

**ADELAIDE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS'
PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY:
A HUMANISTIC SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY**

By

Vegneskumar Maniam

B. Physical Education (UPM)

M.Ed. (Science & Technology)

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Abstract

The focus of this study is the relationship between secondary school students' sense of cultural identity and their participation in sports. Recent studies by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on the participation of Australian youth in sports and physical activities indicated that 25 per cent of young adolescents aged 12 to 14 years were not involved in sports. This figure rose to 36 per cent for students in one-parent families; to 44 per cent for those from overseas and non-English speaking countries. Other studies found that those of minority cultural background more often played Soccer, Australian Rules Football and Rugby than Cricket, Netball or Hockey. The participation of the larger minority ethnic groups of Australia within the established sports was the focus of a 1997 book, pointed to the need for studies which investigated individuals' personal understanding of their own and mainstream culture and how these factors influenced their involvement in sports.

This study conducted such research with students from year 11 classes in six secondary schools in Adelaide. It adopted the humanistic sociological approach originating with the Polish-American sociologist Florian Znaniecki, and later developed by J J Smolicz for research on cultural pluralism in Australia. The concepts of group cultural values and individual personal cultural values were adopted to investigate individuals' participation in sport and their sense of cultural identity. The method involved collecting information on participants' personal and family background and analysing their written personal statements in response open-ended guideline questions on their views and experiences concerning playing sport, and their sense of cultural identity.

The students played a total of 24 sports, with Soccer being the most popular (32) followed by Australian Rules Football (21) and 14 sports having four or less participants. The reasons given by the 89 students who participated in sport, and their likes and dislikes about playing, indicated that fun and enjoyment, the social side of sport, fitness and health and, less often personal development, were regarded as the most important aspects of sport. The 22 students not playing sport expressed similar views, but focussed more on their dislikes of its physical demands and competitive element. In the students' view, family influence was most often in the form of support and encouragement; only a few reported that they had learned a sport directly from their parents. Friends were also seen as an important dimension of playing sport. In terms of their sense of cultural identity, 47 of the 89 who played sport were classified as Monocultural Mainstream Australians, while another ten identified with a different Monocultural group. The remaining 23 were Bicultural or Polycultural, linking their sense of being Australian to identification with one or more other cultural groups. Among those who did not play sport, nine were Monocultural Mainstream Australians, three identified with another group and four were Bicultural, identifying both with Australia and another group. For particular sports, the breakdown by cultural identity showed substantial variation. In Soccer players of diverse cultural identities were one more in number than those of mainstream Australian identity. By contrast, Netball and Cricket were dominated by players of Mainstream Australian identity. Very few respondents found their sense of cultural identity to be a barrier to sports participation, but its influence was apparent in their choice of sports.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or any other tertiary institution to Vegneskumar Maniam and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, expect where due reference is made in text.

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School of Education
Faculty of the Professions
The University of Adelaide

Date:

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