on the West Coast have all inflated praise and curtailed critique intended for Black recipients. This positive feedback bias—the tendency to give more praise to Blacks than to Whites for work of equal merit—has additionally transpired in both written and face-to-face feedback, when feedback is delivered anonymously as well as publicly, and when recipients are peers or students. In a near-identical experimental design, Croft and Schmader (2012) also found White evaluators provided less constructive feedback to students of color. The psychologists, who aptly dubbed their findings the feedback withholding bias, also revealed that participants assigned higher grades (on a numerical scale of 0 to 100) for essays ostensibly penned by Blacks.

Related research has explored the dynamics of Whites advising minorities. In a set of studies, undergraduate peer academic advisors took on the role of academic advisors and were randomly assigned either a White or a Black student allegedly interested in taking on a challenging academic course load (Crosby & Monin, 2007). When paired with a Black student, advisors expressed less caution and reported less concern over the ambitious schedule than when assigned the profile of a fellow White student. More specifically, Black students were less likely to receive feedback that the course load was overly demanding, less likely to be told they would
need tutoring, and were told they would have more time for extracurricular activities. The authors deemed this the *failure to warn*, a reduced likelihood of cautioning Black students against potential academic difficulty.

Why is it that race influenced perceptions and behaviors in each of the aforementioned studies? While the question remains debated among academics (Biernat, Collins, Katzarska-Miller, & Thompson, 2009; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Wegener & Petty, 2013), it seems as though Whites are uniquely lenient with Blacks more than they are particularly demanding of fellow Whites. Interracial feedback scholars now believe that discrepant feedback outcomes stem from a fear that providing constructive criticism—or discouraging a high level of ambition—would signal prejudice more than it would an objective evaluation of the student’s performance or potential.

As a case in point, research on individual differences has revealed that some people are more susceptible to exhibiting feedback bias than others. Many of the feedback findings, for example, were moderated by participant scores along the Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice Scales (Plant & Devine, 1998). These two independent measures pinpoint the underlying motivations for why people publicly endorse racial equality. Some individuals, the authors contended, espouse equal opportunity because it is “the right thing to do” and is integral to their self-concept. Such people are *internally* motivated to respond without prejudice. Others, however, lean more toward *externally* motivated. These people also publicly endorse meritocracy and fairness, yet do so more out of adherence to social norms than out of moral obligation. Unsurprisingly, these differences in attitudes also predict differences in behavior. Participants who scored low on internal motivation yet high on external motivation—those who
advocate for racial equality simply to avoid social sanction—were significantly more likely to display prejudice than all other respondents (Croft & Schmader, 2012; Crosby & Monin, 2007).

Just as self-image concerns predict who will exhibit bias, they also foretell when such bias is likely to surface. Several of the above studies used a method from previous interracial research (Monin & Miller, 2001) that enabled experimenters to make feedback suppliers temporarily feel less racist. Affirming participants’ self-perceived moral credentials, it was hypothesized, would alleviate concerns about appearing prejudiced. The researchers assumed that receiving such a boost would also provide tacit license to deliver unfettered feedback. And that is exactly what happened. Such participants conveyed the same feedback to Blacks as they did to Whites (Harber et al., 2010; Harber et al., 2012). A similar study (Ruscher, Wallace, Walker, & Bell, 2010) cleverly influenced participant concerns by administering and then reporting the results of a bogus Implicit Association Test (IAT), a common measure of implicit attitudes toward controversial topics such as race (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). Some learned they held an unconscious aversion to Black people; others discovered they held positive associations. The latter provided subsequent feedback devoid of bias, while the former, sensing threat, did not. Taken together, this set of findings is particularly noteworthy. The participants who received affirmation of their egalitarian attitudes were unencumbered by pressure to evaluate with kindness. The absence of such pressure, instead, enabled them to evaluate with fairness. These discoveries lend credence to the notion that race-based fears—experienced differently across both individuals and situational contexts—are largely responsible for differential feedback outcomes.
The Importance of Diversity Dialogue in Coaching

Leadership Challenges Facing Black Managers and Executives

The difficulty for Whites to partner across the racial divide holds significant implications for coaches. More specifically, the ability to discuss the impact of race and racial dynamics is paramount to Black leaders. Research has shown corporate America is uniquely difficult for people of color. Compared to Whites, Blacks experience more circuitous paths to leadership (Maume, 1999; Mong & Roscigno, 2009), receive slower and more tepid wage increases (Kalev, 2014; Kalev et al., 2006), face greater risk of biased performance evaluation (Wilson, Roscigno, & Huffman, 2012), and contend with an inflated chance of being fired or demoted (McBrier & Wilson, 2004). Even worse, these discrepant outcomes compound and widen over time (Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2009; Tomaskovic-Devey & Stainback, 2007). The result is that relatively few Black men and women hold high-level positions of power in organizations. In fact, Blacks constitute only 3% of executives and senior-level managers in corporate America (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2015). The numbers are even worse within the world’s largest businesses: a mere four current Fortune 500 CEOs are Black (Fortune, 2017). Equally stunning is that wide-scale diversity investments and initiatives have produced negligible results (see Kalev et al., 2006). According to recent research, Fortune 100 and 500 companies have fewer Blacks sitting on their respective boards of directors today than they did 20 years ago (Deloitte & Alliance for Board Diversity, 2017). Such stalled progress poses particular concern in light of recent empirical discovery that board diversity is “the most important factor” in shaping a company’s level of equity and representation (Cook & Glass, 2014, p. 186).
The scarcity of Black organizational leaders offers several subsequent challenges. One such impediment is that an imbalance of demography within a particular context heightens awareness of social identity as a distinguishing attribute (Cohen & Swim, 1995). In other words, the less difference there is overall, the more those differences stand out. Numerical minorities in such settings are referred to as “tokens,” a label signifying their status as symbolic representatives of their category more so than as individual people (Kanter, 1977). The burden placed on token shoulders is unique and unfortunate. Their behavior reflects not just on their personal character, but also on their entire identity group. As Carbado and Gulati (2004) put it, a token’s every action is “racially representative.” Such conditions ultimately conspire to undermine their organizational performance.

For example, Kanter’s (1977) pioneering work revealed that tokens’ unique visibility casts a proverbial spotlight on their behavior. Such undue attention denies privacy and heightens scrutiny. Bereft of anonymity, tokens sense their errors will appear particularly prominent and incur greater penalty. In response, tokens often perceive they must be “bulletproof,” or demonstrate behavior devoid of performance mistakes and political missteps (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Ironically, though, tokens report their accomplishments fail to receive the same public attention (see Duguid, Loyd, & Tolbert, 2012). Such concern has been substantiated by studies illustrating that minorities are often held to higher standards and evaluated less positively (Ridgeway, 2014). For tokens, this paradox instills the belief they must work twice as hard as their majority group member peers (Kanter, 1977).

Kanter’s (1977) research examined token women, but more recent work has revealed the phenomenon transcends gender. Structured interviews with 167 Black elites—congressmen, federal judges, mayors, entertainers, college presidents, and scholars—indicated token dynamics
undercut racial minorities as well (Jackson, Thoits, & Taylor, 1995). The quantitative analysis demonstrated that numerical rarity correlated with workplace difficulty: tokens reported that the salience of their racial identity imposed greater demands and required a level of excellence unexpected from their White counterparts. Notably, this finding did not extend to leaders working in industries with a higher percentage of fellow Blacks. Similarly, Roberson, Deitch, Brief, and Block (2003) learned that Black professionals who were the only minority in their department were more likely than non-tokens to believe their racial identity undermined the perceptions colleagues held of them. Given the dearth of Black executives in corporate America, it is likely they too contend with a confluence of performance pressures to which majority group members remain immune.

Token dynamics induce social isolation as well. Token status emanates from the notion—conscious or not—that members of their group do not belong (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). Further, the tenuous nature of race relations in the United States compounds the issue. As Carbado and Gulati (2004) wrote, “a presumption exists that people of color are different, that their loyalties reside outside of the institution, and that they have been suspicious about, feel uncomfortable around, and are also distrusting of their White counterparts” (p. 1675). The result is that racial minorities often assume outsider status within their organizations. Tokens sense they are the subject of conversation, critique, and gossip (Jackson et al., 1995; Kanter, 1977). The implications of such are important. Success in large organizations depends on access to tacit and unofficial information (Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2009). To climb the organizational ladder, employees often must understand how to bypass formal rules, how to navigate workplace politics, and how to curry favor with particular executives. Such learning comes not from organizational charts, but from offline conversations. This inherently disadvantages minorities.
For one, after-work socialization is typically same-race (Carbado & Gulati, 2004). For another, research has shown those atop the organizational hierarchy—who are predominantly White—prefer to mentor colleagues who remind them of their younger selves (Benokraitis, Feagin, & Henslin, 1993). Taken together, Blacks are regularly deprived of “relationship constellations” (Higgins & Kram, 2001) vital to upward mobility.

**Diversity Initiative Challenges Facing Black Managers and Executives**

Many organizations have responded to such racial dynamics by attempting to increase the number of minority leaders. One such initiative that has gained traction in the past several decades is Affirmative Action Plans (AAPs). First implemented by President Lyndon Johnson’s Executive Order in 1965, AAPs are identity-conscious policies aimed at improving the employment outcomes of typically underrepresented groups (Yang, D’Souza, Bapat, & Colarelli, 2006). On one hand, AAPs have been shown to increase the representation of women and ethnic minorities in managerial positions (Kalev et al., 2006). On the other, much scholarly work has suggested that an uptick in the number of Black leaders fails to offset the oppressive context in which they find themselves. In the United States, Blacks must contend with stereotypes that they are lazy, unambitious, and lacking in intelligence (Stephan et al., 2002). More specific to the workplace, Chung-Herrera and Lankau (2005) demonstrated people associate Whites with the concepts leader and manager, yet do not make the same associations of Blacks. In fact, research shows that AAPs ultimately—and ironically—undermine minority success.

For example, Affirmative Action Plans create the perception that Black advancement stems more from quotas than from qualifications. Affirmative action decisions are rarely public, creating ambiguity as to why minorities and women receive promotion. This provides unintentional yet tacit license for others to discount the merits of potential AAP beneficiaries.
Further, suspected affirmative action hires face an elevated threshold of excellence and disproportionate likelihood of having their abilities questioned. Heilman, Block, and Lucas (1992) showed that Blacks assumed to be affirmative action hires were rated as less impressive and less likely to climb the organizational ladder than assumed non-affirmative action hires. Heilman, Block, and Stathatos (1997) similarly revealed the affirmative action label undermines perceptions of performance. Sampling 264 organizational managers, the researchers found that affirmative action hired women—despite identical performance—received lower ratings and lower salary recommendations than non-affirmative action hires. Leslie, Mayer, and Kravitz’s (2014) meta-analysis provided further corroboration. Analyzing 45 lab and field experiments—across 6,432 individuals—the authors discovered that AAPs are negatively linked to perceptions of both ability and performance. As Heilman and colleagues (1997) aptly described, affirmative action employees walk around with a “stigma of incompetence.”

**Psychological Challenges Facing Black Managers and Executives**

Unfortunately, such stigma weighs heavily on Blacks. For example, racial minorities often struggle with how best to refute the stereotypes levied against them. Carbado and Gulati (2013) offered a hypothetical that captures this dilemma. According to the UCLA and Duke Law professors, Blacks may work particularly long hours in an effort to disabuse others of the notion minorities are lazy or lack ambition. But this approach may backfire: putting in extra time at the office could unintentionally substantiate the stereotype that Blacks are cognitively inferior to Whites. In other words, Black employees face a double bind, where they run the risk of incurring social penalties regardless of their behavior.

Walking such a tightrope breeds emotional difficulty. A recent survey of 649 Black employees in industries from healthcare, to financial services, to education found that workplace
racial dynamics induce psychological struggle. The data revealed that racial minorities pay a “Black tax”—an emotional toll stemming from the sense they must work twice as hard to keep pace with their White co-workers (Travis, Thorpe-Moscon, & McLuney, 2016). Notably, this mindset extended from non-managers all the way to corporate executives. Moreover, the impact was painful. Those who incurred a Black tax were more likely to report a fear of discrimination than were those unaffected by the tax. They were twice as likely to experience disrupted sleep patterns. They were nearly four times as likely to express a diminished sense of “psychological safety” and inclusion (see Edmondson, 1999). The result was that these workers were more reluctant to offer their opinion on crucial decisions and felt less innovative than Black employees who did not feel as marginalized (Travis et al., 2016). The survey results corroborated similar patterns others have revealed. Jackson and colleagues (1995) found Black tokens exhibit greater symptoms of depression than non-tokens. Bell and Nkomo (2001) unearthed that while 81% of Whites felt accepted by their organization, only 51% of Blacks felt the same. In all, Blacks often perceive the workplace as a microcosm that perpetuates social inequities, inciting feelings of isolation and corresponding mental health challenges (Wingfield, 2010; Witt Smith & Joseph, 2010).

Just as problematic, Blacks embody the projections they receive from others. Scholars have contended that stereotypes are so powerful, the mere possibility of them can induce psychological hardship. For example, Blacks fear their actions will be viewed through a lens of deficiency, which precipitates adverse effects on their behavior (Steele, 1997). Experts have referred to this phenomenon as “stereotype threat.” Coined by Steele and Aronson (1995), stereotype threat is the expectation one will be judged on the basis of social identity group membership rather than actual performance or potential. Often when people engage in an activity
in which their identity group is seen as inferior, they worry—conscious or not—that their behavior will conform to the stereotyped levied against them. This threat of being reduced to a stereotype has been shown to interfere with and undermine optimal performance, ultimately—and ironically—perpetuating the stereotype (Steele, 2011). The damaging effects of stereotype threat have been documented in more than 400 empirical studies, spanning diverse industries and contexts (Walton, Murphy, & Ryan, 2015). Yet research has shown that Black employees are particularly susceptible to its harm.

As detailed above, affirmative action plans activate negative social stereotypes about people of color. For Blacks, the pervasive discounting from others elicits self-doubt. The perception that colleagues disregard minority intellect legitimizes the potential accuracy of the stereotype, leading Blacks to question the validity themselves (Gunderson, Ramirez, Beilock, & Levine, 2012; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). In other words, Blacks may also wonder whether they were hired or promoted to fill affirmative action quotas. In their aforementioned meta-analysis, Leslie and colleagues (2014) discovered that corporate AAPs are associated with an increased sense of stereotyping from others and elevated feelings of stereotype threat. For minorities, the result is diminished self-competence and subsequent underperformance. As a whole, the bias Black people feel at work diminishes organizational commitment, domain identification, and career aspirations—compromising both self-efficacy and on-the-job success (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Purdie Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008).

**Identity Challenges Facing Black Managers and Executives**

On top of all this, Blacks must suppress aspects of their cultural identity when at work. In particular, they receive backlash for engaging in race-related behavior. One recent study, for example, examined 350 senior leaders tapped by their respective bosses for an executive
development program at the Center for Creative Leadership (Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang, 2017). Unbeknownst to the executives, their supervisor had rated them 2 weeks prior on their perceived competence, performance, and “diversity-valuing behavior.” This last construct was measured by adapting the Miville-Guzman Universality-diversity Scale (Miville et al., 1999). For example, the bosses reported the extent to which their executive “values working with a diverse group of people” or was “comfortable managing people from different racial or cultural backgrounds.” The results affirmed that Black leaders who exhibited diversity-valuing behaviors were rated lower in competence and performance, as compared to Black managers who did not demonstrate such behaviors. For comparison, the same study found that diversity-valuing behaviors had no impact on perceived competence and performance among White managers.

The authors pointed to other research as potential explanation for their findings: Blacks who partake in diversity-related behavior may be seen as potential threats to the organizational power structure (e.g., Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska, & George, 2004). As a result, Blacks reported an obligation to compromise their authenticity and sidestep “racialized” organizational policies and initiatives (Hewlett, Leader-Chivee, Sherbin, Gordon, & Dieudonne, 2012). In fact, a 2016 study of nearly 4,000 white-collar working adults unearthed that 38% of Blacks felt it was “never acceptable at my company to speak out about experiences of bias based on race” (Bell Smith, Hewlett, Phillips, & Rashid, 2017). Qualitative research has hinted at the potential cost of promoting diversity. Fearing a diversity champion label, minorities often succumb to separating their racial and professional identities (Duguid et al., 2012). Quantitative research has confirmed their concern. Hekman and colleagues (2017) found that Black managers who hired a fellow minority candidate in an effort to increase racial representation were seen as worse leaders.
than Black managers who ignored diversity in their decisions. Carbado and Gulati (2004) summarized this dynamic well: Companies seek to hire people who look but do not act Black.

**Implications of Not Discussing Race With Black Managers and Executives**

Given the focus on performance and well-being in coaching, clients of color would benefit from the opportunity to discuss the impact race has on them at work (Grant et al., 2010). However, the empirical examination of interracial interactions within organizations remains scant and is even less prevalent within coaching contexts (Stout-Rostron, 2017). To understand the value of racial dialogue in coaching, then, it is wise to survey the influence of such dynamics in counseling. The underpinnings of the two disciplines are relatively consonant. Therapists and coaches alike explore how their clients’ cognitive and emotional reactions can interfere with well-being and effectiveness (Bluckert, 2005). Similar to their clinical counterparts, coaches demonstrate active listening, empathy, and analytical problem solving (Peltier, 2011). Successful coaches additionally build rapport and establish trust by creating judgment-free environments that encourage vulnerability (Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010). Indeed, their theoretical similarity has spawned suggestions that future scholars leverage our understanding of psychotherapy in an effort to better isolate the processes and outcomes of effective coaching (Smither, 2011).

Along that vein, qualitative counseling research has suggested coaches may struggle the same way White therapists have in talking about race with clients of color (Cardemil & Battle, 2003). Hare (2015) illustrated that White clinicians hesitate to engage in racial dialogue despite acknowledging its importance. Ultimately, the therapists’ desire to avoid discomfort, as well as their fear of being seen as racist, shuts the door to racial dialogue. Constantine and Sue (2007), meanwhile, documented that Black doctoral clinicians-in-training experienced their White supervisors as avoidant and dismissive of racial-cultural issues. In response, the burgeoning
therapists reported frustration, sadness, and anger. The transgressions eventually undermined the way the supervisees felt about their clinical development, the relationship with their own clients of color, and, unsurprisingly, the relationship with their White supervisor. This latter implication aligns with previous research that linked the failure of White supervisors to process racial issues with a breakdown of trust in interracial relationships (Terrell & Terrell, 1984).

The importance of trust in coaching cannot be overstated. As in counseling, coaching involves behavioral change that requires client openness and risk taking (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009). Thus, it remains essential that clients view their coach as a trusted and supportive confidant. In fact, recent research revealed that the variable most underlying coaching success is neither perceived similarity in personality (Bozer, Joo, & Santora, 2015) nor similarity in gender (Boozer et al., 2015). It is not match in MBTI profiles (de Haan et al., 2013). Nor is it even the modality or specific coaching interventions practiced (de Haan, Culpin, & Curd, 2011). Instead, research has revealed that the strength of the working alliance—the quality of the dyadic partnership—is the variable most predictive of effective counseling (Horvath & Marx, 1990; Horvath & Symonds, 1991) as well as coaching (de Haan et al., 2013; McGovern et al., 2001). If a perceived inability to discuss race is associated with a tenuous relationship, and the quality of the relationship is tantamount to coaching success, it follows that the absence of racial dialogue likely correlates with ineffective coaching.

The Importance of Constructive Feedback in Coaching

While the lines between coaching and psychotherapy often blur, their espoused differences remain clear. Clinicians diagnose disorders, while coaches develop individual and team performance. The attainment of such organizational targets requires coaches to provide information the client cannot readily identify (Riddle & Ting, 2006). Thus, positive
reinforcement and working with a strengths-based approach are necessary but insufficient: Truly effective coaching requires both challenge and support (Blakey & Day, 2012). Such challenge often comes in the form of feedback.

**Coaches’ Reliance on Multi-rater Feedback**

Research has indicated that developmental feedback is required for behavioral change. Most organizations, for example, employ “360” or multi-rater feedback as a way to fuel employee performance (Pfau & Kay, 2002). These processes allow for an employee’s managers, direct reports, and peers to provide anonymous feedback on his or her behavior. Such scores are then compared to how the employee rated him or herself on the same behavioral competencies. In this regard, the feedback reports provide a holistic view of performance that captures all relevant vantage points. The use of multi-rater feedback centers on the assumption that the exercise will inform and motivate employee performance. Learning that a gap exists between our perceptions and others’ perception of our work increases awareness around where and how to improve. This is why more than 85% of Fortune 500 companies leverage multi-rater data (Korotov, 2016).

Increasing client awareness is a central tenet of coaching. Several popular models on which coaching is based—such as Luft and Ingham’s (1961) *Johari Window* and Goleman’s (2006) *Emotional Intelligence*—maintain that success requires an accurate understanding of how we are seen. Indeed, a theme within the coaching literature is that of the “unaware self” (Maxwell, 2017). A coach’s role, thus, is to help illuminate an executive’s blind spots. Such newfound awareness, then, enables the client to try on different behaviors and leadership styles. Enlightenment, it is believed, will give rise to action.
Coaches’ Reliance on Facilitating and Providing Feedback

Surfacing these blind spots requires coaching feedback. As a result, the essence of executive coaching rests on development appraisal (Maxwell, 2017). Scholars have contended feedback is so fundamental to coaching that it is both “integral” (Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999, p. 764) and often “taken for granted” (McDowall, 2012, p. 60). However, no comprehensive frameworks existed prior to Gregory, Levy, and Jeffers’ (2008) model, which outlined the role feedback plays within the five stages of executive coaching: (a) Catalyst for coaching, (b) Establishing the relationship, (c) Data gathering, (d) Utilizing the feedback, and (e) Outcomes. According to the authors, feedback is not an isolated event, but rather a continuous process woven into the fabric of the practice. Maxwell (2017) asserted that feedback can be categorized as either internal or external. Internally generated feedback derives from the client. Through self-reflection and self-analysis, executives gain insights that precipitate behavioral change. The coach’s role here is to facilitate rather than deliver feedback.

This stands in contrast to feedback that is externally generated. External feedback emanates from one of three sources. The first is multi-rater scores, as described above. Though ratings are culled from opinions of third-party stakeholders, coaches serve as messengers of such content. The task for them is to present objective feedback, as well as any additional observations they deem relevant and helpful (Gregory et al., 2008). Similarly, they attempt to highlight any “lack of fit” between clients and the demands imposed on them by the external environment (Grant, 2003). The second source is personality assessment data. With an increasing array of tools and instruments, coaches regularly lean on psychometric tests to understand client behavior better. Such inventories may measure anything from learning styles, to emotional intelligence, to one’s orientation towards conflict (Maxwell, 2017). Coaches then help executives
process the results and provide feedback around the potential implications the findings hold. In a study of 112 Ph.D. executive coaches, 98% reported they often or always administer feedback in the wake of collecting assessment data (Del Giudice, Yanovsky, & Finn, 2014).

While these first sources depend on quantifiable metrics, the third emerges more from instinct. Coaches regularly provide feedback on their direct (albeit subjective) experience of their client. Such interventions provide ‘here and now’ reactions and interpretations as a way of informing clients how their behavior impacts others (Maxwell, 2017). The literature referred to this technique as immediacy, whose origins lie within the world of psychotherapy. Immediacy assumes that a coach’s perceptions offer a snapshot into clients’ real-world interactions (O’Neill, 2013). Put another way, how a client is received in session intimates how he or she is likely received in his or her organization. Giving voice to these observations, then, provides clients the opportunity to recognize better how colleagues may be experiencing them. As O’Neill (2013) described, “The use of immediacy is the real gold of any coaching moment. Your own interaction with the executive is a window into his or her characteristic patterns” (p. 98).

While immediacy offers tangible value, it is not without its limitations. The downside to the approach is that it injects a level of coaching bias and subjectivity (Driver, 2011). This speaks to a larger conversation within the coaching community around how much feedback should be externally as opposed to internally generated. Those who oppose the notion of feedback argue it runs counter to an important non-directive stance. Whitmore (2010), for example, contended that a coach’s role is not to provide feedback but to facilitate reflection. Ladyshewsky (2010) went even further in saying that evaluation—or at least the perception of evaluation—creates an unwanted power imbalance within the coaching relationship. Others have disagreed. Gregory and colleagues (2011) maintained that “negative process feedback provides the most specific and
useful information for goal attainment.” (p. 33). Blakey and Day (2012) similarly argued the best coaching focuses on performance—and behavioral change requires honest, developmental feedback. Debate notwithstanding, the prevailing wisdom is that the most effective coaches are willing to serve as a proverbial mirror, shining light on what their clients cannot see. In other words, they are willing to engage in hard conversations (Grant, 2017).

**Coaches’ Reliance on Setting and Accomplishing Client Goals**

Less controversial is the role coaches play in supporting client goals. Once data have been collected and muti-rater scores processed, coaches help executives establish goals. The importance of goals in pursuit of new behavior remains well documented. Goals allow us to home in on the gap between our current state and our desired one. More specifically, they help direct where we should focus our attention, how much effort to exert, and what strategies will yield success (Locke & Latham, 2002). Previous scholarly work has offered an additional context for why goals are so powerful: The act of setting and then maintaining them inspires intrinsic motivation (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Striving for observable, targeted change sits at the foundation of coaching conversations. It is for this reason that researchers consider goal clarity and attainment cornerstones to effective coaching (Gregory et al., 2011; Mackie, 2015).

Notably, coaches hold two particular feedback roles in pursuit of client goals. First, they serve as thought partners in creating the plan for change. Establishing goals involves mutual deliberation around what new behaviors will be enacted as well as how they will be measured. Indeed, goal success is maximized when the objective is specific and challenging (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). Within these brainstorming sessions, coaches often share their thoughts on what goals hold the most potential—yet simultaneously reside within the executive’s reach. In this regard, coaches must be able to provide honest feedback about what is attainable. The
critical skill here is establishing a goal that remains ambitious yet not impossible (Gregory et al., 2011). Thus, they must act with the client’s best interest in mind—providing sound yet objective perspective on the client’s true potential.

Additionally, coaches provide constant feedback on goal progress. Scholars have held that goal reappraisal is part of the relationship’s connective tissue (Tolli & Schmidt, 2008). Practitioners recognize successes, acknowledge lapses, and evaluate overall success (Nowack, 2009). Tracking improvement is vital to sustaining motivation. A recent study conducted by Teresa Amabile—one of the world’s foremost experts on creativity—affirmed as much. Amabile examined 26 teams, across seven organizations, and tasked employees with documenting their daily interactions. The study included 238 participants and nearly 12,000 diary entries over the span of several months. The research team sought to answer what workday events correlated with creative output and productivity. The results proved surprising: Employees’ best days occurred when they saw progress in their work. Amabile found that progress instilled a sense of achievement, which in turn propelled motivation. The researchers deemed this the progress principle, concluding that recognized success—no matter the size—provides sustenance and encouragement that moves us forward (Amabile & Kramer, 2015). The study illustrated the potential benefit coaches offer clients. Positive reinforcement in recognition of client progress strengthens their relationship. Beyond that, though, a coach’s feedback inspires motivation on the frequently bumpy path toward behavioral change (Gregory et al., 2008).

Ancillary Benefits of Feedback in Coaching

Two other benefits of coaching feedback bear mentioning. First, leaders receive increasingly less feedback as they climb the organizational ladder. Hall, Otazo, and Hollenbeck (1999), for example, found that senior managers are often bereft of objective and honest
developmental feedback. Moreover, the feedback they do receive is often vague and opaque. The fact that such leaders receive little pushback on a day-to-day basis underscores the potential value of their coaching conversations. Second, coaches serve as role models to coachees, demonstrating how they can supply feedback to their colleagues and staff (Stern, 2004). Indeed, an ancillary goal of coaching is empowering executives to develop those around them better. Thus, effective coaching is not only likely to facilitate client growth, but it is also likely to spur performance from their entire team and organization (Gregory et al., 2008).

**Limitations of Constructive Feedback**

The relationship between feedback and subsequent performance is more complicated than many recognize. As described above, the focus on constructive feedback within organizations rests on the belief that surfacing deficiency heightens awareness and motivation—which ultimately spikes performance. This notion, however, defies our academic understanding of how humans process negative feedback. Significant scholarly work has indicated that feedback regularly fails to yield improvement. In fact, Kluger and DeNisi’s (1996) meta-analysis of feedback interventions revealed that negative assessment *worsened* subsequent performance in more than one third of the 131 studies they examined. The emotional implications of receiving feedback offer helpful context in unpacking these confounding results. Learning others see us in a more negative light than we see ourselves does not merely illuminate objective difference; it poses psychological threat (Ilgen & Davis, 2000). Such situations are also likely to challenge our self-esteem and self-efficacy (Colquitt, 2017). We then interrogate our own views or question the intentions of others. The emotional reactions to such situations vary. Some internalize the feedback and become dejected. Others reject the criticism out of anger (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). Either way, progress is impeded. This is why Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found that
feedback on our character or identity—rather than on a concrete task—proves particularly ineffective: An undermined self-concept saps our motivation and diminishes future performance.

Scholarly work from several disciplines has provided further corroboration. Neuroscience research has highlighted that receiving feedback activates the region of the brain associated with physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). Dickerson and Kemeny (2004), meanwhile, revealed that cortisol levels surge nearly 50% when feedback is oriented toward the person. These findings mirrored studies within organizations as well. Heaphy (2007) discovered that the highest-performing teams provided five times as much positive feedback to each other than they did critical feedback. In recent work, Green, Gino, and Staats (2017) found that critical appraisals from peers had no impact on performance—but they did lead employees to seek out new relationships and social networks within the company. Even structured multi-rater feedback reports failed to inoculate the pain of receiving critique. Managers who rated themselves higher than others did experience more negative reactions in processing the feedback, reported lower motivation to improve, and demonstrated less subsequent behavioral change (Bret & Atwater, 2001). This last finding dovetailed with Smither, London, and Reilly’s (2005) meta-analysis, which found that 360-degree feedback on its own did little to improve performance.

**Trust and Credibility Temper Feedback Reactions**

Smither and colleagues’ (2005) meta-analysis outlined several variables that predicted whether individuals will take in and act on feedback received. One of the variables identified was a person’s *feedback orientation*. Feedback orientation is an individual difference variable defined as the extent to which someone accepts, values, and ultimately utilizes feedback (London & Smither, 2002). Interestingly, though, the authors contended that feedback orientation is situational: *Who* supplies the feedback often dictates our response to it. More specifically, we
must believe that our feedback source is reliable. This finding parallels Ilgen et al.’s (1979) seminal work on the nature of feedback within organizational contexts. In particular, the authors noted that feedback providers must be seen as trustworthy, credible, and possessing expertise.

The implications to coaching seem fairly straightforward. As discussed earlier, the variable most predictive of coaching success is the extent to which executives trust and value the relationship with their coach (de Haan et al., 2013). It becomes imperative, then, that coaches establish rapport and cultivate a supportive environment with coachees. Such partnership enables clients to process, make meaning, and extract learning from important developmental feedback.

That being said, developing a trusting relationship is no simple feat. Given the complexities of providing beneficial feedback, coaches may hesitate to engage in potentially difficult conversations. Indeed, coaching feedback is often met with resistance, anxiety, even anger (Grant et al., 2010). Broaching such discussions requires delicate precision; inherent is a degree of uncertainty as to how the recipient will respond. As a result, feedback is often withheld to avoid confrontation (Hornsey, Frederiks, Smith, & Ford, 2007) or to uphold how we are regarded (Jeffries & Hornsey, 2012). The result is that some coaches may—consciously or unconsciously—choose to sidestep feedback conversations. The consequences of such are dire. Put simply, coaches who withhold constructive feedback rob their clients of developmental opportunities: It is impossible to learn from our mistakes if we remain unaware they exist.

While this truism holds for all coaching contexts, the volume of interracial feedback research has intimated that clients of color are particularly susceptible to receiving disingenuous feedback. As mentioned before, Blacks often believe their behavior is viewed through the prism of stereotypes that doubt their ability. In response, they often interrogate the accuracy of feedback provided across racial and status lines. More specifically, research has demonstrated
that Blacks are dubious about whether positive feedback signals sympathy more than it does objective assessment of their performance (Crocker, Voelk, Testa, & Major, 1991). Intrapsychic dynamics that render Blacks unable to decipher the meaning of cross-racial feedback have been dubbed *attributional ambiguity* (Crocker et al., 1991). Such uncertainty is linked to discounting feedback among Black students (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2010), doctoral clinicians-in-training (Constanine & Sue, 2007), and, notably, organizational managers (Roberson et al., 2003). In fact, Jeanquart-Barone (1996) found that Black employees receive less supervisory support and fewer developmental opportunities from White managers than they do fellow Black managers. Black executives receiving coaching are unlikely immune from such dynamics. In this regard, overly praiseworthy or curtailed critical feedback may undermine feelings of self-esteem as well as confidence in their coaches (Crocker et al., 1991).

**Potential Moderator: Racial Bias Malleability Beliefs**

The potential missteps of cross-racial interaction render it important to examine whether some coaches are more willing than others to engage Black clients in difficult conversations. Most previous research has explored underlying racial attitudes in attempting to pinpoint why people vary in their approach to interracial behavior (e.g., Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002). Such investigation, unsurprisingly, has learned that the more prejudiced one’s beliefs, the more likely he or she is to experience anxiety, act aloof, or even avoid cross-racial communication (Richeson & Shelton, 2003). However, recent research has suggested the calculus for understanding intergroup behavior is a bit more complicated than simply measuring racial animus. More specifically, Carr, Dweck, and Pauker (2012) discovered that beliefs about
the *malleability* of prejudice—irrespective of attitudes toward other groups—play a significant role in how we engage across race.

**Fixed and Growth Mindsets**

The idea to study how our malleability beliefs inform our behavior is not new. In their pioneering work 30 years ago, Dweck and Leggett (1988) discovered that people hold different lay or implicit theories about the human capacity for change. In a series of studies, the authors found that some people see intelligence as a *fixed* attribute; however, much one possesses today is likely the same amount one will possess tomorrow. However, others perceive intelligence as an attribute that we can enhance through trial and error. Such people are said to see intelligence as *malleable*. Importantly, the investigation revealed that where one falls on the fixed-malleable spectrum informs one’s willingness to make and learn from mistakes. As a case in point, Dweck and Leggett (1988) provided participants with the choice between two cognitive tasks. One option seemed manageable, described as questions that were “fairly easy if you are smart.” The other, framed as consisting of problems that were “hard, new, and different,” presented greater challenge. Sixty-one percent of participants who saw intelligence as malleable jumped at the latter option, but those with a fixed mindset were more reticent. Only 18% selected the challenging path, with an overwhelming 82% choosing the less intricate one. For participants subscribing to a fixed theory of intelligence, the authors concluded, the fear of failure eclipsed the desire for learning (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; see also Beer, 2002; Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

Such conclusions were drawn from the sense that fixed- and malleable-minded people hold different goals when attempting intellectual exercises. The focus of fixed-mindset individuals is on performance: Success is seen as proof they are smart and adversity as proof they are not. For them, the prospect of a difficult activity—replete with the potential for
struggle—poses unique threat (Curry, Da Fonseca, Zahn, & Elliot, 2008; Rhodewalt, 1994). Such apprehension is understandable. If intellect is seen as unchangeable, it seems wise to avoid activities where mistakes and self-perceptions of inadequacy may ensue. Such an approach preserves feelings of self-efficacy and self-worth (Yeager et al., 2014). In contrast, those who envision intelligence as fluid are less motivated to perform than they are to learn (Molden & Dweck, 2006). Working from the assumption that intelligence can be developed, they viewed adversity not as deficiency but opportunity. Imperfection provides valuable feedback, illustrating where and how to improve. In other words, mastery is not an innate talent one does not have, but rather a talent one does not have yet (Briceno, 2012).

Following up on Dweck and Leggett (1988), several field and neuroscience experiments have revealed similar patterns of apprehension in response to feedback about poor academic or intellectual performance. Research has shown, for example, that for those who see intelligence as a static trait, feedback heightens anxiety, lowers self-esteem, and reduces blood circulation in the brain (Mangels, Butterfield, Lamb, Good, & Dweck, 2006; Niiya, Crocker, & Bartmess, 2004). The impact of such fear and realization of poor performance for fixed-mindset individuals is that it leaves them less interested in subsequent opportunities for challenge or improvement (Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999; Nussbaum & Dweck, 2007).

As it turns out, the significance of lay theories transcends notions of intelligence. People also differ in their beliefs surrounding the malleability of other individual characteristics, such as personality. Beer (2002), for example, investigated the impact of mental models on shyness. Parallel to the findings above, the research uncovered that shy people who endorsed a malleable-oriented theory about shyness—believing that communication skills can be acquired—were significantly more likely to confront and endure challenging social situations than shy people.
who adopted a fixed mindset. Even further, independent judges rated fixed-mindset participants as more anxious, more avoidant of eye contact, and even shyer than their growth-minded counterparts. Job, Dweck, and Walton (2010) additionally applied lay theories to perceptions of willpower or the capacity to exert self-control. Some believe self-control is a limited resource that diminishes after strenuous activities. Others see willpower as vast and actually strengthened by demanding tasks. Again, mindsets informed behavior: A demanding activity sapped fixed-mindset participants of self-control but had minimal impact on malleable-minded ones. In fact, a longitudinal field study showed implicit theories predicted eating behavior, procrastination, and goal accomplishment amid stressful experiences. In all, the authors contend that explanations of ego depletion may lean more on psychological than they do biological (Job et al., 2010).

Interestingly, one’s lay theory beliefs and demonstrated ability are typically unrelated; our confidence to develop an attribute has no correlation with how much of that attribute we actually possess (Dweck, 1999). Yet where one falls on the mindset spectrum holds significant impact: Implicit theories shape our “meaning system” (Molden & Dweck, 2006) or the interpretations we draw from experiences. Such subjective conclusions then guide our motivations. For those with a fixed mindset, every situation carries the potential for evaluation that may confirm or disconfirm our abilities: Am I going to succeed or I am going to fail? Am I going to look smart or am I going to look dumb? (see Dweck, 2006). Feeling less pressure to perform, those with a growth mindset focus on stretching themselves. For them, the road to success is paved not with talent but with effort.

Fixed and Growth Mindsets of Racial Bias

Particularly relevant to the current interracial coaching study, Carr and colleagues (2012) grew curious about whether similar implicit theory dynamics extended to notions of racial bias
malleability. More specifically, they examined whether those with a fixed mindset of racial bias—people who see prejudice as an unchangeable quality—were more likely to avoid or engage in less effective cross-racial interactions. The investigation stemmed from the recognition that White people often experience stereotype threat, or the fear of confirming a stereotype about one’s social identity group (Steele & Aronson, 1995), during situations where racial prejudice may be evaluated (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008). The authors reasoned that Whites who perceive bias as ingrained may be particularly concerned to reveal racial animus. Such display of prejudice may be uniquely threatening to them because it would signal not just that they have bias but that they are biased. Therefore, these people may seek to avoid interracial interactions to protect themselves from potential embarrassment or shame. In contrast, a growth mindset toward racial bias may actually encourage cross-racial engagement: Evidence of their bias is likely to be received with curiosity and an openness to learn.

To test whether beliefs of bias malleability predicted interracial behaviors, the authors developed the Theories of Prejudice Scale. The six-item inventory was adapted from Dweck, Chiu, and Hong’s (1995) measure of beliefs about the malleability of personality. The Theories of Prejudice Scale asks people the extent to which they agree with statements related to the fixedness of racial attitudes. One item reads, “People have a certain amount of prejudice and they can’t really change that.” Another declares, “People can learn how to act like they’re not prejudiced, but they can’t really change their prejudice deep down.” Participant responses run along a 6-point scale that ranges from very strongly disagree to very strongly agree. A pilot study confirmed the scale was internally reliable (α = .94).

The researchers then recruited White participants and administered the Theories of Prejudice Scale. Two weeks later, the respondents received several surveys that were ostensibly
part of a second and unrelated study. Two of these surveys contained the authors’ target
dependent variables: Participant interest in interracial interactions and interest in activities
related to race or diversity. The former asked respondents how much they enjoyed getting to
know people from diverse ethnic groups, “such as African-Americans.” The latter gleaned
respondent willingness to participate in future race-related studies. As hypothesized, those who
endorsed a fixed view of racial bias rather than a malleable one were less interested in engaging
in interracial interactions and were more hesitant to partake in studies that touched on race or
diversity. The researchers concluded that for many participants the idea of engaging or even
discussing race likely conjured the possibility of demonstrating bias or ignorance. The authors
surmised that this image posed a unique threat for fixed-mindset individuals, whose potential
multicultural missteps would have elicited greater pain and disappointment than those not
holding a fixed mindset (Carr et al., 2012). Notably, the authors discovered that participant
beliefs about prejudice malleability were uncorrelated with both explicit (McConahay, 1986) and
implicit (Greenwald et al., 1998) racial attitudes. These findings suggested interracial behavior
extends beyond underlying prejudice. It seems, then, that mindsets may have a greater impact on
our propensity for cross-racial dialogue than previously recognized.

Carr et al. (2012) then explored whether such phenomena influence actual behavior. A
different group of White participants were recruited and randomly assigned to interact with
either a Black or White partner. The study hypothesized that those with a fixed belief of bias
malleability would feel more anxious about their cross-racial interaction and such anxiety would
manifest in their behavior. When they arrived at the lab, all participants met their partner, who
was actually a study confederate. Participants were then led to a separate room where the
conversation would occur. Upon entering the room, the chairs were (intentionally) stacked in the
corner. While the researcher supposedly tended to the interaction partner, participants were tasked with arranging the chairs so they faced each other in the middle of the room. The experimenter then returned with a few questions he or she had “forgotten” to ask. One of the items in the questionnaire assessed how much time participants desired to spend in the interaction. The investigator then told participants that marked the end of the experiment.

Unbeknownst to respondents, the researchers were truly interested in how close participants had paired the chairs. This method has been used in recent research as a way to measure discomfort and anxiety when anticipating interracial interactions (e.g., Goff et al., 2008). As it turned out, fixed-view participants sat themselves farther from their Black partners—and desired shorter conversations—than did participants with a malleable view. However, this effect disappeared when interacting with fellow White partners. A particularly noteworthy and unexpected finding emerged as well: Those with a malleable view of bias placed their seats closer and expressed a desire for longer conversations with Black interaction partners than they did with White ones.

Why these results surfaced remains unknown. However, one reasonable explanation is that those with a malleable belief of racial bias—either consciously or unconsciously—saw their impending interracial conversation as an opportunity to learn about racial difference and develop multicultural competence.

Carr and colleagues (2012) then devised another study that measured whether bias malleability beliefs were associated with physiological and behavioral anxiety during an actual interracial conversation. To answer these questions, they recorded baseline heart rate levels of White participants. Subjects were then randomly assigned to a videotaped discussion with either a Black or White experimenter, where additional heart rate measures were taken. For malleable-oriented individuals, the race of their interaction partner had no impact on their heart rates.
However, this was not the case for their fixed-mindset counterparts. Such participants saw their heart rate spike when engaging with a Black but not a White experimenter. As it turned out, their physiological anxiety showed up on camera as well. After the conversations had concluded, independent observers who were blind to the research questions, hypotheses, and the race of the experimenter coded participant behavior. They found that fixed-bias participants who interacted with a Black experimenter made less eye contact, smiled less, nervously laughed more, sat in a more rigid manner, and exhibited less speech fluency than malleable-minded participants. Strikingly, all differences in behavior vanished when observing participants who spoke with White researchers. In all, the series of studies overseen by Carr and colleagues (2012) provided compelling evidence that our belief in the capacity to reduce racial bias plays a pivotal role in our pursuit and behavior when interacting across race.

The implications of the bias malleability research are profound. Research has long maintained that those who possess the greatest amount of prejudice are uniquely poor in cross-racial communication (e.g., Dovidio et al., 20002; Plant & Devine, 1998). Therefore, we would expect those most avoidant, anxious, and awkward when interacting with a Black partner would also hold the most hostile racial animus. Yet that seems not to be the case. As mentioned previously, neither explicit nor implicit attitudes predicted behavior. Instead, theories dictated action. Those with a fixed view of bias were more likely to evade and shorten cross-racial interactions. They were also more likely to distance themselves and act unfriendly than when conversing with a fellow White person. In other words, they demonstrated behavior that may appear “prejudiced,” regardless of their actual racial attitudes. Thus, the fear of confirming or revealing bias may unintentionally engender perceptions of racial malice. The irony, then, is that those with a fixed view of bias may give off the exact impression they are likely hopeful to
avoid. How racial bias malleability beliefs impact coaches remains unknown. However, the findings here have provided sufficient reason to believe some coaches will be more predisposed than others to engage in conversations about race and diversity with their clients of color.

**Current Study and Hypotheses**

Therefore, the current research poses two empirical questions: (1) Do coaches provide less critical feedback to Black clients than White clients? (2) Do coaches engage in fewer race-based conversations with Black clients than with White clients? This investigation follows up on Finch Bernstein’s (2017) pilot study, which measured interracial coaching dynamics among 43 graduate students enrolled in an Executive Coaching course. The findings revealed participants provided less constructive feedback to Black clients than they did to otherwise identical White ones. Participants were also twice as likely to initiate race-based dialogue with White clients than they were with Black clients. It should be noted, however, that this latter finding trended toward—yet failed to reach—statistical significance. Thus, the present study sought to measure the extent to which such dynamics occur among a larger sample of real-world practitioners.

In line with previous interracial work, it was assumed coaches would respond to Black and White clients differently, despite otherwise identical profiles. Specifically, it was expected coaches would view Black clients—and their clients’ organizational performance—in a more favorable light than they would White clients. Relatedly, coaches would provide less constructive feedback to Black clients, as compared to White clients. It was also anticipated that coaches would exhibit less willingness and less comfort discussing diversity issues with Black clients. Lastly, it was predicted that racial bias malleability beliefs would moderate participant responses. More specifically, participants who believe racial bias is fixed would exhibit the greatest difference in responses provided to Black clients, as opposed to White clients. Similarly,
participants who saw racial bias as malleable would exhibit the smallest difference in responses provided to Black clients, as opposed to White clients. In total, four hypotheses were tested:

**Hypothesis 1:** Black clients will be rated more positively than White clients.
   a. Black clients will be rated as higher in competence than White clients.
   b. Black clients will be rated as higher in warmth than White clients.
   c. Black clients will be rated as higher in “coachability” than White clients.
   d. Racial bias malleability beliefs will moderate participant responses, such that those who believe racial bias is *fixed* will exhibit a greater difference in perceptions of Black clients, as opposed to White clients, than will participants who believe racial bias is *malleable*.

**Hypothesis 2:** Black clients’ performance will be rated more positively than White clients’ performance.
   a. Black clients’ feedback scores will be perceived as more positive than White clients’ scores.
   b. Black clients’ feedback scores will be viewed as having fewer Areas of Development (and more Areas of Strength) than will White clients.
   c. Black clients will receive greater organizational rewards than White clients.
   d. Racial bias malleability beliefs will moderate participant responses, such that those who believe racial bias is *fixed* will exhibit a greater difference in performance ratings of Black clients, as opposed to White clients, than will participants who believe racial bias is *malleable*.

**Hypothesis 3:** Black clients will receive less constructive feedback than White clients.
   a. Black clients will receive more support than White clients.
b. Black clients will receive less challenge than White clients.

c. Black clients will receive more praiseworthy feedback than White clients.

d. Black clients will receive less critical feedback than White clients.

e. Black clients will receive less time dedicated to Areas of Development than will White clients within a coaching session.

f. Racial bias malleability beliefs will moderate participant responses, such that those who believe racial bias is fixed will exhibit a greater difference in feedback provided to Black clients, as opposed to White clients, than will participants who believe racial bias is malleable.

**Hypothesis 4:** Coaches will demonstrate less comfort and less willingness to discuss issues of diversity with Black clients than they will White clients.

a. Coaches will express less comfort in discussing Valuing Diversity with Black clients than they will with White clients.

b. Black clients will receive fewer inquiries pertaining to diversity than will White clients.

c. Racial bias malleability beliefs will moderate participant responses, such that those who believe racial bias is fixed will exhibit a greater difference in diversity comfort and willingness when working with Black clients, as opposed to White clients, than will participants who believe racial bias is malleable.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Participants

One hundred and thirty-five executive coaches completed the study. However, three participants were dropped from analysis after failing the race manipulation check (described in greater detail below). Eighty-four (65%) of participants self-identified as White or Caucasian, 11 (9%) as Hispanic or Latino, 6 (5%) as Asian, 3 (2%) as Black or African American, 2 (2%) as American Indian, 1 (1%) as Pacific Islander, and 4 (4%) as Other, while 21 (16%) chose not to say. As is common with interracial feedback research (Crosby & Monin, 2007), the three participants who identified as Black were excluded from consideration. Such measures are often taken in light of the findings that cross-racial interactions induce more expressions of bias than do conversations between partners of the same color (Toosi et al., 2012). It is worth highlighting that analysis was additionally conducted on the full sample of 132 participants. The results did not differ from what is reported here.

It also bears mentioning that other non-White participants, such as Hispanics and Asians, were included for analysis. The choice to include all non-Black racial minorities is also consistent with previous interracial feedback research. In fact, similar studies that compared feedback offered to Whites with feedback to Blacks drew from samples where Whites were neither a majority (Crosby & Monin, 2007) nor a plurality (Croft & Schmader, 2012). Part of the reason why research has included all non-Black minority participants is that like Whites, they too are often concerned about displaying prejudice when interacting with a Black person. Specifically, Nosek, Banaji, and Greenwald (2002) found that Hispanics and Asians displayed a
“pro-White bias at levels comparable to Whites” when completing Implicit Association (IAT) tasks (p. 110). As a result, 129 participants were included for analysis.

Among the 129 participants, 70 (54%) identified as female, 40 (31%) as male, and 19 (15%) chose not to say. One hundred and two (79%) participants self-identified as a coach, 3 (2%) as a coach trainer, 3 (2%) as a coach educator, and 1 (1%) as a coach supervisor, with 20 (16%) choosing not to say. The sample was predominantly U.S.-based, with 87 (67%) indicating they lived in the United States, 23 (18%) stating they lived internationally, and 19 (15%) choosing not to say. Eighty participants (62%) indicated English as their first language, 30 (23%) indicated English was not their first language, and 19 (15%) chose not to say. The majority (n = 100, 78%) of participants reported they held a graduate certificate in executive coaching, while 10 (8%) indicated they did not possess a graduate certificate, with 19 (15%) choosing not to say. (All participants without a graduate certificate reported they were currently enrolled in such a program.) These participant demographic characteristics can be found in Table 1.

The average age of participants was 52.05 years (SD = 10.78). Participants ranged in age from 28 to 76 years old, with a median age of 53. Participants indicated they had been coaching for an average of 9.0 years (SD = 6.55). Participants also revealed they had worked across race with an average of 44.6 (SD = 105.32) coaching clients. Table 2 presents these demographic characteristics.

Table 3 reveals participants’ professional backgrounds. Fifty-four (42%) respondents indicated they were a manager or leader, while 53 (41%) identified as a business professional, 30 (23%) as an organizational development specialist, 29 (23%) as a human resources professional, 13 (10%) as a coach trainer, 8 (6%) as an organizational psychologist, 7 (5%)
as a coach educator, 5 (3%) as a coach supervisor, and 3 (2%) as a clinical or counseling psychologist.

Table 4 depicts the coaching theories respondents indicated they use in their practice. Sixty (47%) participants reported they incorporate Cognitive-behavioral techniques, 51 (40%) reported a Systems Thinking approach, 50 (39%) said a Person-centered approach, 48 (37%) indicated Positive Psychology, 42 (33%) the GROW Model, 31 (24%) Social Psychology, 30 (23%) Context-Content-Conduct, 9 (7%) Gestalt, and 8 (6%) Psychodynamic, with 31 (24%) reporting Other. It should be noted that the most frequent write-in response was Co-Active Coaching (n = 7), an approach taught at the Coaches Training Institute, “the largest in-person coach training school in the world” (CTI, 2017). The second most frequent write-in response was Neuroscience or Brain-based coaching (n = 5).

Participants also offered information on the industry or industries in which they coached. Eighty-five (66%) participants coached in business services, 64 (50%) in the nonprofit sector, 63 (44%) in financial services, 63 (49%) in healthcare, 59 (46%) in education, 55 (43%) in information technology, 41 (32%) in government, 28 (22%) in telecommunications, and 20 (16%) within the Military or Armed Forces. Such information is summarized in Table 5.

Seventy-five (58%) indicated they predominantly provide external coaching, 22 (17%) predominantly internal coaching, 12 (9%) a balance between internal and external, and 20 (16%) chose not to say. Most participants (n = 77, 60%) reported they conduct most of their coaching in the for-profit sector, while 10 (8%) reported most of their coaching is done in the nonprofit sector, 20 (16%) indicated a balance between the two, and 22 (17%) chose not to say. Participants’ coaching role and sector of practice responses are reflected in Table 6.
It bears mentioning that 19 participants did not provide demographic characteristics. (This explains the much of the aforementioned “chose not to say” responses.) These participants provided their responses on all outcome variables of interest yet exited the survey prior to reporting their demographic information. It was ultimately decided to include these 19 participant responses. This choice was predicated on the notion that the study aimed to investigate whether coaching practitioners—both White and non-White—operate less effectively with Black clients. There is reason to believe that very few, if any, of these participants were Black. Indeed, only three of the 116 respondents who chose to identify their race indicated they were Black. Coupled with the more general observation that there is a relative (and concerning) scarcity of Black coaches (Peltier, 2011; Stout-Rostron, 2019), the inclusion of these 19 unidentified coaches seems warranted.

Taken together, it appears as though the study’s sample is fairly representative of executive coaches working in the United States. First, virtually all participants were alumni of some of the most prestigious and well-regarded coaching certification programs in the country. Respondent demographics also indicated similarity to the greater coaching community. Participants’ age, gender, race, coaching experience, industries of focus, and preferred techniques all aligned with the typical make-up of executive coaches practicing in the United States (Kilburg, 1996; Orenstein, 2002; Peltier, 2011; Whitmore, 2010).

**Design**

An experimental study replicating a realistic coaching engagement was used to test the four aforementioned hypotheses. Using a between-subjects design, the study manipulated one independent variable of interest: client race (Black, White). As a result, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions.
Sampling Method

All participants were recruited electronically. Most participants were recruited based on their current or former enrollment in coaching certification programs across the United States. Such prospective participants were recruited via an email sent from the director of their respective coaching program. Several coaching organizations and networks supported participant recruitment: International Coach Federation, Institute of Coaching, Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching, Fielding Graduate University’s Evidence-Based Coaching Certification Program, and Columbia University’s Coaching Certification Program all distributed the survey link to their networks of coaching alums and students. The remaining participants were recruited via electronic snowballing methods, based on their affiliation with various coaching organizations. It bears mentioning that the anonymity of the survey, coupled with the electronic method of distribution and submissions, made it impossible to identify the specific source of where participants learned about the study.

All emailed invitations to participate indicated that participation would require the completion of one 30- to 35-minute electronic survey. Prospective participants were told that the title of the study was “Identifying Coaches’ Strategies When Preparing for Client Interactions” and the purpose of the study was to understand such strategies better. To that end, recruits were provided with a high-level depiction of what their study experience would entail if they elected to participate. They first learned they would be assigned (via the survey) a hypothetical coaching client. Prospective participants also learned the survey would include their client’s job title and job description, as well as information about the company for which the client worked. In addition, participants were told they would have access to the results of their client’s recent multi-rater feedback report. Thus, participants were tasked with providing their impressions of
their client as well as their strategies for the hypothetical coaching session. Participants also learned they may have the opportunity to provide feedback to their client. Lastly, participants learned the survey would ask them to report their demographic information so that the researcher could better understand the responses provided.

Recruitment methods also informed potential participants that all individual responses would remain confidential and be only used for research purposes. Lastly, recruitment emails included the following: The Teachers College IRB protocol number, the potential benefits and risks associated with participating, and an electronic link to the informed consent and participant’s rights forms. Participants then provided their informed consent by clicking on the link and electronically agreeing to partake in the study. The cover story, informed consent, and participant’s rights documents can be found in Appendix A.

**Participant Compensation**

The current research was awarded a grant by the Institute of Coaching, an organization affiliated with Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital. The Institute of Coaching is a nonprofit committed to the development and publication of coaching research. The grant enabled the researcher to compensate all participants with a $20 digital gift card redeemable at one of more than 20 global retail companies, including Amazon, Visa, and iTunes.

**Procedure**

Once consenting to the study, participants were directed to an electronic survey. From there, they were reminded that the title of the study was “Identifying Coaches’ Strategies When Preparing for Client Interactions” and the purpose of the study was to understand better such strategies. As such, they would be asked to complete a 30- to 35-minute survey. Respondents were also reminded that those who completed the survey would receive the digital gift card.
However, gift card eligibility required participants provide their email address to Rybbon, a third-party company that enables individuals to send gift cards electronically and in a traceable way to one or more subjects. Thus, participants learned that at the close of the survey they would be asked to provide their email address, which would be sent directly to Rybbon. Rybbon would then send a follow-up email informing participants how they could redeem their gift card. Participants learned that such measures were taken to ensure that their email addresses would remain confidential as well as unassociated and detached from their individual responses. The first page of the survey also indicated that the researcher was only interested in examining responses at the aggregate level and not in anyone’s individual responses. The study’s instructions can be found in Appendix B.

In the cover story, participants learned they had been contracted for a hypothetical coaching engagement. They were told their task was to provide impressions of their client based on his or her profile, and to indicate their strategies for the impending coaching session. They were also tasked with helping their client make meaning from his or her recent developmental feedback results. Before seeing the feedback scores, participants learned their client was named James Wilson, a senior project manager at the healthcare company Sigma Health. The stimulus materials also included James’s job responsibilities as well as Sigma Health’s mission statement and description of services. It should be noted that the client’s name, industry, and job title were chosen in an attempt to create a racially neutral profile (see Appendix C for client’s job information). It also bears mentioning that all respondents received a male client to avoid potential gender effects.

Participants then read their client’s feedback results. Multi-rater feedback is a frequent coaching intervention that identifies strengths and areas of development and seeks to increase
one’s awareness of the perceptions others hold of them in the workplace (Cavanagh, Grant, & Kemp, 2005). However, participants learned that this was the first time Sigma Health had undertaken a multi-rater feedback process. As a result, the company elected only to collect data from managers’ direct reports. Thus, James only received ratings for those he supervised. It bears highlighting that the decision to include only direct report feedback was intended to simplify the interpretation of the feedback form. The participants were told that their client’s feedback assessment was administered to all senior managers and was intended for developmental rather than evaluative purposes. This was done to prevent the assumption that the ratings were in response to the client’s poor performance or conduct.

The assessment displayed their client’s perceived performance along 10 behavioral competencies: Maintaining a Client Focus; Making Decisions; Driving Change; Valuing Diversity; Managing Others; Demonstrating Strategic Thinking; Communicating with Impact; Pursuing Self-Development; Fostering Innovation; and Engaging in Teamwork. These 10 behavioral dimensions were chosen after reviewing *For Your Improvement*, a well-regarded leadership development book that highlights the myriad dimensions on which organizational performance is often measured (Lombardo & Eichinger, 2009). The client received a score, ranging from 1 to 10, on each behavioral dimension, with higher scores indicating a more positive perception of performance. In an attempt to minimize the impact of participants’ preconceived notions, the assessment indicated that the client’s organization deemed all behavioral dimensions equally important to the role. Efforts were taken to ensure client profiles offered obvious strengths and obvious weaknesses, as well as competencies where perceived success was a bit more ambiguous. It also bears mentioning that efforts were taken to create an overall profile, suggesting that the client was an impressive individual contributor but struggled
working with and on behalf of others. Upon reviewing James and his feedback scores, coaching participants then completed a questionnaire that sought to gather their perceptions of James and his performance as well as their intentions for the impending session. Appendix D provides the feedback results coaching clients received.

Unbeknownst to participants, clients received an intentionally low Valuing Diversity score on their multi-rater feedback report. In fact, clients received a 4.6 out of 10 on Valuing Diversity which, along with Pursuing Self-Development (also rated 4.6), was tied for the lowest score among the 10 behavioral dimensions on which James was ostensibly rated. The low score signaled Valuing Diversity as a clear area of development. However, it remained up to participants whether they elected to discuss his diversity behaviors in lieu of other perceived areas of development.

At the end of the study, participants read a debrief describing the research objectives in greater detail. The intention of the debrief was to highlight the true intention of the study as well as to return participants to their psychological equilibrium. Additionally, the debriefing statement provided participants with the researcher’s contact information in case they wished to follow up with questions or concerns. Appendix E contains the study debrief.

**Experimental Manipulations**

**Race of client.** To manipulate race of client, participants’ stimulus materials included a photograph of the person to whom they had been assigned to work. Participants were randomly assigned to receive a photo of a Black male or a White male, thereby creating two conditions. Two photos were used for each condition, yielding four experimental photos in total. All photos were similar in size, camera angle, and dress attire. (Each of the four photos displayed a male approximately 30-35 years of age, dressed professionally in a suit and tie.) A pilot test found no
significant differences across the four photos in terms of perceived age, attractiveness, intelligence, or friendliness. Appendix F contains the photos participants were randomly assigned to receive.

**Dependent Measures**

An overview of the measures used to test the four hypotheses and additional sub-hypotheses can be found in Table 7. What follows below is a more detailed compendium of all items, inventories, and scales.

**Perceptions of client.** Three scales captured participants’ perceptions of their client. Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick’s (2004) stereotype content model was leveraged to rate both client warmth and competence along two separate continuums, using 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert scales. Warmth was measured by averaging the responses to four items such as: “James is a trustworthy person” and “James is a sincere person” ($\alpha = .79$). Competence was measured by averaging the responses to four items that included: “James is competent at his job” and “James is capable at his job” ($\alpha = .82$). All warmth and competence items are located in Appendix G.

The third measure was a four-item scale created to assess client “coachability.” Using a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale, participants indicated their belief of how coachable their client would be if he had the opportunity to work with a different coach for a more long-term engagement. The prompt intentionally inquired about potential success with a different coach to control for participants’ own feelings of self-efficacy in partnering with their client. A sample of the four-item scale includes statements such as “James will benefit from coaching” and “James will be able to accept feedback.” Reliability was good across the four-item scale ($\alpha = .81$). The “coachability” scale is located in Appendix H.
**Perceptions of client performance.** Three items captured participants’ judgment of performance intimated by the feedback report. First, similar to the approach used by Croft and Schmader (2012), participants rated how positively they perceived their client’s feedback scores on a scale of 1 (not at all positive) to 100 (extremely positive).

Second, participants identified whether they perceived each of their client’s scored behavioral dimensions as an Area of Strength or as an Area of Development. Similar to previous research (Harber, 1998, 2004), participants were forced to deem each of the 10 behavioral competencies as either an Area of Strength or an Area of Development. Identifying each competency as a strength or as one development helps coaches focus their attention and direct their conversations with clients (Peltier, 2011). Thus, the number of identified Areas of Strength (and, inversely, the number of Areas of Development) was tallied for participants. The positivity scale and Areas of Strength/Development items can be found in Appendix I.

Third, the Allocation of Organizational Rewards Scale (Allen, Russell, & Rush, 1994) measured the extent to which participants would recommend their client for five different rewards that organizations often provide to high performers. The rewards included admitting him to a fast-track executive training program, selecting him as a mentor, offering him a promotion, providing him a challenging high-profile project, and awarding him a salary increase. Each of these ratings was made on a 1 (definitely inappropriate) to 5 (definitely appropriate) Likert scale (α = .83). Similar to previous research, all scores provided were averaged to create an overall response, with higher scores indicating a stronger recommendation for organizational rewards (see Appendix J for the entire scale).

**Feedback provided.** Five items were created to capture the type of feedback coaches intended to provide. The first was their response to the question, “How much support do you
envision providing James in your session with him?” on a 1 (no support at all) to 7 (a great deal of support) scale. The second was the response elicited from “How much challenge do you envision providing James in your session with him?” This also ran along a 1 (no challenge at all) to 7 (a great deal of challenge) scale. The third item inquired how much positive feedback coaches would try to provide when discussing James’s feedback results with him. Similar to the above, scores ranged from 1 (no positive feedback at all) to 7 (a great deal of positive feedback). Fourth, participants indicated how much critical feedback they would provide, also along a 1 (no critical feedback at all) to 7 (a great deal of critical feedback) scale. Lastly, participants indicated the number of minutes within a 60-minute coaching session they would allocate to discussing behavioral dimensions they saw as James’s Areas of Strength, as well as the number of minutes they would allocate to discussing his perceived Areas of Development. Appendix K contains all items that captured participants’ intended feedback.

**Comfort and willingness engaging in diversity dialogue.** Two items were created to capture coaches’ intention and comfort in talking about diversity with their client. The first item asked participants to indicate their level of comfort in discussing each of the 10 behavioral dimensions on a 1 (extremely uncomfortable) to 7 (extremely comfortable) Likert scale. Of particular interest was their reported comfort in discussing with James his Valuing Diversity performance. The score they provided on this item indicated their level of comfort engaging in diversity-based dialogue, with higher scores revealing greater comfort. The form that measured participant comfort engaging in diversity conversations can be found in Appendix L.

The second item that measured participant willingness to engage in diversity-based dialogue entailed a level of deception. Nearing the end of the survey, participants read that “research shows that the best coaches address not only their clients’ strengths, but also their areas
of development.” To that end, participants were led to believe they would record a 2- to 3-minute video. The purported reason for the video was to provide feedback to their client on one Area of Development the participant identified earlier in the study. In preparing their feedback, participants were encouraged to reflect on why it was important their client to improve his performance on this dimension, as well as why they selected this Area of Development over any other. Participants then selected which Area of Development was to be the focus of their video recorded feedback. As mentioned above, client profiles included two intentionally low behavioral dimension scores: Valuing Diversity and Pursuing Self-Development. Therefore, coaches’ willingness to engage in diversity-based dialogue was measured by whether they intended to inquire about Valuing Diversity, as opposed to Pursuing Self-Development (or any of the other eight behavioral dimensions). Thus, participant responses were coded as either reporting or not reporting that they would provide diversity-focused video feedback. It bears mentioning that upon learning of a recording responsibility, 38 participants chose to exit the survey (21 who had been assigned a Black client; 17 who had been paired with a White client). These 38 participants were excluded from all analyses. The prompt that inquired about coaches’ willingness to engage in diversity-related conversations can be found in Appendix M.

It also bears highlighting, though, that no video recording actually occurred. The rationale for such deception was to capture coaches’ cross-racial behavior accurately. Specifically, it was assumed that the appearance of a video would heighten the study’s experimental realism, or the extent to which the exercise felt psychologically real and meaningful. Social psychology research holds that experimental realism is critical for identifying how people truly think and act (Baumeister & Vohs, 2011). The social desirability bias, for example, suggested that participants will often—either consciously or unconsciously—provide
responses that cast them in a socially favorable light (Crowne & Marlowe, 1980). As such, responses may focus more on avoiding shame or embarrassment and less on truthful reporting. Without a video recording deception, participants would have been asked to hypothesize which Area of Development they thought they would initiate with their client. Given that the survey item would remain detached from any sort of behavioral commitment, the question would measure conscious cognitive intentions but nothing more. In 2019, race remains a hot button topic within the United States. With the goal of appearing politically correct, it was feared that coaching participants would see the opportunity to discuss Valuing Diversity with their client as the “low-hanging fruit” or the right answer. In other words, there was concern that phrasing the question as a hypothetical would trigger the social desirability bias.

It is for this reason why researchers typically employ similar forms of deception when measuring sensitive topics, such as race (Carr et al., 2012; Goff et al., 2008). In cross-racial research, these tactics regularly serve as measures of discomfort and anxiety when anticipating interracial interactions (e.g., Amodio & Devine, 2006; McRae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994). The importance of such a method—and its particular relevance to the current study—is that the expectation of an interaction often serves as a proxy for cross-racial behavior. Despite the absence of a real interaction, this approach enables us to assess whether one’s assumption has a material impact on participant choices. As is the case with previous interracial research, what matters most here are the decisions coaching participants make in anticipation of an experience, irrespective of whether that experience ultimately occurs.

The pretense of a recording means feedback choices also carries behavioral expectations. Coaching participants who indicated they would ask about Valuing Diversity did so under the assumption they would then have to record a 2- to 3-minute video delivering that feedback. In
other words, their selection was predicated on the belief they would have to *perform* that behavior. Creating this perception was important. In their book *Measuring Racial Discrimination*, Blank, Dabady, and Citro (2004) highlighted that people regularly underreport discriminatory attitudes and are relatively unwilling to admit to feelings or thoughts that might appear prejudiced. However, the authors contended that one way to mitigate such underreporting and inaccuracy is to attach a behavioral component to participant responses (Blank et al., 2004). Participants learned shortly after indicating their video feedback intentions that they would in fact not be asked to record. They were notified of this during the aforementioned study debrief, which informed them of the true nature of the study—and attempted to return participants to their psychological equilibrium.

**Racial bias malleability beliefs.** However, just before they were debriefed, participants were asked to report their beliefs about racial bias malleability. In particular, the six-item Theories of Prejudice Scale (Carr et al., 2012) assessed the extent to which respondents believed racial bias is a fixed versus a malleable trait. Participants reported how much they agreed with statements such as “People’s level of prejudice is something very basic about them that they can’t change very much” and “No matter who somebody is, they can always become a lot less prejudiced” (reverse scored). Participant responses ranged along a 1 (very strongly disagree) to 6 (very strongly agree) Likert scale. Participant responses were split at their median, which is common to studies measuring Theories of Prejudice (Carr, Rattan, & Dweck, 2012). Reliability was good across the six-item scale ($\alpha = .81$). The Theories of Prejudice Scale can be found in Appendix N. Participants were thus dichotomized as either holding a Fixed or a Fluid mindset around racial bias malleability. Those who scored below the median of 3.17 were categorized as adopting as a Fixed mindset; those above 3.17 were affixed a Fluid mindset.
**Race of client manipulation check.** At the end of the study, participants were asked to identify their client’s race in order to confirm the client race manipulation proved effective. More specifically, all participants provided identifying information about their client, such as his name, gender, and—most importantly—his race. Manipulation check items are in Appendix O.

**Demographic variables.** Once participants reported their video feedback intentions, they were led to a page that inquired about demographic characteristics. Respondents were asked to provide their age, gender, race, country of residence, and whether English was their first language. Participants were also asked several questions that capture their previous experience with coaching. For example, participants indicated the number of years they had been coaching as well as the number of times they had coached across race. Another elicited whether participants held a formal certification or an advanced degree in coaching. Another still measured the coaching models that practitioners self-reportedly use in their work. Collecting such participant information allowed for a more granular analysis of the data. Of particular interest was the relationship between coaches’ race and their responses to Black versus White clients. However, collecting all of the demographic variables shed light on whether any non-race individual difference characteristics additionally correlated with participant responses. Demographic variable items can be found in Appendix P.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Manipulation Check

Race of Client Manipulation

At the end of the study, all participants were asked to identify the race of their hypothetical client in order to confirm client race was adequately manipulated. The manipulation check was largely successful. Upon inspection, 132 out of the 135 (98%) participants correctly identified their client’s race. The three participants who failed to identify their client’s race were dropped from all subsequent analyses. The removal of participants who fail a race manipulation check is common for this type of interracial research (Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008).

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted to assess whether it was necessary to control statistically for any of the participant demographics. Table 8 reports the intercorrelations for all outcome and demographic variables. In particular, 12 demographic variables were analyzed: participant age; gender; race; years of coaching experience; whether they had graduated from a coaching certification program; whether they were currently enrolled in a coaching certification program; their amount of cross-racial coaching experience; whether English was their first language; whether they at the time of survey completion lived in the United States; whether they identified most closely as a coach (as opposed to a coach trainer, supervisor, or educator); whether they served more as internal or an external coach; and whether they provided more coaching services in the for-profit or the nonprofit sectors. It bears mentioning that race was entered as a dichotomous variable, in that participants were classified as either White or non-White. This decision was in response to the observation that relatively few participants (n = 24)
identified as non-White. For this same reason, coach identity was also entered as a dichotomous variable. Given that only seven participants identified more as a coach trainer, educator, or supervisor than they did a coach, it was decided to dichotomize coach identity as either coach or something other than coach (which included coach trainer, educator, and supervisor).

The amount of cross-racial coaching experience was entered as a categorical variable as well. For context, participants were asked how many clients they had previously coached who were of a different race than how they self-identify. Participants indicated an average of 44.6 (SD = 105.32) cross-race coaching clients. The size of the standard deviation relates to the fact that participant responses ranged from 0 cross-race coaching clients to 900. Similarly, further analysis revealed that White participants had previously worked with an average of 31.5 (SD = 45.02) and a range of 0 to 300 non-White clients. Non-White participants indicated they had worked with an average of 75.4 (SD = 19.52) and a range of 4 to 900 cross-racial clients. Given the wide dispersion of the data, it was decided to split participants at their median, a common practice in social science research when the data are widely distributed (MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002).

The median of participant responses was 20 cross-racial clients. Thus, any participant who indicated they had worked with fewer than 20 cross-racial clients was deemed as having “a small or moderate amount of cross-racial coaching experience.” Participants who provided a response of 20 or more were categorized as having “a lot of cross-racial coaching experience.” Lastly, it was decided not to separate White participant responses from non-White participant responses, given the similarity between their respective medians. More specifically, the overall median of 20 was similar to and located between the median of White participant responses (Median = 18), as well as non-White participant responses (Median = 25).
Mentioned above, Table 8 presents the intercorrelations for all outcome and demographic variables. Several demographic variables correlated significantly with outcome measures. Multiple demographic characteristics correlated with perceptions of client warmth. Specifically, participant race and perceptions of warmth were significantly correlated, such that White participants rated their clients as less warm than did non-White participants, $r = .21$, $p < .05$. Graduated status also covaried with perceptions of client warmth, $r = -.22$, $p < .05$. Those who had not yet graduated from a coaching program reported they found their clients warmer than did participants who had graduated from a coaching program. As a result, participant race and graduated status were covariates for subsequent analyses on client warmth.

Additionally, coach identity—whether participants identified most closely as a coach or most closely as a coach trainer, supervisor, or educator—demonstrated a main effect on the amount of positive feedback they provided to their clients, $r = -.19$, $p < .05$. Statistics revealed coaches were more likely to provide positive feedback than were participants who identified not as a coach, but as a coach trainer, supervisor, or educator. Thus, coach identity was entered as a covariate when analyzing positive feedback responses.

Several demographic characteristics also correlated significantly with participant comfort discussing Valuing Diversity. Also depicted in Table 8, comfort discussing Valuing Diversity responses correlated significantly with participant age. In particular, the older a participant was, the more likely he or she was to report comfort discussing diversity with their client, $r = .41$. Participant gender also covaried as well. In particular, females were more comfortable than males, $r = -.22$, $p < .05$. White participants were reportedly more comfortable discussing Valuing Diversity than were Non-White participants, $r = -.32$, $p < .01$. Further analysis revealed that the main driver behind this significant difference was that White participants were more comfortable
engaging in diversity dialogue than were participants who identified as Hispanic or Latino ($M = 4.09, SD = 2.17$). One potential explanation for this is that Hispanic participants—unlike White ones—were in a cross-racial interaction, regardless of which client they were assigned. Further analysis revealed that Hispanic participants working with White executives reported an average comfort level of $3.75 (SD = 2.06)$, while Hispanics partnering with Black executives indicated a comfort level of $4.29 (SD = 2.36)$.

Participant comfort with Valuing Diversity also correlated significantly with respondents’ graduated status, such that those who had graduated from a coaching program indicated more comfort than did those who had not yet graduated from a coaching program. These differences were also significant, $r = -.21, p < .05$. Lastly, participants who indicated they provide more coaching in the nonprofit sector were more comfortable discussing Valuing Diversity than were coaches whose services were enlisted more in the for-profit space. These differences were significant as well, $r = .25, p < .01$. Thus, participant gender, race, graduated status, and sector of focus were all added as covariates when analyzing subsequent comfort with Valuing Diversity responses. No other categorical demographics covaried with the study’s outcome variables.

**Main Analyses**

Table 9 presents the correlations and descriptive statistics for all continuous variables. Before analyzing responses across client race, analysis was undertaken to ensure no within-condition differences. As a reminder, participants had been randomly assigned to receive one of four photos—two depicting a Black man and two presenting a White man. Analysis revealed no significant within-condition differences on any of the study’s outcome measures. In other words, participants responded to the two Black photos equivalently. They also provided equivalent responses to the two White photos on all measures. Thus, participants who had been paired with
either of the two Black photos were collapsed into one condition, as were participants assigned to either of the two White photos.

**Dependent Measures**

**Perceptions of client.** The perceptions participants held of their respective clients were measured along attributions of competence, warmth, and coachability. Hypothesis 1a predicted that Black clients would be rated as higher in competence than would White clients. An independent samples t-test was conducted to examine whether differences seen across the Black and White conditions were significant. As depicted in Table 10, the differences in mean scores were not significantly different, \( t(127) = -0.49, p = .63 \).

Hypothesis 1b maintained that Black clients would be rated as higher in warmth than White clients. Table 11 presents the results of the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) that was conducted to assess whether the adjusted mean differences seen across conditions were significant when controlling for participant race and status of coaching program enrollment. Analysis revealed that participant race was a significant predictor, \( F(1, 103) = 4.12, p < .05 \). White participants rated their clients as less warm (\( M = 4.15, SD = .75 \)) than did non-White participants (\( M = 4.52, SD = .72 \)). Graduated status was not significant, \( F(1, 103) = .18, p = .67 \). Controlling for both demographic variables, analysis found that mean differences between the White and Black client conditions were also non-significant, \( F(1, 103) = .30, p = .59 \).

Hypothesis 1c predicted that Black clients would be rated higher on coachability than White clients. As presented in Table 10, an independent samples t-test also found no significant differences of perceived coachability, \( t(127) = -0.81, p = .42 \).

It was also assumed in Hypothesis 1d that participant scores along the Theories of Prejudice Scale would moderate responses on competence, warmth, and coachability. Table 12
depicts the two-way ANOVA findings on participant Theories of Prejudice. In particular, a set of Two-way ANOVAs found no main effects of client race on competence, $F(1, 125) = .22, p = .64$, no main effects of Theories of Prejudice on competence, $F(1, 125) = .75, p = .39$, and no interaction effects between client race and Theories of Prejudice on competence $F(2, 125) = .04, p = .84$.

Controlling for participant race and graduated status, a set of two-way ANCOVAs found no main effects of client race on warmth, $F(1, 125) = 1.39, p = .24$, and no main effects of Theories of Prejudice on warmth, $F(1, 125) = 1.62, p = .21$. However, as depicted in Figure 1, interaction effects between client race and Theories of Prejudice on warmth trended toward significance, $F(2, 125) = 2.82, p = .09$. As expected, those with a Fluid mindset around racial bias trended toward demonstrating a smaller difference across conditions on perceived warmth (White clients: $M = 4.18, SD = .14$; Black clients: $4.11, SD = .15$) than did Fixed-mindset participants (White clients: $M = 4.13, SD = .14$; Black clients: $4.52, SD = .14$).

A two-way ANOVA also found no main effects of client race on coachability, $F(1, 125) = .54, p = .47$. However, main effects of Theories of Prejudice on coachability trended toward significance, $F(1, 125) = 3.36, p = .07$. Those with a Fixed mindset ($M = 4.79, SD = 1.07$) trended toward seeing clients as more coachable than did participants holding a Fluid mindset ($M = 4.46, SD = 1.00$). Counter to expectation, there were no significant interactions between client race and Theories of Prejudice on coachability $F(2, 125) = 1.06, p = .31$. Thus, hypotheses 1a-d were not supported: participant perceptions of White and Black clients were statistically equivalent.

**Perceptions of client performance.** Table 13 presents the means and standard deviations for perceptions of client performance. Hypothesis 2 maintained that Black clients’ performance
would be rated more positively than White clients’ performance. In particular, hypothesis 2a predicted that respondents would see Black clients’ feedback scores as more positive than White client scores. Hypothesis 2b predicted that Black clients’ feedback scores would be viewed as containing fewer Areas of Development (and more Areas of Strength) than would White client feedback scores. Finally, hypothesis 2c maintained that Black clients would be seen as more deserving of organizational rewards than would White clients. However, a set of independent samples t-tests revealed the differences in means associated with the positivity of feedback scores were not significant, $t(127) = -1.05, p = .288$; nor were differences in perceived Areas of Development, $t(127) = 0.86, p = .39$; nor recommendation of organizational rewards, $t(127) = -0.97, p = .33$. Thus, hypotheses 2a-c were not supported.

Table 14 displays the results of the two-way ANOVAs that assessed whether racial bias malleability beliefs moderated participant scores on positivity, number of developments, and organizational rewards. Findings revealed no main effects of client race on positivity, $F(1, 125) = .97, p = .33$. However, main effects of racial bias malleability on positivity were found, $F(1, 125) = 9.85, p = .01$. Participants with a Fixed mindset saw client feedback scores as more positive ($M = 70.81, SD = 9.84$) than did Fluid-minded participants ($M = 63.98, SD = 14.40$). Analysis revealed, though, that the interaction between positivity and Theories of Prejudice scores was non-significant $F(2, 125) = .14, p = .71$.

Results found no main effects of client race on number of developments, $F(1, 125) = .62, p = .43$. Main effects of Theories of Prejudice on number of developments, however, trended toward significance, $F(1, 125) = 3.01, p = .09$. Overall, those with a Fixed view of racial bias trended toward seeing fewer Areas of Development ($M = 4.57, SD = 1.86$) than did participants
holding a Fluid view ($M = 5.15, SD = 1.95$). However, the interaction between racial bias and Areas of Development was not significant, $F(2, 125) = .88, p = .35$.

Lastly, tests revealed no main effects of client race on organizational rewards, $F(1, 125) = .87, p = .35$. Similar to the above, main effects were found of Theories of Prejudice on organizational rewards, $F(1, 125) = 15.30, p < .001$. Overall, Fixed-mindset respondents believed their clients to be more deserving of organizational rewards ($M = 3.25, SD = .69$) than did respondents holding a Fluid mindset ($M = 2.73, SD = .78$). However, the ANOVA revealed the interaction between bias malleability and organizational rewards to be non-significant, $F(2, 125) = .11, p = .74$. Taken together, hypotheses 2a-d were not supported: Participants perceived no significant differences between White and Black clients’ performance.

**Feedback provided.** Hypothesis 3 centered on the feedback choices participants made in anticipation of their hypothetical coaching conversation. This was operationalized in five ways: participant intention to provide support, challenge, positive feedback, constructive feedback, and time allocated for discussing perceived Areas of Development. Hypothesis 3a assumed Black clients would receive more support than White clients. Table 15 presents the means and standard deviations associated with hypotheses 3a, 3b, 3d, and 3e. An independent samples t-test confirmed support for hypothesis 3a, $t(127) = -2.93, p < .05$. Black clients ($M = 5.89, SD = .91$) received significantly more support than did White clients ($M = 5.39, SD = 1.07$).

An independent samples t-test also found support for hypothesis 3b, revealing that Black clients ($M = 5.10, SD = 1.40$) received significantly less challenge than did White clients ($M = 5.72, SD = .92$), $t(127) = 2.99, p < .05$.

Analysis of Covariance tested hypothesis 3c, which predicted that Black executives would receive more positive feedback than White executives. As Table 16 illustrates, coach
identity was a significant predictor of positive feedback, $F(1,106) = 4.30, p < .05$, such that coaches were more likely to provide positive feedback ($M = 5.96, SD = 1.01$) than were participants who identified not as a coach, but as a coach trainer, supervisor, or educator ($M = 5.14, SD = 1.06$). However, when controlling for coach identity the ANCOVA found no significant differences between positive feedback provided to Black and White clients, $F(1, 106) = .42, p = .52$). Thus, hypothesis 3d was supported. Hypothesis 3e predicted that participants would allocate fewer minutes to discussing Areas of Development (and more minutes for Areas of Strength) with Black executives than they would with White executives. An independent samples t-test found significant support for the hypothesis, $t(127) = 2.97, p < .05$. Overall, Black clients ($M = 28.06, SD = 9.14$) received 5 fewer minutes for development than did White clients ($M = 33.04, SD = 9.96$).

Table 17 depicts the two-ways ANOVAs associated with hypothesis 3f, which predicted that racial bias malleability beliefs would moderate participant scores on support, challenge, positive feedback, critical feedback, and minutes of developmental feedback provided. Similar to the t-test findings discussed above, the main effects of client race on support were significant, $F(1, 125) = 9.29, p < .01$. However, main effects of racial bias malleability on support were not significant, $F(1, 125) = .62, p = .43$. The interaction between the two was also non-significant, $F(2, 125) = 3.69, p = .22$.

Main effects of client race on challenge were significant, $F(1, 125) = 8.86, p < .01$, while main effects of racial bias beliefs on challenge were not, $F(1, 125) = .66, p = .42$. Similarly, the interaction between racial bias beliefs and challenge was also not significant, $F(2, 125) = .19, p = .66$. 
An ANCOVA then tested the interaction effects of client race on positive feedback and Theories of Prejudice while controlling for participant coach identity. Analysis revealed that coach identity trended toward, yet was not a significant predictor, $F(1, 104) = 3.59, p = .06$. Controlling for participant coach identity, an ANCOVA found no main effect of client race on positive feedback, $F(1, 125) = .08, p = .77$, yet did find a main effect of Theories of Prejudice on positive feedback, $F(1, 125) = 4.62, p = .03$. Specifically, Fluid participants ($M = 6.06, SD = .96$) offered more positive feedback than did Fixed participants ($M = 5.67, SD = 1.06$). However, the interaction between Theories of Prejudice and positive feedback was non-significant, $F(2, 125) = 1.76, p = .19$.

Discussed above, there was a main effect of client race on critical feedback, $F(1, 125) = 5.36, p = .02$. However, the main effects of Theories of Prejudice on critical feedback, $F(1, 125) = .12, p = .73$, and the interaction between Theories of Prejudice and critical feedback were both non-significant, $F(2, 125) = .08, p = .78$.

Lastly, the main effects of client race on development minutes, $F(1, 125) = 8.97, p < .01$, as well as the main effects of Theories of Prejudice on development minutes were both statistically significant, $F(1, 125) = 9.46, p < .01$. Those with a Fluid mindset of racial bias ($M = 33.35, SD = 9.83$) allocated 5 more minutes of developmental feedback than those with Fixed theory of racial bias ($M = 28.15, SD = 9.27$). However, tests also found that the interaction between racial bias malleability and minutes of developmental feedback was non-significant, $F(2, 125) = .54, p = .46$. Overall, hypotheses 3a-f were partially supported: Participants offered Black clients more support, yet less challenge, less critical feedback, and fewer minutes devoted to discussing developmental issues than they did for White clients.
Comfort and willingness engaging in diversity-based dialogue. Table 18 shows the ANCOVA Findings for participant comfort discussing Valuing Diversity. In particular, it was predicted that coaches would express less comfort in discussing Valuing Diversity with Black clients than they would with White clients. Previous analysis revealed that participant age, gender, race, graduated status, and sector of focus all correlated with comfort discussing Valuing Diversity. As a result, each of these demographic variables was entered as a covariate when testing the differences seen across conditions. Results revealed that participant age was a significant predictor of comfort with discussing Valuing Diversity, $F(1, 97) = 14.49, p < .01$ such that the older a participant was, the more he or she was comfortable discussing Valuing Diversity. Participant race was also a significant predictor, $F(1, 97) = 8.86, p < .01$, such that those who were White were more likely than non-White participants to feel comfortable discussing diversity. Sector of practice was also significant, $F(1, 97) = 6.91, p < .01$, such that participants who worked more closely in the non-profit space were more comfortable discussing diversity than participants whose worked leaned more in the for-profit space. However, the analysis found that neither participant gender, $F(1, 97) = 1.06, p = .31$ nor graduated status, $F(1, 97) = 1.92, p = .17$ were significant predictors. Controlling for all five covariates, an ANCOVA revealed no significant differences between participants’ comfort discussing diversity with White and Black clients, $F(1, 97) = 1.08, p = .30$. Results suggested that client race did not have a significant impact on participants’ reported comfort engaging in diversity-based dialogue. Thus, hypothesis 4a was not supported.

Hypothesis 4b centered on participants’ willingness to engage in diversity-based dialogue. This was measured by whether they expressed intention to provide video-recorded developmental feedback about “Valuing Diversity,” as opposed to feedback geared toward a
different perceived Area of Development. Table 19 illustrates the frequency and percentages associated with participant Valuing Diversity feedback intentions. A chi-square test of independence was used to examine whether the proportion of participants choosing to discuss “Valuing Diversity” with White versus Black James differed from what would be expected due to chance. The analysis revealed significant findings, $\chi^2(1, N = 129) = 5.08, p < .05$. As expected, Black clients were significantly less likely to receive Valuing Diversity feedback than were White clients. As depicted in Figure 2, Black executives received Valuing Diversity feedback from 19% of participants, whereas White executives received such feedback from 37% of participants. In all, White clients were 95% more likely to receive Valuing Diversity feedback than Black clients. Thus, hypothesis 4b was supported. Interestingly, a subsequent chi-squared test of independence revealed that these findings were virtually flipped when analyzing participant intentions to provide Pursuing Self-Development feedback. In particular, Black clients were 76% more likely to receive Pursuing Self-Development feedback than were White clients. Black managers received this feedback from 37% of participants, while White managers received the feedback from 21% of participants. These findings were significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 129) = 4.13, p < .05$.

Hypothesis 4c centered on the extent to which Theories of Prejudice scores would moderate participant comfort, as well as willingness to discuss Valuing Diversity. Table 20 presents the set of two-way ANCOVAs that examined the extent to which Theories of Prejudice scores moderated participant comfort discussing Valuing Diversity. Analysis revealed that participant age was a significant predictor, $F(1, 95) = 14.16, p < .01$, such that the older someone was the more comfortable he or she was discussing Valuing Diversity. Participant race was also significant, $F(1, 95) = 6.71, p < .05$, whereby White participants were more comfortable than
non-White participants discussing Valuing Diversity. Sector of practice was also a significant predictor, $F(1, 95) = 7.01, p < .05$. Coaching participants in the non-profit sector were more comfortable discussing Valuing Diversity than were participants in the for-profit space. However, both participant gender, $F(1, 95) = .92, p = .34$, and participant graduated status were both non-significant predictors, $F(1, 95) = 1.80, p = .18$. Main effects tests of client race on comfort discussing Valuing Diversity, $F(1, 125) = 1.16, p = .28$, main effects of Theories of Prejudice on comfort discussing Valuing Diversity, $F(1, 125) = .39, p = .53$, and interaction effects between Theories of Prejudice and comfort discussing Valuing Diversity, $F(2, 125) = .14, p = .71$, were all non-significant.

Given that willingness to inquire about Valuing Diversity was entered as a categorical dependent variable, a binary logistic regression was used to assess whether Theories of Prejudice scores moderated participant responses. Table 21 presents the findings from such analysis. In particular, a binary logistic regression found the main effect between client race and intentions to provide Valuing Diversity feedback was non-significant, $\chi^2(2) = 6.41, p = .43$, as was Theories of Prejudice on intentions to provide Valuing Diversity feedback, $\chi^2(2) = 6.41, p = .51$. Similarly, the interaction between Theories of Prejudice and Valuing Diversity feedback intentions was also non-significant, $\chi^2(2) = 6.41, p = .27$. The binary logistic regression results are located in Table 21. Thus, hypothesis 4c was not supported.

Overall, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported: Participants were reportedly just as comfortable discussing Valuing Diversity with Black clients as they were with White clients. However, their feedback intentions suggested otherwise. Participants were nearly twice as likely to provide Valuing Diversity feedback to their client when he was White.
Summary of Findings

A full summary of hypotheses and findings is presented in Table 22.

**Hypothesis 1**

Hypothesis 1 expected that Black clients would be rated more positively than would White participants. However, results revealed that Hypothesis 1 was in no way supported. Participants viewed their White and Black clients equivalently in terms of perceived competence, warmth, and coachability. Additionally, racial bias malleability beliefs did not moderate participant responses across conditions.

**Hypothesis 2**

Hypothesis 2 predicted that Black clients’ performance would be rated more positively than would White clients’ performance. Again, statistical analysis demonstrated no support for Hypothesis 2. Black and White clients were perceived as having similarly positive feedback scores, equivalent number of perceived Areas of Development (as well as Areas of Strength), and equally deserving of organizational rewards. That said, tests of main effects revealed significant differences between those with a Fluid mindset around racial bias and those with a Fixed mindset. In particular, those with a Fixed mindset saw their client’s performance in a more positive light than did Fluid-minded respondents: They attached higher positivity to James’s feedback scores, indicated fewer Areas of Development (and more Areas of Strength), and recommended James for greater organizational rewards than did Fluid-mindset participants. However, analysis also demonstrated that Theories of Prejudice scores did not moderate any of the outcome measures within Hypothesis 2.
Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 expected that Black executives would receive less constructive feedback than would White executives. Contrary to expectations, participants provided equivalent amounts of positive feedback to Black and White clients. However, all other sub-hypotheses were supported. Black clients received more support, yet less challenge, less constructive feedback, and fewer minutes devoted to development than did White clients. Additionally, analysis revealed a main effect of Theories of Prejudice on number of development minutes allocated, as well as a main effect that trended toward significance on positive feedback. In particular, those with a Fluid mindset of racial bias malleability provided 5 more minutes of feedback catering to Areas of Development and trended toward offering more positive feedback to their clients than did those with a Fixed belief of racial bias. However, tests also showed that racial bias malleability scores did not moderate any of the outcomes measured in Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 assumed that coaching participants would demonstrate less comfort and less willingness to discuss issues of diversity with Black clients than they would with White ones. Counter to expectations, participants reported that client race had no significant impact on their comfort discussing Valuing Diversity. However, this self-reported feeling did not align with their actual behavior. Participants were nearly twice as likely to provide Valuing Diversity feedback when James was White. Additionally, main effect findings revealed that White participants were reportedly more comfortable discussing diversity issues than were non-White participants. This was driven largely by the finding that Hispanic participants were much less comfortable engaging in diversity dialogue than were White participants. Main effects analysis also confirmed that coaches who primarily work in the nonprofit space were more comfortable
discussing issues of diversity than were participants who engage more in the for-profit sector. However, as found in the previous three hypotheses, racial bias malleability did not moderate participant responses on comfort and willingness to engage in diversity-based dialogue.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Overview

The present research tested the prediction that coaches would supply less critical feedback and engage in less racial dialogue with Black clients than they would with White clients. The hypothesis that Black executives would receive less constructive feedback presumed that coaches would view Black clients’ personal attributes—as well as their organizational performance—in a more positive light than a fictitious but otherwise identical White client. Counter to expectations, coaches perceived their Black clients just as warm and just as competent as they did their White clients. Black executives were also seen as equally coachable. Similarly, there was no evidence that client race impacted perceptions of organizational performance: Coaches provided equally positive ratings of feedback scores and identified just as many Areas of Strength (and Areas of Development) for both Blacks and Whites. In short, coaches surprisingly viewed their client profiles identically.

Yet, client race seemed to influence participants’ strategies for the coaching session. Even though respondents provided similar levels of positive feedback, coaches indicated their sessions with White managers would include more challenge and more focus on development than their conversations with Black managers. Additionally, participants offered Black coachees more support and less critical feedback for work of equal merit. Relatedly, Black clients received 5 fewer minutes of developmental feedback within a hypothetical 60-minute coaching conversation. The results were even more discouraging upon taking a step back. Black executives received more support than challenge and more time discussing Areas of Strength than Areas of Development. Such feedback patterns for Whites were the exact opposite: White
clients received more challenge than support and more time devoted to perceived developments than strengths. It was also hypothesized that coaches would exhibit reluctance to engage in diversity-based discourse with clients of color. Findings were consistent with expectations: Coaches were virtually twice as likely to initiate diversity dialogue with a White client than when paired with a Black one. Interestingly, participant behavior was not entirely in accord with their perceptions. Client race offered no statistical impact on coaches’ self-reported comfort with a hypothetical conversation focused on diversity.

Findings revealed that Theories of Prejudice scores failed to moderate any of the above hypotheses. In other words, counter to expectations, whether someone held a Fixed versus a Fluid mindset around racial bias had no bearing on how they interacted with Black clients. That said, several main effects of bias malleability were uncovered. Those with a Fixed mindset of racial bias saw their clients’ performance in a more positive light than did coaches holding a Fluid mindset. In particular, Fixed respondents perceived client feedback scores as being more positive, possessing more Areas of Strengths, and being more deserving of organizational rewards. One explanation for this unexpected finding is that bias malleability beliefs impacted how participants interpreted their clients’ low Valuing Diversity scores. It is possible, for example, that those with a Fixed view—believing racial bias is an immutable quality—were disproportionately more likely to discount the score. These participants may have assumed (consciously or otherwise) that James’s capacity to value diversity could not be improved and was thus out of his control. In response, they may have reasoned that taxing his performance was unjust. However, participants who believed racial bias could be reduced may have been less sympathetic to the client’s low Valuing Diversity score—ultimately undermining their perceptions of his performance.
This dynamic may also explain the main effect that those with a Fluid mindset reported intention to provide 5 more minutes centered on developmental feedback than did participants holding a Fixed view. Coaches who saw racial bias as malleable may have felt that additional time allocated for development—and less time focused on strengths—offered a worthwhile investment. Coaches with a crystallized view of racial bias, though, may have been less willing to make this tradeoff if they saw James’s diversity acumen as less flexible and responsive to developmental feedback. Pessimistic a valuing diversity conversation would yield progress, they may have reasoned that catering to James’s strengths presented a better use of time.

**Theoretical Implications**

Aside from racial dynamics, these findings give credence to the recent call for increased investigation around the antecedents and moderators of effective coaching (Blumberg, 2016; Grant, 2016). Arguably even more important, the experiment serves as the first empirical undertaking—at least to my knowledge—that examined the impact of diversity dynamics within coaching. As a result, the study serves as an important step toward identifying whether coaches are equipped to work with an increasingly diverse contingent of managers and leaders. Along that vein, the novelty of interracial coaching dynamics research renders it important to unpack the current investigation’s findings, both significant and non-significant.

**Feedback Provided**

The present findings extend our theoretical understanding of practitioners’ capacity to partner across a racial divide. Consistent with previous work from similar fields, the current experiment found executive coaches demonstrated a *feedback withholding bias*, delivering less critical feedback to Black clients than they did White ones (Croft & Schmader, 2012). Black clients also received more support, less challenge, and 5 fewer minutes discussing perceived
Areas of Development. This tracks Crosby and Monin’s (2007) finding that academic advisors exhibited a failure to warn Black students about a demanding course load. The observation that Black executives received more support than challenge—while White executives received more challenge than support—only serves to underscore concern that White coaches may hesitate to engage in difficult conversations with racial minorities.

The pattern of Whites suppressing their critical feedback to Blacks is well documented (Harber, 1998, 2004; Harber et al., 2012; Ruscher et al., 2010). However, much debate remains about why we see discrepant behaviors when interacting with people of color. The present study sheds light on such discussion. Some have argued that society—often implicitly—holds Blacks to a lower standard of competence and ability (Biernat, 2009; Biernat et al., 2009). Therefore, equivalent performance by a Black manager should be perceived as particularly impressive when compared to a White manager. In other words, it was expected that coaches would reveal a level of implicit bias, a demonstration of how we feel—consciously or not—about particular social groups (Greenwald et al., 1998). However, the results here fail to corroborate such assumptions. Coaches saw the organizational performance of their Black clients as no more remarkable or worthy of reward than that of their White clients. In short, there is little reason to believe that unconscious expectations influenced conscious perceptions. One explanation is that participants in the Black client condition may have sensed that race was a variable of interest—and that in response, they were careful to present them in a fair and socially desirable manner.

However, social desirability appeared not to impact the discrepant feedback outcomes seen across conditions. Here, an alternative explanation seems most likely: Whites’ fear of difficult cross-racial interaction undermined their capacity to supply constructive criticism. Coaching sessions, particularly those focused on one’s performance deficits, pose uncertainty.
Such dialogue often engenders heightened emotional states and client resistance (Grant et al., 2010). However, the thought of engaging in critical interracial feedback induces even greater concern. The salience of racial identity amid one-on-one interactions (Crocker et al., 1998) creates a setting where conflict or tension may be easily interpreted as racial discord (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). For Whites, this hypothetical presents a unique threat. Given the stereotype indicting Whites as racially prejudiced, it follows that any interracial conflict may serve as evidence of such (Stephan et al., 2002). It is possible, then, that the differences seen across conditions had less to do with implicit bias and more to do with racial anxiety. Godsil and Richardson (2016) contended that racial anxiety encompasses the concerns that often arise both before and during interracial interactions. If implicit bias measures how I feel about them, racial anxiety focuses on protecting how they will feel about me.

One potentially pertinent example of racial anxiety is stereotype threat. As detailed above, stereotype threat is the concern—sometimes conscious, sometimes not—that we will be judged based on our social identity group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). While the current study did not measure whether participants experienced stereotype threat when partnering with a Black client, research elsewhere suggested the implicit fear may have been induced. Indeed, studies have found that stereotype threat derailed the behavior of participants fearful of corroborating the Whites-are-racist reputation (Frantz, Cuddy, Burnett, Ray, & Hart, 2004). In fact, Lee (2017) discovered that White evaluators experienced greater stereotype threat-related emotions—anxiety, tension, discomfort, even fear of poor performance—when providing feedback to Black students. Interestingly, such participant emotional strain occurred even in the absence of any experimental stereotype threat manipulation. Thus, it remains plausible that participants in the
current study felt concern that their cross-racial actions would create the appearance of bias or preconceived racial notions.

Further, Schmader and colleagues’ (2008) stereotype threat process model contended that the phenomenon engenders increased attention and cognitive monitoring of performance. For instance, previous research revealed that individuals under stereotype threat often grew fixated on avoiding failure. Ironically, such focus ultimately led to overly cautious and suboptimal behavior (see Siebt & Forsters, 2004). This may explain why coaches made efforts to avoid difficult cross-racial conversations that carried the possibility of casting them in the role as the racially insensitive White. Put another way, participants may have sought to “avoid failure” by opting into a conversation focused more on support and out of a conversation rife with challenge. Digging more deeply, such intrapsychic dynamics may also illuminate why when working across race, coaches withheld constructive and developmental feedback, yet chose not to embellish client accolades or lavish overly positive feedback: The absence of a particularly praiseworthy conversation is less threatening than the presence of a constructive one. Interestingly, there is precedent for finding a feedback withholding bias but not a positive feedback bias. Both Croft and Schamder (2012) and Schmader (2011) found teachers provided less constructive feedback—yet an equal amount of positive feedback—on an essay ostensibly penned by a Black student.

**Diversity Feedback Intentions**

Coaches’ fear of a hard conversation may also explain their reluctance to engage in diversity-based dialogue with clients of color. Participants paired with a White coachee were nearly twice as likely to inquire about diversity than those partnering with a Black coachee. This finding, while the first of its kind within the coaching space, parallels research conducted
elsewhere. Counselors-in-training (Sue, 2010), psychotherapists (Knox & Hill, 2003), mentors (Cohen & Steele, 2002), teachers (Segall & Garrett, 2013), and physicians (Murray-Garcia, Harrell, García, Gizzi, & Simms-Mackey, 2014) have all struggled to engage in honest dialogue on race and ethnicity. However, it remains unknown why participants in the present study expressed greater intention to supply White clients with diversity-based feedback than they chose to with Black clients. One explanation, related to the above, is that they were fearful of appearing prejudiced. Indeed, concerns about being labeled racist leave many reluctant to notice or “see” race in social situations (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). Thus, the mere act of even acknowledging diversity with Black clients may have been a bridge too far. Another explanation is that respondents had the desire but not the self-efficacy to engage in cross-racial diversity dialogue. For instance, participants may not have believed they had sufficient and substantive diversity feedback to offer their Black clients. This sentiment parallels Sue’s (2016) contention that Whites often silence themselves because they do not consider themselves authority figures on issues of diversity and social justice. Others hesitate to speak to and across race because they believe they lack the skill sets necessary. If true, coaches may have had the ambition but not the acumen to navigate a diversity-centered conversation.

**Self-development Feedback Intentions**

A fascinating yet unexpected finding was that Black clients were significantly more likely to receive Pursuing Self-Development feedback than were White clients. It was hypothesized that Black managers would receive fewer inquiries about race, but not that they would necessarily receive more inquiries about self-development. As a reminder, participants had 10 behavioral competencies from which to choose when reporting their video-recording intentions. Thus, a choice to forego diversity dialogue did not automatically dictate a
conversation about self-development. The discovery that Black James was more likely than White James to receive self-developmental feedback may be entirely coincidental; Pursuing Self-Development, after all, was tied with Valuing Diversity as the lowest-scored dimension. It is certainly possible that participants thought it prudent to address one of the two competencies where their client experienced the greatest struggle. If I am not going to inquire about diversity, the thinking may have gone, I might as well as offer feedback on self-development.

However, another interpretation is that these results are not entirely coincidental. Feedback focused on self-development aims to increase awareness about the importance of continuous growth. In this regard, Pursuing Self-Development feedback suggests, “This is why and how you should treat yourself better.” Choosing to offer Valuing Diversity feedback, meanwhile, sends a different message. The directive here is “This is why and how you should treat others better.” Telling James he should be kinder to himself is likely to come across as validating and encouraging. Indicating he should be kinder to others reads more like a warning, maybe even an admonishment. More to the point, coaches’ feedback intentions remain curious in light of their behavior demonstrated elsewhere in the study. Participants offered Black clients more support and allocated more minutes to discussing strengths, yet supplied less challenge, less constructive feedback, and fewer minutes devoted to areas of development. At first glance, the distinction between Valuing Diversity and Pursuing Self-Development may not trigger concern. Yet taken in totality, a clear picture emerges: The care and compassion Black clients received ultimately came at the cost of sessions focused more on learning and development.

**Equivalent Comfort Discussing Diversity**

In examining participants’ comfort with diversity, a discrepancy emerges between their ‘espoused theories’ and their ‘theories-in-use’ (Argyris, 1976). It was suspected that the
possibility of talking about race with a Black executive would induce greater discomfort than would racial dialogue with a White executive. However, coaches partnering with a person of color expressed, on average, just as much comfort envisioning a diversity conversation as did coaches paired with a White client. Curiously, the same finding emerged in Finch Bernstein’s (2017) pilot study of 43 graduate students enrolled in an executive coaching course. This discovery, while initially surprising, offers intrigue. Self-reports of minimal discomfort engaging in race-based conversations with clients of color are—on the surface—relatively benign. The responses are even less noteworthy when substantiated by participant behavior. But that is not what the results in the current study revealed. Highlighted above, coaches were only half as likely to enter into diversity discussions with Black clients. While contrary to expectation, it is possible that coaches felt hesitant to reveal discomfort when envisioning a race-based talk with a minority. Therefore, it is possible that the fear of appearing racist may have tempered self-reported concerns of engaging in racial dialogue. In other words, participants may have felt—consciously or not—that acknowledging anxiety was tantamount to acknowledging bias.

Surprisingly, scores along the Theories of Prejudice Scale failed to moderate participant responses on any of the study’s outcome variables. Upon reflection, it is possible that the wording of the six-item inventory may explain why we found no significant moderating effects. The questions measure racial bias malleability by inquiring about people’s belief about prejudice rather than participant beliefs. For example, one question asks the extent to which respondents agree with the statement People have a certain amount of prejudice and they can’t really change that. Another suggests People can learn how to act like they’re not prejudiced, but they can’t really change their prejudice deep down. The choice to measure perceptions of people rather than perceptions of self may have induced a subtle yet significant change in how participants
responded. For example, those who expressed fixed views of bias may not have been expressing their own beliefs but rather their perceptions of other people’s beliefs. In such a circumstance, those who demonstrated a fixed mentality may have been less interested in interracial interactions—not because they were afraid of revealing their bias, but because they grew apprehensive about an exchange with someone who may judge them as permanently prejudiced. As a result, it would be interesting to investigate whether modifying the scale so that it explicitly measures participant malleability beliefs (i.e., *My level of prejudice is something very basic about me that I cannot change very much*) reveals different interracial behavior.

Another plausible explanation is that some of the hypotheses measured participants’ cross-racial attitudes and not behavior. The findings revealed here suggested that Theories of Prejudice may not extend to attitudes (i.e., perceptions of warmth, competence, or coachability) the same way they extended to behaviors within Carr and colleagues’ (2012) set of experiments. Regardless, more studies testing the impact of bias malleability beliefs are warranted to better understand the value as well as limitations of the scale.

**Practical Implications**

**Implications for Clients**

**A challenge deficit.** The current study also holds several practical implications. The finding that coaches provided less constructive feedback to their Black clients is of particular concern. This suggests clients of color may be robbed of developmental opportunities afforded to non-stigmatized Whites. Overly lenient feedback is likely to induce a “challenge deficit,” stunting minorities’ intellectual growth and achievement (Steele, 1995). The ramifications of such are dire. Leaders pursue coaching engagements to learn where and how to grow. Successful coaches act as a proverbial mirror, holding up for the client what he or she cannot identify on
their own (Gregory et al., 2011). Coaches who prioritize their fear of presenting as prejudiced keep coachees’ blind spots in the dark, never to be seen. As Crosby and Monin (2007) argued, the failure to warn is particularly pernicious when it shows up as phony affirmation. The absence of a conversation centered on constructive criticism may lead clients of color to internalize their lack of organizational advancement. In the short term, compromised feedback restricts Black managers’ chances for increased self-awareness and insight. In the long term, it stymies their professional trajectory.

**Undermined trust and commitment.** How minorities respond to overly supportive or challenge-deficient feedback likely presents consequences as well. Insufficient criticism may be perceived as sympathy and a doubt of ability. Black clients are likely to question their coach’s integrity if feedback received fails to reflect the merits of performance (Crocker et al., 1991). Also, evaluations that convey low expectations may trigger awareness of the stereotypes questioning Black people’s intellect and ambition (Crocker & Major, 1989; Steele et al., 2002). Similar to their White coaches, this dynamic may also place Black clients under stereotype threat. In fact, feedback that elicits suspicion they are being stereotyped diminishes racial minorities’ self-esteem (Mendoza-Denton, Goldman-Flyth, Pietrzak, Downey, & Aceves, 2010), task engagement (Lawrence, Crocker, & Blanton, 2011), and ultimately performance (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Therefore, disingenuous feedback is likely to deplete Black clients’ commitment to coaching and undermine benefits otherwise offered by the process.

Unfortunately, the delivery of honest constructive feedback does not offer the simple remedy one might hope. The history of race relations in the United States renders interracial interactions a difficult terrain to navigate, often resulting in misinterpretation and misunderstanding (Son Holoien, Bergsieker, Shelton, & Alegre, 2015). A White person
providing constructive feedback to a Black person is one example that captures this dynamic.

Given racial minorities’ knowledge of the stereotypes levied against them—and awareness they are viewed through a corresponding prism of deficiency—they are often leery of criticism received from White evaluators. In this regard, they interpret feedback as evidence of racial bias more than personal limitation. Again, this leaves clients dubious of their coach’s intentions as well as the quality of the relationship. This is why Black students (Mendoza-Denton, 2009), doctoral clinicians-in-training (Constanine & Sue, 2007), and organizational managers (Roberson et al., 2003) have discounted and dismissed feedback from Whites. Thus, there is reason to suspect that even well intentioned, objective critique from White coaches may be misconstrued. Regardless of intentions, the impact is clear: Black executives may be unable to distill and then act on feedback needed for professional growth.

**Inability to discuss racial dynamics.** Black clients are further disadvantaged when they perceive their coach as unwilling to discuss or even acknowledge race. Significant empirical research has indicated that the workplace experience is fundamentally worse for Blacks than it is for Whites (Carbadi & Gultati, 2004; Kalev, 2014; Kalev et al., 2006). This is particularly true for those in positions of leadership: People tend to associate Whites with the concepts leader and manager, yet do not make the same associations of Blacks (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005). In response, leaders of color often believe they must be “bulletproof,” or demonstrate behavior devoid of performance mistakes and political missteps (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). The result is that racial minorities pay a Black tax—an emotional toll stemming from the sense they must work twice as hard to keep pace with their White co-workers (Travis et al., 2016). As Orenstein (2002) depicted, coaches should not just cater to their individual client, but also to the relationship their
client has to his or her organization. Clients whose coaches fail to understand the value of this
dynamic lose out on exploring the impact of their potentially oppressive workplace.

Similarly, working with a coach who does not “see” race requires clients to leave a part
of their identity at the door when they walk in. Coaches who fail to speak to race—presumably
out of fear of appearing prejudiced—may unknowingly prioritize their concerns over those of
their clients. Indeed, people of color often report diminished trust when sensing their interaction
partners feign colorblindness (Apfelabaum et al., 2008). Recent research examining sessions
between Black coaches and Black executives illuminates the impact of race-based dialogue.
Barbara (2018) found that Black leaders receiving coaching voiced frustration that race dynamics
impeded their climb up the organizational ladder. The coachees experienced stress, stereotyping,
feelings of isolation, and an inadequate network of support—all of which served as barriers to
advancement. It bears repeating that such strain manifested within the confines of a same-race
coaching relationship. Given the anxieties and grievances aired in Barbara’s (2018) qualitative
study, we cannot help but wonder how much of themselves Black executives feel comfortable
revealing to their non-Black coaches.

Effective cross-racial coaching likely requires clients’ sense of inclusion and acceptance.
This notion emanates from broader organizational behavior research on the antecedents and
consequences of perceived diversity climates. Diversity climate is defined as the extent to which
traditionally underrepresented groups are socially integrated and treated fairly at work (Mor
with job satisfaction and organizational commitment (McKay, Avery, & Morris, 2007), while
correlating negatively with both job stress and intention to leave (Walsh, Matthews, Tuller,
Parks, & McDonald, 2010). Relatedly, Edmonson (2018) argued that psychological safety—the
belief that the environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking—is the bridge between diversity and inclusion. The link to coaching seems fairly straightforward: Coaches who choose to avoid race rather than attend to it may create climates that are cold and uncaring. The result is their clients of color may grow disenchanted and disengaged from the coaching relationship. In all, executive coaching will return maximum utility to minorities only when the context gives them license to bring their full selves to the work.

Implications for Coaches

Building trust through wise interventions. Clearly, coaches working with clients of color face a predicament: How does one convey criticism in a way that inspires rather than stifles motivation? Academics refer to such challenge as the mentor’s dilemma, relevant to a wide range of practitioners, including coaches, teachers, and clinicians (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999). As it turns out, trust is the crucial factor determining how minorities decipher the ambiguities inherent in cross-racial feedback (Cohen et al., 1999). Importantly, the level of trust minorities feel provides a window into whether they see criticism as a benevolent desire to help or as racial malice (Major, Kunstman, Malta, & Sawyer, 2016). Therefore, it would be sensible for coaches to cultivate rapport and trust with their clients. This recommendation is underscored by research confirming that the quality of the coaching relationship is, in fact, the variable most predictive of client success (de Haan et al., 2013). While trust remains paramount in all relationships, it becomes particularly important in cross-racial ones. However, building such trust is a difficult feat, given the unstable ground on which interracial coaching pairs find themselves.

Fortunately, recent research offers a glimmer of hope. In a set of field experiments, Yeager and colleagues (2013) sought to promote trust between Black students and their middle school teachers. All students in the study drafted a five-paragraph essay about their personal
hero. Teachers then gave feedback, having previously been encouraged to provide particularly constructive comments. Before returning the essays, the experimenters first appended a handwritten message from the students’ instructors. Students were randomly assigned to receive one of two notes on their essay. (Teachers prewrote multiple messages and were absent from this part of the study. As a result, they remained blind to the experimental treatment.) Some students were told, “I’m giving you these comments so that you will have feedback on your paper.” Having received a note devoid of substance, these students served as the control group. The experimental group read a different message, one that invoked both high standards and assurance those standards could be attained. Their note declared, “I’m giving you these comments because I have very high expectations and I know that you can reach them.” The investigators deemed this manipulation a *wise intervention*, a name appropriate given its impact.

Upon receiving the feedback-laden yet ungraded essays, students had the option to revise and resubmit a draft one week later. Whether students chose to hand in an edited paper served as the dependent variable of interest. The results were striking. Only 17% of Black students in the control condition, those who received criticism yet no affirmation, completed a second draft. However, Black students who received wise feedback—replete with both challenge and support—were more than four times as likely (72%) to dedicate the time and energy for a rewrite (Yeager et al., 2013). Just as encouraging, a neutral party later rated the experimental group’s essays as deserving of a higher grade than those submitted by control participants. In short, the inclusion of both expectations and encouragement boosted motivation and performance.

The authors concluded that sense of trust distinguished whether students undertook revision. Several baseline and one posttest measure of *school trust* were taken as part of the experiment. (Students indicated the extent to which they agreed with statements such as “My
teachers at my school have a fair and valid opinion of me.”) As it turns out, Black students who felt initial mistrust of school were the group that benefited most from wise feedback. It impacted not only whether they revised their work, but also enhanced perceptions of whether their school was fair for them and for other Black students. Conversely, mistrusting Black students placed in the control condition reported even greater suspicion of school 2 months after the study ended. Yeager and colleagues claimed that the wise feedback lifted the barrier of mistrust, inspiring students to apply themselves. It bears mentioning that White student participants also showed improvement upon receiving wise feedback but not nearly at the rate of Black students: 62% of control group Whites resubmitted, as opposed to 87% in the treatment condition. Importantly, level of trust did not moderate the likelihood of White students’ optional submission. The authors concluded that the absence of the stereotype questioning Whites’ intelligence rendered the type of feedback provided less consequential to their subsequent behaviors (Yeager et al., 2013). This suggests that trust may be a currency uniquely valuable when working with minorities.

The studies offer profound implications for coaches. Practitioners working with Black clients should strive to create a foundation of trust—potentially even more so than they do with White clients. When responding to critique, trust allows executives to draw positive attributions rather than negative ones. Research from education indicates wise feedback may be the avenue for cultivating such trust. Overly lenient feedback signals doubt of ability, engendering diminished self-esteem and motivation. Criticism without the assertion of confidence may signal racial bias, leading clients to refute and reject feedback. The tightrope of interracial partnership dictates support without challenge is as doomed to fail as challenge without support. If they hope to inspire change, coaches must convey high standards as well as belief that clients can reach
those standards through effort and persistence. Such appreciation for how their words are likely to resonate may increase client trust, opening up opportunities for learning. Clearly, coaches must navigate a fine line when working with clients of color. However, evidence hints that wise feedback offers a prudent place to start.

**Engaging the zone of uncomfortable debate.** Regardless of client race, the findings of the current study affirmed recent concern that coaches may not be challenging their coachees as much as they should. As highlighted above, the best coaches support their clients by cultivating a sense of inclusion, which inspires vulnerability. Simultaneously, effective practitioners know that to incite behavioral change, clients must also be challenged (Gregory et al., 2011). The current study found that, client race aside, coaches provided more positive feedback ($M = 5.83$) than they did critical feedback ($M = 5.13$). The investigation also uncovered that participants who identified most closely as a coach provided more positive feedback ($M = 5.96$) than did participants who identified most closely as a coach educator, trainer, or supervisor ($M = 5.14$). Additionally, we found that Black coachees were offered less challenge, less critical feedback, and less time devoted to discussing areas of development than were White coachees. Taken together, these findings suggest coaches may struggle to enter the Zone of Uncomfortable Debate (ZOUĐ). Originally applied to discourse within high-performance teams, the framework suggests that the recipe for breakthrough is the ability to shift from *comfortable debate* to *uncomfortable debate* (Bowman, 1995). The philosophy maintains that as practitioners encroach on an important, yet potentially difficult conversation they often feel tense, anxious, fearful even that the topic may irrevocably damage the relationship. This apprehension often overwhelms to
the point that they redirect the conversation back to the zone of comfortable debate (Bowman, 1995). While rapport remains intact, it comes at the cost of a missed opportunity for growth.

In their book *Challenging Coaching*, Blakey and Day (2012) cautioned that coaches may also struggle with entering the Zone of Uncomfortable Debate. The authors argued that coaches are quite capable and comfortable providing support. Yet surfacing deficiency requires practitioners to “hold the tension” inherent in accountability and growth (p. 23). Of unique relevance to the current study, the authors also maintained that supplying critical feedback can provoke “identity issues” for coaches. In particular, they suggested that delivering hard feedback often threatens the self-view in a way that provokes discomfort—ultimately leading coaches to shy away from challenging yet crucial interactions. The authors maintained that coaches’ fear of breaking rapport often holds them back from entering the ZOUD. The consequence of such apprehension, they wrote, is dire: “The greatness within a coachee cannot be freed if the coach holds them in a safe place” (p. 38).

The potential that coaches are reluctant to have difficult conversations with their clients—and in particular their clients of color—is especially concerning. Coaches are often seen as experts on delivering hard feedback. As Peltier (2011) noted, coaches are often enlisted when managers are reluctant or unable to navigate tricky conversations with their direct reports. The results in the current study indicate that coaches may not be as adept at initiating such dialogue as sponsoring organizations assume. The potential impact is twofold. First, the organization may erroneously assume that their employee is receiving the necessary feedback from his or her coach. Second and related, the person who will ultimately bear the brunt of this misperception is the client. Not only will they not hear how or where to improve, but they will also be unfairly held accountable for their likely subsequent lack of organizational progress. This dynamic may
signal trouble for all coaching clients. However, it may augur particular concern for minority clients whose managers may be uniquely uncomfortable or unable to engage in difficult cross-racial conversations.

Interestingly, Blakey and Day (2012) suggested the predicament facing practitioners harkens back to coaching having its roots in psychotherapy. In particular, they offered that counseling takes a non-directive, person-centered approach replete with unconditional positive regard (see Rogers, 1977). While this foundation has proven beneficial, the stance ultimately undermines coaches’ capacity to challenge and stretch their clients. Indeed, participants in the current study indicated Positive Psychology and a Person-centered Approach as two of the models they most frequently leverage when coaching. In all, the results of the current study underscore the two changes Blakey and Day (2012) advocated for within the coaching landscape: that practitioners lean into the Zone of Uncomfortable Debate and that they shift from a person-centered perspective to one more team- and organization-centered. Thus, this study’s findings suggest that coaches may want to consider examining their biases and fears that impede their willingness to have difficult conversations with clients of all colors.

**Implications for the Coaching Community**

**Incorporate Diversity Intelligence (DQ) as a core competency.** The findings also serve as a call to action for the greater coaching community. The presence of bias depicted here is the first to challenge the notion that coaches are equipped to work effectively with minority managers. In response, coaching programs and associations should focus greater attention to developing the competence necessary for cross-racial work. Indeed, the International Coach Federation, the world’s largest coaching network, makes no mention of culture, diversity, or difference within its code of ethics or list of core competencies (ICF, 2019). Mandating a level of
sensitivity awareness training would be a welcome and appropriate change. The first step to solving a problem is to acknowledge its existence. The time has come for the industry to recognize the relevance of bias in coaching conversations.

The inclusion of a diversity mindset may engender increased self-awareness required to reduce coaches’ racial anxiety. Described above, inconsistency emerged between participant attitudes and behavior. On one hand, coaches reported they were just as comfortable talking about diversity with Black executives as they were with White executives. On the other, coaches were just half as likely actually to broach such conversations with minority clients. One potential explanation of the contrast is that coaches were less comfortable with interracial dialogue than they realized. If true, this presents an additional challenge: Not only do coaches lack the ability for effective cross-racial partnership, but they also lack the awareness of such. This further underscores the value of diversity education for all practitioners. Analogous to Black clients being robbed of developmental opportunities, coaches must first recognize their blind spots if they hope to remedy them.

It is also worth highlighting that the present study examined coaches’ willingness but not ability to discuss difference. At face value, one may assume a positive link between the two; in fact, research has shown that talking about race benefits interracial therapeutic relationships (Burkard, Juarez-Huffaker, & Ajmere, 2003; Hare, 2015). Counseling findings, though, may not extend to coaching, which currently does not require extensive diversity education. As a case in point, racial dialogue attempts often flounder without prior training and experience. Research has affirmed that these exchanges induce anxiety (Trawalter & Richeson, 2008) and impel Whites to distance themselves physically from conversation partners (Goff et al., 2008). Other work has revealed that racially charged issues elicit from Whites grammatical mistakes, repetition, and
incomprehensibility. Bonilla-Silva (2002) referred to this phenomenon as “rhetorical incoherence” (p. 68). In fact, the present study found that previous cross-racial coaching experience had no impact on diversity feedback intentions. As a reminder, coaches who had worked with “a lot” of cross-racial clients were no more likely to inquire about Valuing Diversity than were participants who had “none or a moderate amount” of such experience. Thus, it is plausible that experience without education fails to improve coaches’ cross-racial capacity sufficiently. Regardless, the predicament the coaching industry faces may be more problematic than the current study suggests. Simply put, mindset is no substitute for skill set: even those open to race-based exchanges may prove ineffective without the requisite competence.

One potential solution is that the coaching community invests significant resources in attracting and developing a greater number of Black coaches. As mentioned previously, the coaching field is predominantly White. If coaches are ill equipped to meet the needs of their racial minority clients, it is incumbent upon coaching associations to ensure there are a greater number of minority coaches who may be less susceptible to the dynamics and apprehensions revealed in the present study. In short, if the current set of coaches is unable to work effectively across race, it may be wise to increase the racial diversity of our certified practitioners.

Another and related implication is that coaching certification programs should consider incorporating curriculum tied specifically to diversity. One such competency may be Diversity Intelligence (DQ). First coined by Hughes (2016), Diversity Intelligence is our ability to recognize the impact of workplace diversity—and to use this information to guide our thoughts and behavior. Leaders high in DQ demonstrate acceptance and appreciation of difference. They are also able to work effectively with those similar and dissimilar to themselves. Interestingly,
Wittmer and Hopkins (2018) wrote convincingly of DQ’s application to coaching conversations. The authors maintained that DQ is similar yet separate from Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and Cultural Intelligence (CQ)—which are both cornerstones of coaching effectiveness. While these latter two constructs may touch on diversity, the researchers noted, neither addresses the workplace experiences of people belonging to protected classes.

In response, the researchers undertook a qualitative approach to determine which EQ factors are most crucial to leaders’ DQ development. Using Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2013) as their frame, the authors argued that two particular components of Emotional Intelligence map onto Diversity Intelligence as well. The first is emotional self-awareness. Considered the bedrock of Emotional Intelligence, self-awareness is our capacity to recognize and understand our emotions (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2018). Previous research has demonstrated the mere act of acknowledging our emotions enables us to shift them to the logic center of our brain known as the neo-cortex (Lieberman, Inagaki, Tabibnia, & Crockett, 2011). The result is that we act with greater agency and obstruct our emotions from “hijacking” our decisions (see Goleman, 2012). In other words, increasing self-awareness may enable coaches to better locate and alleviate racial anxiety that manifests when working with clients of color.

The second relevant domain of EQ is empathy, the recognition for how others feel (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2018). Demonstrating empathy is crucial for all coaches, but particularly for those who work closely with managers of color. Discussed earlier, research has shown that Black employees often perceive the workplace as a microcosm that perpetuates social inequities, ultimately inciting impaired mental health and diminished performance (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Casad & Bryant, 2016). In short, coaches who are able to empathize with their Black clients may be better equipped to overcome apprehension about potentially difficult discourse. It bears
mentioning that Wittmer and Hopkins (2018) focused on how coaches can develop their clients’ Diversity Intelligence. However, as the authors noted, in order to impart such knowledge and skills, coaches must first receive the requisite education and training themselves. The findings uncovered in the present study corroborate this sentiment. Given the increasing importance of Diversity Intelligence—to both coaches and the clients they serve—certification programs would be wise to weave such content into the fabric of their curriculum.

Related, coaching programs should consider their messaging around creating a more inclusive community. In particular, it would be wise for coaching associations to help their practitioners recognize that diversity is not an issue uniquely held by traditionally marginalized groups. The best way to inspire sustainable change is to help educate coaches—particularly White coaches—that diversity impacts everyone and all identities. Helping coaches become more attuned to their Whiteness, for example, may give them implicit license to enter a conversation around diversity (see Sampson, 1993). As a case in point, recent work revealed that those from traditionally powerful groups often recuse themselves from social justice advocacy because they do not see themselves as legitimate spokespeople on the topic (Sherf, Tangirala, & Weber, 2017). The researchers indicated that such choice occurs when people believe they do not have psychological standing, or the sense that they have license to engage on an issue. In their set of both correlational and experimental studies, Sherf and colleagues (2017) maintained that diminished psychological standing was partially responsible for why men in corporate America often fail to discuss gender parity. Aside from potential sexism or discriminatory attitudes, the authors contended that men might additionally refrain from the discourse because they do not see themselves as authority figures on the matter. The connection to the current study is that the coaching community would benefit from helping practitioners recognize that inclusion is
relevant for all. In short the more coaches are in touch with their own social identities, the more they will authorize themselves to touch on challenging, yet crucial conversations.

**Mandated supervision.** One other practical implication is that the findings demonstrated here underscore the need for mandated coaching supervision. Supervision allows coaches to discuss their cases with a supervisor, typically a seasoned coach (Lawrence & Whyte, 2014). Bachkirova (2008) defined the intervention as “a formal process of professional support, which ensures continuing development of the coach and effectiveness of his/her coaching practice through interactive reflection, interpretative evaluation, and the sharing of expertise” (pp. 6-7). Supervision has been long established within similar helping professions—from social workers, to psychotherapists, to medical doctors (Carroll, 2006; Grant, 2012). The practice ensures that both industry standards and client needs remain closely monitored after coaches have completed their formal education (Koortzen & Odendaal, 2016).

Passmore and McGoldrick’s (2009) qualitative study found several benefits of coaching supervision. First, coaches indicated that the process offered them valuable development. In this regard, coaches have the opportunity to reflect on their practice, consider alternative approaches, and receive tangible feedback (Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009). Second, the authors revealed supervision offers quality assurance. Coaches reported that supervision improved management of ethical dilemmas—and importantly—induced greater levels of comfort in discussing sensitive issues with their clients. Third and related, supervision also provides support. The conversations created a sense of relief and improved mental health, ultimately allowing coaches to regain their “psychological resources” essential to maintaining their role (Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009). Of unique relevance to the current study, coaches also highlighted that the support and challenge inherent to effective supervision enabled them to process their *countertransference*. Considered a
linchpin of the therapeutic process, countertransference occurs whenever coaches have an emotional or cognitive reaction to their clients (Orenstein, 2002). Applied to the present investigation, supervision would facilitate coaches’ exploration of any racial anxiety or apprehension that manifests when partnering across race.

Additionally, such insights may provide a larger window on the client’s on-the-job experience. Drawing connections between the coach-client and client-organization relationship exemplifies the notion of parallel process (Orenstein, 2002). Supervision, in this regard, enables coaches to use their reactions as a way to understand better how others might also be reacting to their client. If a coach experiences racial anxiety sitting across from a Black manager, so too might that manager’s colleagues. Leveraging such recognition—and then bringing that work into the coaching conversation—presents opportunity. For one, it offers a chance to enhance the quality of their client relationship. Two, it provides coaches a more nuanced appreciation for the impact of race dynamics on their Black clients. The result is that coaches are then able to serve as better thought partners in navigating the racial impediments minorities face at work.

Given the value coaching supervision offers, support for the practice has risen sharply in recent years. In fact, surveys have now suggested that 83% of executive coaches across the world engage in supervision (Kotte, 2017). However, the tool is much more common internationally than it is domestically. For context, 92% of United Kingdom-based coaches receive supervision, and 81% of European coaches as well. Yet less than half (48%) of coaches in the United States incorporate the practice. Much of this discrepancy centers on the fact that only 9% of American executive coaching certification programs require supervision (Kotte, 2017). In all, the findings revealed in the current study—coupled with the benefits argued elsewhere—provide sufficient justification that executive coaching programs in the United States should require supervision.
both concurrent to and following formal training. Such practice would enable coaches to make sense of, interpret, and respond to emotions evoked in working with their diverse set of clients.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Several limitations to the current study are worth mentioning. First, 19 participants chose to leave the study prior to providing their demographic characteristics. As detailed earlier, the decision to include these 19 respondents seems warranted. There appears to be little reason to believe that client race impacted participants’ choice to leave the study: Of the 19 participants who exited, 10 were assigned to a White client and 9 had been paired with a Black client. Even still, knowing these participants’ respective ages, genders, coaching experience, and the like would allow us to understand the data more fully.

Second, the current study examined the coaching strategies of a one-time engagement. Such decisions may not accurately capture the dynamics inherent to a more extended interracial coaching relationship. In fact, research has illustrated that both the frequency (Blascovich et al., 2001) and duration (Shelton & Richeson, 2006) of intergroup contact are both associated with greater cross-racial communication (even though the present investigation found otherwise). Thus, whatever bias was demonstrated here might exceed that which occurs in real-world coaching contexts. Alternatively, though, one could argue cultural missteps are particularly damaging in introductory sessions, where establishing trust and alliance are paramount. Scholars have found that Black clients are more likely to terminate the relationship with their White counselors (Owen, Thomas, & Rodolfa, 2013; Swift & Greenberg, 2012) and doctors (Murray-Garcia et al., 2014) after just one session than are White patients. In this regard, it remains possible that coaches who sidestep conversations around development and diversity may unknowingly signal an inability to partner with racial minority clients.
Third, these findings reflect coaches’ reported intentions rather than their actual behavior. In order to truly assess the efficacy of coaches’ capacity to work across race, it would be ideal to sample real-world interracial coaching partnerships. In fact, there is reason to believe that the bias present amid actual coaching conversations may exceed the bias found in the present study. Providing cross-racial feedback may be harder face-to-face than within the virtual exchange created here. As Harber (2004) noted, people may be uniquely pressured to socially conform when in close proximity to someone of another race. Indeed, Shelton (2000) highlighted that decades of prejudice research have paid surprisingly little attention to actual encounters between and across ethnic groups. Thus, future academics should study the current research questions within the applied context of racially diverse coaching conversations. Such inquiry would allow us to discover whether client race impacts the quality of the feedback provided. Opting into a conversation with a client of color is an important first step. Identifying how effective coaches are in having that conversation is just as important. Future research should measure not just choice but also competence.

The electronic design of the study poses a fourth limitation. Participants completed the survey electronically, likely on a personal computer or tablet. As Nosek and colleagues (2002) noted, internet-based research struggles to maximize experimental impact as well as standardize the experience for all participants. Such impediments occurred in the present study. Per Qualtrics policy, once participants opened the survey link, they had exactly 1 week to submit. While most participants completed the survey within 30-35 minutes upon opening the link, it is impossible to know their engagement levels when responding. The result is that we remain unaware of how focused or serious participants were in completing the survey. The design of the study offered participants privacy, which may have led to increased comfort and candor. That
said, the design also reduced experimenter control. Ideally, participants would have completed
the survey under optimal, controlled conditions.

A fifth limitation is that we do not know the effectiveness of the video-recording
feedback deception. In particular, the study failed to inquire about the extent to which
participants believed they would actually have to provide video feedback. Participants who
trusted they would have to deliver feedback may have reported different feedback intentions than
did participants who were not adequately deceived. In retrospect, a question at the end of the
survey should have asked *To what extent did you believe you were going to be required to
provide video-recorded feedback to your client?* Such a question would have allowed us to
ensure the manipulation proved effective.

That being said, two pieces of evidence indicated participants were sufficiently deceived.
First, 38 participants chose to leave the study upon learning of the video-recording component.
(As mentioned above, these participants were excluded from all subsequent analysis.) It is
important to note—yet not over-interpret—that of these 38 participants, 21 had been assigned a
Black client, while 17 had been paired with a White client. Given the spike in attrition, it is
reasonable to assume these participants abandoned the survey because they trusted they would
have to record feedback. Second, several participants mentioned in their follow-up
 correspondence with the researcher that they were deceived by the recording manipulation. For
context, upon survey completion, participants were debriefed on the true nature of the study.
Within that debrief, the researcher provided her email address and invited participants to reach
out if they were interested in receiving a copy of the results. About 20 coaches accepted the
offer. Among those 20, several indicated they were surprised to learn there was no video
recording. One participant’s response encapsulates their collective sentiment: “I just completed

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your survey. I feel a bit tricked since I spent a few minutes getting ready to do the video—[smile emoji]—but I totally understand why and am curious about what you will learn. Please do send me the results when you are done with the study.” In all, there is reason to believe the deception proved effective. However, it would have been best practice to include a definitive manipulation check.

The fact that so many people dropped out of the study upon learning of the video recording introduces a sixth limitation. It remains unclear why participants chose to leave at this point. But many plausible explanations exist: these participants were not technologically savvy; they were reluctant to be shown on camera; they did not trust the confidentiality of the researchers who would have access to the video; or maybe they were anxious about having to record something of substance. It could have also been an entirely different reason altogether. Regardless of the explanation, the volume of survey terminations is noteworthy and potentially discouraging. In particular, we cannot help but wonder whether the attrition seen here undermines the external validity of the study, thereby limiting our capacity to generalize findings to the entire executive coaching community.

The latter two limitations pertain to the specificity of the research questions and design. The seventh limitation is that the study looked exclusively at Black managers and leaders receiving coaching. As a result, the study did not examine interracial relationships with clients belonging to other non-Black minority groups. Given that part of the impetus for this study is the recognition that the U.S. workforce has grown increasingly diverse, it remains important to examine the multiple configurations of cross-racial dynamics. For example, it would be helpful to conduct an additional investigation on the impact of client race or ethnicity when coaches partner with Asian, Latino, or Muslim managers and executives. Future research should identify
the extent to which the difficulty in having hard conversations with racial minorities extends not just to Black clients but to all leaders belonging to socially marginalized groups.

An eighth and related limitation is that the study only examined Black males. The choice to exclude Black female clients enabled us to isolate the impact of client race on coaching perceptions and decisions. The consequence is that we cannot necessarily generalize these findings to interracial feedback provided to women. Future research should study the impact of not only race but also gender within coaching conversations. Such future investigation is particularly important, given that Black women face organizational hardship that neither men nor non-Black leaders face at work (Barbara, 2018; Uzogara & Jackson, 2016). Given the impact of race, gender, and the impact of their intersectionality, additional research is warranted in exploring coaches’ capacity to work effectively with Black female leaders.

Future research should consider the findings revealed—both significant and non-significant. In particular, if racial anxiety were truly responsible for the differential feedback outcomes seen here, it would be wise for the coaching community to investigate how best to mitigate such cross-racial apprehension. Racial bias malleability beliefs did not moderate participant responses in the current study. Ironically though, recent research illustrates the value of educating participants on the capacity to mitigate their racial bias. As a case in point, Carr and colleagues (2012) conducted several studies—where they not only measured, but also manipulated theories of prejudice beliefs. In one study, the authors convinced half their participants that racial bias is malleable and that “prejudice can be unlearned.” The author half were told that “prejudice, like plaster, is stable over time”—and is therefore fixed. The manipulations proved effective. Those in the fixed condition were not only more likely to later
endorse a fixed view of racial bias; they also grew more concerned about revealing prejudice amid a hypothetical interracial interaction.

In a follow-up study, the researchers also revealed that those who had been taught a fluid belief around racial bias were no more anxious interacting with a Black partner than they were a White one. As the authors noted, it would be morally questionable to teach people that bias malleable if it were not. However, recent work reveals that racial prejudice can be reduced (e.g., Kawakami, Dovidio, & Van Kemp, 2007; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, Alegre, & Siy, 2010). As a result, the coaching community may want to consider educating practitioners about the impact—and malleability—of racial bias. Helping coaches locate themselves on the fixed-fluid spectrum may be helpful; it may be even more beneficial to help coaches recognize that through effort and experience we can overcome much of our intrapsychic anxieties.

Related, and as mentioned previously Theories of Prejudice scores failed to moderate participant responses on any outcome measures. Future research should examine whether coaches’ Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998), Bias Awareness (Perry, Murphy, & Dovidio, 2015), or any other individual difference variable moderates the extent to which coaches partner effectively with Black leaders. It is likely that interracial anxiety hinders some coaches more than it does others. The sooner we learn which demographic characteristics moderate coaches’ cross-racial behavior, the more quickly we can develop targeted interventions that seek to create the climate and psychological safety required for interracial coaching partnerships.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, the goal of this research was to advance our understanding of whether coaches have the requisite skill set to work with an increasing number of Black executives and
leaders. The results call into question whether coaches possess such ability. The focus on support at the exclusion of challenge and development—coupled with an avoidance of diversity-based dialogue—poses troubling implications for coaches and clients as well as the greater community. Clients of color are likely robbed of developmental opportunities needed for professional growth and advancement. They may also hesitate to highlight the impact of workplace race dynamics when their coach appears to sidestep or ignore the issue. Relatedly, coaches who convey doubt of client potential or enact strategic colorblindness may unknowingly sever trust in the relationship. The coaching community should heed these warnings, mandating supervision and incorporating diversity intelligence as a core competency.

One can envision how the findings from the present study may manifest if brought to life. White James Wilson, through no fault of his own, is likely to learn a lot from his coaching experience. He is likely to partner with a coach who is challenging, helping James locate where and how to improve. The short-term impact is that James will be able to view his behavior more objectively. More importantly, James will be set up to ascend the organizational ladder.

Yet a different story is likely woven for Black James Wilson. He probably will not be pushed in the same way. He probably will not be confronted as much. And he probably won’t have the space or climate necessary to reflect and ultimately act upon how his racial identity intersects with workplace politics. The most likely outcome is that his performance and promotions will stagnate. How James responds remains to be seen. Unaware that his coach chose to sidestep challenging, yet crucial conversations, James may internalize his lack of progress. He may question his own capacity or become mired in regret. Another possibility is James channels his frustration outward, toward his coach—and by extension his sponsoring organization. The response here is likely to be met with feelings of isolation and disenchantment. Regardless of
how James ultimately interprets his coaching and subsequent corporate experience, the result is clear: his well-being, performance, and ultimately his professional trajectory will suffer.

While the above offers a mere one-off, hypothetical depiction, the unfolding of these two universes paints a stark picture of the disparate experiences likely facing White and Black men navigating corporate America. The findings from the current study offer nothing nefarious or malicious. Yet that is what precisely why they are so dangerous if left unattended.

Hypotheticals aside, a major aim of this investigation was to incite curiosity intended for future inquiry. The present study was exploratory in nature, serving as the first empirical examination of interracial feedback dynamics in coaching. Subsequent undertakings should seek to replicate these findings within real-world coaching conversations, as opposed to the confines of a relatively controlled experiment. In all, the current study may ultimately serve as the first in a line of research that asks: What roles do stereotypes and anxieties play when coach and client do not look like each other? Therefore, much work remains in determining how social identity—ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and everything in between—impacts the capacity of coaches to partner across difference.
REFERENCES


Major, B., Kunstman, J. W., Malta, B. D., Sawyer, P. J., Townsend, S. S., & Mendes, W. B.


Table 1

*Participant Race, Gender, Coaching Identity, Country of Residence, First Language, and Coaching Program Status*

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*All Black participants were excluded from statistical analyses.*
Table 2

*Participant Age, Years of Coaching Experience, and Number of Cross-racial Coaching Clients*

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<td>Number of Cross-racial Coaching Clients (Non-White participants)</td>
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*Note.* Participants ranged in age from 28 to 76 years old, with a median age of 53.
Table 3

*Participant Professional Background*

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Table 4

*Participant Coaching Theories Practiced*

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<td>Social Psychology</td>
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<td>Other*</td>
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* The two most frequent write-in responses were Co-Active Coaching (n = 7) and Neuroscience or Brain-Based Coaching (n = 5).
Table 5

*Participant Industries of Practice*

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<td>Military/Armed Forces</td>
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### Table 6

*Participant Coaching Role and Sector of Practice*

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<td>Chose not to say</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sector of Practice</td>
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<td>Mostly For-profit</td>
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<td>Mostly Nonprofit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chose not to say</td>
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### Table 7

**Overview of Dependent Measures**

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<th>Dependent Measure</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Sample Item</th>
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</table>
| Perceptions of Client                          | Warmth & Competence (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004)                     | • *James is a trustworthy person*  
|                                                |                                                                       | • *James is capable at his job*  
|                                                | Client Coachability                                                   | • *James will be able to accept feedback*                                    |
| Perceptions of Client Performance              | N/A                                                                   | • *How positively do you perceive James’s feedback results?*                |
|                                                |                                                                       | • *Do you see this dimension as a strength or as an area of development?* |
|                                                | Allocation of Organizational Rewards Scale (Allen, Russell, & Rush, 1994) | • *Based on his feedback scores, how appropriate is it that James is offered a promotion?* |
| Feedback Provided                              | N/A                                                                   | • *How much support do you envision providing James in your session?*       |
|                                                |                                                                       | • *How much challenge do you envision providing James in your session?*     |
|                                                |                                                                       | • *How many minutes will you allocate to discussing James’s areas of strength/development?* |
| Comfort and Willingness Engaging in Diversity Dialogue | N/A                                                                   | • *How comfortable are you discussing Valuing Diversity with James?*       |
|                                                |                                                                       | • *Which area of development is going to be the focus of your video recorded feedback?* |
### Table 8

**Intercorrelations for All Outcome and Demographic Variables**

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<td>.06</td>
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<tr>
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*Note. N = 129. *p < .05 **p < .01. Participant gender code dummies include 1 = female 2 = male. Participant race code dummies include 1 = White 2 = Non-White. Participant English as 1st language code dummies include 1 = yes 2 = no. Participant live in US code dummies include 1 = Yes, currently live in the United States 2 = No, currently do not live in the United States. Participant coach identity code dummies include 1 = coach identity 2 = coach supervisor, educator, or trainer identity. Participant cross-race experience code dummies include 1 = no or a moderate amount of cross-racial experience 2 = a lot of cross-racial coaching experience. Participant enrolled code dummies include 1 = currently enrolled in a coaching certification program 2 = not currently enrolled in a coaching certification program. Participant internal/external code dummies include 1 = provide more external coaching 2 = provide more internal coaching. Participant for-profit/nonprofit code dummies include 1=provide more coaching in the for-profit sector 2 = provide more coaching in the nonprofit sector.
Table 9

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Continuous Variables*

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Table 10

_Hypothesis 1a and 1c Results: Means and Standard Deviations for Competence & Coachability_

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<th>White James (n = 67)</th>
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<th>Black James (n = 62)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
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<td>5.26</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coachability (Likert scale 1-5)</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 129. Higher means indicate that participants provided a higher number on the variable of interest.*
Table 11

*Hypothesis 1b Results: ANCOVA Findings for Warmth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>2.76&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.873</td>
<td>1.605</td>
<td>.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1345.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1345.17</td>
<td>2471.41</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Race</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated Status</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.180</td>
<td>.672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td>.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>56.06</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>.544</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1985.00</td>
<td>107</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>58.68</td>
<td>106</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = 129. a. R squared = .045 (Adjusted R Squared = .017)*
### Table 12

**Hypothesis 1d Results: 2-way ANOVA Findings on Participant Theories of Prejudice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measure</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice (Fluid/Fixed)</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice (Fluid/Fixed)</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>.206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coachability</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.579</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice (Fluid/Fixed)</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 110. Participant race and graduated status were entered as control variables when measuring perceptions of warmth.*
Table 13

_Hypothesis 2a-c Results: Means and Standard Deviations for Perceptions of Client Performance_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measures</th>
<th>White James (n = 67)</th>
<th>Black James (n = 62)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivity (Range from 1-100)</td>
<td>66.40</td>
<td>15.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Developments (Range from 0-100)</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Rewards (Likert scale 1-5)</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 129. Higher means indicate that participants provided a higher number on the variable of interest.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measure</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>146.87</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice (Fluid/Fixed)</td>
<td>1486.20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.85</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>21.19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Develops</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice (Fluid/Fixed)</td>
<td>10.96</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Rewards</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.483</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice (Fluid/Fixed)</td>
<td>8.48</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15.30</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.741</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 110.*
Table 15

_Hypothesis 3a, 3b, 3d, and 3e Results: Means and Standard Deviations for Support, Challenge, Critical Feedback, & Number of Developmental Minutes_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measures</th>
<th>White James (n = 67)</th>
<th>Black James (n = 62)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support (Likert scale 1-7)</td>
<td>5.37*</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge (Likert scale 1-7)</td>
<td>5.72*</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Feedback (Likert scale 1-7)</td>
<td>5.37*</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Developmental Minutes</td>
<td>33.04*</td>
<td>9.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Range from 0-60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 129. * p < .05 across conditions. Higher means indicate that participants provided a higher number on the variable of interest.
Table 16

*Hypothesis 3c Results: ANCOVA Findings for Positive Feedback*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>4.81(^a)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3624.16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3624.16</td>
<td>3483.87</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach Identity</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>110.27</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3920.00</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>115.08</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 129. a. R squared = .042 (Adjusted R Squared = .024)*
Table 17

*Hypothesis 3f Results: 2-way ANOVA Findings on Participant Theories of Prejudice*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measure</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>9.05</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.29</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice</td>
<td>.600</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>12.31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>.269</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>10.50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice</td>
<td>.241</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>772.43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.97</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minutes</td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice</td>
<td>814.86</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9.46</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction (Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>46.68</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.463</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N = 110. Participant coach identity was entered as a control variable on positive feedback.
Table 18

Hypothesis 4a Results: ANCOVA Findings for Participant Comfort Discussing Valuing Diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Model</td>
<td>95.50a</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.92</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>39.71</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>39.71</td>
<td>20.06</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Age</td>
<td>26.68</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28.68</td>
<td>14.49</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Gender</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Race</td>
<td>17.54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17.54</td>
<td>8.86</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated Status</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>.169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector of Practice</td>
<td>13.67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13.67</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>.301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>191.99</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3726.00</td>
<td>104</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>287.50</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 129. a. R squared = .332 (Adjusted R Squared = .291)*
Table 19

**Hypothesis 4b Results: Frequency and Percentages of Participant Valuing Diversity Feedback Intentions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback Intentions</th>
<th>White James (n = 67)</th>
<th>Black James (n = 62)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Diversity</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 20

*Hypothesis 4c Results: 2-way ANCOVA Findings for Participant Theories of Prejudice on Comfort Discussing Diversity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measure</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comfort Discussing</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>.284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of Prejudice</td>
<td>Fluid/Fixed</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Fluid/Fixed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>Condition*Theories</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Condition*Theories)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 110. Participant age, gender, race, graduated status, and sector of focus were entered as control variables.*
Table 21

**Hypothesis 4c Results: Binary Logistic Regression Findings for Participant Theories of Prejudice on Valuing Diversity Feedback Intentions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome Measure</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>se</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Diversity Feedback Intentions</td>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.428</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of Prejudice (Fluid/Fixed)</td>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Condition*Theories)</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.268</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model $\chi^2 = 6.41$, p = .268

Pseudo $R^2 = .05$ (Cox & Snell)

*Note. N = 110*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis 1</th>
<th>Black clients will be rated more positively than White clients.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 1a</td>
<td>Black clients will be rated as higher in competence than White clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 1b</td>
<td>Black clients will be rated as higher in warmth than White clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 1c</td>
<td>Black clients will be rated as higher in coachability than White clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 1d</td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice scores will moderate responses on Hypotheses 1a-c.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis 2</th>
<th>Black clients’ performance will be rated more positively than White clients’ performance.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 2a</td>
<td>Black clients’ feedback scores will be perceived as more positive than White clients’ scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 2b</td>
<td>Black clients’ feedback scores will be viewed as having fewer Areas of Development than will White client scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 2c</td>
<td>Black clients will receive greater organizational rewards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 2d</td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice scores will moderate responses on Hypotheses 2a-e.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis 3</th>
<th>Black clients will receive less constructive feedback than White clients.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 3a</td>
<td>Black clients will receive more support than White clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 3b</td>
<td>Black clients will receive less challenge than White clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 3c</td>
<td>Black clients will receive more positive feedback than White clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 3d</td>
<td>Black clients will receive less constructive feedback than White clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 3e</td>
<td>Black clients will receive less time dedicated to Areas of Development than White clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 3f</td>
<td>Theories of Prejudice scores will moderate responses on Hypotheses 3a-e.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>Results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hypothesis 4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hypothesis 4a</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hypothesis 4b</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hypothesis 4c</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hypothesis 4c</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Moderating effects of theories of prejudice on client warmth

A 2-way ANOVA found that these results *trended* toward significance, $p = .095$. 
Figure 2. Participant Valuing Diversity feedback intentions

Participants were asked, *Among the Areas of Development you identified, which is going to be the focus of your video recorded feedback?* A chi-square test of independence confirmed participants were significantly more likely to provide Valuing Diversity feedback to White James than they were to Black James.
APPENDIX A1: COVER STORY

Study Title: IDENTIFYING COACHES’ STRATEGIES WHEN PREPARING FOR CLIENT INTERACTIONS

Protocol ID: 18-434

Principal Investigator: Ariel Finch Bernstein, M.A.: afb2131@tc.columbia.edu

Thank you for your interest in participating. The purpose of the study is to identify and understand the strategies coaches use when preparing for client interactions. The current research will explore how coaches prepare, as well as what decisions they make, in anticipation of client interactions.

Participation will consist of completing one 30-35-minute electronic survey. In the survey, you will learn you have been assigned to a hypothetical coaching engagement. Your task will be to provide impressions of your client based on his/her profile, and to indicate your strategies for the hypothetical coaching session. You will also be tasked with helping your client make meaning from his/her recent developmental multi-rater feedback results.

Nearing the end of the survey, you will be asked to provide demographic information about yourself. Such information will be helpful to the researchers in better understanding the responses provided.

As a token of our appreciation, participants who complete the survey will be rewarded with a $20 digital gift card, redeemable at more than 20 different retail companies (including Amazon, Visa, & iTunes). Funding for this study has been provided by the Institute of Coaching, a non-profit organization affiliated with Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital. The Institute of Coaching’s mission is to enhance the integrity and credibility of the coaching field.

In order to receive the gift card, you will be asked to provide your email address upon survey completion. However, please know the researchers have taken efforts to ensure that your email address will remain confidential, as well as both unassociated and detached from your individual responses. The researchers are only interested in examining responses at the aggregate level and are not interested in anyone’s individual responses. Similarly, all of your responses to the survey will be kept confidential and will only be used for this research.

Please click “>>” below to review the Participant Informed Consent Information.
APPENDIX A2: INFORMED CONSENT

**Protocol Title:** Identifying Coaches’ Strategies When Preparing for Client Interactions

**IRB Protocol ID:** 18-434

**Principal Investigator:** Ariel Finch Bernstein, M.A.
Teachers College, Columbia University’s Graduate School of Education
afb2131@tc.columbia.edu
(858) 344-3185

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**INTRODUCTION**

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Identifying Coaches’ Strategies When Preparing for Client Interactions.” You may qualify to take part in this research study if you are an executive coach, a managerial coach, or serve as a coach within professional development contexts. Regardless of your title or official role, you must self-identify as a coach to participate in the current study. Approximately 200-300 people will participate in this study and it will take 30-35 minutes of your time to complete.

Funding for this study has been provided by the Institute of Coaching, a non-profit organization affiliated with Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital. The Institute of Coaching’s mission is to enhance the integrity and credibility of the coaching field.

**WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

The purpose of the study is to identify and understand the strategies coaches use when preparing for client interactions. The current research seeks to explore how coaches prepare, as well as what decisions they make, in anticipation of client interactions.

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete one electronic survey that will likely take 30-35 minutes to fill out.

In this study:

- You will be asked to prepare for a hypothetical coaching engagement. In order to prepare, you will be provided information about your client, including his/her job title and job description, as well as general information about the company for which he/she works. You will also receive the results from the client’s recent multi-rater feedback report.
- After learning about your client and his/her scores, you will then be asked to provide your impression about the client, as well as your strategies for the impending session.
- You will additionally have the opportunity to provide feedback, either positive or constructive in nature.
- Lastly, you will be asked to provide demographic information about yourself (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, country of residence, numbers of years with coaching experience, etc). This information will allow the researchers to better understand participant responses to survey items.
WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There is minimal risk in the study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking psychological questionnaires or inventories. However, you are welcome to end your participation at any time without penalty.

The principal investigator has taken precautions to keep your information confidential and to prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity. How you respond to the survey questions will remain unaffiliated and detached from any identifying information that you are asked to provide. Additionally, all response data will be kept on a password-protected computer overseen by the research team.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?
There are no direct benefits from participating in this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?
Yes! All participants who complete the 30-35 minute survey will receive one $20 digital gift card good at more than 20 pre-selected retail companies (including Amazon, Visa, iTunes, Nordstrom, and Hotels.com, to name just a few).

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?
The study is over when you have completed the electronic survey. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished. Those who choose to terminate their participation prior to completing the survey, though, will not receive a $20 digital gift card.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY
Your individual responses will remain confidential and only used for research purposes. Efforts have been taken to ensure that individual responses will remain unassociated with the participants who provide those responses. In other words, how you respond to the survey questions will not traced back to you in any identifying manner. The researchers are only interested in examining responses at the aggregate level and are uninterested in examining responses at the individual level.

Any electronic or digital information will be stored on a computer that is password protected.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?
The results of this study will be published in journals and/or presented at academic conferences. However, neither your name nor any identifying information about you will be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator.
WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?
If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Ariel Finch Bernstein, at afb2131@tc.columbia.edu or at (858) 344-3185.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

Please click “>>” below to view the Participant’s Rights page.
APPENDIX A3: PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS

PARTICIPANT’S RIGHTS

- I have read the informed consent provided by the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

I have read and understood the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

_____ YES, I consent to participate in the current study

_____ NO, I do not consent to participate in the current study

Click “>>” to confirm your response. If you consented to participate, you will be redirected to the survey. If you did not consent, you will not be directed to the survey.
APPENDIX B: STUDY INSTRUCTIONS

Study Instructions:

Imagine you are a coach who has just been contracted by an organization for a new coaching engagement. The organization recently initiated a developmental multi-rater feedback process for all senior managers with the intention of encouraging continuous learning. Based on your contract, you are scheduled to interact with your client to discuss the results of his/her recent multi-rater feedback assessment. Your task today is to prepare for the session.

The following set of materials includes information about your new client. In the next few pages, you will read about your client’s role and the organization in which he or she works, as well as the results from the multi-rater assessment. After reviewing the information about your client, you will be asked a few questions about how you will prepare for the session, as well as how you will help your client make meaning from his/her feedback results.

Please be sure to answer all questions. The entire study should not take more than 30-35 minutes to complete.

The next screen will introduce you to your client.

Thank you again for participating!

Click “>>” to begin.
APPENDIX C: CLIENT’S JOB INFORMATION

Company Description

James Wilson
Senior Project Manager,
Sigma Health

Sigma Health is a Fortune Global 500 company that distributes health care systems, medical supplies, and pharmaceutical products across the United States. As a leader in pharmaceutical distribution and supply chain management, Sigma Health delivers branded and generic pharmaceuticals, as well as over-the-counter products, to more than 40,000 customers in three primary segments: retail chains, independent retail pharmacies and institutional providers such as hospitals, health systems, integrated delivery networks and long-term care providers.

Sigma Health’s software, distribution and business services play an essential role in addressing the challenges health care organizations face today — and shaping how they’ll overcome them tomorrow. Sigma Health connects people and organizations, supports the quest for higher quality and improved clinical outcomes, and helps health care businesses run better. And that supports better patient health.

Sigma Health’s mission is to advance the health care system for better health for all.

Current Roles and Responsibilities

James Wilson has served as a Senior Project Manager at Sigma Health for the past 3 years. In his role, James is responsible for managing complex healthcare projects from initiation and development to execution and follow-up. He achieves operational objectives by providing recommendations to strategic plans and reviews; preparing and completing action plans; implementing production, productivity, quality, and customer-service standards; resolving problems; identifying trends; determining system improvements; and implementing change. As Senior Project Manager, James interfaces with both internal and external stakeholders to ensure both quality and efficiency of production. James has 10 years of experience in designing, building, and implementing business solutions in the healthcare sector. He similarly has 6 years of experience in project management, leading both large and small teams. James holds a bachelor’s degree in Public Health from the University of Maryland.
APPENDIX D: DEVELOPMENTAL FEEDBACK RESULTS

The following context is intended to help you prepare for the coaching session:

- Below are the results from a section of James’s recent 360-feedback assessment.
- It should be noted that Sigma Health is early to 360. As a result, James only received ratings from his direct reports, and all feedback received is quantitative in nature.
- The feedback below summarizes how James’s direct reports rated him along 10 behavioral dimensions important to his role as Senior Project Manager.
- Sigma Health considers each of these behavioral dimensions as equally critical to his position.
- What you see in the chart below is an average score for each dimension, on a scale of 1 to 10—with higher scores indicating a more positive perception of performance.
Study Debrief

Thank you for completing your participation in this research! You have reached the end of the study and will not be asked to record any video feedback.

Now that you are finished, I can tell you more about the study. I was not able to say before because such information may have influenced your responses. For this reason, it is important that you do not share the following information with others who may participate in the study, as doing so may taint their responses.

I mentioned in the introduction that the purpose of the study was to identify coaches’ strategies when preparing for client interactions. This is true. I am particularly interested in how coaches prepare for their sessions, as well as whether coaches prepare differently for some clients than they do others. One thing I am curious about is whether coaches’ strategies and decisions differ based on the race of their client.

Research from several other professions suggests working with someone of another race can be difficult. Studies have shown that even well-intentioned White teachers, mentors, doctors, and clinical therapists have all made cultural missteps when working with Black clients (Burgess et al., 2010; Cohen & Steele, 2002; Sue et al., 2008; Yeager et al., 2014). However, no study—at least to my knowledge—has looked at the role race plays in coaching.

In order to better understand how client race may impact coaching decisions, participants in this study were randomly presented with different clients. Some participants learned they were working with a White client. Other participants learned they were working with a Black client. Besides their supposed race, client profiles were otherwise identical.

I am curious whether coaches are comfortable having “difficult conversations” with Black clients. More specifically, I am curious whether it is harder to challenge or provide constructive feedback to a Black client than it is a White client. Similarly, I am curious whether it is more difficult to discuss issues of race and diversity with Black clients. My hope is that shedding light on these questions will ultimately benefit the greater coaching community.

As a reminder, I am not interested in any one person’s survey responses. I am only interested in identifying themes that emerge across all responses. In fact, I have made efforts to ensure that I am unable to determine which participants provided which responses. Similarly, all of your responses to the survey will be kept confidential and will only be used for this research.

Multicultural issues are often very difficult to study directly. Therefore, researchers regularly use techniques like the one used in this survey to measure such behavior. My hope is that the gains in understanding such coaching dynamics more than offset any discomfort you may have experienced. To that end, my goal is that this research will be published and will provide greater insight into whether coaches work differently—and potentially less effectively—with minorities. Your participation has been an invaluable contribution to this effort.
If you are curious to see the results, please contact me by e-mail and I will send you a copy once the research has been completed. However, please know the study will likely not be completed for several months.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me. My email address is afb2131@tc.columbia.edu.

In case you are interested, here are the references mentioned above:


Thank you again for your participation!

Sincerely,
Ariel Finch Bernstein

*Click “>>” below to finalize your participation.*
APPENDIX F: COACHING CLIENT PHOTOS
Coaches often begin forming general impressions of their clients when reviewing assessment data. The next set of questions inquires about your initial impressions of James.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James is competent at his job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is a warm person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is busy at his job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is a sincere person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is a trustworthy person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is satisfied with his job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James finds his job rewarding.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is efficient at his job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James feels inspired by his job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James enjoys his job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is good-natured.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is skillful at his job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is practical.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is determined at his job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James is capable at his job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Non-italicized items serve as filler questions.
## APPENDIX H: COACHABILITY SCALE

Indicate below how “coachable” you believe James would be if he had the opportunity to work with a coach for a few sessions. Identify the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement. (*Please circle a number for each statement.*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James will see the coaching process as an opportunity to grow.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James will be able to accept feedback.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James will be open to considering new behaviors when working with others.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James will benefit from coaching.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX I: POSITIVITY SCALE AND MEASURES OF AREAS OF STRENGTH/DEVELOPMENT

How positively do you perceive James’s feedback scores? *(The higher the score, the more positive your perception.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below, indicate whether you perceive each of the 10 behavioral dimensions as more of an Area of Strength or more of an Area of Development for James. *(Please indicate each behavioral dimension as either an Area of Strength or as an Area of Development.)*

Maintaining a Client Focus | Area of Strength | Area of Development  
Making Decisions | Area of Strength | Area of Development  
Driving Change | Area of Strength | Area of Development  
Valuing Diversity | Area of Strength | Area of Development  
Managing Others | Area of Strength | Area of Development  
Demonstrating Strategic Thinking | Area of Strength | Area of Development  
Communicating with Impact | Area of Strength | Area of Development  
Pursing Self-Development | Area of Strength | Area of Development  
Fostering Innovation | Area of Strength | Area of Development  
Engaging in Teamwork | Area of Strength | Area of Development
APPENDIX J: ALLOCATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL REWARDS SCALE

While the multi-rater assessment was conducted for developmental purposes—and not for evaluative purposes—data from multi-rater feedback often provides coaches an idea of how well people are performing in their jobs. The next question serves to inquire about the extent to which you believe James’s performance qualifies him for additional organizational rewards or responsibilities.

Based on his multi-rater feedback scores, how appropriate is it for Sigma Health to offer any of the below opportunities to James? *(Please circle a number for each statement.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definitely Inappropriate</th>
<th>Definitely Appropriate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admitting him to a fast-track executive training program</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting him as a mentor</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offering him a promotion</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing him a challenging high profile project</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awarding him a salary increase</td>
<td>1  2  3  4  5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX K: FEEDBACK PROVIDED

How much support do you envision providing James in your session with him? *(Please indicate one number.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No support at all</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A great deal of support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much challenge do you envision providing James in your session with him? *(Please indicate one number.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No challenge at all</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A great deal of challenge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much positive feedback will you try to provide when discussing James’s multi-rater feedback performance with him? *(Please indicate one number.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not positive feedback at all</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A great deal of positive feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much critical feedback will you try to provide when discussing James’s multi-rater feedback performance with him? *(Please indicate one number.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No critical feedback at all</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A great deal of critical feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the coaching session is scheduled for 60 minutes, how much time will you allocate to discuss James’s Areas of Strength? How much time will you allocate to discuss his Areas of Development? *(Please make sure your two responses equal 60 minutes in total.)*

_______________________ minutes dedicated to Areas of Strength

_______________________ minutes dedicated to Areas of Development
APPENDIX L: PARTICIPANT COMFORT ENGAGING IN DIVERSITY CONVERSATIONS

How would you rate your level of comfort in discussing each behavioral dimension with James? *(Please indicate a number for each behavioral dimension.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral Dimension</th>
<th>Extremely Uncomfortable</th>
<th>Extremely Comfortable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a Client Focus</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Decisions</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving Change</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Diversity</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Others</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating Strategic Thinking</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with Impact</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuing Self-Development</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering Innovation</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in Teamwork</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX M: PARTICIPANT WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE IN DIVERSITY CONVERSATIONS

Most coaches operate with a “strengths based” mindset, meaning they tend to focus on their clients’ skills and abilities. However, research shows that the best coaches address not only their clients’ strengths, but also their areas of development.

With that in mind, the next part of the study will ask you to record a 2-3 minute video. The intention of the video is to provide your client feedback on one Area of Development you identified earlier. Please focus your feedback exclusively on one Area of Development.

You will be asked to record your video a few minutes from now. To prepare for the video recording, you may want to consider the importance of the behavioral dimension you will discuss, the implications of poor performance in that area, or anything else you think might prove worthwhile for your client to hear.

Among the Areas of Development you identified above, which is going to be the focus of your video recorded feedback?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maintaining a Client Focus</th>
<th>Demonstrating Strategic Thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making Decisions</td>
<td>Communicating with Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving Change</td>
<td>Pursuing Self-Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Diversity</td>
<td>Fostering Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Others</td>
<td>Engaging in Teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A -- I indicated earlier that all 10 behavioral dimensions are Areas of Strength for my client</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You will shortly be asked to record your video feedback. It is important you speak for at least 2 minutes, but not much more than 3 minutes. (There will be a clock on the next screen to let you know how much time has elapsed.) As a way to prepare, you might want to use the space below to write or sketch out what you intend to say. Feel free to consider:

1. Why you chose this Area of Development over others
2. The importance of improving James’s performance on this dimension
3. The implications, both short and long-term, associated with not improving performance in this arena
4. Anything else that you see as relevant to highlight

You are welcome to write as much or as little as you would like in the space below.
Identify the extent to which you agree with each of the statements below.

(*Please indicate a number for each statement.*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Very Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Very Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People have a certain amount of prejudice and they can’t really change that.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s level of prejudice is something very basic about them that they can’t change very much.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No matter who somebody is, they can always become a lot less prejudiced.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People can change their level of prejudice a great deal.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People can learn how to act like they’re not prejudiced, but they can’t really change their prejudice deep down.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As much as I hate to admit it, you can’t teach an old dog new tricks. People can’t really change how prejudiced they are.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX O: MANIPULATION CHECK OF CLIENT RACE

The final set of questions is asked because participants in this study were exposed to different coaching clients. Therefore, the questions below inquire about your client’s background and are only asked for data analysis purposes.

What is the name of your client?
_______________________________

What is the gender of your client?
_______________________________

What is the race of your client?
_______________________________

In what industry does your client work?
_______________________________
APPENDIX P: DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE ITEMS

How old are you?


How would you identify your gender?

_____ Female  _____ Other
_____ Male

How would you identify your race?

_____ American Indian or Alaska Native  _____ Native American or Other Pacific Islander
_____ Asian  _____ White or Caucasian
_____ Black or African American  _____ Other
_____ Hispanic or Latino

Was English the first language you learned?

_____ Yes  _____ No

Do you currently live in the United States?

_____ Yes  _____ No

Which of the following do you most closely identify with?

_____ Coach  _____ Coach trainer  _____ Coach educator

How many years experience do you have as a professional coach?


How many people have you coached who are of a different race than you?


Are you currently enrolled in a program that offers either certification or an advanced degree in coaching?

_____ Yes  _____ No
Do you currently possess either a formal certification or an advanced degree in coaching?

_____ Yes  _____ No

Do you have more experience working internally or externally as a coach?

_____ More internal coaching  _____ More external coaching  _____ About the same amount of experience with each  _____ N/A

Has most of your coaching experience been in the for-profit or in the non-profit space?

_____ For-profit  _____ Non-profit  _____ About the same amount of experience with each

Which of the following best describes your background? Please check all that apply.

_____ Clinical/Counseling Psychologist  _____ Manager or Leader
_____ I-O/Social-Organizational Psychologist  _____ Licensed coach
_____ Business professional  _____ Coach trainer
_____ Organizational Development Consultant  _____ Coach educator
_____ HR Professional  _____ Other (please indicate)

In which industries have you provide coaching services? Please mark all that apply.

_____ Business Services  _____ IT/Software
_____ Education  _____ Military/Armed Forces
_____ Financial Services  _____ Non-profit
_____ Government  _____ Telecommunications
_____ Healthcare/Pharmaceuticals/Biotech  _____ Other (please indicate)

What models or theories of coaching do you typically incorporate in your work with clients? Please check all that apply.

_____ Person-centered  _____ Positive Psychology
_____ Social Psychology  _____ Cognitive-behavioral
_____ Systems Thinking  _____ GROW Model
_____ Psychodynamic  _____ Other (please indicate)
_____ Gestalt  _____ N/A
_____ Context-Content-Conduct

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