Sport Participation and Acculturation among Immigrants: A Systematic Review

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As the number of immigrants increases exponentially (US Census, 2018), acculturation has been one of the most crucial processes for immigrants to adapt to a new society. Acculturation is defined as "groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Herskovits, 1936; p.149). Earlier studies tended to deem acculturation as a uni-dimensional process in which the host country culturally absorbs immigrants, whereas later studies have conceptualized acculturation as a bi-directional process, where immigrant groups and host country groups culturally influence each other (Lee & Funk, 2011).

Sport participation is one dominant form of physical activity that can be crucial for promoting the acculturation process among immigrants due to its social nature (Berg et al., 2015). Nevertheless, compared to other well-explored predictors of acculturation, such as dietary habits (Satia et al., 2001) or language proficiency (Barry, 2001), relatively little studies have examined the sole effect of sport participation on acculturation among immigrants and the findings are still fragmented. This is due to the fact that: (1) many studies examined the mixed effects of sport participation with other activities such as unorganized physical activity, exercise, or non-sport related leisure activities (Yu & Berryman, 1996), and (2) the concept of “sport participation” has been used with different terms, such as serious leisure, recreation, or physical activity. Recognizing these challenges, using systematic review, we explored the relationship between sport participation and acculturation among immigrants to identify the current research gaps and provide future implications.

A total of seven major bibliographic databases were searched using a combination of the keyword "acculturation" and one of the keywords indicating sport participation (i.e. sport, physical activity, exercise, and leisure). A total of 1,211 were obtained initially, and six studies were included for the final review according to the PRISMA guideline (Moher et al., 2009).

Among these six articles, four suggested the positive relationship between sport participation and acculturation, one found no relationship, and one provided an unclear conclusion. Five studies were empirical (four quantitative; one qualitative), and one study was a review. Four empirical studies were cross-sectional studies, whereas one study analyzed the second-hand longitudinal data. Regarding age, one study investigated adolescents, one explored graduate students, two investigated the samples of the general public, and one did not specify.

None of the studies utilized the same instrument to measure the level of sport participation. While two studies did not have a specific measurement, the other four used a Total Frequency and Duration Score, Recreational Sport Participation and Recreation Sport Function, Perceived Behavioral Control in the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Serious Leisure Inventory Measure.

Out of the six included studies, four articles conceptualized acculturation as a bi-directional process based on the four strategies of Berry (1997), whereas two conceptualized acculturation as a unidirectional process using Segmented Assimilation Theory. For the measurement of acculturation, Acculturation Index, AHIMSAA Acculturation Scale, Assimilation and Integration Scale, and Berry's East Asian Acculturation Measure was adopted by three studies.