The effects of racial categorization activation: an investigation in soccer academies

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The aim of this research is to test the effect of racial categorization activation on the sport satisfaction of newcomers’ trainees of soccer academies. One hundred and four participants from four French soccer academies were enrolled - two with an unbalanced racial group composition and two with a balanced composition. Results show that in soccer academies with a balanced racial composition, the sports satisfaction of the black trainees remains relatively stable over time and it decreases among the white students, whereas the evolution of the scores for blacks and whites does not differ significantly in the unbalanced racial composition. The impact of the effects of racial categorization on the sport satisfaction of black and white trainees of soccer academies is discussed.

Keywords: soccer academy, soccer satisfaction, racial categorization, racial composition.

Introduction

In the European soccer context, each professional soccer club has to manage a youth academy for players likely to evolve to the highest national level. These soccer academies recruit players between 14 and 16 years of age and offer them soccer education for three to four years. In this context, the satisfaction of the young athletes can be an element of success which should be taken into account. Athlete satisfaction has been defined as a “positive affective state resulting from a complex evaluation of the structures, processes and outcomes associated with the athletic experience” (Chelladurai & Riemer, 1997, p. 135). Dispositional factors, such as soccer self-determination and Conscientiousness, seem to have an effect on soccer satisfaction (Laurin & Nicolas, 2009). Nevertheless, situational factors...
must also be taken into account. This study proposes considering the racially mixed social context which is one of the specificities of French soccer academies.

According to the social categorization theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987), individuals will tend to perceive themselves and others as members of given social categories insofar as it is adequate and useful regarding the characteristics of the situation and the person’s goals and motives in that situation. The most appropriate categories are those which maximize the differences between members of different categories and minimize the differences between members of the same category (Oakes et al., 1994). Among human categorizations, skin color, like age and sex, is one of the most directly accessible criteria and therefore leads to resistant stereotypes.

Racial stereotypes about athletes, particularly about black and white athletes, represent the beliefs which are generated to explain the perceived relationship between race and performance in sports. Considerable theorizing about black superiority in sports can be found in the mass media by sportswriters (e.g., Kane, 1971; Price, 1997), contemporary authors (e.g., Entine, 2000; Hoberman, 1997; Schermer, 2000), and by filmmakers, such as in the movie “White Men Can’t Jump”. In the domain of sports, Devine and Baker (1991) found that the attributes assigned to the social category of “black athlete” included “unintelligent” and “ostentatious”. Biernat and Manis (1994) and Krueger (1996) reported that black men were perceived by both black and white participants as being more “athletic” than white men.

Moreover, the positive black stereotype can be integrated by whites via the metastereotype and also strengthens the belief of an athletic superiority of blacks (Vorauer, Main, & O’Connell, 1998). According to Siegelman and Welsh (1993) and Tuch, Siegelman and Martin (1997), these beliefs will be all the more active since the contacts between both groups are permanent. Nevertheless, the salience of a superordinate category should reduce the effect (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Gonzalez & Brown, 2003). Indeed, in a school context, it is argued that in a racially mixed environment, a child is more protected from negative stereotypes (see Fishbein, 1996, for reviews), since the superordinate category “pupil” can be mobilized. We should observe the same effects in the context of soccer academies where the superordinate categories “trainee” or “soccer player” can be mobilized.

However, the reality seems to be more complex and a racially balanced environment could also emphasize the racial stereotype. Studies on the influence of the numerical composition of a group on gender category salience have shown that the overall use of gender categorization activation (male/female)
was higher when the distribution of men and women in the groups was equal than when it was unequal (Abrams, Thomas, & Hogg, 1990; Randel, 2002; Van Twuyver & Van Knippenberg, 1999). All things being equal, category salience and hence category-based processing, like stereotypes, seem to be maximal if category membership divides the group into two subgroups of equal size (Oakes & Turner, 1986, p. 330). Conversely, category salience should decrease as the group composition becomes more unbalanced.

Some French soccer academies have a balanced composition of black and white trainees, thereby reinforcing the perception of “color” as a possible basis for categorization. On the contrary, others academies adopt an unbalanced composition, toning down the vividness of color. While a white/black balanced composition should favor racial categorization activation, the stereotypes linked to color should be less activated among participants in academies with an unbalanced white/black composition. The soccer satisfaction of the trainees would regularly decrease over time (Laurin & Nicolas, 2009) and the permanent contacts between both groups would facilitate the activation of the stereotype (Siegelman & Welsch, 1993; Tuch, Siegelman, & Martin, 1997). It was also hypothesized that soccer satisfaction would decrease between the beginning and the end of the academic year significantly more among white trainees than blacks trainees in a balanced racial composition but not in an unbalanced racial composition.

**Methods**

**Participants.** One hundred and four French soccer academy trainees were enrolled in this study. All participants were male. The average age was 16.8 at the beginning of the study (SD = 0.8). The participants attended different French academies. All were newcomers and consented to participate until the end of the study. Forty-three were black and 61 were white. Out of the 43 black participants, twelve were of West Indian origin and 31 of African origin.

Numerous soccer academies were contacted. Four soccer academies were selected on the basis of their racial group composition. Two academies had a balanced black/white composition, academy A (12 blacks and 13 whites) and B (14 blacks and 13 whites), and two academies had an unbalanced racial composition, academy C (9 blacks and 18 whites) and D (8 blacks and 17 whites).

**Measures and procedure.** The Soccer Trainee Adjustment Scale (Laurin, Nicolas, Labruère-Chazal, & Lacassagne, 2008) was used to measure the soccer satisfaction of the trainees. The STAS is a 13-item measure of satisfaction with five sub-scales: peer, supervisor, soccer, school and administration satisfaction. Participants were asked to rate propositions from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to
5 ("strongly agree"). The 3 items of the soccer satisfaction sub-scale ("I am satisfied with the interest the coaches show in the trainees.", "I am satisfied with the training offered at this academy.", "My relationships with the others team members are satisfactory.") were used. Internal consistencies of the two measures were .77 and .78 respectively.

The first measure of soccer satisfaction (Time 1) was carried out 3 weeks after the trainees’ arrival at the academy, and another measure was repeated in May (Time 2) between one and two weeks before the selection decision was made. The measures were carried out in groups at the trainees’ academy and always in the same room.

The levels of soccer ability could explain the variability of the scores of soccer satisfaction between blacks and whites. In addition, four months after the first measure of satisfaction, the coaches of each group of trainees were invited to appraise the soccer performance of each trainee. A meeting was organized with all the coaches to verify that the same behaviors were being evaluated. They focused on technical, tactical, physical and mental abilities. They agreed on the behaviors to evaluate in each area. Finally, they had to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale the level of the trainee’s abilities in each area. The mean score of the four areas was calculated to obtain a soccer performance score. No significant differences were found between the performance of white and black trainees in the academies (Academy A, M White = 3.82 and M Black = 3.93, F (1, 24) =1.12, ns; Academy B, M White = 3.75 and M Black = 3.68, F (1, 26) =1.02, ns; Academy C, M White = 3.91 and M Black = 3.85, F (1, 26) =0.95, ns; Academy D, M White = 3.59 and M Black = 3.65, F (1, 24) =1.11, ns).

Results

The means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1. Before testing our hypothesis, preliminary analyses were performed to test for soccer satisfaction differences in Time 1 between the unbalanced and balanced conditions. The results showed a significant difference between black trainees in the unbalanced condition (M= 4.37) versus the balanced condition (M= 3.48), F (1, 42) = 8.32, p < .001 and between white trainees in the unbalanced condition (M= 4.42) versus the balanced condition (M= 3.91), F (1, 42) = 4.07, p < .01), and confirm the importance of taking into account a baseline measure of soccer satisfaction.

In order to test our hypothesis, a 2 x 2 x 2 (race x group composition x time) ANOVA was performed on soccer satisfaction scores. The analyses revealed a significant three-way interaction effect, F (1, 200) = 4.02, p < .05. In order to interpret the nature of this effect, the unbalanced and balanced group
compositions were analyzed independently as suggested by Keppel (1991), and a 2 x 2 (Race x Time) ANOVA was performed on each sub-group. The results showed a Race - Time interaction effect in the balanced racial composition. The soccer satisfaction of the black trainees remains relatively stable over time (M Time 1 = 3.48 and M Time 2 = 3.41) and it decreases among the white trainees (M Time 1 = 3.91 and M Time 2 = 3.46), F (1, 100) = 3.99, p < .05. However, no interaction effect was found in the unbalanced racial composition, F (1, 100) = 1.85, ns. The evolution of the scores for blacks (M Time 1 = 4.37 and M Time 2 = 4.02) and whites (M Time 1 = 4.42 and M Time 2 = 3.94) does not differ significantly. This three-way interaction effect is shown in figure 1.

Discussion

This study aimed to test the effect of racial categorization activation on the soccer satisfaction of white newcomer trainees. It was hypothesized that soccer satisfaction would decrease more strongly over time among white trainees than black trainees in the balanced racial composition but not in the unbalanced racial composition. The results of this study support our hypothesis. As suggested by previous research on gender category (Abrams, Thomas, & Hogg, 1990; Randel, 2002; Van Twuyver & Van Knippenberg, 1999), it seems that the racial group composition in soccer academies affects racial category salience and hence category-based processing, such as the stereotype of black superiority in sports. The soccer satisfaction of the white trainees in the balanced group composition, as in the unbalanced group composition, decreased between the beginning and the end of the year, while it remained stable among black trainees in the balanced group composition. Moreover, it seems that the relational proximity between white and black trainees only enhanced the racial stereotype activation in the balanced condition, that is, when the other categories which are objectively present in the environment cannot be mobilized. Crossed categorization is no longer possible. As suggested by Crisp, Ensari, Hewstone and Miller (2002), since color is a primary category, it seems to limit the salience of the others.

In spite of the methodological precautions, all the criteria of the experiment in social psychology were not respected, thereby limiting the control of the results. However, this research highlights the interest of working on intergroup relations to better understand the difficulties encountered by young athletes in adapting to sports organizations, and opens perspectives of application for sport psychologists in the areas of prevention and training. As suggested by Hogg’s studies on the relation between cohesion and categorization (Hogg & Hardie, 1992; Hogg, Hardie & Reynolds, 1995), it seems that working on team cohesiveness could facilitate the super categorization mechanism and prevent the negative effects of racial stereotype activation.
References


Racial Categorization and Sport Satisfaction


Table 1. Means and standard deviations of trainee sport and scholastic satisfaction

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<th>Time</th>
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<td>Black U.C.</td>
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<td>4.37</td>
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<td>3.91</td>
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<td>White U.C.</td>
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Note: B.C. = Balanced composition; U.C. = Unbalanced composition
Figure 1. Race by group composition by time interaction effect on soccer satisfaction of black and white trainees of soccer academies.