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INTRODUCTION

Sport participation, and in particular organized sports, is an important socializing agent because of the large number of participants that are attracted (Bailey, 2005). As such, sports may be a viable vehicle for smoothing social and cultural barriers because they bring together individuals from different backgrounds. Given the multicultural character of contemporary societies, sport may have a significant integrative role for the promotion of social and cultural interaction. Nevertheless, sport participation is not by itself an effective means towards the goal of social integration. Sport can also be a source reinforcing existing differences, as individuals may seek not to socialize with 'other group' members, finding shelter in groups of similar ethnic/cultural background, and strengthening their identity (Krouwel, Boonstra, Duyvendak, & Veldboer, 2006). Despite its intuitive appeal the integrative potential of sport has remained unexplored.

Ting-Toomey *et al.* (2000) identified ethnic and cultural identity as important determinants of social integration. Ethnic identity salience reflects the degree to which individuals hold their ethnicity to be of importance, whereas cultural identity salience reflects the degree to which individuals hold the larger culture to be of importance. Depending on ethnic and cultural identity salience, individuals may evaluate their group or the culture they live in positively or negatively, and may be more or less involved in ethnic or cultural practices.

The present report is part of a larger project across five European countries, aiming to identify sport factors that may help enhancing integration in multicultural societies. The purpose of this study is to present preliminary results regarding young athletes' ethnic and cultural identity in relation to demographic characteristics.

METHOD

Participants. Children participating in organized sport ($n=626$; 330 males and 296 females) from 5 European countries (Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, and UK) took part at this stage of the project (mean age 15.31 \pm 1.74). Approximately 90% of participants were identified as belonging to the dominant culture and 10% to the non-dominant culture.

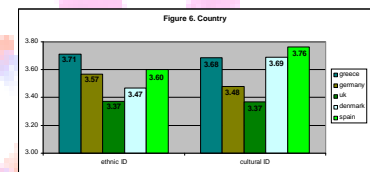
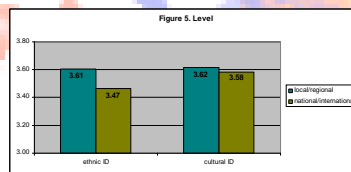
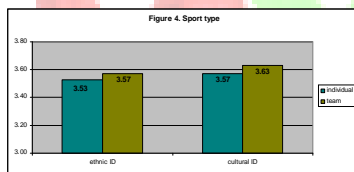
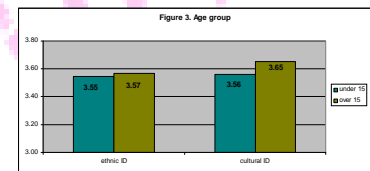
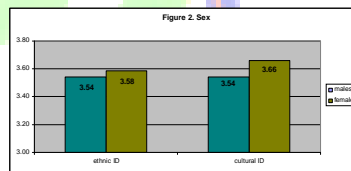
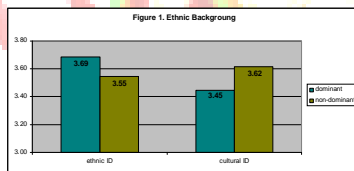
Measures. Participants completed the Ethnic Cultural Identity Questionnaire as adapted by Kouli and Papaioannou (2009), which assesses two dimensions of Ethnic Identity (Ethnic Belonging and Fringe) and two dimensions of Cultural Identity (Assimilation and Lack of Interaction). With regard to ethnic identity, ethnic belonging (5 items, e.g. In general, belonging to my ethnic group is an important part of my self-image) reflects the degree to which members feel attached and comfortable with their own ethnic group, whereas fringe (6 items, e.g. I often feel confused about which ethnic group I should identify myself with) refers to the degree of confusion individuals have concerning their own ethnicity. With regard to cultural identity, assimilation (6 items, e.g. It is important to me to identify closely with the overall culture) refers to the degree to which individuals identify with the overall dominant culture, whereas lack of interaction (7 items, e.g. I avoid to become friends with people from other ethnic groups) refers to tendencies of individual to avoid communication with members of groups with different ethnic or cultural background. Responses were given on a 5-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The four dimensions showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's alphas ranging from .75 to .86).

Analyses. Overall ethnic and cultural identity scores were computed from the respective dimensions and were examined as a function of ethnic background (dominant - non-dominant ethnic background), sex, age, level of competition (local/regional - national/international), sport type (individual - team), and country of origin. To test these differences, analyses of variance were calculated.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for all the groups are presented in Figures 1 to 6. The analyses revealed significant effects of:

- (a) ethnic background on cultural identity, $F(1, 580) = 3.16, p < .05$, and ethnic identity, $F(1, 580) = 3.16, p = .07$, with athletes from the dominant culture scoring higher on cultural identity, and athletes from the non-dominant culture scoring marginally higher on ethnic identity;
- (b) sex on cultural identity $F(1, 598) = 5.05, p < .05$, with females scoring higher than males,
- (c) age on cultural identity $F(1, 606) = 5.09, p < .05$, with athletes older than 15 years scoring higher than younger ones;
- (d) level of competition on ethnic identity, $F(1, 429) = 8.50, p < .05$, with athletes competing at local or regional level scoring higher on than athletes competing at national or international level;
- (e) country on ethnic identity, $F(4, 607) = 5.71, p < .01$, and cultural identity $F(4, 607) = 9.22, p < .01$, with participants from Greece scoring higher on ethnic identity than participants from UK and Denmark; and participants from Greece, Spain, and Denmark, scoring higher on cultural identity than participants from UK and Germany.



CONCLUSION

The results of the present study provide some interesting findings and suggest that demographic differences should be taken into account when programs aiming to promote integration through sport are to be developed. These preliminary findings set the stage for the search of sport factors that can influence and shape athletes' identity for the promotion of multicultural integration. In the stages to follow, ethnic and cultural identity will be examined in relation to motivational and group factors that may have a crucial role in promoting integration. In particular, the role of motivational climate, autonomy support, controlling group environment, coaching behaviour, and group cohesion will be investigated.

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