

Homophily in Youth Athletics: Sociodemographics, Group Cohesion, and the Psychology of Performance in Sport

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Abstract : Whether it's a kitchen staff or a law firm, many groups tend to have homogenous characteristics of race, gender, interests, and goals. Social groups are not typically random samples of the population and will usually have common identifiers. According to Blau, age, sex, and education all play salient roles in shaping relationships within members of society. So if there is some degree of homogeneity within groups, the question arises whether this is beneficial or harmful to a group's effectiveness. There has been much disagreement in the scientific community as to whether the presence of homophily benefits or hinders an athletic team's cohesiveness. For this paper, a comparative study of research of soccer case studies that followed various, youth players was studied against examinations of the effects that such a culture has on athletes. The case studies were used as evidence to determine what kind of homophily existed within the soccer camps. One case study followed several European developmental clubs such as Bayern Munich and Barcelona. Another study followed eight different players, four of each gender, implementing a similar method of interviewing, observing, and questioning. The individual and team goals of each athlete were reviewed to see which teams and players were ego-oriented and which were team-oriented. Additionally, there had been little research done on the relationship between homophily and how it applies to the sport community, suggesting the need to develop this neglected problem in applied psychology. This paper argues that the benefits of an egalitarian culture and stronger relations with people of a similar socio-demographic outweigh the liabilities of cohesion like being stereotyped and a lack of network outside the group as produced by homophily in athletic competition.

Keywords : group cohesion, homophily, sports psychology, youth athletics

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