

Female basketball players face disproportionate racial bias: New study

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New research has uncovered a recurring pattern of referee bias in women's college basketball.

The Howard Journal of Communications study reveals that, during the ten seasons from 2008 to 2017, referees called a disproportionate number of personal fouls against female basketball players from historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) compared to female basketball players from predominantly white institutions (PWIs).

The findings add to mounting evidence that racial discrimination remains an issue in sport today. In recent years, several high-profile examples have been reported in professional leagues nationwide, including the National Football League (NFL) and the National Hockey League (NHL).

To shed light on whether referee bias exists in women's [college](#) basketball, study author Dr. Andrew Dix examined publicly-accessible data from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) website. All 333 teams that played every season in Division 1 from 2008 to 2017 were included in the analysis: 23 women's college basketball teams classified as HBCUs, and 310 teams classified as PWIs.

Dr. Dix tabulated the total number of personal fouls per game (PFPG) that referees called against each individual team, and calculated the ten-year average for every team.

The five most penalized teams over these ten seasons were HBCUs. Overall, eight out of the 15 most penalized teams were from HBCUs, despite representing less than 7% of the universities analyzed. On average, teams from HBCUs were called for an additional 1.5 personal fouls per game than teams from PWIs.

Comparatively, referees called significantly fewer personal fouls against female basketball players from PWIs than those from HBCUs, indicating a recurring pattern of referee bias.

This significant new research suggests that elements of racism are still embedded in various parts of the American cultural fabric, and underlines how racial inequality can permeate amateur-, as well as professional-level, sport.

Dr. Dix commented: "This research reveals evidence of flawed officiating, and exposes a hidden socio-cultural issue in which female basketball players from historically black colleges and universities are at a competitive disadvantage when they step onto the court.

"It is imperative to provide a voice for the current and former female basketball players from historically black colleges and universities who have been subjected to this form of racial inequality in women's college [basketball](#). Creating awareness and fostering a dialogue on this iteration of referee bias is an important step towards facilitating meaningful change in the officiating of women's [college basketball](#)."

More information: Andrew Dix, "And 1" More Piece of Evidence of Discrimination Black Basketball Players, *Howard Journal of Communications* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/10646175.2018.1491434](https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2018.1491434)

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