

Racism in Officiating in the Women's Flat Track Derby Association

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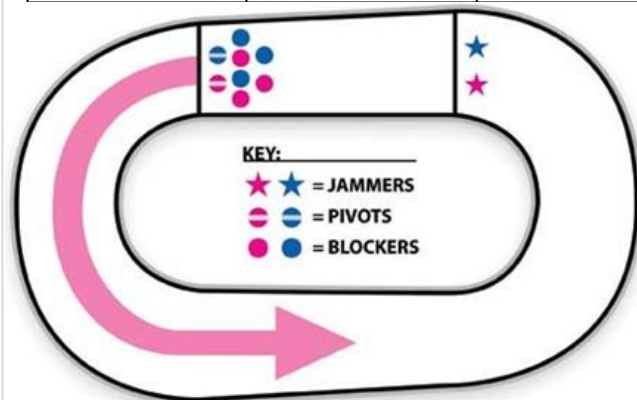
Abstract:

Previous research in international soccer and the NBA has shown racial bias in the rates of fouls called on players with darker skin tones and referees showing favorable bias towards their race. Our objective was to determine whether racial or skintone bias is present in women's roller derby officiating. We collated 655 photos of roller derby skaters from a combination of publicity materials and team websites for playoffs and championships sanctioned by the Women's Flat Track Derby Association (WFTDA) played between 2017 and 2019. Up to 7 raters of varying races and ethnicities evaluated skin color and "observer-assigned race." The raters used a numeric color palette to make skin tone judgments (1 = pale, 11 = dark), while a modified version of the 2020 U.S. Census categories was used to make racial judgments. The number and types of penalties for each player were gathered. Overall penalties rates per jam (ppj) by skater skin color and observer-assigned race were compared. Among 422 players with skintone and racial ratings as well as penalty data, the mean skintone was 1.863. 77.8% of skaters were classified as white, 3.7% were black, and 17.3% of an indeterminate race. Locally estimated scatter plot smoothing (LOESS) regressions revealed no apparent association between skintone and penalty rates. Overall penalty rates were 0.173 for skaters assigned white race and 0.164 for other skaters. A sensitivity analysis looking at subjective penalties only found similar results. Our analysis found no evidence of racial or skintone bias in roller derby penalties. Limitations include a sample with a low percentage of non-white skaters and non-standardized photos and facial expressions. It also does not adjust for position or investigate the impact of officials' race. Our findings will inform the WFTDA Anti-Racism Task Force's efforts to ensure unbiased officiating and encourage further diversity.

Advised by Dr. Zachary Binney, Oxford College of Emory University

Background & Motivation

Position	Helmet cover	Responsibility
Jammers	Star	point scorer for a team
Blocker	None	positional skaters who form the Pack, up to 4 per jam per team



- Bout**- what a derby game is called
 - Jams** - basic unit of play for the game; can last up to 2 mins
- basic 3 categories of penalties in roller derby:
 - Getting out of position
 - Insubordination
 - Hitting Illegally

RELATED RESEARCH

- Research on high-level int'l soccer and the NBA found racial bias in penalty rates called on darker-skinned players and referees having own-race bias.
- Our study's procedure is a modified version of a similar [study by Drs. Foy and Ray](#) on Men's NCAA Basketball announcers, which was also assessing colorism and racism in a sport.

Methodology

Objective: determine whether there is evidence of racial or skin color bias in women's roller derby.

EXPOSURES

Population: 655 roller derby skaters with headshots from WFTDA Int'l playoffs and championships played between 2017-2019.

1) Skin color (PERLA Color Palette)

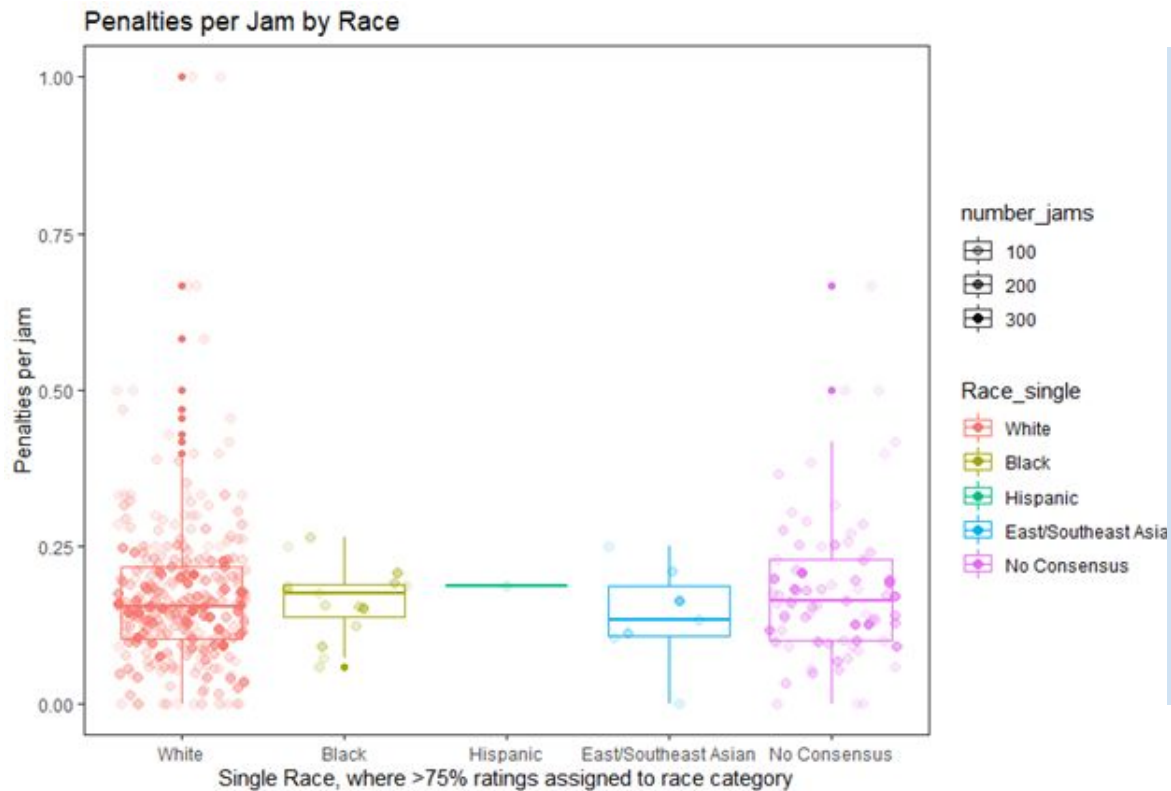


Figure 8. PERLA Color Palette Princeton (2021)

2) **“Socially-assigned race”:** skaters were assigned to 1 or more racial categories by external rater. Used **new Census categories**, modified to **separate East and Southeast Asian from South Asian**.

White
Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin
Black or African-American
South Asian or Asian Indian
East or Southeast Asian
American Indian or Alaska Native
Middle Eastern or North African
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
Other

Results & Discussion



PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS:

No **association** between overall penalty rates and external racial classification or skin tone.

Sensitivity analysis looking only at **subjective penalties** found no difference either

- **Subjective penalties:** can be affected by prejudice as they are up to the referee's discretion. No "booth" review for referees to replay a jam.