Can sport contribute to the promotion of social integration in contemporary multicultural societies?*

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INTRODUCTION

Ethnic and cultural identity has been identified as an important determinant of social integration in multicultural societies (Ting-Toomey *et al.*, 2000). The purpose of this study was to examine whether sport participation has a social role in shaping ethnic and cultural identity in young adults across Europe. In addition, it was tested whether ethnic and cultural identity of young adults participating in sport was related to perceptions of favouritism from the coach. Following Ting-Toomey *et al.*'s (2000) framework, ethnic identity was conceptualized as the degree to which individuals hold their ethnicity to be of importance, including the dimensions of ethnic belonging and fringe, whereas cultural identity was conceptualized as the degree to which individuals hold the larger culture to be of importance, including the dimensions of assimilation and lack of interaction.

METHOD

Young adults (n=1441; mean age 15.50 ±1.74) from 5 European countries (Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, and UK) participated in this study. Among them, 661 children were active sport club members, whereas 772 children were not.

Participants completed the Ethnic-Cultural Identity Questionnaire as adapted by Kouli and Papaioannou (2009). The instrument comprises 24 items assessing two dimensions of Ethnic Identity (Ethnic Belonging and Fringe) and two dimensions of Cultural Identity (Assimilation and Lack of Interaction). In particular, ethnic belonging reflects the degree to which individuals feel attached to their own ethnic group (5 items; e.g. *I like to keep the traditions of my ethnic heritage*); fringe refers to the degree of confusion individuals have for their own ethnicity (6 items; e.g. *I often feel bad that I belong to this ethnic group*); assimilation refers to the degree to which individuals identify themselves with the overall dominant culture (6 items; e.g. *It is important for me to be accepted by the general culture*); finally lack of interaction refers to tendencies of individual to avoid communication with members of other groups with different background (7 items; e.g. *I avoid becoming friends with people from other ethnic groups*).

In addition, participants completed a questionnaire assessing their perceptions of favouritism from the coach for children from either the dominant or the non-dominant background (Kouli, 2004). The questionnaire comprises 17 items assessing perception of favouritism for athletes from the non-dominant background (6 items; e.g., *…athletes/players enjoy more benefits*), perception of favouritism for athletes from the dominant background (6 items; e.g., *… athletes/players receive more attention*), and perceptions of equal treatment (5 items; e.g., *All athletes/players receive equal attention*).

Responses in both questionnaires were given on a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

RESULTS

One-way MANOVA showed no differences in ethnic and cultural identity dimensions between children participating in sport and those who did not, F (4, 1398) = 1.85, p = .12. In particular, for ethnic belonging, F (1, 1394) = .01, p = .93; for fringe, F (1, 1394) = .14, p = .71; for assimilation, F (1, 1394) = 1.71, p = .19; and for lack of interaction, F (1, 1394) = 3.10, p = .08. Mean scores for all variables are presented in Table 1.

Correlations showed that perceptions of favouritism for children from either the dominant or non-dominant background were positively related to lack of interaction and feelings of fringe, whereas perceptions of equal treatment were negatively related to lack of interaction and feelings of fringe. Furthermore, perceptions of favouritism for native children was positively related to ethnic belonging, whereas perceptions of equal treatment was positively related to tendencies for assimilation. The correlations are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Non-athletes		Athletes		Total	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Ethnic belonging	2.89	.91	2.88	.90	2.88	.90
Lack of interaction	1.85	.78	1.92	.82	1.88	.80
Feelings of fringe	1.78	.75	1.77	.67	1.77	.71
Assimilation	3.03	.90	3.09	.89	3.06	.89

Table 2. Correlations

	Favouritism for native athletes	Favouritism for non-native athletes	Equal treatment
Ethnic belonging	.14 **	.09 *	-.02
Lack of interaction	.29 **	.22 **	-.21 **
Feelings of fringe	.27 **	.25 **	-.15 **
Assimilation	.10 *	.05	.13*

CONCLUSION

This study examined differences in ethnic and cultural identity between children participating in sport and children who do not. Preliminary findings suggest that, even though no differences in ethnic and cultural identity emerged between children who participate in sport and those who do not, there may be factors in the sport environment, such as coaching behaviour, that influence children's ethnic and cultural identity. In the stages to follow, such factors will be explored. In particular, the role of cohesion, motivational climate, autonomy support and controlling coaching behaviour will be examined in connection with social integration and their relation to young athletes' ethnic and cultural identities.

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