

## **\*\*Football video gaming and race\*\***

**Article.** Campbell, P.I. & Maloney, M. (2022). “White digital footballers can’t jump”: (re)constructions of race In FIFA20. *Soccer & Society*, 15, 23, 894-908.

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**Aims.** The popular football (soccer) video game FIFA 20 (currently titled ‘EA Sports FC’), despite aiming for realism, may unintentionally reinforce harmful racial stereotypes about athletic ability. The researchers investigated how players in the game are represented, looking at their individual skills and attributes. They categorized players as “White” or “Black” based on their real-life counterparts and compared their in-game performance as this is reflected in the in-game statistics for the various in-game players.

**Key findings.** Drawing on the quantitative datasets of EA’s *FIFA 20* top 100 players and their qualitative descriptors, the researchers found patterns suggesting racial bias. Black players were generally rated higher in physical skills like speed, strength, jumping, agility, and tackling, while White players excelled in technical skills like passing, shooting, and ball control. Importantly, the way the game ‘describes’ these skills also subtly reinforced stereotypes – for example, framing Black players as naturally athletic and White players as more intelligent or skillful. One striking finding was the significantly lower “jumping” ability assigned to White players. This matters because FIFA 20 is played by millions worldwide, and these in-game representations can help influence how players of the game perceive athletes in the real world. By repeatedly experiencing these differences, players may subconsciously internalize and reinforce the idea that certain races are naturally better at certain sports, perpetuating harmful and inaccurate beliefs. The game’s underlying data and coding, even without intentional bias, can contribute to these stereotypes.

**Limitations.** Using broad racial categories like “White” and “Black” doesn’t capture the full diversity of human ability. The study also focused specifically on ‘FIFA 20’, and the findings may not apply to all video games or football video games. Furthermore, analyzing numerical data alone can’t fully explain the nuances of how players of ‘FIFA’ experience and interpret these representations within the game. However, this research serves as a crucial reminder that even virtual worlds aren’t neutral and that we need to critically examine how games shape our understanding of race and athleticism.