

Appendix: Background on our Survey Experiment

This section provides some background on the substantive research question that originally motivated our survey experiment. We provide this information for interested readers, but it is *not* central to understanding the points we make in the main text of the article.

Broadly, we were interested in how members of the racial majority—in our case, “white British” in the UK—categorize racial minorities and individuals with a migration background. Would chosen social categories highlight ethnic and racial differences or a shared English nationality?

When we first started discussing these ideas, the German national team had just been unceremoniously eliminated from the Group Stage of the 2018 World Cup. Midfielder Mesut Özil, a third-generation Turkish-German, became one of the scapegoats for the loss, with public criticisms going beyond his on-pitch performance to also call into question his “German-ness” (Van Campenhout & van Houtum, 2021). In response to the controversy, Özil resigned from the German national team citing his experiences with racism. In a poignant statement highlighting the *conditional nature* of his acceptance within Germany, Özil wrote, “I am German when we win, but I am an immigrant when we lose.” A strikingly similar pattern occurred two years later when England lost the Euro 2020 final at penalty kicks, and the three players who missed the penalties faced an outburst of racial abuse. Similar episodes dating back to the 1990s are recurrent in other countries and have not spared players of the caliber of Karim Benzema, Romelu Lukaku, and Kylian Mbappé.

Against this backdrop, it seemed to us that *sport* provided an ideal context to explore our interest in social categorization. For one, whereas the topic of someone’s citizenship rarely comes up in everyday interactions, international athletic competition represents a prominent domain where an individual’s nationality is clearly on display. Secondly, racial and ethnic criteria are often invoked to question the national allegiance of players with a migration background, thereby underscoring an interesting tension between shared nationality and ethno-racial difference. Finally, as highlighted by Özil’s statement, we had a potential mechanism—measurable athletic performance—that might causally influence whether racial and ethnic minorities are embraced as “full members” of the nation.¹⁰

Theoretically, we can derive hypotheses from Cialdini et al. (1976)’s theory of “basking in reflected glory” or BIRGing.¹¹ The key idea is that individuals will wish to associated themselves with successful others—for example, by redefining social categories to group themselves with the successful. A related idea termed “cutting off reflected failure (CORFing)” holds that individuals will also distance themselves from the unsuccessful (Snyder et al., 1986). Applied to our context, we hypothesized that the under-performance of minority athletes would activate CORFing and lead to so-

cial categorizations highlighting racial and ethnic differences rather than shared nationality.

With these ideas in mind, we conducted a survey experiment with an online-panel involving approximately 3000 white English respondents during the 2022 World Cup. We employed a between-subjects design, where subjects were randomly assigned to four video treatments, which we describe in the main text of the article. The survey instrument itself comprised the following parts:

- Consent to take part in the study “Sport and Cognition”
- Collection of demographic information such as gender, age, country of birth, ethnic self-classification, educational attainment, and postcode. This information was used to screen-out individuals who (i) were born outside England, (ii) resided outside of England, and (iii) did not self-identify as “white.”
- Questions about the strength of English identity and party identity
- Questions about how much the respondent follows football
- The video treatment
- The manipulation check
- The triad task, which we describe below, and
- A short debrief where respondents could leave feedback about the survey

The survey was programmed by Dynata and administered to their online panel. Any screenouts for response quality were handled by Dynata. We simply received the final dataset after the completion of fieldwork.

To capture the choice between racial and national categorizations, we adapted the “triad task” from social psychology (Chao et al., 2013). Although not the focus of this paper, we describe the task here in case researchers are interested in adapting this method to their own work.

Respondents were shown images of three athletes from different sports—none of them football—and asked to select two out of the three pictures that best belong together. For instance, both individuals in the center and left panels of Fig. 4 are wearing England jerseys, while both in the center and right panels are non-white. This setup allows respondents to choose either a racially-based or a nationality-based classification. In total, we administered five different triad tasks to each respondent, always with two pictures displaying England jerseys, and two pictures displaying racial minorities.

Here, we simply give a flavor of how respondents reacted to this task. A full analysis of the outcome data is reserved for future work. In all, a nationality-based classification was chosen in about 60% of cases, while a racially-based classification was chosen in 30% of cases. In the remaining 10% of

¹⁰For related work showing that athletic performance can reduce prejudice, see Alrababa’h et al. (2021).

¹¹Interestingly enough, BIRGing was first developed in the context of *American* college football.



Figure 4

Example of an experimental outcome measurement. Participants are asked to select two out of the three images that best belong together. Both individuals in left and center panels are wearing England jerseys, while both in the center and right panels are non-white.

cases, respondents grouped together the white English athlete with the non-white non-English athlete. We also find that UKIP supporters are more likely to use racial classifications, and less likely to use national ones. We interpret this as supporting the conceptual validity of our measure. Finally, as respondents proceeded through the five classification tasks, racial classifications were increasingly displaced by national classifications. We interpret this pattern to indicate that racial classifications represent an initial “gut reaction” to differences in skin color.