

Uneven Bars? Looking for Environmental Microaggression Effects in NCAA Women's Gymnastics*

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Abstract

We study whether environmental microaggressions, a type of racial microaggression, affect the performances of NCAA Division I women gymnasts of color when competing at any given university hosting women's gymnastics meets between 2015–2024. NCAA gymnastics meets provide an excellent setting to test for such an effect because scores are assigned individually but meets are hosted and attended by entire teams. We hypothesize that environmental microaggression effects would manifest as institution-specific racial gaps in scoring and employ a difference-in-differences model that quantifies such gaps, controlling for ability-, preparation-, and event-level factors that also contribute to scores. Across two specifications – first, comparing Black gymnasts to White gymnasts, and second, comparing White gymnasts to all other gymnasts – we find no convincing evidence that gymnasts' scores are affected by an environmental microaggression effect.

Keywords: women's gymnastics, college sports, racial microaggression theory

JEL Codes: J15, Z2, Z20

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