

Racial Presentations Among Players of NBA2K19

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The basketball court has traditionally proven to be a safe space for African American individuals who were usually excluded from other public areas. Basketball was seen as a way to increase status within the community, and was thought of as an opportunity to go to college or travel across the world. As of 2018, over 74% of the players in the NBA occupy a minority status, according to the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports (TIDES). Cultural segregation is pervasive across the sports industry, and is usually fueled by access to certain sports or socio-economic status. We can see this through the racial makeup of sports such as baseball, which is played by predominantly White athletes, or basketball and track and field sports, which are predominantly played by minorities. This research aims to explore how patterns of racial representation in sports is reflected in the virtual sports environment of multiplayer online gaming, specifically looking at NBA2K19. Drawing on nonparticipant observations as well as existing data on NBA2K19 players posted on Reddit, as well as US Census data and NBA player demographics, findings indicate the replication of racial stereotypes in the selection of gaming avatars. While gaming provides an opportunity for fantasy expression through the creation of dissimilar avatars, it also draws attention to the ways players may unknowingly participate in a form of “identity tourism”.