

**\*\*An analysis of race and female fandom within English football\*\***

**Article.** Leslie-Walker, A., Taylor, K & Jones Russell, E. (2024). 'Inclusivity for who?': An analysis of 'race' and female fandom at the 2022 UEFA European Women's Championships. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 59, 459-475

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**Aim.** The study explores how welcoming and inclusive the world of football is for women of color and people from minoritized ethnic backgrounds, both as fans and potential players. The researchers aimed to understand what changes are needed to make the sport more accessible and representative for everyone.

**Method.** The researchers conducted a survey amongst 51 respondents, mainly women of a racialized background, followed by three focus groups. Respondents attended the 2022 Women's Euros, and were asked about their experiences. In addition, existing research on race, ethnicity, gender, and fandom in football has been reviewed to identify key themes and gaps in understanding.

**Key findings.** The study points to a significant need for greater inclusion in football. While the rising popularity of the women's game is encouraging, women of color often feel they need to mentally prepare for potential racism or judgement when attending matches, and may be hesitant to fully express their support. A key theme was the importance of representation – seeing people who look like them, both in the stands and on the pitch. The presence of diverse players on teams was particularly inspiring. This isn't just about fairness; it's about the future of the sport. When fans from minoritized ethnic backgrounds feel a sense of belonging, they're more likely to engage with the game, support teams, and encourage their children to participate. This means a wider audience, more talent, and a stronger, more vibrant football community. The research highlights that simply increasing the number of minority players isn't enough. Efforts are needed to address systemic barriers to participation, promote role models in all areas of the game (players, coaches, administrators), and ensure cultural sensitivity in all football-related activities. Understanding the unique experiences of different groups, like Black women and British Asian fans, is also crucial.

**Limitations.** The study focusing on the Women's Euros was based on a relatively small group of participants, so their experiences may not reflect everyone who attended. Still, a strong case is made for the need for continued and focused efforts to make football truly inclusive.