

# Punishing the Foreigner: Implicit Discrimination in the Premier League based on Oppositional Identity

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Edoardo Gallo (University Lecturer at the University of Cambridge), Thomas Grund (Postdoc at ETH Zurich) and James Reade (Lecturer at the University of Birmingham) are coauthors of the article "[Punishing the Foreigner: Implicit Discrimination in the Premier League based on Oppositional Identity. \(/Documents/college-social-sciences/business/economics/2012-discussion-papers/12-02.pdf\)](#)"



The authors analyse referees' decisions in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 English football's Premier League seasons using an extensive in-match dataset collected by OPTA Sportsdata. They show that referees are more likely to award yellow cards to players of "oppositional identity": players who are foreign and belong to ethnic groups which are minority ethnic groups in the UK. The detailed data allows the researchers to show that these players do not play in a more aggressive fashion than other players, but they are more likely to be discriminated against by referees.



The most novel component of the research is an investigation of the mechanism that leads to the observed discrimination. The authors show that the level of discrimination increases the more rushed the referee is in taking a decision: the discriminatory behaviour only emerges if the referee is rushed because the players are trying to put the ball back in play quickly. They also show that the level of discrimination increases in the level of ambiguity of the decision: the discriminatory behaviour appears only in situations when there is more room for debate on whether a certain action deserves a punishment. These patterns point to the presence of what psychologists dub "implicit discrimination": the unconscious mental association between members of a social group and a negative attribute.

The referees are unaware that they are discriminating against this group of players and hence cannot be held liable for their actions.

[Read the full discussion paper \(/Documents/college-social-sciences/business/economics/2012-discussion-papers/12-02.pdf\)](#)