

****Football fandom, media, the World Cup, and race****

Article. Van Sterkenburg (2013). National bonding and meanings given to race and ethnicity; Watching the football World Cup on TV. Soccer and Society, 14, 3, 386-403.

Link. [National bonding and meanings given to race and ethnicity: watching the football World Cup on Dutch TV: Soccer & Society: Vol 14, No 3](#)

Aim and method The FIFA World Cup is often touted as a unifying event, bringing people together in national pride. But how does this play out in a diverse country like the Netherlands, and does it truly bridge divides based on ethnicity and background? Recent research explored these questions by talking to 36 men and women of Dutch, Surinamese, and Moroccan descent about their experiences watching the World Cup and supporting the Dutch national football team.

Key findings. The study found that the World Cup *can* create a sense of national connection, particularly for people with Dutch roots. However, this feeling isn't universal. While many felt a surge of national pride when the team performed well, the strength of that connection was often tied to the team's success. For some with European backgrounds, this pride was even conditional – they expressed feeling less connected if the team wasn't perceived as being primarily 'Dutch' (often meaning White), revealing underlying anxieties about cultural change. People of Surinamese and Moroccan descent had more varied experiences. Some felt a strong connection to the team, while others felt distanced, often pointing to biased media coverage, particularly towards players of Moroccan heritage. A common thread across all groups was the persistence of stereotypes. Even while celebrating national pride, people often unconsciously relied on preconceived notions about the athletic abilities or intelligence of players from different ethnic backgrounds. The media was seen as both a source of unity *and* a potential perpetuator of these stereotypes.

The research highlights that while big sporting events can foster a sense of shared national identity, they don't automatically erase existing societal divisions. Ethnic identity and deeply ingrained stereotypes continue to help shape how people experience and support the national team.

Limitations. It's important to note that this study was based on interviews with a specific group of people in the Netherlands, and may not fully represent the views of the entire population. Furthermore, the study focused on one particular World Cup, and experiences may vary in different years with different team compositions and media narratives. Nevertheless, the findings offer valuable insights into the complex relationship between national identity, ethnicity, and sport in a multicultural society.