

Advanced Subsidiary GCE

SOCIOLOGY

Unit G671: Exploring socialisation, culture
and identity

PRE-RELEASE MATERIAL

**SPECIMEN PAPER
G671**



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This document consists of **3** printed pages and **1** blank page.

**“One of the lads”?: dual ethnicity and assimilated ethnicities
in the careers of British Asian professional footballers’**

Burdsey, D. (2004), *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 27, 5: 757-759.

One of the Lads’ is an ethnographic study of young, male British Asian footballers. The footballers were from a range of British Asian backgrounds, including: British Pakistani, British Bengali and British Punjabi. Some of them had professional status as footballers, others were amateurs. Until this research was conducted British Asian footballers had largely been ignored by sociologists.

The research was an attempt to ‘get under the skin’ of the footballers and was therefore conducted in the natural environment of their clubs, and in addition, for the amateur footballers, the places where they socialised, the pubs, clubs and restaurants where they went before and after training sessions and matches. Two methods of data collection were used, unstructured interviews and participant observation.

One of the aims of the research was to explore the relationship between the ethnic identity of the footballers and their, apparent, need to fit into the predominantly white laddish culture of the world of football in order to be successful. This culture was one of drinking, gambling and sexual discussion, including the watching of pornographic videos.

The notion of becoming ‘one of the lads’ is one that has, until recently, been seen to be in opposition to that of being British Asian. However, over the last four to five years there has been increasing evidence of the consumption of designer clothes, recreational drugs and other leisure activities by young British Asians previously associated with young white and black males. Burdsey suggests that amongst footballers the need to conform to a common lifestyle of the peer group is likely to be greater than for those not involved in the sport.

‘I didn’t say “I’m Asian, I’m different from all the others”. I still saw myself as a normal YTS (youth training scheme) player like any of the others, just trying to become a professional football player’. [Interview, March 11 2002].

The research on the professional footballers was carried out over three years between 2000 and 2003 and on the amateur footballers for approximately nine months between the autumn of 2001 and the summer of 2002.

32 unstructured interviews were conducted with a range of people including British Asian footballers currently playing for clubs, some ex-players, professional coaches, academy directors and members of Anti-racist organisations. The unstructured interviews were informal, conducted in a conversational style, enabling the footballers to give detailed accounts of how they saw their status as footballers in relation to their ethnic identity. The research did not attempt to find out about how the professional players saw themselves in relation to their ethnic and/or cultural identity in relation to other aspects of their lives although as far as the amateurs were concerned it did emerge that they pursued a range of laddish behaviour in all aspects of their lives.

In addition to the unstructured interviews, overt participant observation was carried out during the 2001-2002 season with four amateur football teams in the London area. Burdsey joined in with the social activities of the players and assisted with matchday chores. The players in two of the teams were predominantly of Bengali Muslim cultural origin. One of the other teams was predominantly comprised of Pakistani Muslim players and the fourth was largely players from Punjabi Sikh background.

Access to the amateur footballers and their clubs was gained, in the case of two of the clubs, through personal contact and for the other two by snowball sampling that is by asking people from one club to introduce the researcher to other clubs who would be willing to take part in the research. In order to gain specific access to the players it was necessary to make a number of visits to the clubs and find out who could act as gatekeepers to the players. Once these were identified, they were able to tell the researcher who would be the best and most appropriate players to be interviewed. Access to the professional footballers was gained through the managers of the clubs they played for.

Burdsey found British Asian footballers who have been successful in the past have usually had dual ethnicity or been anglicised. Their role and status as footballers has been the dominant part of their identity.

'I just play like any other white lad out there, another white person' [Interview with 'Asian' professional player, 20 March 2002]. He found for the British Asian professional footballers, their ethnic identities took a lower priority for them than that of the laddish culture, which was seen as the cultural norm by white and black professional footballers. He also found some of the amateur footballers demonstrated behaviour more associated with laddism in all aspects of their lives, behaviour very similar to white working class lads. They talked about drinking, gambling and pornographic films as part of their everyday experiences.

In addition to the extent to which the footballers adopted or generally practiced a laddish culture, Burdsey also found that one of the reasons why so few amateur British Asian footballers moved to professional status was they had no 'inside' contacts. The amateur clubs they played in were not clubs that were regularly visited by scouts and they therefore had little chance of being spotted. Also their families had little knowledge of how to go about making appropriate contacts.

'There's loads of [Asian] kids that can play but they don't know how to get into a team. They need someone to, like, help them get into a Sunday team, go for a trial or whatever. But it's hard because the parents don't really understand that much, so they need someone outside the family giving them help and advice.' [Interview, 11 February 2002].

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