

**\*\*Understanding diversity, inclusion and (implicit) racism in Dutch sports reporting\*\***

**Article.** Van Sterkenburg, J., De Heer, M. & Mashigo, P. (2021). Sport media professionals reflect on racial stereotypes and ethnic diversity in the organization. Corporate Communications. An International Journal, 26, 5, 31-46.

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**Aim.** This research investigates how people working in Dutch sports media think about diversity, ethnicity, and racial stereotypes in their work. The goal was to understand whether professionals in the field believe these issues impact how sports are reported in the Netherlands.

**Methods.** Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with ten individuals working in various roles at Dutch sports media organizations – including journalists and editors. They then analyzed these interviews to identify common themes and patterns in how these professionals discussed diversity and the potential for racial bias.

**Key findings.** The study revealed a striking contradiction. While most professionals acknowledged a lack of diversity within their workplaces, they often downplayed its importance. A common belief was that their reporting was objective and ‘colorblind,’ meaning they didn’t consider race to be a relevant factor. In fact, many dismissed evidence suggesting racial biases might exist in sports media coverage. This ‘colorblind’ approach appears to be linked to the fact that the Dutch sports media industry is overwhelmingly dominated by White men in positions of power.

Interestingly, journalists from minoritized ethnic backgrounds were more likely to recognize the need to address racial stereotypes and increase diversity, but their perspectives were often overlooked or marginalized. The fast-paced nature of sports journalism was also cited as a barrier to deeper reflection on these complex issues, with those working on longer-form pieces having more opportunity to consider them. The research suggests that a lack of awareness about unconscious bias, combined with a strong emphasis on ‘objectivity,’ may contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes in sports reporting, even unintentionally. This matters because how sports are reported can shape public perceptions of athletes and communities, and a lack of diverse perspectives can reinforce existing inequalities.

**Limitations.** The study was based on interviews, focusing on professionals’ beliefs about race and diversity, rather than directly analyzing their actual reporting. Additionally, the study involved a relatively small sample size of only ten interviewees, all of whom were male, meaning the findings may not fully represent the views of everyone working in Dutch sports media.