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Youth, Identify and Resistance: A Sociological Study of Street and Informal Athletic Cultures

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Abstract:

Street and informal sports cultures in Sargodha, Pakistan, this research explores the link between youth, identity, and resistance. Data were gathered from hundred male participants, ages 11 to 40, who often participated in street and informal sports activities in parks, open spaces, and local streets using a quantitative cross-sectional survey approach. Four subsections gender dynamics in street sports, class and economic inequalities, geographical control and access, and intersections of identity scored on a five-point Likert scale were included in the structured, closed-ended questionnaire. A pilot study and expert review were used to verify the instrument, and internal consistency was confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha. In SPSS (version 25), descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the data, and comparisons were made between three age groups (ages 11–20, 21–30, and 31–40). The results show that when it came to identity creation, empowerment, social belonging, and resistance to marginalization, younger participants (ages 11–20 and 21–30) expressed the highest levels of agreement. This was particularly noticeable when it came to acknowledging the gender, class, and geographical characteristics of informal sports as well as combating social (66.7%) and cultural-political marginalization (66.7%). On the other side, respondents between the ages of 31 and 40 showed more neutral or disagreeing answers,

[204]

especially when it came to resistance, class disparity, and spatial ownership. This suggests that as people age, there is less importance placed on using street sports to define one's identity. Overall, the study comes to the conclusion that teenagers and young adults actively negotiate questions of gender, class, belonging, and resistance in street and informal sports, which serve as potent sociocultural arenas. These results emphasize the transforming impact of non-institutional sports activities in identity formation and advance sociological understandings of teenage subcultures.

Keywords: Youth Identity, Resistance, Street Sports, Informal Athletic Cultures, Sociological Study

Introduction:

In the field of sport sociology, street and informal athletic cultures such as pick-up games, informal neighborhood contests, and street sports have long been understudied (Krieger, 2023). These informal activities typically take place in public areas of cities, away from official institutional contexts like clubs, leagues, and institutions. Street sports provide more than just physical activity for many young people; they serve as a platform for identity development, social integration, norm negotiation, marginalization resistance, and a means of understanding gender, class, power, and space limitations. Informal or street athletics is a vital platform for social life and youth expression because official sports infrastructure and organized sport possibilities can be few in many developing country cities, including Pakistan. This is especially true for those from lower socioeconomic strata (Almeida, 2025). Young men engage in a variety of outdoor sports activities in Sargodha, a mid-sized city in Punjab, Pakistan. They play in alleyways, open spaces, and local streets. Sociocultural elements such as class, gender norms, urban environment, and experiences of marginalization (economic, social, and geographical) all influence these activities. Both sociological theory and policy (youth development, urban planning, sports policy, social inclusion) benefit from an understanding of how identity is formed in these contexts, how resistance is enacted and lived out, what norms and values drive these subcultures, and how gender, class, and spatial dimensions impact them.

The following are important factors in this quantitative study:

Identity development includes a youth's self-perception, social and group affiliations, and self-esteem and identity rooted in their involvement in street or athletic sports. Participating in informal sports can serve as an apparent or covert form of resistance to social exclusion, economic hardship, geographical isolation, and other forms of marginalization (Oettle, 2025).

Values and norms in informal sports subcultures:

what moral principles, peer standards, social regulations, and expectations are in place (e.g., fairness, respect, competitiveness, solidarity, etc.). Gender, class, and geographical dimensions: how socioeconomic class affects access, resources, and status; how gender roles and expectations influence participation; and how physical considerations (open space availability, neighborhood safety, and urban layout) either facilitate or restrict street sports (Farina, 2025).

These factors are crucial because they enable the study to map out not just what is taking place (participation levels or patterns), but also how young people's identities are formed, how they deal with being marginalized, and how informal sports cultures fulfill larger societal roles. They help close a gap: a lot of sport sociology concentrates on organized sports, or on young people in clubs or schools; those in informal settings, and maybe even those in Pakistan's smaller cities, receive less attention. Additionally, when it comes to casual athletics, intersectional factors like class, gender, and location are frequently overlooked.

Objectives of the Study:

- i. To investigate how urban teenagers in Sargodha develop their identities by participating in street sports.
- ii. To investigate informal sports as a means of fending off marginalization.
- iii. To comprehend norms, values, and social dynamics in informal sports subcultures.
- iv. To investigate how participation in street sports is influenced by gender, class, and geographical aspects.

Research Questions:

These objectives suggest the following potential study questions:

1. How do young people in Sargodha who play street sports define themselves and the function that street sports play in the development of their identities?
2. How can engagement in informal street sports function as a kind of social, economic, and geographical marginalization resistance?
3. What social dynamics, norms, and values (peer relationships, trust, justice, and a sense of belonging) define informal athletic subcultures among participants in street sports?
4. How are patterns of participation, experiences, and meanings associated with street sport influenced by gender, socioeconomic class, and spatial access/constraints?

Literature Review:

Researchers are paying more and more attention to street and informal sports as crucial spaces for young people's identity, socialization, and cultural resistance. In a comprehensive nationwide research in Europe, Engell et al. (2024) discovered that street sports were not only well-liked by young people but also closely linked to socioeconomic class and immigrant status. According to their results, people from underprivileged groups who might not have access to traditional athletic systems are frequently drawn to street sports. This is relevant to Pakistan, because lower socioeconomic groups frequently do not have access to organized organizations or facilities, making street sports an essential means of establishing one's identity.

Sport as a means of resistance is a well-established concept. According to Isard et al., (2023), women's regular involvement in sports turns into a means of defying gendered societal norms. The larger idea of "everyday resistance" equally applies to young males participating in street sports who contest exclusive urban and social institutions by reclaiming public places for recreation, even if their study concentrated on women in more organized situations. Similar to this, Talat and Ali (2023) investigated the obstacles that females in Lahore confront and demonstrated that family limitations, safety concerns, and cultural norms all pose major challenges. Although this study draws attention to gender disparities, it also

supports the notion that informal settings, like local streets, serve as substitute forums where underrepresented groups may negotiate their involvement and fight exclusion.

The development of athletic identity is another aspect covered in the literature. According to research conducted in Hong Kong, children's engagement in sports is strongly predicted by their sport identity, with perceived competence and peer support being important factors. This is accordant with research by Kokandakar et al. (2024), which shown that playing sports as a teenager had long-term positive effects on early adult self-rated health and well-being. These results lend credence to the idea that identity building via sport has long-term effects that transcend beyond play, which is a factor your study aims to investigate in the Sargodha setting. According to studies on risk factors and sports identity, identity is multifaceted and includes social recognition, exclusivity, and emotional commitment. Instead of official coaches or teams, peer groups and local networks frequently strengthen these identity elements in informal sports.

The social dynamics, conventions, and values ingrained in informal sports have also been highlighted in studies. A research on street football showed that informal games are controlled by agreed-upon regulations, peer pressure, and ethical standards of justice and decency rather than being disorderly (Ayed, 2019). These relationships highlight the ways in which informal sports subcultures develop their own rules and interpretations. Similar to this, Marqués-Sánchez et al., (2021) demonstrated how teenagers who participate in team sports establish important roles and identities within their peer groups using social network analysis. This supports the sociological theory that peer networks' recognition and interactions which are particularly evident in street sports are intimately linked to identity building in sports.

The class and spatial dimensions of informal athletics are also well documented. A comparative analysis of sports participation in Zaragoza (2020) revealed that while street sports often emphasize autonomy and subcultural identity, social stratification still persists. Those from higher socioeconomic groups may choose informal sport as a lifestyle preference, whereas for lower classes it may be the only available option. This stratified access parallels the situation in Pakistan, where urban planning and socioeconomic inequalities shape access to safe and adequate play spaces. Relatedly, studies of Pakistani female students have found that religious, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers significantly restrict participation in physical activities.

Informal sports also have well-documented geographical and class characteristics. While street sports frequently highlight autonomy and subcultural identity, class inequality still exists, according to a comparative study of sports participation in Zaragoza (2020). Informal sport may be the sole alternative open to those from lower socioeconomic categories, while it may be the lifestyle choice of those from better socioeconomic groups. The scenario in Pakistan, where socioeconomic disparities and urban planning influence access to secure and suitable play areas, is comparable to this stratified access. Similarly, research on female students in Pakistan has revealed that financial, cultural, and religious restrictions severely limit physical activity participation. Despite focusing on women, these findings highlight the larger fact that where and how sport is played is heavily influenced by cultural and socioeconomic standards. All things considered, the research now in publication emphasizes

the close connections between identity, social networks, cultural resistance, and gendered or classed inequality and informal sport. Nevertheless, the majority of these research are qualitative, concentrated on gendered obstacles in formal sports, or were carried out in Western or metropolitan metropolises. There are still few quantitative studies of young men participating in informal street sports in Pakistan's smaller cities. Furthermore, no one integrated framework has been used to examine how identity, resistance, social norms, and spatial/class dynamics connect. In order to fill these gaps and offer empirical proof of how informal sports cultures serve as places of identity and resistance in Pakistan, this study surveyed 100 male participants in Sargodha across three age groups.

There are still several gaps in the literature, despite the fact that research on street sports, lifestyle sports, informal athletics, etc. is expanding worldwide. Most studies are qualitative or small-scale, and only a small number of them are quantitative with sizable sample sizes that concentrate on the informal athletic cultures of Pakistani or South Asian smaller cities. Gender is particularly underrepresented among male and female participants in informal settings, and intersectional analysis (gender, class, and spatiality) is frequently underdeveloped. Many studies concentrate on organized youth programs or formal or structured sport; street sport and informal sports are less frequently the main emphasis.

In Pakistani urban environments, the notion of resistance how informal sport challenges marginalization is not well understood and experimentally investigated. Few studies have examined how identity, norms, and other factors may change with age among street sport players across a range of age groups, such as 11–20, 21–30, and 31–40. By doing a quantitative survey of 100 male street/informal athletes in Sargodha across all age groups, this study seeks to close these disparities by examining identity, resistance, norms, and the intersections of gender, class, and place.

Research Methodology:

Design of Research

In order to investigate the connections between youth, identity, and resistance within the framework of street and informal sports cultures, this study used a quantitative cross-sectional survey approach. The researcher was able to record participant perception and experience patterns without changing variables since the design permitted data collection at a single moment in time.

Population and sample

Male young people in Sargodha city who actively engage in street and informal sports activities made up the research's target demographic. In order to be eligible, participants had to be: male athletes in the age range of eleven to forty; Participating in street sports or informal athletic activities on a regular basis (e.g., playing in public places, open fields, or local streets outside of organized sports venues). To choose volunteers who best reflected the phenomena being studied, a purposeful sampling strategy was used. This approach improved the validity of the results by guaranteeing that only those directly involved in street or informal sports were included. One hundred individuals made up the final sample size, which is sufficient to provide trustworthy statistical conclusions.

Research Instrument

A standardized, closed-ended questionnaire that was created especially for this study and was based on research on teenage identity, resistance, and subcultural behaviors in sports was used to gather data. Four subsections that reflected the main themes of the study were included in the questionnaire:

1. Gender Dynamics in Street Sports
2. Class and Economic Inequality
3. Spatial Control and Access
4. Intersections and Identity

A five-point Likert scale, from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), was used to measure responses, allowing attitudes and perceptions to be quantified in a number of ways. A pilot research was carried out with a small sample of participants to examine clarity and reliability, and the instrument was reviewed by subject matter experts in sports sciences and sociology to guarantee content validity. To determine the scale's internal consistency, Cronbach's Alpha was computed.

Data Collection Procedure

Participants were given the questionnaires by the researcher in person in a few Sargodha informal sports venues, including parks, public spaces, and neighborhood street setups. Where required, prior consent was obtained from informal sports organizers and local community leaders. The study's goals were explained to the participants, they were given confidentiality guarantees, and they were asked to answer truthfully. Each participant took 15 to 20 minutes on average to finish the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-25) was used to code and analyze the gathered data. Responses from participants were compiled using descriptive statistics (frequencies). Different age groups (11–20, 21–30, and 31–40 years old) were compared to look at how they perceived resistance, social belonging, and identity creation. Key trends were shown graphically using graphs.

Ethical Considerations

The study complied with sociological research ethics. All participants gave their informed consent, and for those under the age of 18, parental consent was also acquired. Respondents were given the assurance that their names would be kept private and that the information would only be used for academic research, and participation was entirely voluntary. Participants in the trial did not face any physical or psychological risks.

Results :

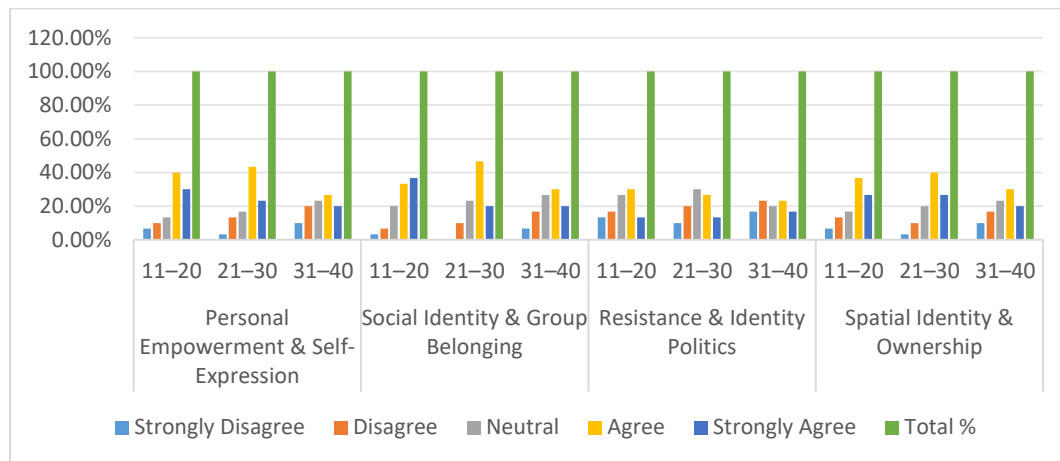


Figure 1: Distribution of Responses (%) Across Age Groups on Subtopics of Street Sports (Personal Empowerment, Social Identity, Resistance, and Spatial Ownership)

In a figure 1. the findings indicate that the youngest group (11–20) had the most agreement and strong agreement on personal empowerment, social belonging, and spatial identity, pointing towards greater identity construction through street sports. The group aged 21–30 also registered similar agreement, especially in social belonging (46.7%) and spatial ownership (40.0% agree, 26.7% strongly agree). By contrast, the 31–40 group was more likely to give neutral and disagreeing answers, particularly in resistance and identity politics, and indicated that the street sports' contribution to identity formation is greatest at adolescence and early adulthood but decreases with age.

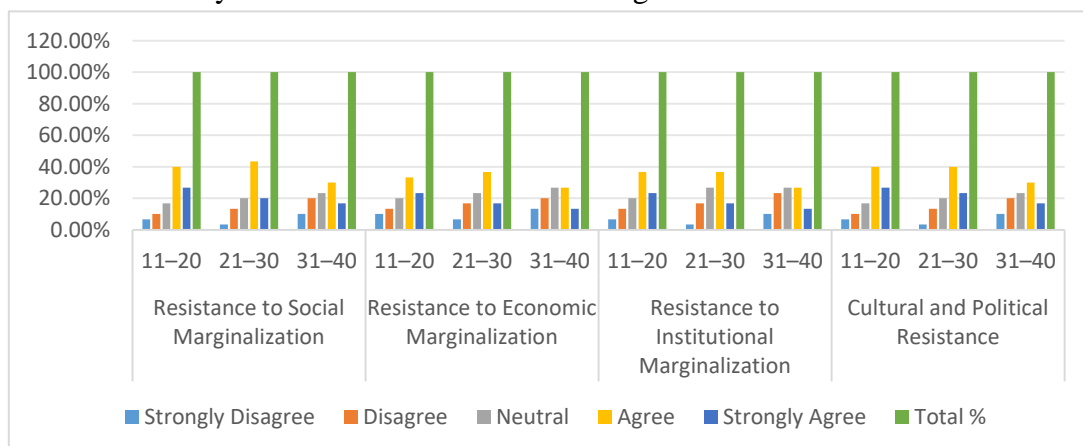


Figure 2: Percentage Distribution of Responses by Age Group on Dimensions of Resistance in Street Sports (Social, Economic, Institutional, and Cultural-Political)

In a figure 2. the findings show that the youth participants (11–20) reported consistently high agreement and strong agreement on all the subtopics, especially in counteracting social (66.7%) and cultural-political marginalization (66.7%), with strong coherence on using informal sports as a means of resistance. The 21–30 group also indicated a significant agreement, particularly in counteracting social (63.3%) and institutional marginalization (53.4%). Conversely, the 31–40 group reported a higher tendency towards neutral and disagreement responses, which indicate weaker feelings of resistance via informal sports.

Resistance can be seen to be strongest among young adults and adolescents but grows weaker with age.

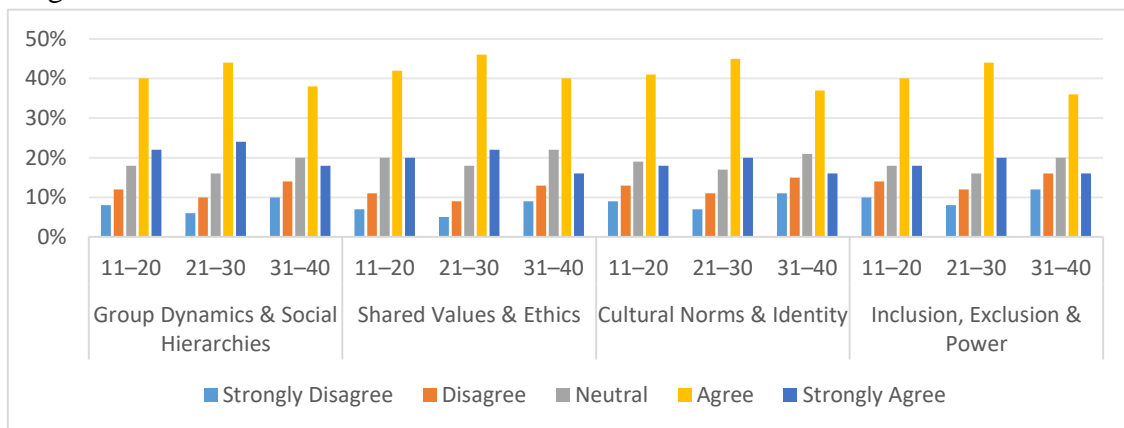


Figure 3: Percentage Distribution of Responses by Age Group on Social Dimensions of Street Sports (Group Dynamics, Shared Values, Cultural Norms, and Power Relations)

In a figure 3. the findings indicate that among all age groups, most respondents tended towards agreement on all four subtopics, meaning most respondents generally acknowledged group dynamics, shared values, cultural norms, and power structures within informal athletic subcultures. The 21–30 age group reported highest levels of agreement, proposing most alignment with these social dynamics, while the 31–40 group reported comparatively higher neutrality and disagreement, possibly reflecting more critical or balanced perspectives. On the whole, the results emphasize that younger and middle-aged respondents tend to view informal sporting cultures as organized around values, norms, and hierarchies.

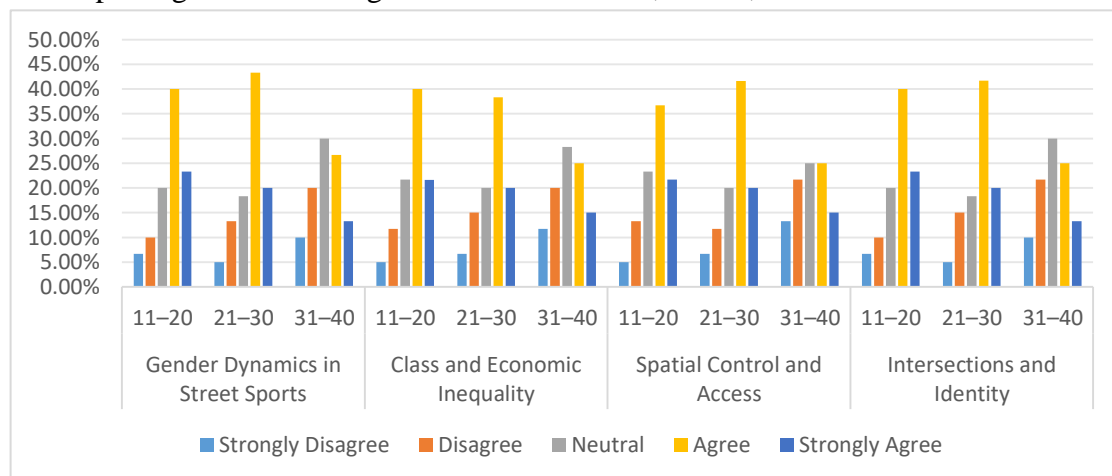


Figure 4: Percentage Distribution of Responses by Age Group on Key Dimensions of Street Sports (Gender Dynamics, Class Inequality, Spatial Access, and Intersections of Identity)

In a figure 4 the results present that participants in 11–20 and 21–30 years of age revealed more agreement and strong agreement for all four subtopics, especially in the identification of gender dynamics, economic inequality, and spatial access, indicating that younger groups are more sensitive to and influenced by these dimensions in street sports. Conversely, the 31–40 group produced more neutral and conflicting answers, particularly in terms of class inequality

and control of space, which were indicative of a relatively lower focus on these identity-forming factors. Overall, the findings identify the street sports as a more robust locus of negotiating youth, young adults' gender, class, and spatial identities compared to older participants.

Discussion:

According to the study's findings, people's perceptions of street and informal sports as venues for resistance, social belonging, and identity creation are greatly influenced by their age. Adolescence is a crucial time for identity building through street sports, as seen by Figure 1, which shows that younger participants (ages 11 to 20) expressed the highest levels of agreement on personal empowerment, social belonging, and spatial identity. This supports the claims made by Wheaton (2013) that, outside of formalized frameworks, youth participation in alternative and informal sports gives them a sense of agency, autonomy, and empowerment. Sports and other leisure activities are frequently used by adolescent subcultures as locations for creating a sense of identity and belonging, according to Hodgkinson (2007).

Strong agreement was also shown by the 21–30 age group, especially on social belonging and spatial ownership, indicating that early adulthood still views street sports as crucial for community cohesiveness and social integration. These results are consistent with Thorpe and Wheaton (2011), who highlight how informal sports venues help young adults develop their social capital and sense of community. Participants between the ages of 31 and 40, on the other hand, responded more neutrally and disagreeably, particularly when it came to resistance and identity politics. According to Elder's (1998) life-course approach, this could indicate a change in priorities, with older people placing more value on family, employment, or institutional relationships and less on constructing their identities through street sports.

Youth participants (ages 11 to 20) in Figure 2 expressed strong agreement that street sports are a way to fight against social and cultural marginalization. This bolsters the findings of Spaaij (2009), who discovered that underrepresented groups frequently use grassroots and informal sports as means of visibility, empowerment, and resistance. The notion that young people use street sports as a counter-space to dominant societal institutions is further supported by the considerable agreement that was recorded by the 21–30 group, especially with regard to resistance to social and institutional marginalization (Richardson & Kak, 2021). The group aged 31 to 40, on the other hand, displayed greater neutrality and disagreement, which suggests that they rely less on informal sports as a form of resistance as they become older.

Group dynamics, values, cultural norms, and power structures among informal sports subcultures were largely accepted by respondents across all age groups, as shown in Figure 3. Atencio and Beal (2011) argued that informal sports frequently serve as micro-communities where similar values, hierarchies, and ethics are repeated, and the group between the ages of 21 and 30 showed the highest alignment. A more critical detachment or a change in participation with such processes is suggested by the somewhat higher neutrality among the 31–40 group.

Lastly, Figure 4 shows that younger participants (ages 11–20 and 21–30) perceived gender dynamics, economic disparity, and geographical access as essential aspects of their experiences participating in street sports and were more sensitive to these factors. This is consistent with the results of Ratna and Mandrekar (2017), who highlights the ways in which class and gender interact to influence involvement in informal sports. The neutrality and disagreement of the 31–40 age group may indicate that these identity-forming variables are less directly involved or that their prominence decreases with age.

When combined, these results support the idea that street sports are important venues for young people and young adults to negotiate social injustices, oppose social injustices, and build their identities. The importance of these activities tends to decrease with age, indicating the temporality of subcultural participation across life.

Conclusion:

This study shows that, especially for teenagers and young people of Sargodha, street and informal sports are essential for establishing identities, creating a sense of community, and offering channels for resistance. Informal sports are closely linked to self-expression and community-building processes, as evidenced by the consistently higher levels of agreement reported by the 11–20 and 21–30 age groups across dimensions like empowerment, social belonging, marginalization resistance, group dynamics, and socio-cultural identity. The age group of 31 to 40, on the other hand, indicated higher levels of neutrality and disagreement, indicating that these identity-forming factors wane with age. All things considered, the findings highlight the fact that street sports serve as important cultural arenas where questions of gender, class, power, and belonging are actively debated rather than being purely leisure activities. These results advance sociological knowledge of identity politics, resistance, and youth cultures in informal athletic settings. Future studies should look more closely at how age, gender, and class intersections continue to influence street sport participation in various cultural contexts.

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