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Sport as a means of immigrant youth integration: an empirical study of sports, intercultural relations, and immigrant youth integration in Switzerland

Western European countries with a high proportion of immigrants among their permanent residents are confronted with the task of integrating immigrants into their society. Research on immigrants' acculturation and their intercultural relations has provided ample evidence that positive contacts between individuals from an outgroup and an ingroup are effective in improving both intergroup relations and immigrants' adaptation to the society of settlement. Sport offers the opportunity for intergroup contact based on constructive rules of participation; it can, therefore, be an effective means of immigrant youth integration.

Sport as a popular free-time activity among youths

Sport has become one of the most popular leisure activities in Western Europe. In a representative German survey conducted in 2009, 20,000 respondents over 14 years of age ranked sporting activities highest on their list of free-time activities (Braun & Nobis, 2011). Mutz and Burmann (2011) have shown that participation in sports clubs is important among 13–15-year-old German and immigrant youths. On average, 7 h/week is spent practising sports. Immigrant youths commit even more of their free time to sports, but more often outside of sports clubs. Interest in sport is also more pronounced in male than in female youths. The differences between boys

and girls with respect to sporting activities are even more distinct among immigrant youth than among native youth, mainly because immigrant girls are comparatively rarely involved in sporting activities in sports clubs (Fussan & Nobis, 2007; Klein, 2011; Kleindienst-Cachay, 2009).

In Switzerland, sport has also become the most popular free-time activity, especially among young people (Lamprecht, Fischer, & Stamm, 2008); this observation is substantiated by sports club membership rates of 62 % for children and 47 % for adolescents. However, as in Germany, in Switzerland girls and young women are less likely to be members of sports clubs than their male peers, and sports club membership is especially low (15 %) among girls with an immigrant background. A study by the Council of Europe (2011) confirms these data, insofar as 68 % of 14-year-old boys but only 54 % of girls in the same age group are members of sports clubs in Switzerland. Moreover, this study highlighted that women from the Balkans and Turkey have “the highest levels of physical inactivity” (ibid., p. 13) among immigrants in Switzerland.

The frequency of sporting activities is also strongly associated with social status: the higher the educational status of parents, the higher the frequency of sporting activities among their children. This has been shown by several studies in different nations (Herzog, Egger, Makarova, Neuenschwander, & Abächerli, 2009;

Eime, Harvey, Craike, Symons, & Payne, 2013; Lamprecht et al., 2008; Nagel, 2004).

In summary, sport is the most popular free-time activity among young people and provides opportunities for immigrant youth to have frequent intercultural contacts with their peers. However, male immigrant youths are more likely to be involved in sporting activities than their female counterparts.

Intercultural relations and immigrant youths' integration into the host society

On the basis of a “review and synthesis of the global literature on intercultural relations in plural societies,” Ward and Leong (2006, p. 484) identified two theoretical traditions in research on intercultural relations: (1) research in social psychology on intergroup contact and (2) research in cross-cultural psychology on acculturation attitudes.

In the tradition of *cross-cultural psychology*, contact between individuals of different cultural backgrounds is described in terms of changes in behavior and attitudes, commonly subsumed under the term of *acculturation* (Berry, 2005). On the individual level, the theoretical framework of acculturation emphasizes psychological changes that individuals of a given ethnocultural group undergo in circumstances of intercultural contact (ibid.).

It is a widely accepted assumption that immigrants use different *acculturation strategies* in their adaptation to the socio-cultural environment in the new country of residence. Each of these strategies consists of two main dimensions that are independent of each other: (1) maintenance of heritage culture and identity and (2) relationships sought among ethnocultural groups. The combination of immigrants' attitudes along these two dimensions makes it possible to identify four different acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. An *integration strategy*, for instance, implies that immigrants have an interest in maintaining the ethnic origin culture as well as in daily interactions with other ethnocultural groups in the society of settlement, especially with those from the majority group (Berry, 1990, 2005). However, acculturation strategies as short-term outcomes of the acculturation process are different from the *adaptation* of immigrants, which stands for their long-term acculturation. Immigrants' adaptation to the society of settlement is a "highly variable process" that includes more than one aspect (Berry, 2006, p. 40). A distinction is warranted between *psychological adaptation*, which involves individual psychological and physical well-being, and *socio-cultural adaptation*, which refers to immigrants' success in dealing with daily life in the new cultural environment (Ward, 2001).

Research on immigrant youths' adaptation in the host country has generally shown that an integration strategy is more conducive to successful adaptation (Phinney, Berry, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). In Switzerland, research has shown that immigrant youth who favor an integration strategy reported more positive relationships with their peers. However, immigrant girls tended to have better peer relationships than immigrant boys. Furthermore, peer relationships appeared to be better among younger immigrants than among older ones (Makarova & Herzog, 2011). These findings are in line with the results of a cross-cultural study in 13

countries¹ that showed that girls adapted socioculturally more easily than boys, and younger immigrants (aged 13 and 14 years) were generally better adapted than older ones (Sam, Vedder, Ward, & Horenczyk, 2006). In the same study, the immigrant youths' socioeconomic status and their ethnicity were important predictors of the success of the adaptation process (Phinney et al., 2006).

However, immigrant youth can choose an integration strategy for their acculturation "only where the dominant society is open and accepting of the wishes of the various acculturating groups" (Berry, 1990, p. 245). With respect to the immigrants' contacts with natives, *social psychological research on intercultural relations* has shown that there is a common tendency among ethnocultural groups in plural societies to favor ingroup members and to derogate outgroup members (Hagendoorn, 1993; Kalin & Berry, 1996). According to Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (2008), an ethnic majority group has stronger tendencies toward ethnocentrism than ethnic minority groups have. Therefore, intergroup contact has been explored as a means of reducing ethnocentrism and xenophobic attitudes *among ethnic majority group members* (review in Brown & Hewstone, 2005). A meta-analysis of 713 independent samples from 515 studies highlighted the fact that intergroup contact typically reduces intergroup prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Other findings related to this subject underline the importance of the quality of intergroup contact and show that the combination of positive contacts with individuals from the outgroup and group salience is effective in improving intergroup relations (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Voci & Hewstone, 2003). Hence, the *frequency* and *quality of contacts* with youths from ethnic minorities have a corrective influence on xenophobia among local young people (Fritzsche & Wiezorek, 2006).

To investigate intergroup contacts from the perspective of members of *ethnic minority groups*, research has mainly focused on perceptions of personal and

group discrimination (Ward & Leong, 2006). With respect to immigrant youths' adaptation, the results of a cross-cultural study have shown that immigrants who experience discrimination are likely to find support primarily within their ethnic network rather than in social networks of the new society (Phinney et al., 2006). Hence, "it is likely that the relationship is interactive, with both separation and discrimination reinforcing each other" (ibid., p. 228). Regarding the influence of immigrants' sociodemographic characteristics on the perception of discrimination, cross-cultural comparisons support the view that in some contexts certain characteristics (sex, length of residence, and parental occupational status) are associated with a higher level of perceived discrimination (ibid.).

On the other hand, frequent contact with members of the majority group decreases the perceived individual and group discrimination of minorities (Ward & Leong, 2006). Moreover, the amount of interaction with host nationals and positive intergroup attitudes are factors that facilitate sociocultural adaptation of immigrant youths (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). At the same time, satisfaction with relationships with host nationals is a significant predictor of the psychological adaptation of immigrant youths (Searle & Ward, 1990).

To conclude, immigrant youths undergo an acculturation process in the new society of settlement. The most conducive acculturation strategy for immigrant youths' adaptation to the new society of settlement is an integration strategy. However, immigrant youth can only adhere to such an integration strategy if they are involved in social networks with native youth. Thus, the quantity and quality of contact between immigrant youth and national youth are crucial factors for the integration of immigrant youth into a host society.

The integrative power of sport: Hypotheses of the study

The fact that sport is one of the most popular free-time activities opens up opportunities for peer contact among young people. The interactions that take place

¹ Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the UK, and the USA.

during sports can facilitate respectful relations between peers if they are based on internationally recognized rules and concepts of *fair play* (Schwier, 1998; Weiss, 1991). Sporting activities can also simplify intercultural interaction through the common language of sport, which is universal and does not need translation (Weiss, 1999). Therefore, the main question of our study is whether immigrant youths' participation in sporting activities can facilitate their integration into the society of settlement.

According to Hoffmann (2002), sporting activities are not per se integrative; rather, the conditions in which they take place determine their integrative power. Consequently, sporting activities provide opportunities for frequent and positive intercultural contacts among peers only if they are based on *constructive and universal rules for participation* (Elling, De Knop, & Knoppers, 2001). In Switzerland, the majority of sports clubs offer inexpensive ways of participation so that individuals with low income as well as senior citizens and people with an immigrant background can be involved in their sporting activities (Lamprecht, Fischer, & Stamm, 2011). We thus hypothesized that *sporting activities are an important part of immigrant youths' free time, especially based on their membership in sports clubs (Hypothesis I)*. However, on the basis of the well-documented low participation of female immigrants in sporting activities (Fussan & Nobis, 2007; Klein, 2011; Kleindienst-Cachay, 2009; Lamprecht et al., 2008), we expected *female immigrant youth to be less involved than their male counterparts in sporting activities in general and in sports clubs in particular (Hypothesis Ia)*.

According to the general assumption of the Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954), factors such as equality of status, aims, and interests as well as positive social sanctioning result in positive contacts between members of different ethnocultural groups. We assume that peer contacts in sports clubs encompass all these factors and are thus conducive to positive intercultural contacts because they provide common aims and interests as well as equal status for immigrant and native youths. Moreover, sport as a free-time activity is positively sanctioned in society.

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to examine the role of sport in immigrant youths integration into a host society. The analyses are based on a survey of 454 first-generation immigrant youths from secondary, vocational, and pre-apprenticeship schools located in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. In short, our results indicate that for most immigrant youth, sport is an important part of their free time, even though the proportion of female immigrant youth doing sport in sports clubs is twice as low as that of male immigrant youth. Our findings also illustrate that female and male immigrant youth who do sports in clubs have considerably more per-

sonal contact with Swiss peers during these sporting activities. Moreover, the young people who have frequent personal contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities reported having considerably more intercultural contacts in their free time and among their close friends. Finally, immigrant youths' contacts with Swiss peers during sporting activities increase their feeling of being integrated in Switzerland.

Keywords

Sport · Immigrants · Intercultural contact · Integration · Gender

Sport als Medium der Integration von Jugendlichen mit Migrationshintergrund

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag geht der Bedeutung des Sports für die Integration von jugendlichen Einwanderern in die Aufnahmegesellschaft nach. Aufgrund von Daten einer Querschnittstudie bei 454 Jugendlichen der ersten Einwanderergeneration aus Gymnasien, Berufsschulen und Vorlehreinrichtungen der deutschen Schweiz zeigen unsere Ergebnisse, dass der Sport für die meisten Jugendlichen mit Migrationshintergrund ein wichtiger Teil ihrer Freizeit darstellt, auch wenn der Anteil von Migrantinnen, die Mitglied eines Sportvereins sind, im Vergleich zu Migranten zweimal niedriger ausfällt. Zudem haben sowohl männliche wie weibliche Jugendliche mit Migrationshintergrund, die Sport in einem

Sportverein ausüben, deutlich mehr persönliche Kontakte mit Schweizer Peers während ihrer sportlichen Aktivitäten. Jugendliche, die von häufigen persönlichen Kontakt mit Schweizer Peers im Sport berichten, haben auch deutlich mehr interkulturelle Kontakte in ihrer Freizeit generell und innerhalb des Kreises ihren engsten Freunde. Schließlich vermögen häufige Kontakte mit Schweizer Peers im Sport das Gefühl der jugendlichen Einwanderer, in der Schweiz integriert zu sein, zu erhöhen.

Schlüsselwörter

Sport · Migranten · Interkultureller Kontakt · Integration · Geschlecht

As shown by research on the contribution of sport to social integration, individuals who are involved in sports, especially those who are members of sports clubs, are better integrated socially (i.e., they have frequent social contacts and more friendships with members of the host society) compared with those who are not involved in sporting activities in their free time (Becker & Häring, 2012; Fussan, 2006). Thus, we hypothesized that *sporting activities promote intercultural contacts and friendships between immigrant*

youth and national youth (Hypothesis II). We additionally hypothesized that *sporting activities in sports clubs open up even more opportunities for immigrant youth to establish and maintain contacts with their Swiss peers (Hypothesis IIa)*.

Based on the social psychological framework, frequent social contacts and friendships with natives are effective in improving both intergroup relations and immigrants' adaptation to the society of settlement. This led us to the assumption that *frequent contacts with Swiss nationals*

during sporting activities enhance in immigrant youth a feeling of being integrated in Switzerland (Hypothesis III). However, intercultural contacts among peers occur not only during sporting activities, but also in other free-time activities. Therefore, we assume that the *proportion of contacts with Swiss peers during free time have to be taken into account as influential factors for immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society (Hypothesis IIIa)*. Moreover, on the basis of ample empirical evidence (Phinney et al., 2006; Sam et al., 2006) that immigrant youths' sociodemographic characteristics influence their adaptation, we expected *immigrant youths' sex, age, socioeconomic status, length of residence in Switzerland, and ethnicity to have an impact on their feeling of being integrated in Switzerland (Hypothesis IIIb)*.

Method

Procedure

The present study had a cross-sectional design and was conducted in secondary, vocational, and pre-apprenticeship schools located in the German-speaking part of Switzerland.² First, the educational authorities of four cantons were contacted and asked for permission to recruit samples in their schools. Then, the school headmasters were informed with a letter explaining the purpose of the study. In those schools where the headmasters agreed to support the study, classes with immigrant students were chosen and asked to participate. The teachers and students were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate the different aspects of young people's daily lives. The standardized questionnaires were distributed by research assistants who also supervised the survey. Students who volunteered to participate filled out the questionnaires during a regular lesson. The confidentiality of their data was assured (Herzog et al., 2009).

² The authors gratefully acknowledge the Swiss Federal Sports Commission for financial support of the study *Sport als Medium der sozialen Integration bei schweizerischen und ausländischen Jugendlichen*.

Participants

Overall, 864 immigrant students were recruited, but only the data of 454 youths of the *first* immigrant generation were selected for analysis. None of them was naturalized in Switzerland. Most of the immigrants originated from the countries of former Yugoslavia ($N=248$, 54.6%), followed by immigrants from Turkey ($N=34$, 7.5%), Italy ($N=29$, 6.4%), Spain ($N=28$, 6.2%), and Germany ($N=19$, 4.2%). Other immigrants ($N=96$, 21.1%) were very diverse in terms of their place of origin. The sample consisted of 56.4% male and 43.6% female students. The students' ages ranged between 15 and 23 years ($M=18.10$ years, $SD=1.40$). The duration of the immigrant youths' residence in Switzerland ranged from less than 1 year to 21 years ($M=9.06$ years of residence; $SD=4.31$). Most of the immigrant youths were attending a vocational school ($N=273$, 60.1%), followed by youths who were attending a secondary school ($N=113$, 24.9%) or a pre-apprenticeship school ($N=68$, 15.0%).

Measures

The questionnaire included information about *immigrant youths' sociodemographic characteristics*, including their age, sex, educational status (secondary school, vocational school, pre-apprenticeship school), the social status of their family (based on the parents' highest education and occupational skill level), their ethnic origin (based on the country of their origin), and the length of their residence in Switzerland.

Youths' sporting activities were measured by two questions: "Do you do sports in your free time (excluding sports at school and sports in sports clubs)?" with the answer categories "Yes" and "No"; and "Are you a member of a sports club?" with the answer categories "Yes, in one sports club," "Yes, in more than one sports club," and "No." Three categories were subsequently constructed for our analysis: "nonathletes," i.e., youths who did not do any sports in their free time and were not members of sports clubs; "athletes without membership," i.e., youths who did sports in their free time but were not members of

sports clubs; and "athletes in sports clubs," i.e., youths who did sports in their free time and were members of sports clubs.

Immigrant youths' intercultural relations were measured using the following three indicators:

1. *Personal contacts with Swiss peers during sporting activities*, measured with one item, i.e., "How often do you have personal contact with Swiss peers during your sporting activities?" on a 4-point scale (1 = *never* and 4 = *often*). The frequency of the youths' contacts with Swiss peers was dichotomized into two categories: 1 = *never or seldom* and 2 = *sometimes or often*.
2. *Personal contacts with Swiss peers among close friends*, measured with one item, i.e., "How often do you have personal contact with Swiss peers among your close friends?" on a 4-point scale (1 = *never* and 4 = *often*). The frequency of the youths' contacts with Swiss peers was dichotomized into two categories: 1 = *never or seldom* and 2 = *sometimes or often*.
3. *Proportion of Swiss peers among youths' contacts during free time*, measured with two items. If the answer to the first item, i.e., "Do you see other young people in your free time?" was "Yes," a second question was asked to measure frequency: "What percentage of those youths is of Swiss origin?"; this question had an open answer category.

Immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society was measured by answers to the question "Do you feel that you are integrated in Switzerland?" chosen from a 4-point scale (1 = *not at all* and 4 = *fully*).

Results

Immigrant youths' sporting activities

Most of the immigrant youths (86.4%) reported being engaged in sporting activities in their free time. Sporting activities—as a sports club member or without any sports club membership—were more popular among male (94.1%) than among female youths (76.3%; see ■ Table 1).

Table 1 Immigrant youths' involvement in sports activities: chi-square tests

		Sex		
		Female	Male	Total
Nonathletes	<i>N</i>	46	15	61
	Percentage	23.7	5.9	13.6
	<i>R_{adj}</i>	5.4***	-5.4***	
Athletes without membership	<i>N</i>	96	76	172
	Percentage	49.5	29.9	38.4
	<i>R_{adj}</i>	4.2***	-4.2***	
Athletes in sports clubs	<i>N</i>	52	163	215
	Percentage	26.8	64.2	48.0
	<i>R_{adj}</i>	-7.8***	7.8***	
Total	<i>N</i>	194	254	448
	Percentage	100.0	100.0	100.0

****R_{adj}* ≥ ± 3.3 = *p* < 0.001
R_{adj} adjusted residual

Most (64.2%) male immigrant youths reported doing sports as a member of a sports club and about one third (29.9%) of male youths reported doing sports without any sports club membership. Only a few (5.9%) male youths were not engaged in sporting activities in their free time. By contrast, approximately half (49.5%) of the female immigrant girls reported being involved in sporting activities in their free time, but less than one third (26.8%) had a sports club membership. However, nearly one fourth (23.7%) of the female youths were not engaged in any sporting activities in their free time. These sex differences in immigrant youths' sporting activities turned out to be significant, $\chi^2(2, 44) = 68.58, p < 0.001$.

Immigrant youths' sporting activities and their intercultural relations

Immigrant youths who were members of a sports club were overrepresented among those youths with frequent personal contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities, and they were also significantly underrepresented in the group with rare personal contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities. Conversely, nonathletic immigrant youth and those who were engaged in sporting activities in their free time but not in sports clubs were overrepresented in the group with rare personal contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities, and underrepresented among immigrant youth reporting frequent con-

tact with Swiss youth involved in sports (see **Table 2**).³

These findings were significant across all immigrant young people, $\chi^2(2, 434) = 49.76, p < 0.001$, both for female, $\chi^2(2, 189) = 20.63, p < 0.001$, and for male immigrant youths, $\chi^2(2, 245) = 13.79, p < 0.001$.

Concerning free-time contact with Swiss peers, the ANOVA results indicate that the proportion of contact with Swiss youth was significantly higher, $F(3, 411) = 3.11, p < 0.05$, among immigrant youths doing sports in sports clubs (46.7%) than among nonathletes (36.1%). However, a post-hoc test (Bonferroni) yielded no significant differences in the proportion of Swiss peers reported for free-time peer contact between athletes without membership (42.8%) and sports club athletes (46.7%).

Additionally, chi-square tests indicate [$\chi^2(1, 448) = 37.36, p < 0.001$] that immigrant youths who had more frequent contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities (*N* = 317) counted significantly more Swiss youths among their

³ Although considerably more immigrant youths who were engaged in sporting activities reported more frequent contacts with Swiss peers, some immigrant youths (8.1%) who did not do any sports in their free time and were not members of sports clubs (nonathletes) also reported having frequent contact with Swiss peers. This finding supports the idea that intercultural contacts among peers occur not only during sporting activities, but also in other free-time activities (see Hypothesis IIIa).

close friends (*N* = 290, 76.3%; *R_{adj}* = 6.1, *p* < 0.001). By contrast, those immigrant youths who reported less contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities (*N* = 131) had significantly fewer close friendships with Swiss youths (*N* = 90, 23.7%; *R_{adj}* = -6.1, *p* < 0.001).

Immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society

Table 3 illustrates that the frequency of immigrant youths' contact with Swiss peers during sports, the proportion of Swiss peers in their free-time contacts, the length of their residence in Switzerland, as well as their social and educational status correlated significantly positively with their feeling of being integrated into Swiss society.

Moreover, the frequency of immigrant youths' contacts with Swiss youths during sports correlated significantly positively with the proportion of Swiss peers in their free-time contacts. The immigrant youths' social status also correlated significantly positively with the proportion of Swiss peers among their free-time contacts. Length of residence and age, on the other hand, correlated significantly negatively with the proportion of Swiss peers among their free-time contacts. The immigrant youths' educational status correlated significantly positively with the proportion of Swiss peers in their free-time contacts, and significantly negatively with age. Finally, the proportion of Swiss peers among free-time contacts correlated significantly negatively with age. All correlations remained significant when the variable of youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society was controlled for.

As the next step, immigrant youths' sociodemographic characteristics, the frequency of immigrant youths' contacts with Swiss peers during sports, and the proportion of Swiss peers in their free-time contacts were included as predictors in a generalized linear model (GzLM; Garson, 2012) to analyze the impact of these variables on the youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society. A generalized linear model was chosen for data analysis because it is a flexible generalization of different regression models and permits the nonnormal distribution

Table 2 Immigrant youths' contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities: chi-square tests

		Contact frequency		
		Sometimes or often	Never or seldom	Total
Nonathletes	<i>N</i>	25	33	58
	Percentage	8.1	26.6	13.4
	<i>R_{adj}</i>	-5.1***	5.1***	
Athletes without membership	<i>N</i>	107	62	169
	Percentage	34.5	50.0	38.9
	<i>R_{adj}</i>	-3.0**	3.0**	
Athletes in sports clubs	<i>N</i>	178	29	207
	Percentage	57.4	23.4	47.7
	<i>R_{adj}</i>	6.4***	-6.4***	
Total	<i>N</i>	310	124	434
	Percentage	100.0	100.0	100.0

R_{adj} adjusted residual
 R_{adj}* ≥ ±2.6 = *p* < 0.01; *R_{adj}* ≥ ±3.3 = *p* < 0.001

Table 3 Zero-order and partial correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6
(1)						
(2) ^a	0.07					
(2) ^b	0.05					
(3) ^a	0.15**	0.44***				
(3) ^b	0.11*	0.42***				
(4) ^a	0.23***	0.21***	0.30***			
(4) ^b	0.21***	0.20***	0.27***			
(5) ^a	0.00	-0.12*	0.09	0.03		
(5) ^b	-0.02	-0.13**	0.07	0.01		
(6) ^a	-0.08	-0.19***	-0.30***	-0.19***	0.09	
(6) ^b	-0.08	-0.19***	-0.31***	-0.19***	0.09	
(7)	0.15**	0.12*	0.27***	0.16**	0.14**	-0.02

1 = contact with Swiss peers during sports, 2 = social status, 3 = educational status, 4 = proportion of Swiss peers during free time, 5 = length of residence in Switzerland, 6 = age, 7 = feeling of being integrated into Swiss society; *N* = 392–393
 p* < 0.05; *p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001
 Correlations: ^aControl variable (none)
^bControl variable (7 = feeling of being integrated into Swiss society)

of the dependent variable; in our case, the variable *youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society* (*N* = 443, *M* = 3.01, *SD* = 0.85) was nonnormally distributed (Kolmogorov–Smirnov (443, 443) = 0.24, *p* < 0.001). Moreover, a GzLM allows one to determine the effect size of model predictors on the response variable and to rank their relative importance. All calculations were performed using the software IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

In the initial model, immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society was predicted by immigrant youths' contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities (*sometimes or often* vs. *never or sel-*

dom) and by the proportion of Swiss peers in their free-time contacts. From among immigrant youths' sociodemographic characteristics, their sex (female, male), age, social status (low, middle, high), educational status (secondary school, vocational school, and pre-apprenticeship school), ethnic origin (former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Italy, Spain, Germany, and other origin), and the length of residence in Switzerland were entered as predictors. All hypothesized predictors were entered in one step in the initial model.

The omnibus test, likelihood ratio, $\chi^2(14, 395) = 49.57$, *p* < 0.001, indicated the significance of the model prediction.

According to the tests of the model effects in the initial model (see ■ Table 4), only contact with Swiss peers on the part of immigrant youth during sporting activities and their educational status turned out to be significant predictors. However, immigrant youths' sex, social status, age, ethnic origin, length of residence in Switzerland, and the proportion of Swiss peers among free-time contacts were not significant predictors and were therefore removed from the model. Afterwards, Cook's distance measure was applied to identify outliers with large residuals in order to provide for the accuracy of regression outcomes (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

Thus, in the final model, immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society (*z*-score: *M* = -0.40, *SD* = 1.08) was predicted by their contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities (*sometimes or often*: *N* = 280; *never or seldom*: *N* = 115) and their educational status (*high school*: *N* = 100; *vocational school*: *N* = 244; and *pre-apprenticeship school*: *N* = 55). These predictors were entered into the model in one step. This generalized linear model included 399 cases (99.3%). The fitted model is significant compared with the intercept-only model (likelihood ratio $\chi^2(3, 399) = 35.91$, *p* < 0.001). According to the goodness of fit statistics indicated by Akaike's information criterion (AIC), the final model is a better approximation model (AIC = 1180.30) than the model with outliers (AIC = 1290.82)⁴.

The tests of model effects indicated that immigrant youths' contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities, Wald $\chi^2(1, 399) = 5.62$, *p* < 0.05, and their educational status, Wald $\chi^2(2, 399) = 32.10$, *p* < 0.001, were significant predictors of immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society.

Although the regression model is limited in its ability to show causal relations, the regression coefficients of the model suggest that the feeling of being integrated into Swiss society was more pronounced among immigrant youths who

⁴ When there are several competing models, the AIC estimation is an indicator for model selection. The model with the smaller AIC is the better approximation model among compared models (Burnham & Anderson, 2004).

Table 4 Immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society: predictors in the initial model

	Wald χ^2	df	Significance
Intercept	15.60	1	0.000
Age	2.05	1	0.152
Sex	0.05	1	0.830
Social status	2.61	2	0.271
Educational status	21.98	2	0.000
Ethnic origin	3.87	5	0.568
Length of residence in Switzerland	2.38	1	0.123
Contact with Swiss peers during sports	4.47	1	0.034
Proportion of Swiss peers during free time	1.65	1	0.199

Table 5 Immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society: final model

	β	SE	Wald χ^2	df	Significance	Exp(β)
Intercept	-1.05	0.17	38.80	1	0.000	0.35
Contact with Swiss peers during sports (sometimes-often)	0.27	0.11	5.62	1	0.018	1.31
Contact with Swiss peers during sports (never-seldom) ^a	0 ^b					1
Educational status (high school)	0.88	0.18	22.56	1	0.000	2.40
Educational status (professional school)	0.36	0.18	4.20	1	0.040	1.43
Educational status (pre-apprenticeship school) ^a	0 ^b					1
Scale	1.10 ^c	0.08				

Dependent variable: immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society (z-score); Model: (Intercept): immigrant youths' contact with Swiss peers during sports; immigrant youths' educational status

^aComparison group

^bSet to zero because this parameter is redundant

^cMaximum likelihood estimate

had more frequent personal contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities and among youths who attended secondary or vocational school. The effect sizes based on odds ratios indicated that frequent personal contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities increased the immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society by a factor of 1.31. However, the educational status of immigrant youths turned out to be a more powerful predictor of immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society. Thus, the feeling of being integrated into Swiss society among immigrant youths who attended secondary school increased by a factor of 2.40, and among immigrant youths from vocational schools by a factor of 1.43 compared with youths from pre-apprenticeship schools (see **Table 5**).

Discussion

Generally, our results indicate that sport is an important part of both male and fe-

male immigrant youths' free time. However, as expected, young female immigrants are less involved in sporting activities in their free time compared with young male immigrants. It has been argued that sports do not have the same meaning for female as they have for male youths (Braun & Finke, 2011): Young female students mainly emphasize aesthetic criteria, while male youths stress achievement criteria (Alfermann, 1995; Baur & Miethling, 1991; Burrmann, Krysmanski, & Baur, 2002; Kelinske, Mayer, & Chen, 2001; Späth & Schlicht, 2000). Moreover, the symbolic process of inclusion in or exclusion from participation in sport can also be influenced by young people's gender and ethnical stereotypes (Elling & Knoppers, 2005). In addition, Walseth and Fasting (2004, p. 109), in reviewing the European research on minority women and sport, point out "that sport organizations rarely offer sport activity in accordance with minority women's cultural needs." Consequently, the lower rate of

participation in sport among immigrant girls and women compared with that of their national counterparts is linked to organizational conditions and not to a lack of interest among female immigrants.

According to our study, sex differences are especially pronounced in sporting activities within sports clubs where the proportion of male immigrant youths is twice as high as that of female immigrant youths. Therefore, we posit that sports clubs in Switzerland provide inadequate conditions for *female* immigrant youth. In the words of Elling et al. (2001, p. 428), "one cannot speak of a fully integrated sport practice" in Swiss sports clubs. Our findings are consistent with results from other studies suggesting that female immigrant youths are less involved than their male counterparts in sporting activities in general and in sports clubs in particular (Fussan & Nobis, 2007; Klein, 2011; Kleindienst-Cachay, 2009; Lamprecht et al., 2008).

Nonetheless, immigrant youths' participation in sporting activities is fundamental for their contact with Swiss peers. Specifically, our findings demonstrate that both male *and* female immigrant youth who do sports in sports clubs have considerably more numerous contacts with national peers during sporting activities than those who are not involved in a sports club. With respect to the frequency of social contacts, our findings are consonant with results from previous studies (Becker & Häring, 2012; Fussan, 2006) according to which members of sports clubs have more frequent peer contact and more friends than nonmembers have, even though this does not necessarily extend to broader social contacts among women (Becker & Häring, 2012). However, in our study, sex was not a significant predictor of the frequency of social contact among immigrant youths who were members of sports clubs; we therefore suggest that sports club membership holds significant promise as a means of integration for immigrant women.

Moreover, immigrant youths who had frequent contact with national peers during sports often had close friendships with national youths as well. Besides, interactions with peers in sports turned out to facilitate intercultural relations of

immigrant youths in general. Thus, those immigrant youths who were involved in sporting activities reported having more contact with Swiss peers even outside sporting activities. These findings support the idea that sports offer an advantageous setting (Schwier, 1998; Weiss, 1991, 1999) for peer interactions and therefore provide various opportunities for positive intergroup contacts (Allport, 1954). Based on ample empirical evidence that positive intergroup contact is effective in improving intergroup relations (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Voci & Hewstone, 2003), our results further highlight the importance of sport in promoting intercultural relations in multicultural societies. In line with research on immigrant youths' acculturation, positive intercultural relationships with host nationals are among the factors that facilitate integrative efforts in immigrants' acculturation (Berry, 2005, 2006). Moreover, as shown by research on immigrants' adaptation, intercultural relations of good quality facilitate immigrants' psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

Finally, with respect to immigrant youths' integration, our results show that frequent contact with Swiss peers during sports as well as attendance of secondary school were positively related to an increase in immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society. Since students with an immigrant background are less successful in the Swiss school system than native youth (c.f., for example, Kronig, Haeblerlin, & Eckhart, 2000), sport is an especially important means of integration. Indeed, contact with Swiss peers during sporting activities appears to be more crucial for immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society than their sex, age, social status, or ethnic origin. Based on the findings that immigrant youths' feeling of being integrated into Swiss society was not associated with the length of their residence in Switzerland or the proportion of contacts with Swiss peers during their free time in general, we suggest that sport has a promising potential to promote the social inclusion of immigrant youth into

a host society. Overall, our results demonstrate that sport is an important part of immigrant youths' free time, especially of male youths, highlighting the meaning of sports for intercultural relations and acknowledging the importance of intergroup contacts for immigrant youth integration into a host society.

However, our study also has some limitations. Firstly, it employed a cross-sectional design and therefore cannot describe the causality of the suggested relations between immigrant youths' involvement in sporting activities and their integration into the host society. In fact, the relation could also be proposed in the opposite direction, namely, that better integration of immigrants in a host society (e.g., more intercultural contacts with host peers) can lead to higher involvement in sporting activities (Becker & Häring, 2012; Fusan, 2006). Hence, a longitudinal study would be needed to confirm the causality of the reported findings. Secondly, the generalizability of the present results is limited to the context of one European country; more research on the meaning of sport for immigrant youth integration is needed in other countries. Finally, the generalizability of the present results is also limited to the first immigrant generation. It would, therefore, be important to verify the proposed integrative impact of sports by analyzing following immigrant generations.

Practical conclusion

Our findings have implications for official policies and practices. They suggest that efforts to increase and facilitate immigrant youth involvement in sports clubs of the host country should be prioritized to create more opportunities for joint sports activities of national youth and immigrant youth. In particular, special efforts should be made to involve female immigrants in sporting activities in sports clubs of the host country with programs that take into account the special needs of immigrant girls and young women of different cultural backgrounds.

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