

Sport, gender and cultural diversity: exploring the nexus

Tracy Taylor and Kristine Toohey
School of Leisure and Tourism Studies
University of Technology, Sydney
PO Box 222
Lindfield 2070
New South Wales
Australia
Telephone 61 2 95145112
Fax 61 2 95145195
Email T.Taylor@uts.edu.au

Sport, gender and cultural diversity: exploring the nexus

Abstract

This paper discusses a research project that investigated the sporting experiences of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This sub-population is excluded from most mainstream sport scholarship in Australia. Information on the sporting attitudes and experiences of women from selected ethnic groupings was collected via questionnaire surveys, focus groups and individual interviews. Sporting, local government, community and ethnic organisations were also surveyed about their current policies and practices in relation to sport for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The interviews undertaken with sports providers and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds resonate with a strong sense of frustration about current sport policy and provision. For many sport providers the low levels of sport participation of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are a perplexing issue to which they seem to have few answers. The comments of many of the women interviewed reflect extreme dissatisfaction with the current lack of consideration given to them by sports providers, but a hope that the situation will improve for the better if the two groups can work together to improve understand the issues involved.

--

Introduction

This paper summarises a research study that investigated the relationships and attitudes to sport of females from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Females born in non-English speaking countries comprise nearly 15 per cent of Australia's population and a further 22 per cent have at least one parent born in a non-English speaking country (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996). Therefore, these sub-populations form a substantial component of the nation. However, this group of women is significantly disadvantaged in many areas of community life and well being, exhibiting low levels of educational attainment, employment, income and participation in physical activity (Bureau of Immigration Research, 1994). In a recent national study, the rate of involvement in sport¹ of females born in non-English speaking countries was 7 per cent, compared with 20 per cent for Australian born females (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994).

Why do women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds exhibit low levels of participation in sport? What are their perceptions of sport? How can sport providers maximise the opportunities for participation for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds? These questions were explored in this study by investigating the experiences and opinions of both women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and sport providers.

¹ Involvement was classified by participation in formal sporting competitions in the 12 months prior to the study. The level or duration of involvement was not measured.

Sport and ethnicity

Like many other countries, Australia has a history of passionate involvement in sport. Sport has been perceived as important in the development of its national psyche and character (Cashman, 1995; and Howell and Howell, 1987). Sport has traditionally been labelled as the great equaliser and the arena in which all persons are treated fairly, regardless of their background or social standing (Stoddart, 1986). However, more recently social analysts such as Daryl Adair and Wray Vamplew (1997) and Jim McKay (1991) have refuted these widely generated myths of Australian sporting egalitarianism. In connection to this, Colin Tatz (1995) and David Rowe and Geoff Lawrence (1996), have suggested that sport is yet another institution that maintains and perpetuates the dominant ideologies and power structures of Australian society.

In addition to its sporting heritage, Australia also has a long record of immigration and is now one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world². While migrants arriving on Australian shores have brought with them sporting traditions and conventions from their home countries, some these have been able to put into practice here while others have not been as transferable. Sports with Anglo-Celtic origins have flourished to a greater extent in this country than activities brought from non-English speaking countries. This research project focuses on the latter group of migrants, those from non-English speaking countries. It should also be noted that this paper does not encompass the experiences of Aboriginal people whose situation is unique and quite different from settler migrants (for detailed discussions on Aboriginal sport see Tatz 1987,1995).

Given the recent prominence of immigration-related issues in Australian society and the exalted place that sport occupies in the nation's cultural practices, it is surprising that few researchers or theorists have published in this area. Most Australian research exploring ethnicity and sport has focussed on male involvement, while discussions of gender and sport have reflected the experiences of Anglo-Australian women. Thus, current conceptualisations of sport as a site of cultural and identity formation in Australia are incomplete. A deeper and richer understanding of the real place and space of sport in the Australian context must include the involvement or non-involvement in sport by all sections of the population.

Internationally research on ethnic and racial differences in sport has been a subject of inquiry for over three decades (Floyd, Gramann & Saenz, 1993). Investigations in this area primarily explore the issues in two ways; both developed by Washburn (1978). The first theory proposes that certain ethnic groups are limited in their sport and recreation choices by class-based indicators such as income and level of education. The second approach suggests that ethnic groups choose to participate in certain activities due to cultural traditions, practices and group characteristics such as language or religion. Underlying both of these approaches is the understanding that sport can be either a site for assimilation or a tool for cultural resistance or maintenance.

Most research to determine sporting participation patterns has focussed on identifying differences between ethnic groups, and ascertaining the role of sport in the acculturation

² Ethnicity relates to people who have a shared history, allegiance to a country or geographical region, common

process by examining specific sports for their ethnic composition. On a micro level the study of positional segregation by race in sport is another well-researched area (Melnick, 1996).

To date research on sport and ethnicity has been primarily conducted in the United Kingdom and North America, and its relevance to the Australian context is limited. A recent exception is the work by Mosely *et al* (1997) that was commissioned by the now defunct Bureau of Immigration, Multiculturalism and Population Research. However, as Australia shares many cultural commonalities with these other countries, such as a common ancestry and its Anglocentricity, selected overseas material may be used to inform and guide research in this country.

Research about ethnic minority participation in sport commonly examines the constraints this sub-group face in their sporting involvement. Social, personal, environmental and cultural factors can combine to influence a person's motivation and ability to participate in sport and the degree to which they are constrained in this process (Jackson, Crawford and Godbey, 1993). Constraints can initially shape preferences and then act to circumvent preferences and therefore restrict participation (Jackson, 1990). Studies have attempted to both categorise and prioritise constraints (Crawford, Jackson and Godbey, 1991; Godbey, 1985; Goodale and Witt, 1989; Raymore, Godbey, Crawford and VanEye, 1993) but primarily within an Anglo-Celtic context. Specifically focussing on women's experiences, Karla Henderson and Deb Bialeschki (1993) argue that constraints are continually being contested and negotiated and

language, religion and culture (Bottomley, 1991:116).

as such are multi-faceted and dynamic. However, this literature does not address the complex dimensions of ethnicity. The research presented in this paper, while incorporating components of constraints theory, has not attempted to place constraints into discrete categories or hierarchies. These classifications may produce broad-based generalisations that can stereotype and further marginalise ethnic minority groups.

Studies related to sport and ethnicity have explored the topic of sport participation from a number of perspectives and have produced conflicting results. Differences in levels and types of participation, have been attributed to socioeconomic circumstance (West, 1989), inappropriate programmes and facilities (Lindsay and Ogle, 1977), or discrimination, racism, and cultural identity (Carr and Williams, 1993; Floyd and Gramann, 1993; Hutchinson, 1987; Jarvie, 1991; MacClancy, 1996). However, while some studies have found significant differences in participation among ethnic groups (Bhandari, 1991; Carrington *et al.* 1987; Dew, 1992; Phillip, 1995), others have claimed that the differences are not significant (Floyd *et al.*, 1993; Tangsujjapoj, 1991).

As an overriding consideration of the impact of ethnicity, McPherson *et al.* (1989) have proposed that the degree to which any of these variables effect sporting involvement depends on the level of assimilation of the individual or group in relation to the dominant culture. According to this proposition, ethnic groups are positioned on a continuum of assimilation, with some groups being totally isolated and thus engaging in activity that only involves other group members. At the other end of the continuum are minority ethnic participants who are completely structurally and culturally assimilated.

Other research has explored the links between sport and the construction and maintenance of ethnic identity. For example, Jeremy MacClancy (1996) has asserted that sport has specifically contributed to the development of a sense of ethnicity for particular groups. He illustrates this by citing the distinctive role of Basque football in the construction of a nationalist Basque community and attributes the same role to cricket in the Trobriands and baseball in Japan. Closer to home Jean Martin (1972) has discussed the importance of soccer and basketball to post World War II European migrants to Australia, and Philip Mosely (1995) has written about the use of soccer clubs as support networks for ethnic minority groups.

Most managers who have been involved in sport for any length of time could easily produce a list of sports or sporting examples that support or contravene each of the theories outlined above. This indicates that there is some element of 'reality' in each analysis. It also highlights that the general interpretations of sport and ethnicity are not always transferable, resulting in a need for situation specific analysis. Scott Fleming's (1994) United Kingdom study of young males from South Asian communities is a useful example of such situation specific research. Fleming found that South Asian males in the study had been systematically stereotyped as preferring non-contact sports due to their perceived physical weaknesses. This label then perpetuated actions that reinforced the stereotype. Conclusion from the study were that firstly, male youths of South Asian backgrounds do not necessarily want to emulate white middle-class sport participation patterns and secondly, experiences of discrimination and racism at both personal and institutional levels impacted on equality of opportunity.

The theories, research and case studies outlined above serve to illustrate the inherent complexities in examinations of the nexus of ethnicity and sport. The uniqueness of time and place and the social construction of sport within different societies means that situation specific research is required to better understand the relationship of sport in ethnicity in any given community. When considerations of gender are included within this already complex framework of understandings, research must be appropriately designed to incorporate this additional dimension.

Women, sport and ethnicity

Research relating to women in sport within Australia has primarily focussed on women of Anglo-Australian backgrounds. Lois Bryson (1990), Libby Darlison (1985), Jim McKay (1991), Marion Stell (1991) and Brian Stoddart (1986) have examined aspects of gender and sport participation in the Australian context. They conclude that generally women have been disadvantaged through access and opportunities. In these writings sport is presented as primarily a male domain that reflects societal power structures and perpetuates masculine domination.

Research specifically about women, sport and ethnicity in the Australian milieu still in its infancy. As Adair and Vamplew (1997:77) point out “we know, for example, remarkably little about the impact of ethnicity on women’s sport.” Works such as those by Bottomley (1991) and Taylor and Toohey (1997) address the nexus and can be used as a starting point for further research. However, there still a heavy reliance on overseas studies to assist and

inform sporting knowledge and practice in this country. As discussed in the previous section, the transferability of such research has inherent limitations and restricted application due to situation specific circumstances.

In other research it has been suggested that women from ethnic minority groups may have particular cultural requirements that are not fully met, or in many instances even recognised, by mainstream service providers. Bhandari (1991) linked low Asian female participation in sports in the United Kingdom to language difficulties, clothing requirements and embarrassment, and recommended segregated activities as the most effective means of addressing these issues. In complement, David (1991) argued for creche provision, elimination of racial stereotypes and the eradication of racial harassment to assist with achieving greater female Asian involvement in sport. Additionally, Benn's (1996) research with Muslim women in England found that many informants recalled negative experiences of physical education in school. Women in the study had encountered public embarrassment and guilt at transgressing religious requirements, had experienced religious and racial prejudice, and were not encouraged in sport.

Bob Carroll's (1993) study of the impact of religion on sport participation in the United Kingdom, indicated that participation levels in sport for Muslim and Hindu women were inversely related to the importance attached to their religious beliefs. The more important religion was for these females the lower their sport participation. These findings suggest that if women choose to adhere to specific cultural or religious requirements (eg no males present when women engage in sport) then participation prerequisites can become barriers to their

sport involvement unless sports services, facilities and providers can meet these specific needs. Taylor and Toohey (1995), in their study of women, ethnicity and sport in Australia, found that many Muslim women indicated they would like to participate in sport but could not do so because of the limited number of existing facilities and programmes which met their religious requirements.

Literature on women, ethnicity and sport is gradually emerging and evolving. While some of the broader work completed on women and sport has relevance for female members of minority cultures, an acknowledgment of difference, rather than otherness or silence, is beginning to emerge. There is a growing recognition that more research is needed about diverse groups of women in a society in order to better understand and cater for the sporting needs of all women. The research outlined in this paper has stepped into this gap in order to expand our knowledge about the sporting beliefs, practices and requirements of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the Australian context.

The research project

The main objective of this study was to investigate the relationships between women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and sport. The aims of the research were to ascertain sport participation patterns of females from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, identify reasons for their involvement or non-involvement in sport and to explore their attitudes to, and perceptions of sport.

Method

The methodology chosen for the study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Data were collected via: a questionnaire survey completed by women from

culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; individual interviews and focus group interviews with these women; a questionnaire survey for sports providers; and interviews with sport providers and community representatives. Each of these data collection methods are detailed below.

After consultation with the Ethnic Affairs Commission it was decided that the study would focus on seven ethnic groups. The selection criteria for the sample population were based on the group's population size in the state and length of residence in the country. The seven groups chosen represent the major non-English speaking populations in New South Wales and encompass both long-term residents (eg Greek and Italian) and recent arrivals (eg Vietnamese). As such, women from Chinese, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Serbian and Vietnamese backgrounds formed the basis of the study.

Questionnaires were distributed through or conducted on-site in conjunction with state sporting bodies, schools, adult migrant English services, migrant resource centres, area health services, community health centres, neighbourhood centres, the Ethnic Communities Council and specific community ethnic associations. The in-depth interviews were also arranged via these same organisations.

The questionnaire solicited information about the women's restrictions, levels, and type of sporting participation, its perceived benefits and their attitudes to sport along with demographic information. Questionnaires were translated and available in all languages relevant to the seven selected ethnic groups as well as in English. Two primary methods were used to distribute and collect the instrument. One method was to mail out the questionnaires to an organisation after consultation with its administrator, then provide the number of questionnaires required in the language(s) nominated, with an accompanying cover letter containing implementation instructions and reply-paid envelopes. The second procedure involved research assistants attending sporting fixtures and women's group meetings, where individual women were approached and invited to complete a questionnaire in the relevant language form after obtaining permission from relevant authorities. The questionnaire was handed back to the researchers upon completion.

The precise rate of return of the questionnaire survey is difficult to ascertain as some organisations requested questionnaires, but did not distribute them to their members to complete. Given this situation the rate of return has been estimated at 70 per cent. Another limitation associated with the questionnaire survey was the low level of literacy of many women. Numerous older women could not adequately read the questionnaire, even in their first language. In these instances the questionnaires were read aloud and completed via an intermediary. Questionnaires completed in languages other than English were translated into English for data analysis.

Interviews were conducted with 28 women from the seven selected groups and associated ethnic organisation, and with twelve representatives from sporting providers. These interviews followed up on issues raised in the questionnaire survey responses. Additionally, 21 focus group interviews canvassed the opinions, experiences and comments of a total of 186 women representing the seven targeted groups. Selection of focus group participants was via contacts provided by the Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales, Area Health Services, sporting organisations, word of mouth and 'snowballing' technique (one contact suggesting another).

Each individual and focus group interview began with a standardised introduction regarding the research, explaining its aims and objectives. All participants were given the option to withdraw from the discussion at any point during the proceedings. Participants were assured of confidentiality of responses and permission to tape each interview was sought in advance. Discussion of a range of issues related to sport was pursued. Women were encouraged to talk about their sporting involvement, their general perceptions of sport and women in sport, restrictions on their participation and cultural aspects related to sport participation.

Limitations of the focus group interviews should be noted. When many women spoke at once, only the loudest voice was clear enough to be transcribed. Also, the exact meanings of phrases and words were sometimes lost in the translation process. There were instances when the interpreter articulated a speaker's words in English, and was subsequently

challenged by other group organisations completed a questionnaire exploring their current practices and past experiences in providing sport opportunities to this population. The organisations surveyed members about their incorrect translation.

In addition to surveying women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, questionnaires were distributed to sport and community organisations involved in the development and delivery of sport and recreation policies, facilities and programs within the state. All regional offices of the state Department of Sport and Recreation, state sporting associations, local councils, Senior Citizens Clubs, Police Citizens Youth Clubs and ethnic organisations, and migrant resource centres were surveyed.

Table 1 shows the diversity of organisations that were surveyed and notes the response rate for return of the questionnaires. The overall rate of return of the questionnaires (18%) is skewed by the extremely low return rate from Senior Citizens Clubs. If the latter organisational grouping is removed from the sample the rate of return increases to 36 per cent. The survey research included Senior Citizen and Youth Clubs in an attempt to reach those specific age groups, however, much of the information gathered from the more generic agencies is also applicable to these age groupings.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Respondent characteristics

Table 2 outlines the country of birth of questionnaire respondents and/or their parents, in-depth interview respondents, and focus group participants. Of the women completing the questionnaire survey 59 per cent were not born in Australia and some 85 per cent of the total had at least one parent born in a non-English speaking country. The twenty-eight in-depth interviews were conducted with women from the seven selected groups and also with

sporting and ethnic association representatives. One hundred and eighty-six women were involved in the 21 focus groups.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The low response rate from the survey of sport providers is an obvious limitation of the study. The second mailout of the questionnaire to non-respondents only marginally increased the response rate but a number of organisations did reply that they felt the survey was not relevant to their organisation. Another common response was that the organisation did not have the necessary information to be able to answer the questions about the numbers of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds that were consumers of their service.

Results

Levels of sport participation

Sporting participation levels of respondents are indicated in Table 3. As can be seen from the figures presented, there are significant variations between ethnic groupings. Women from Croatian and Serbian backgrounds had the lowest levels of participation. This may in part be explained by a comment from one of the interviewees “in the last few years we have focussed all our attention on the conflict back home and haven’t had much time or energy to do much else” (Croatian woman). Participation levels are higher for second-generation respondents than for those born overseas, with the highest levels of participation being amongst the more established groups such as Lebanese and Greek women.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Of those respondents who participated in sport only 23 per cent belonged to a sporting organisation. Of these, 83 per cent were members of local sporting clubs and 17 per cent were members of ethnic sporting clubs. This level of participation in formal sporting clubs roughly corresponds with the results of the Involvement *in Sport Australia* study (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994). Of those who participated in sport on a regular³ basis, gentle exercise/aerobics (89%) was the most frequently nominated activity, followed by basketball/volleyball (85%) and soccer (84%).

The most popular sports by country of birth are indicated in Table 4. ‘Gymnastics’ (see note with table) was the most common activity amongst women from Croatian, Greek and Italian backgrounds, while women from Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds engaged in cycling most frequently. Swimming and watersports were also popular amongst all groups.

TABLE 4

Reasons for participating in sport

Of those respondents who participated in sport, 77 per cent nominated physical/health benefits as the aspect they enjoyed most about playing sport. This was followed by having fun (72%) and enjoying looking good (62%). Responses to this question are noted in Figure 1. Overall responses between ethnic groups varied only marginally, with the most frequent answers being the same for all groups.

³ This excludes respondents who indicated that they only participated on an occasional or infrequent basis

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

When asked if sport was an appropriate activity for females, 95 per cent answered ‘yes’ and only 5 per cent said ‘no’. Questionnaire respondents indicated that sport participation was important for women for their: health (50%); fitness (37%); and because ‘sport is for all’ (21%). The three most frequent responses were the same for all ethnic groups.

Constraints and barriers

Questionnaire respondents nominated: time constraints; nobody to go with; family responsibilities; and lack of information as the main barriers to their participation in sport. “The responsibility of children is one of the constraints, and timing. Time I think is the biggest constraint there is because I think everything is available for women to do” (Greek woman interviewed).

Some significant differences in responses were apparent according to country of birth. Chinese-born women frequently commented that they had no time after family commitments, experienced language problems and faced communication barriers. “Our families come first, that's where the priority is” (Chinese focus group member). Other family members frequently viewed sport as inappropriate: “My Dad said, “to run you are not a lady”. It was “Walk slowly like a woman. Sport is a boy’s game not girl’s game” (Chinese focus group member).

The Vietnamese-born women interviewed expressed a need for trainers and facilitators who spoke their language and sports which were socially acceptable. “I wanted to play netball but my mother thought it was too physical and the skirts were too short” (Vietnamese focus group member).

Many of the Lebanese-born women noted language problems and family expectations as a significant constraint. “We were expected to come straight home after school, there were household things that we had to do, the boys could do whatever they liked” (Lebanese focus group member). While religion was not seen as a barrier to being active for these women, religious requirements were identified as restricting where and when such activity can take place. Muslim-Lebanese women listed not being able to meet cultural requirements as a major barrier, as a Muslim Women’s representative commented: “Facilities which are religiously appropriate are hard to find, or if they do exist they are too expensive for us to book out so we can use them on our own”.

Another barrier, although not frequently mentioned, was racial discrimination experienced while playing sport.

“I used to feel left out, they called us 'wogs' and assumed we couldn't play the games, so we went off and did other things and avoided sport and PE” (Italian focus group member).

The issue of public display of the body, clothing requirements and levels of skin exposure featured prominently in many of the women’s sense of unease at the thought of participating in sport. For many of the women interviewed the idea of having to wear tight

fitting garments or shorts was threatening. “The clothes that you have to wear to do exercise, well they aren't for me” (Greek focus group member).

The role of parents in restricting their children’s sporting involvement and development of a negative attitude to sports participation were noted as other reasons why many women from these cultures are not physically active. “The way I was brought up I never thought to do sports, my mother would not have approved” (Croatian woman interviewed). “In my house my Dad didn’t believe in us playing sport. You had to be home doing the cooking and the cleaning” (Italian focus group member). “I represented New South Wales in softball and was approached by a professional team, the Redsocks, to join their ranks, and when I came home to tell Mum of course it wasn’t on. It just wasn’t done. Girls just go out and do things like that” (Greek focus group member).

Organisational results

This section briefly outlines the key findings of the questionnaire survey of organisations. Sixty per cent of organisations responded that they had experienced obstacles in providing sporting opportunities for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as shown in Figure 2. The list of factors shown in Figure 2 represent respondents’ perceptions of why there are so few culturally diverse women participating in their programmes.

(INSERT FIG 2 ABOUT HERE)

As seen in Figure 2, several respondents commented that they felt there was little community encouragement for females from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to engage in sport, especially when their culture and/or family sees little value in sport. Consequently these providers expressed reluctance to spend resources in an area where the potential for consumers was seen as limited. As one respondent indicated “we don’t offer special programmes because they don’t show up or they drop out”.

Respondents perceived that many of these women were constrained in sporting participation by their culture. An example of this was a respondent's comment that participation by some females is only allowed when the husband or father is present or when the wife is on the same team as the husband. Also, several organisations replied that some women from ethnic minorities were limited to attendance when it was a ‘ladies only’ day and no males were present. Adherence to religious practices and customs was also given as a reason for non-participation. Other identified restrictions were a perceived reluctance to participate in activities with male instructors, and unaccompanied females not being allowed to go out in the evening.

Some 21 per cent of organisational respondents felt that women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds viewed sport participation as ‘masculine’ and that this accounted for low levels of participation amongst this group. Organisations also responded that they felt women from non-English speaking backgrounds were more likely than their Anglo-Australian counterparts to believe that sport builds muscles, promotes aggression and therefore is only for males.

Only 10 per cent of organisations indicated that they have put in place specific policies/strategies and programmes that cater for females from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in sport. These strategies included: women-only classes; bilingual instruction; information printed in languages other than English; provision of on-site child care; use of qualified and interested staff; and organisation of ethnic specific clubs and courses.

Discussion

This research project has accented the significant differences between women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and sport providers in their perceptions of sport and their expectations about sport provision. The inaction of sport providers to address these conflicting dimensions can be partially attributed to resource constraints (eg. budgets, staff, and facilities), a lack of incentives (eg financial gain) and an absence of expressed demand (eg groups lobbying for services). However, there is a demonstrated lack understanding about the needs of this group of women, which is compounded by the absence of information on the ways to overcome sport participation constraints. This, coupled with the assimilationist views of many sports providers, has meant that women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have had to either fit into existing sport programmes or miss out. This reality of provision is inconsistent with the numerous government policies that officially support an agenda of cultural diversity for a multi-ethnic country.

The current lack of understanding and knowledge of the sporting needs and requirements of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is frustrating for these women who constantly face systemic and program barriers to their sport participation. Sport providers must change or adapt their current methods of operation and become more cognisant of the needs of women from all ethnic backgrounds, not just those of the majority culture. This means resisting explanations about low levels of sport participation that blame or pathologises the minority culture. Instead providers must acknowledge that structural inequalities are the source of the problem. Accepting this explanation then serves to locate the parameters of the debate about sport participation outside a cultural framework and focuses attention on structural concerns. An understanding of the broader social context within which cultural difference is embedded and recognition of the value of other cultures and experiences can then inform sport practices.

Practically, there are a number of initiatives that sports providers could undertake to facilitate making their programs and facilities more inclusive. Low levels of literacy mean that many women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds cannot access information on programmes and facilities in traditional ways. To overcome such constraints providers need to utilise alternative promotional channels and multi-lingual information and media sources such as ethnic radio stations or direct contact with community groups. Relying on traditional sources of promotion is ineffective in reaching non-traditional participants, such as the women involved in this study.

Messages about sport that emphasise its social and health benefits are more appealing to this population than promotion of sport as a competitive and aggressive activity. Programmes that emphasise these healthy lifestyle characteristics have been successful in allowing women to combine exercise within their established ethnic community organisations and networks. “It would be good to have sports where you already know people. This is especially true for people who have not done much sport before. Through the Chinese Associations, people already go there so that would take away that shyness.” (Chinese/Vietnamese woman).

Role models and even images of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds participating in sport are almost non-existent in Australia. There are several elite-level women athletes in sport who are from this group but they receive little media coverage. Promotion of these successful athletes along with images of ‘real women’ from minority ethnic backgrounds needs to be undertaken to encourage more women from women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to participate.

The above suggestions illustrate just some of the steps that can be taken to ensure sport providers are offering more inclusive programs and services. The particular strategies that can be employed to minimise exclusionary practices and embrace this grouping of women will depend on the nature, location and aim of the provider.

Conclusion

Cultural diversity in Australia means more than just allowing people of various ethnic backgrounds to live in the same country. It is about ensuring that the right to quality of life is available to everyone, regardless of gender, culture and their country of origin. This study has provided evidence that women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have not been provided with the same opportunities to participate in sport as their Anglo-Australian counterparts. These women constantly encounter sport providers, who have a limited understanding, often coupled with a limited desire, of how to meet their specific requirements. Inclusive sporting practices that challenge this maintenance of systemic discrimination need to be promulgated. Alongside such initiatives, sport providers must develop and implement policies that mitigate the constitution of problematic identities through the discursive practices embodied in current sporting policies.

Sporting structures and processes can encourage and promote gender and culturally specific participation. If such a reconstruction of this dimension of society is to occur, it must be done in conjunction with other aspects of general social life. To remove or at least minimise the constraints of gender and racism within sport, the very nature of work, family commitments and leisure also requires reorganisation. While women continue to carry primary domestic and parenting responsibilities, their time and perceived legitimate claim to participate in sport will be limited. Additionally, while sport continues to encapsulate masculine identities, inequalities in many facets of sporting life will persist. Sports and the sporting community can begin to make inroads in the redefinition process by critically addressing the processes involved in the construction of gender and racist agendas within sport and challenging current sporting practices that perpetuate these inequalities.

Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have views, experiences, and requirements of sport that often differs from the mainstream. This uniqueness needs to be better understood by sports providers and incorporated into sports programs and policies. There must also be a general acceptance of responsibility for sport provision that includes these members of the community and does not put the blame for low participation rates on their culture or religious practices. Sports can only encompass cultural diversity after they have confronted the realities of prejudice and racial discrimination.

This study demonstrates that situation specific research is needed to better understand the changing relationships between women from different backgrounds and sport. Such research seeks to inform inclusionary sporting practices and broaden the current perspectives and methods of operation of sport providers. Sport is an institution that can facilitate change and positive responses to ethnically diverse communities. Future research needs to further explore current inequities and provide information about how to better address this complex issue.

REFERENCES

Adair, D. and Vamplew, W. (1997) *Sport in Australian History*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996) *Australian Yearbook*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (1994) *Involvement in Sport Australia March 1993*. (Catalogue No. 6285.0) Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Benn, T. (1996) Muslim women and physical education in initial teacher training. *Sport, Education and Society*, 1(1), 5-21.

Bhandari, R. (1991) Asian action. *Sport & Leisure*, 25.

Bottomley, G. Representing the 'second generation': subjects, objects and ways of knowing. In G. Bottomley, M. de Lepervance and J. Martin (Eds) *Intersexions Gender/Class/Ethnicity*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 92-109, 1991.

Bryson, L. (1990) Challenges to Male Hegemony in Sport, in M. Messner and D. Sabo Eds *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. Champaign, Human Kinetics, 173-184.

Bureau of Immigration Research (1994) *The Social Characteristics of Immigration in Australia*. Canberra: AGPS.

Carroll, B. (1993) Factors influencing ethnic minority groups' participation in sport. *Physical Education Review*, 16(1), 55-66.

Carrington, B. Chilvers, T. and Williams, T. (1987) Gender, leisure and sport: A case study of young people of South African descent. *Leisure Studies*, 6(3) 265-279.

Cashman, R. (1995) *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Crawford, D., Jackson, E., and Godbey, G. (1991) A hierarchical model of leisure constraints. *Leisure Science*. 13, 309-320.

Darlison, L. (1985) Equality, in Department of Sport, Recreation & Tourism and Australian Sports Commission, *Australian Sport: A Profile*. Canberra: AGPS, 98-118.

David, C. (1991) Success in the long term. *Sport & Leisure*, p 18.

Dew, S. (1992) *Ethnic Involvement in Sport in Geelong 1945-1990*. MA Thesis, Deakin University, Melbourne.

Fleming, S. (1994) *'Home and Away': Sport and South Asian Male Youth*. Aldershot: Avebury.

Floyd, M., and Gramann, J. (1993) Effects of acculturation and structural assimilation in resource based recreation: the case of Mexican Americans. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 25(1) 6-21.

Floyd, M. Gramann, J. and Saenz, R. (1993) Ethnic factors and the use of public outdoor recreation areas: the case of Mexican Americans. *Leisure Sciences*, 15, 83-98.

- Godbey, G. (1985) Non-participation in public leisure services: a model. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 3, 1-13.
- Goodale, T.L., & Witt, P.A. (1989) Recreation non-participation and barriers to leisure. In E.L. Jackson & T.L. Burton, (Eds)., *Understanding leisure and recreation: Mapping the past, charting the future*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing, 421-449.
- Henderson, K.A., & Bialeschki, M.D. (1993) Exploring an expanded model of women's leisure constraints. *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*, 18, 229-252.
- Howell, R. and Howell, M. (1987) *A History of Australian Sport*. Drummoyne, NSW: Shakespeare Head Press.
- Hutchinson, R. (1987) Ethnicity and urban recreation: whites, blacks, and Hispanics in Chicago's public parks. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 16(4), 344-349.
- Jackson, E.L. (1990) Trends in leisure preferences: alternative constraints-related explanations. *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*, 15 (3), 129-145.
- Jackson, E.L., Crawford, D.W. & Godbey, G. (1993) Negotiation of leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, 15, 1-11.
- Jarvie, G. (1991) There ain't no problem here? *Sport & Leisure*, 20-21.
- Lindsay, J. and Ogle, R. (1977) Socioeconomic patterns of outdoor recreation use near urban areas. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 4(1) 19-24.
- MacClancy, J. Ed (1996) *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*. Oxford: Berg.
- McKay, J. (1991) *No Pain, No Gain? Sport and the Australian Culture*. Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- McPherson, B. Curtis, J. and Loy, J. (1989) Race, ethnicity, and sport, in *The Social Significance of Sport. An Introduction to the Sociology of Sport*, Champaign IL.: Human Kinetics, 193-218.
- Martin, J. (1972) Suburbia: Community and network. In A. Davies and S. Encel (Eds) *Australian society: A sociological introduction*. Melbourne: Cheshire, 301-339.
- Melnick, M. (1996) Maori Women and postional segregation in New Zealand netball: another test of the Anglocentric hypothesis, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 13, 259-273.
- Mosely, P. (1995) *Ethnic involvement in Australian soccer: A history 1950-1990*. Canberra: Australian Sports Commission.

Mosely, P., Cashman, R., O'Hara, J. and Weatherburn, H. (Eds) (1997) *Sporting Immigrants*, Sydney: Walla Walla Press.

Phillip, S. (1995) Race and leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, 17(2) 109-120.

Raymore, L.A., Godbey, G.C., Crawford, D.W., & von Eye, A. (1993) Nature and process of leisure constraints: an empirical test. *Leisure Sciences*, 15, 99-113.

Rowe, D. and Lawrence, G. (1996) Beyond national sport: sociology, history and postmodernity, *Sporting Traditions* 12(2) 3-16.

Stell, M. (1991) *Half the Race: a History of Australian Women in Sport*. North Ryde, NSW: Harper Collins.

Stoddart, B. (1986) *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in the Australian Culture*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.

Tangsujjapoj, S. (1991) *Recreation Participation Patterns and Acculturation of Thai Immigrant Families in New York City*. PhD Dissertation, New York University.

Tatz, C. (1987) *Aborigines in Sport*. Bedford Rock: Australian Society for Sports History.

Tatz, C. (1995) *Obstacle Race: Aborigines in sport*. Kensington: University of New South Wales Press.

Taylor, T. and Toohey, K. (1995). Ethnic barriers to sports participation. *Australian Parks and Recreation*, 31(2) 32-36.

Washburn, R. (1978) Black under-participation in wildland recreation: alternative explanations. *Leisure Sciences*, 1(3) 175-189.

West, P. (1989) Urban region parks and black minorities: Subculture, marginality and interracial relations in park use in the Detroit metro area. *Leisure Sciences*, 11(1) 11-28.

Table 1: Organisations included in the study

<i>AGENCY TYPE</i>	<i>Number sent questionnaires</i>	<i>Number of questionnaires returned</i>	<i>Rate of return %</i>
Sydney Metro local government area	36	13	36
Other NSW local government area	129	30	23
NSW state sporting organisations	203	123	61
Selected ethnic organisations	41	9	22
Migrant resource centres	7	4	58
Police Citizens Youth Clubs	54	10	19
Senior Citizens Clubs	700	22	3
NSW Department of Sport & Recreation - Regional Offices	12	12	100
Other (community & ethnic)	106	14	13
Totals	1288	235	18

Table 2: Characteristics of respondents

<i>Country</i>	<i>Where Questionnaire Respondent or Parents were born</i>	<i>In-depth interviews conducted</i>	<i>Number of focus groups Total number of people involved in ()</i>
China	545	3	2 (28)
Croatia	84	2	2 (17)
Greece	147	3	2 (18)
Italy	172	2	4 (21)
Lebanon	215	2	4 (25)
Serbia	70	1	3 (23)
Vietnam	293	3	4 (34)
Australia	44		
Ethnic representative s		8	
Sporting association		4	
Total	1570	28	21 (186)

Table 3: Sporting Participation Levels by country of birth

<i>Respondent's or parents' country of birth</i>	<i>% Participating in sport in the past 2 weeks (respondent born overseas)</i>	<i>% Participating in sport in the past 2 weeks (respondent's parent born overseas)</i>	<i>Averaged (%)</i>
China	35	37	36
Croatia	19	29	24
Greece	65	60	63
Italy	46	59	53
Lebanon	66	80	73
Serbia	26	36	31

Figure 2: Organisation perceptions of barriers to sport participation

