

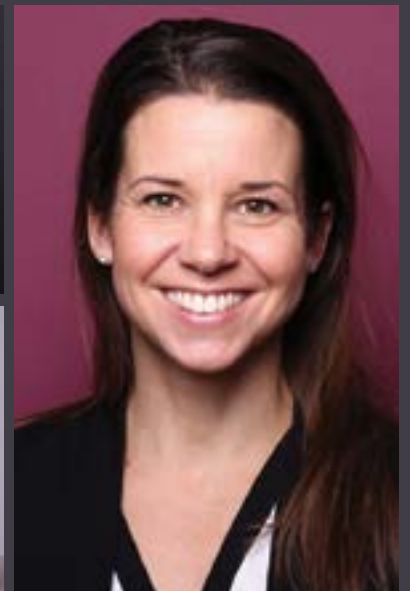
choice

the magazine of professional coaching



Diversity & INCLUSION

How our differences
make a difference





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features

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

How our differences make a difference

How have diversity and cultural issues impacted the coaching profession? Why is it important for coaches to have an interest in our various cultural, racial and social identities? How do cultural, racial or other social identities impact our clients? How do we coach people who experience inequities, power dynamics or systemic racism? What can we do to expand our cultural awareness to support inclusive practices? What skills and behaviors define cross-cultural competencies?

Read on as we explore cultural awareness in coaching.



COACHING IN THE FIFTH DOMAIN

The importance of using an identity lens in coaching interventions

By Amber Mayes, MSOD & Sukari Pinnock-Fitts, MSOD, PCC

“My coach doesn’t understand my racialized identity, so they don’t really understand me.” How many coaches have heard their clients say this? Arguably few, as the words are usually spoken by a coaching client of color who has left their coach to seek help elsewhere. These and other similar reports from coaching clients made us curious about the degree to which certain coaching clients were being underserved by the profession.

In our respective coaching practices, we have encountered clients who expressed significant pain and anxiety

related to social/political events where marginalized groups were targeted, oppressed or even killed. Specifically, the stories of police misconduct in the cases of Tamir Rice (2014), Michael Brown (2014) and Sandra Bland (2015), the mass shootings at the Pulse nightclub (2016) and Charleston Emanuel AME Church (2015), etc. have impacted our respective clients and expanded the types of issues they bring to the coaching conversation.

We became curious about how many coaches were actually equipped with the skills necessary to support clients through these experiences. However, what began as a question about the need

for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) skills in the coaching field has resulted in our concluding that the problem isn’t only that coaches may be underserving a certain segment of their clientele but also that the majority of coach training programs are not equipping would-be coaches to see their clients in the fullness of their respective identities.

Our curiosity spurred us to develop a survey for coaches across industries, sectors and fields with questions specifically focused on the issue of identity coaching (coach conversations that surface issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.) While our sample sizes were small (initially just about 200 in 2016

and another 200 or so coaches in 2019), 84% of respondents to our 2016 and 2019 coach surveys said they encounter issues of diversity, inclusion and belonging in their coaching conversations “some of the time or often” – yet fewer than 50% report feeling “competent” coaching around these issues. Using the survey findings as a springboard, we continued to gather data through webinars, conference presentations and workshops, culminating in the development of a model and process for educating coaches on identity coaching. We call our model the Fifth Domain of Coaching.

Why the Fifth Domain? Through the survey data and conversations with coaches and coach trainers, we affirmed that most coach training programs prepare their students to coach in what is often referred to as four domains of intervention. These are:

- 1 **The cognitive or language domain** (how the client thinks about their situation),
- 2 **The emotional domain** (how the client feels about their situation),
- 3 **The somatic domain** (how the client embodies their situation), and
- 4 **The spiritual domain** (how the client senses or experiences a connectedness to their sacred self).

The Fifth Domain focuses on how a client makes sense of the world based on their lived experiences as members of various social identity groups – the groups assigned to us by society and into which we often self-categorize –

on the basis of shared characteristics, phenotypes and cultural similarities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Holck & Muhr, 2015). This sorting based on similarity also results in the creation of “in-groups and out-groups” or dominant and marginalized group identities. The most commonly recognized social identity groupings today are those tied to:

- Race and/or Color
- Ethnicity
- Gender and/or Gender Expression
- Nationality
- Religion
- Age
- Ability (cognitive, emotional or physical)
- Socio-Economic Status (class)
- Sexual Orientation

To be able to effectively work with a client in the Fifth Domain, a coach must be able to not only identify the significance of social group identities of their clients, but also be aware of and understand the social group identities they hold. Without this awareness, the Coach cannot truly know how their interventions affect what they do (and don't) see of their client's experience.

For example, how does a coach who is a cisgender white woman understand the gaps between her worldview and that of a client who is a transgender black man? What are the skills she needs to both assess her own blindspots and lean into conversations about how issues of race and gender identity shape their experiences?

If we as coaches are to help shine light on aspects of our clients' worlds, how can we effectively do that if we are not able to fully see the ways social group identities are figural for them? We cannot. We need intentional skill building, specialized training and practice. Lots and lots of practice.

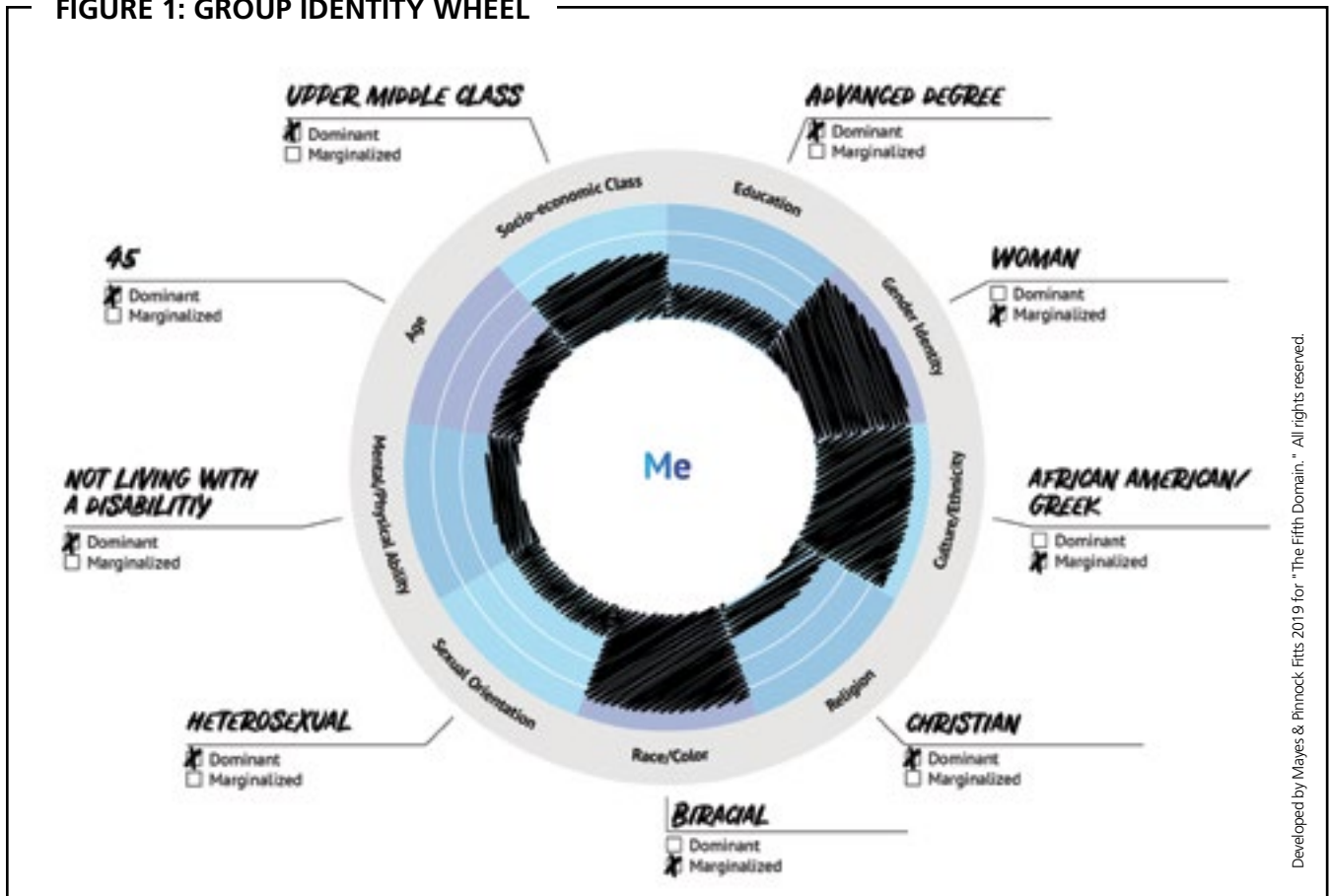
So where does one start the journey of Fifth Domain competence development? As is true in the other four domains, navigating the Fifth Domain of coaching is a journey. We know there are no quick fixes or 10-item checklists. With this ever-evolving “journey” in mind, we developed a non-linear model




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FIGURE 1: GROUP IDENTITY WHEEL



Developed by Mayes & Pinnock, Fitts 2019 for "The Fifth Domain." All rights reserved.

called the “Flow of the Fifth Domain.”

The first step of navigating the flow requires coaches to assess their own identities, biases, blind spots, and fears as these relate to coaching with identity in mind. To aid in this awareness, in 2019, we developed the “Group Identity Wheel” (see Figure 1) to use in our coaching presentations and workshops.

Participants fill out the segments of the wheel with their own social group identities, indicating whether they have a dominant (in-group) social identity or a marginalized (out-group) one. They then shade in a corresponding segment of the wheel to indicate how much time they spend thinking about this identity.

Significant epiphanies frequently arise from this activity. For example, coaches who hold mostly “in-group” or “dominant” identities such as white, heterosexual, U.S. born, Christian, etc. say things like “I don’t think about most of these social group identities at all. I

wonder what I have been missing about the experiences of my clients who are in the out-group!”

One participant revealed that as a black, lesbian woman, she has challenges coaching people who are in “dominant” or “in-groups” related to race, gender and sexual orientation. The wheel helped her realize that she had unconsciously steered clear of people with these identities as coaching clients. She pondered whether she had some “work to do” to be able to coach across these differences and was grateful that she could now be intentional about her choice.

Our “Flow of the Fifth Domain” model helps coaches integrate insights such as these into concrete coaching interventions. Most coaches we have worked with wonder why they have not experienced this type of training sooner in their careers.

There is no doubt that the coaching field is growing, vibrant and having tre-

mendous impact in the lives of individuals and organizations across the globe. The question we set out to answer – whether or not coaches are equipped to competently coach those who are significantly different from them by social group identities – has expanded to include interrogating the coaching field as a profession.

If the field of professional coaching, and its various certifying bodies, will not acknowledge that we can better serve our clients by expanding our lens to include a Fifth Domain of coaching, then the market for our services will begin to shrivel and contract. If we are truly to serve every client equitably, we must include Fifth Domain competencies into our coach training and our practices.

Until the integration of DEI skills are required for every coach training program around the globe, ours will remain a profession bounded by worldviews that fail to serve every client in a way that best meets their respective needs. •