

Abstract

In the era of globalization, multicultural societies are common-place in most developed countries. Therefore, new challenges at both national and international level have come to the fore, and successful acculturation appears to be the key for maintaining social cohesion and promoting multiculturalism. Sport is considered to be a vehicle for bringing people together, and recently there has been an increasing policy interest in the use of sport as a venue for promoting social integration and intercultural dialogue. Regardless of its political significance, research on the integrative role of sport is limited and findings seem equivocal. Overall the purpose of the present study was to investigate whether participation in organized sport can affect the acculturation process of young adolescents from both minority and majority populations in Greece, and to explore features of the sporting environment that are likely to associate with positive acculturation outcomes. Four separate studies were conducted. The first study is a systematic review that aims to provide a complete and exhaustive summary of the current literature relevant to the integrative role of sport, in order to better understand the acculturation process and to identify factors that may regulate the acculturation process through sport participation. The second study focuses on adolescent migrants and aimed at identifying differences in acculturation attitudes and acculturative stress among young migrants who participate in sports and those who do not. Furthermore, it investigates the role of the coach-created sporting environment in the acculturation process within those participating in sport. The results revealed significant differences regarding the level of acculturative stress with migrant participants engaging in sports scoring lower on acculturative stress than their counterparts that did not. In addition, valuable findings emerged regarding the coach's influence on young migrants' acculturation, where an autonomy supportive coaching style was positively linked to integrative patterns and negatively related to

acculturative stress. Considering that acculturation is a two-way process involving both migrant and host populations, the next two studies were conducted with Greek young adolescents in order to enhance our understanding of the complexity of the acculturation process. In this regard, the purpose of the third study was to explore the acculturation attitudes of Greek adolescents as a function of sport participation, and, for those participating in sport, to investigate the role of the motivational environment. The results showed that athletes scored higher than non-athletes on attitudes towards multicultural contact. Furthermore, an empowering motivational environment characterized by a mastery climate, supportive of the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, was positively linked to attitudes favoring migrants' maintenance of their culture and development of interaction with the host culture, whereas a disempowering motivational environment characterized by a performance climate and controlling coaching behaviour was negatively linked to such attitudes. Based on the results of the third study, the final study aimed to provide a preliminary insight into the socio-moral factors that may explain why an empowering motivational climate is associated with integrative acculturation attitudes among the host population. Towards this direction, empathy and altruism were examined as potential mediators of the relationship between empowering motivational climate and acculturation attitudes. The results revealed that an empowering motivational environment could predict empathy and altruism, which in turn predicted positive acculturation attitudes of the host population towards migrants. Overall, the present dissertation provides valuable evidence regarding the role of sport as an acculturation agent, with particular emphasis on the importance of appropriate motivational environment. This evidence enhances our understanding of how sport can be used as an effective socializing

context and introduces new directions for further investigating acculturation in a diversifying world.