

## Pro Social and Antisocial Sport Environment and Attitudes towards Refugees' Acculturation among Young Greek Football Players

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### ABSTRACT

Sport, a field that can facilitate intergroup contact under conditions of equal treatment and respect for human rights, seems to offer a fruitful context enhancing positive intercultural contact across culturally diverse individuals and groups. Nevertheless, the role of the sport environment wherein cultural exchange takes place has been identified as an important factor. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between perceived prosocial and antisocial behaviour encouraged by coach and teammates and acculturation attitudes towards refugees in youth sport. Participants were 255 ( $14.47 \pm 1.95$  years of age) Greek football players. Participants' acculturation attitudes and perceived prosocial and antisocial behaviour were assessed through questionnaires. The results revealed that perceived prosocial behavior was positively linked, whereas perceived antisocial behavior was negatively linked, to acculturation attitudes favoring multiculturalism. In addition, coach promoted prosocial behaviour was found to predict significantly positive attitudes towards cultural maintenance and towards cultural interaction, thus highlighting the most influential role of coach in athletes' positive experiences and behaviour. The findings of the present study provide useful insights concerning the perspective of the host population regarding refugees' acculturation and highlight the key role of coach-promoted behavior in acculturation process.

**Keywords:** cultural interaction, cultural maintenance, integration, multiculturalism, team sports

### INTRODUCTION

Global mobility of population is accelerating while the recent refugee wave has posed important social, political, and economic challenges on most of the European countries. Since 2014, Greece has received more than one million migrants and refugees (UNHCR, 2020), and thousands of displaced people, including children and adolescents, are left stranded in Greece, waiting to be either relocated or acculturated in the country (European Commission, 2018). Therefore, cultural heterogeneity has become a structural element of modern Greek society and the ability to live

within a multicultural and often diverse population has become one of the greatest challenges that both incoming and host populations have to deal with. Intercultural interaction allows refugees and hosts to exchange values, beliefs, behaviours and attitudes. Acculturation reflects these cultural and psychological changes which result from intercultural contact and concerns all individuals in contact (Berry, 2006).

According to Berry (1997) groups in contact are dealing with two key issues in the acculturation process; these are based on the distinction between orientations towards one's own group

and towards others. Accordingly, he proposed that there are two dimensions along to which individuals orient themselves, namely cultural maintenance and cultural interaction. *Cultural maintenance* refers to the degree to which individuals or groups wish to maintain their cultural heritage and the degree to which individuals or groups desire to interact with the host culture is known as *cultural interaction*. The prevalence of these orientations determines how people from different groups negotiate their acculturation (Berry, 2005). Relevant studies in the field (e. g. Berry et al., 2006) have suggested that integration, favoring both cultural maintenance and cultural interaction, is the most preferred strategy and provides the best results for the incoming groups' adaptation during acculturation. However, integration is an achievable goal for incoming populations provided that hosts are open-minded and tend to inclusiveness. (Berry, 2005). In such a way, mutual accommodation is required to attain integration, meaning that the hosts have to accept incomings' cultural maintenance and to promote cultural interaction. Subsequently, attitudes favoring multiculturalism will be reflected.

Bourhis, Moise, Perreault and Senecal, (1997) further extended Berry' acculturation model and drew the attention on the significant host society's acting in the acculturation process where hosts' acculturation preferences may influence the respective ones adopted by the incomings (Bourhis, Montreuil, Barrette, & Montreuil, 2009). Bourhis and colleagues (1997) detected the value of the fit among the acculturation preferences of the two populations. The models of acculturation described by Berry et al. (1987) and Bourhis et al. (1997), are both integrally connected to the exploration of the intergroup attitudes of hosts as well as the incoming group (Bourhis et al., 1997; Pionkowski et al., 2000). The models mentioned before intend to investigate the willingness of acceptance and adaptation that both the hosts and the incomings express during their coexistence in multicultural settings (e. g. Maio et al., 1994).

The multicultural environment creates many opportunities for intercultural interactions and sport has been identified as a leisure activity with a huge impact on youth (Ntoumanis et al., 2012). Sport has been referred as a context able to provide intergroup contact within conditions of equal treatment and human rights respect,

offering also a beneficial environment for positive intercultural contact between incoming and host individuals or groups (Whitley et al., 2016). The World Health Organization and the European Commission have recognized the potential role of sport by arguing that all individuals should have access to sport regardless of social, religious, cultural and individual differences, and claim that sport can help promote integration and multiculturalism (White Paper for Sport, European Commission, 2007). However, a comprehensive review in the field of sport and acculturation suggested that the findings in the field are equivocal (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013). In one hand the evidence show that sport can foster comprehension and respectful behaviors of cultural diversity align with overcoming the existing prejudices (Rosenberg et al., 2003); on the other hand, there are cases when sport has been found to highlight cultural differences and increase ethnic controversy (e.g., Krouweel et al., 2006). Hatzigeorgiadis and colleagues (2013), argued that acculturation through sport is not a simple process and identified as an important determinant of positive acculturation outcomes, the environment created by the coach.

### **The Impact of Sporting Environment on Social Behavior**

Coaches can influence athletes' experiences and behaviors (Williams et al., 2003) through the broader sport environment they create in the sport context. Previous studies that examined the role of sport in acculturation process for both hosts and migrants highlighted the importance of sport environment to the quality of provided acculturation experiences. With regards to migrant population, Elbe et al. (2016) stated that in the examining sample of young athletes with migrant backgrounds in Greece, mastery climate that focuses on personal development and values effort (Duda, 2001), was associated to attitudes that favor cultural interaction. Additionally, autonomy supportive coaching style, where coach provides the opportunity for athletes to take initiatives as well as act independently while acknowledges their feelings (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003), was linked to attitudes favoring cultural maintenance. Furthermore, Morela and colleagues (2019) found that an autonomy-supportive coaching style, which creates the appropriate conditions for athletes to experience the sense of choice was negatively associated

with acculturative stress. In contrast, a controlling coaching style that reflects pressuring and authoritarian behaviors of coach, was positively related with acculturative stress.

As mentioned earlier in the manuscript, acculturation is a two-way process that involves both incoming and host populations (Berry, 1997). Recently, research has also examined the role of sport environment for the host population. Morela and her colleagues (2017) supported that the mastery-oriented climate which is also empowering and support the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, had a positive association with multiculturalism attitudes. These attitudes favor both migrants' maintenance of their cultural characteristics and their interaction with the host culture. Attempting to further understand this relationship, Morela and her partners (2020) examined empathy and altruism as a potential mediator of the relationship among an empowering motivational climate and the attitudes that favor multiculturalism in Greek youth athletes. The results declared there is a positive relation among an empowering motivational climate, empathy and altruism and a positive link of those with multicultural attitudes towards migrants.

The recent findings yielded positive associations between an appropriate sport environment created by the coach and adaptive acculturation attitudes, reflecting both cultural maintenance and cultural interaction. Relevant studies in the field (e. g. Ryba et al., 2018) also highlighted the role of teammates, coaches, and supporting staff in promoting desirable acculturation outcomes. It has been discussed that when peers and coaches are developing positive relationships, sport participation could encourage ones' personal growth and in general favorable psychological outcomes (Eime et al., 2013).

### **Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior In Sport**

Sport represents one of the most popular activities for adolescents and youth (Ntoumanis et al., 2012) while offers a fertile ground for social interactions with peers and adults, which could lead to the development of character-building experiences (Bredemeir & Shields, 2006) and the nurturing of moral norms and values (Bruner et al. 2018; Rutten et al., 2011). Shields and Bredemeier, (1995) argued that character is shaped by the influence of a number of factors and social interactions. In

sport environment and through sport, participants have opportunities to be engaged in behaviours that can have either positive consequences for others, such as solidarity and encouragement (Kavussanu, 2012), or negative consequences for others, such as cheating and aggression (Kavussanu & Stanger, 2017).

In sport literature, the terms prosocial and antisocial behaviour have been used to describe respectively proactive and inhibitive morality (Kavussanu et al., 2006; Sage et al., 2006). Prosocial behavior involve voluntary actions intended to help or benefit another individual (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998), such as helping a player off the floor congratulating an opponent. Antisocial behaviour includes voluntary actions intended to harm or disadvantage another individual (Kavussanu et al., 2006; Sage, Kavussanu & Duda, 2006), such as trying to injure an opponent or faking an injury. These behaviours are considered independent from one another and follow unique patterns depending on whether behaviour is directed toward teammates or opponents (Bandura, 1999).

### **Contextual Factors of Prosocial and Antisocial Behavior in Sport**

The importance of the socio-moral environment created by coach and teammates in the moral development of youth athletes has been broadly recognized (e.g., Shields et al., 2007; Rutten et al., 2011). The interpersonal style of the coach (Bartholomew et al., 2010), the emphasized values and coaching behaviors, could have a significant impact on athletes' motivation and behavior. An autonomy-supportive coaching style has been related with prosocial behaviour towards teammates (e. g. Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011), while autonomous motivation has been strongly positively associated with prosocial behaviour towards both teammates and opponents (Sheehy & Hodge, 2015). In contrast, a controlling coaching behaviour has been found to positively predict antisocial behaviour towards both teammates and opponents (Hodge & Gucciardi, 2015), while controlled motivation has also been linked to antisocial behaviour toward teammates and opponents indirectly via moral disengagement (Hodge & Lonsdale, 2011). With regard to the motivational climate created by the coach, there is considerable evidence that mastery motivational climate could predict prosocial behaviour towards teammates (e. g., Broadley & Kavussanu, 2009), whereas a performance-oriented climate has

been found to positively predict antisocial behaviour in both teammates and opponents (e.g., Stanger et al., 2018).

Research has also shown that athletes are engaged more frequently in antisocial behaviors toward opponents when they perceive their team's moral atmosphere to endorse antisocial behaviors (Bortoli et al., 2012). For example, Benson, Brunel and Eys (2017) found that athletes' perceptions of their teammates engagement to antisocial behaviors towards others during training, were the ones who also reported more antisocial behavior toward their teammates. On the contrary, perceived prosocial teammate behaviour was found to positively predict self-reported prosocial behaviour towards one's teammates (Bruner et al., 2018), while an autonomy-supportive teammate environment had a negative prediction of antisocial teammate behaviour (Hodge & Gucciardi, 2015).

The abovementioned findings suggest that moral judgement and choices of athletes could be influenced by interactions between coach and teammates (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Frequent engagement in antisocial behaviours seemed to be associated with the athletes' perceptions that their coach and/or their teammates encourage these behaviours (Kavussanu et al., 2002; Kavussanu & Spray, 2006). In developing our research questions, we considered (a) the influential role of coach and teammates in athletes' behaviour (e. g. Kavussanu & Al-Yaaribi, 2019), and (b) the links between an appropriate sport environment and hosts' acculturation attitudes towards incoming groups (Morela et al., 2017; Morela et al., 2020). Taking into consideration Berry's bidimensional model of acculturation and considering the important role of the host society in acculturation process as highlighted in Bourhis et al., (1997) interactive acculturation model, the purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships between prosocial and antisocial behaviour encouraged by coach and teammates and hosts' adolescent attitudes towards refugees. More specifically, it was hypothesized that prosocial behaviour encouraged by coach and teammates would predict positively acculturation attitudes favoring both cultural maintenance and cultural interaction, whereas antisocial behaviour encouraged by coach and teammates would predict negative acculturation attitudes towards

refugees' cultural maintenance and cultural interaction.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants and Procedure**

Participants were 255 ( $14.47 \pm 1.95$  years of age) native Greek football athletes (21 girls). The average length of sport participation was  $7.12 (\pm 2.98)$  years and the average length of participation in the current club was  $2.97 (\pm 2.26)$ . The study was approved by the Institution's Ethics Committee (1671). Parental consent was obtained prior to the data collection. Anonymous questionnaires were completed individually by athletes in a quiet place under the supervision of the researcher before the start of a training session. The approximate time for that process was 15 minutes.

### **Instruments**

*Hosts' attitudes towards refugees.* Participants completed the Host Community Acculturation Scale (HCAS; Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001) as adapted by Morela and her partners (2021) for adolescent population. The instrument that was eventually devised comprised 16 items, eight for each of the dimension of cultural maintenance (e. g., *Do you agree with the idea that refugee adolescents maintain their customs?*) and cultural interaction (e. g., *Do you agree with the idea that refugee adolescents hang out with Greeks?*). Responses were given on a 5-point scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). Morela and colleagues (2021) provided sufficient support for the psychometric integrity of the Greek version of the adapted HCAS in adolescents through evidence of factorial validity and reliability.

*Prosocial and Antisocial Behaviour in Sport.* The PABSS (Kavussanu & Boardley, 2009), adapted to Greek by Kazilas et al. (2016) was used to measure prosocial and antisocial behaviour in sport. Participants were presented with 11 items describing prosocial (4 items; helped an opponent off the floor) and antisocial (7 items; e.g., deliberately fouled an opponent) behaviours towards opponents. Participants were asked to report (a) how often their coach encourages or accepts these behaviours during the game, and (b) their teammates had engaged in each behavior during the season, on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

## **RESULTS**

**Descriptive Statistics and Correlations**

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha coefficients and correlations are presented in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha coefficients showed high internal consistency for all variables. Overall, participants had moderate to high scores on cultural maintenance and cultural interaction, and also on coach promoted and teammate displayed prosocial behavior, while moderate to low scored were reported for coach

promoted and teammate displayed antisocial behavior. Examination of the correlations showed that coach-promoted and teammate-displayed prosocial behavior was positively linked to cultural maintenance and cultural interaction, whereas coach-promoted and teammate-displayed antisocial behavior was negatively linked to cultural maintenance and cultural interaction.

**Table1.** Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha coefficients

| Factors                                  | Descriptivestatics |      | Cronbach'salpha | Correlations |        |
|--|--------------------|------|-----------------|--------------|--------|
|  | M                  | S.D. |                 | 1            | 2      |
| <i>Host Community AcculturationScale</i> |                    |      |                 |              |        |
| culturalmaintenance (1)                  | 3.98               | .61  | .80             |              |        |
| culturalinteraction (2)                  | 3.94               | .68  | .83             |              |        |
| <i>Prosocial&amp;AntisocialBehaviour</i> |                    |      |                 |              |        |
| coachpromotedprosocialbehaviour          | 4.09               | .81  | .71             | .43**        | .38**  |
| coachpromotedantisocialbehaviour         | 2.00               | .89  | .88             | -.20**       | -.24** |
| Prosocialteammatebehaviour               | 3.80               | .82  | .75             | .30**        | .23**  |
| antisocialteammatebehaviour              | 2.29               | .84  | .86             | -.14*        | -.18*  |

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

**Regression Analyses**

Regression analyses were performed to assess the degree to which coach promoted and teammate displayed prosocial and antisocial behaviour could predict acculturation attitudes towards refugees. Regarding attitudes towards refugee's cultural maintenance, the analysis showed that prosocial and antisocial behaviour could predict 19% of the total variance, with

prosocial behaviour promoted by coach being a significant predictor (*beta* = .37, *p* < .001) Regarding attitudes towards refugee's cultural interaction, the analysis showed that prosocial and antisocial behaviour could predict 15% of the total variance, with prosocial behaviour promoted by the coach being a significant predictor (*beta* = .34, *p* < .001). The results of the regression analyses are presented in Table 2.

**Table2.** Regression analysis

|                                     | R <sup>2</sup> | F (4, 241) | beta | t     | p    |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|------------|------|-------|------|
| Cultural maintenance                | .190           | 13.86**    |      |       |      |
| coach promoted prosocial behaviour  |                |            | .37  | 4.36  | .000 |
| coach promoted antisocial behaviour |                |            | -.11 | -1.11 | .267 |
| prosocial teammate behaviour        |                |            | .08  | 1.04  | .301 |
| antisocial teammate behaviour       |                |            | .10  | 1.12  | .262 |
| Cultural interaction                |                |            |      |       |      |
| coach promoted prosocial behaviour  | .155           | 10.88**    | .34  | 3.93  | .000 |
| coach promoted antisocial behaviour |                |            | -.13 | -1.34 | .183 |
| prosocial teammate behaviour        |                |            | .007 | .08   | .936 |
| antisocial teammate behaviour       |                |            | .04  | .48   | .632 |

\*\*p < .01

**DISCUSSION**

Overall, the findings revealed that prosocial behavior encouraged by coach and displayed by teammates was positively linked with multiculturalism attitudes, whereas antisocial behaviour was negatively linked with mutlticulturalism attitudes. According to Bandura (2002, 2004), moral thought and action

are strongly affected by the social context. Coaches and teammates are the most significant individuals within the athletes' social environment. Thus, athletes who experience prosocial/antisocial coach promoted or teammate displayed behaviour may increase their engagement in respective behaviours (Kavussanu et al., 2002; Kavussanu & Spray,

2006). The way in which the sport environment is shaped promoting either social or antisocial acts and behaviors has a significant impact on the attitudes and behaviors of athletes.

Importantly, valuable findings emerged regarding the important role of coach and teammates in athletes' sport experience. More specifically, our results showed that prosocial and antisocial behavior encouraged by coach and teammates could predict participants' acculturation attitudes towards refugees' cultural maintenance and cultural interaction with the host society. However, the results from the regression analyses revealed that only coach promoted prosocial behaviour had a significant contribution to the prediction of young athletes' multiculturalism attitudes towards refugees, thus highlighting the influential role of coach in athletes' behaviour. Past research has clearly demonstrated that one of the most influential factors in athletes' sport experiences are coaches and the contextual environment they create. (e.g., Bartholomew et al., 2010; Gagne et al., 2003). According to Bandura (1991), modelling and interactions with others often determine the moral norms and standards of the individuals. In this regard, when coaches display prosocial behaviours towards opponents and encourage their athletes to help or benefit others, both members of the in-group or out-group, young athletes are more likely to increase their own prosocial behaviour and may hold more positive attitudes toward out-group members. These findings coincide with previous research with hosts identifying positive links between empowering sport environment created by the coach, multiculturalism attitudes and prosocial skills (e.g., empathy and altruism) (Morela et al., 2020). Therefore, coaches' role on promoting adaptive social behaviors and encouraging acculturation is underlined

Overall, the findings of the present study add to the limited existing literature regarding the acculturative role of sport and stress the need to consider the influence of the social environment of sport shaped by significant others such as coaches and teammates on athletes' behaviour. Despite the ambiguous findings regarding the potential of sport in promoting adaptive acculturation outcomes (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013), relevant research in the field has provided strong evidence showing that the appropriate sport environment offers an advantageous ground for facilitating cultural maintenance and promoting cultural interaction

across various of cultural contexts and participants (e.g., Morela et al., 2020; Morela et al., 2019). The key agent to achieve desirable acculturation outcomes are coaches. However, coaches have witnessed their lack of training, strategies, and appropriate teaching materials to support refugees' inclusion (Forde et al., 2015). Taking into consideration the present findings, a suggestion therefore could be to educate coaches on these kinds of sport environments that facilitate positive acculturation and support refugees' conservation of their ethnic heritage and cultural traditions. Such environments could promote the latter's interaction with the members of the host country. Towards this direction, nurturing prosocial values and attitudes could be a promising way of enhancing positive intercultural relations between hosts and refugees and promoting multiculturalism.

Despite the importance of the present findings regarding the potential of sport to influence acculturation attitudes, the cross-sectional design of our study does not allow causal inferences. It would be enlightening to attempt to replicate our findings using longitudinal designs and intervention programs, which provide clearer evidence for the direction of causality. In line with our findings, evidence-based intervention programs aiming at enhancing intercultural contact within an appropriate sport environment could enhance our understanding regarding the acculturative role of sport for both incoming and host populations. In addition, this study included only football players; therefore, it would be interesting to replicate this study by examining other sport environments regarding both team and individual sports. Finally, to further increase the predictive power of the sport environment for multiculturalism attitudes, research could investigate whether important sources of socio-moral behaviour, such as values promoted by the coach could influence intercultural attitudes.

## **CONCLUSION**

The potential of sport as a tool to promote intercultural dialogue and to actively integrate the incomings groups into the host societies has now been well documented (e. g. Sagatun et al., 2008). However, acculturation within and throughout the social practice of sport is a complex process and to yield desirable outcomes towards integration it is important to consider the environment within which the activity takes place. Appropriate sport

environments wherein personal development is valued, the social needs of individuals are acknowledged, while prosocial values and behaviours are also fostered, could be a powerful vehicle oriented to integration and multiculturalism which remain as ambitious goals. In light of these findings, what now seems important is to design activities promoting refugees' integration that can be implemented within sport training and to educate coaches on how to implement such activities in order to promote successful acculturation for both refugees and hosts.

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