WHAT ARE THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND GENDER?

- **sport as a traditionally male domain**
- **apply an understanding about the social construction of gender to explore the ways in which sport reinforces or challenges traditional narrow understanding of gender**
- **critically analyse the participation rates of males and females in a range of sports and offer explanations for any differences. Consider how some forms of activity have come to be traditionally associated with each gender**
  - sport and the construction of masculinity and femininity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Having manly qualities such as physical strength and toughness.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Femininity</td>
<td>Characteristics such as tenderness and consideration, traditionally associated with females, but often perceived to be desirable in both sexes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male-dominated sports have been traditionally featured throughout Australia's history. Elite male athletes have achieved high profiles in their sport, which have enabled them to secure lucrative sponsorship deals. Women have also had a long history of sporting participation in Australia, but their journey for recognition in their chosen sports has not been without obstacles and restrictions. As modern society began broadening its perception of gender roles, the relationship between sport and gender, aided by media influence, has redefined the constructs of masculinity and femininity in sport.

Children begin socialising at an early age. Society ensures that sex role socialisation occurs in everyday life and passes on to sport and physical activity pursuits. From early childhood, the family unit influences the expectations of boys and girls, which is further encouraged when children attend school.

Though sport is still seen as a male domain in Australian society today, females have made some inroads into the professional domain.

Boys who want to pursue more feminine sports such as ice skating, gymnastics or dancing, could be seen as sissy or girly by the mainstream population. Similarly, girls who want to play rugby or AFL can face problems when trying to break the male-dominated barriers these clubs have towards women participating in football, as do girls who want to make inroads in lesser known sports like BMX riding and motor sports. Girls who eventually participate in these sports, usually have to constantly defend their rights to do so and to ensure that their femininity is recognised through any media opportunities that present themselves.
Sponsors expect to see female athletes as strong willed and dedicated to their sport, but at the same time graceful, attractive and feminine. Failure to maintain femininity can have a bearing on the level of media exposure and subsequent sponsorship offers that female athletes receive. Media and sponsors also place expectations on male athletes to exude a masculine persona of muscular strength and toughness, yet still be manly and handsome.

**Implications for participation**

Participation rates in sport for boys and girls differ significantly, with varying factors determining the levels of participation for both sexes. Family and cultural background, past experiences, genetic makeup, including body composition and personality traits, socioeconomic status and geographic location all influence the type of sports played and the level of an individual athlete’s commitment and competition.

Boys tend to be encouraged more than girls to participate in sports. Girls can depend heavily on the support of positive role models, such as Lauren Jackson, Samantha Stosur and Cathy Freeman, to spur them on to persevere with their sport. Boys also tend to dominate mixed physical education classes, leaving girls with less involvement. Girls will also tend to drop out of sport if their femininity is questioned and can be heavily influenced by the sex-role stereotyping that still punctuates society today. When this occurs, their desire to acquire skills is minimal, as is the level of fitness; this can lead girls to have a poor body image and reduced confidence in their own ability, which they can carry throughout their life.

Sport participation can be made more difficult for girls who come from different cultural backgrounds, whereby restrictions imposed by their culture or religion do not enable them to participate in sport like the majority of Australian females. Muslim girls who hold the Islamic faith struggle to adapt to the social and female sporting traditions of Australia. In particular, rules of dress have made it difficult for these girls to participate in sport. However, recent clothing designs that fulfils Islamic dress codes while still allowing greater movement has offered more opportunities for them to play sport. Specific fitness venues for Muslim women have also given them the opportunity to participate and gain better fitness levels.

**Sponsorship, policy and resourcing**

Sport sponsorship is far more entrenched in male than in female sport. This uneven distribution of sponsorship stems right back to the exposure and importance placed on male sports. Male sport has a higher profile and greater media coverage, so attracts a greater share of the sponsorship dollar. Though overall, team sports that are more successful in international events are likely to gain sponsorship and media coverage, which means greater resources for their sport.

The success of international competitions has increased the number of sportswomen in Australia, who are benefiting from more government funding and sponsorship along with a high media profile. Women’s netball, basketball and hockey teams are enjoying the fruits of sponsorship and Australian swimming stars like Stephanie Rice enjoy fame and opportunity beyond the pool as a result of her success.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>AGE GROUP (YEARS)</th>
<th>ORGANISED ONLY (c)</th>
<th>NON-ORGANISED ONLY (d)</th>
<th>BOTH ORGANISED AND NON-ORGANISED (e)</th>
<th>TOTAL ORGANISED (A+C)</th>
<th>TOTAL NON-ORGANISED (B+C)</th>
<th>TOTAL PARTICIPATION (A+B+C)</th>
<th>NUMBER ('000)</th>
<th>Participation rate (A+B+C) (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>15 to 24</td>
<td>417.3</td>
<td>385.3</td>
<td>454.7</td>
<td>872.0</td>
<td>840.0</td>
<td>1,257.2</td>
<td>1,257.2</td>
<td>87.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>239.8</td>
<td>538.1</td>
<td>415.6</td>
<td>655.4</td>
<td>953.7</td>
<td>1,931.6</td>
<td>1,931.6</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>195.6</td>
<td>663.7</td>
<td>383.4</td>
<td>578.9</td>
<td>1,047.1</td>
<td>1,625.8</td>
<td>1,625.8</td>
<td>81.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>127.2</td>
<td>632.0</td>
<td>300.5</td>
<td>427.7</td>
<td>932.5</td>
<td>1,359.7</td>
<td>1,359.7</td>
<td>80.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>106.9</td>
<td>508.2</td>
<td>201.4</td>
<td>308.3</td>
<td>709.5</td>
<td>1,017.8</td>
<td>1,017.8</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>163.5</td>
<td>476.7</td>
<td>181.0</td>
<td>344.5</td>
<td>657.7</td>
<td>908.2</td>
<td>908.2</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1,250.3</td>
<td>3,204.0</td>
<td>1,936.6</td>
<td>3,186.8</td>
<td>5,140.5</td>
<td>6,390.8</td>
<td>6,390.8</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>15 to 24</td>
<td>361.0</td>
<td>426.0</td>
<td>340.7</td>
<td>701.7</td>
<td>766.7</td>
<td>1,172.7</td>
<td>1,172.7</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>209.0</td>
<td>618.1</td>
<td>384.0</td>
<td>593.0</td>
<td>1,002.1</td>
<td>1,211.1</td>
<td>1,211.1</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>190.4</td>
<td>742.8</td>
<td>342.1</td>
<td>532.5</td>
<td>1,049.4</td>
<td>1,275.3</td>
<td>1,275.3</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>129.7</td>
<td>700.9</td>
<td>323.3</td>
<td>453.0</td>
<td>1,024.2</td>
<td>1,153.9</td>
<td>1,153.9</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>134.4</td>
<td>530.7</td>
<td>233.6</td>
<td>368.0</td>
<td>764.2</td>
<td>898.7</td>
<td>898.7</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>166.0</td>
<td>527.7</td>
<td>207.5</td>
<td>373.6</td>
<td>735.2</td>
<td>901.3</td>
<td>901.3</td>
<td>81.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1,190.5</td>
<td>3,546.2</td>
<td>1,812.7</td>
<td>3,021.8</td>
<td>5,377.3</td>
<td>6,558.0</td>
<td>6,558.0</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>15 to 24</td>
<td>778.3</td>
<td>811.3</td>
<td>795.4</td>
<td>1,573.7</td>
<td>1,606.7</td>
<td>2,385.0</td>
<td>2,385.0</td>
<td>80.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>448.9</td>
<td>1,156.3</td>
<td>799.5</td>
<td>1,248.4</td>
<td>1,955.8</td>
<td>2,404.7</td>
<td>2,404.7</td>
<td>94.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>385.9</td>
<td>1,406.5</td>
<td>725.5</td>
<td>2,132.0</td>
<td>2,517.9</td>
<td>2,999.9</td>
<td>2,999.9</td>
<td>83.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>256.9</td>
<td>1,332.8</td>
<td>623.8</td>
<td>880.7</td>
<td>1,956.7</td>
<td>2,213.5</td>
<td>2,213.5</td>
<td>82.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>241.3</td>
<td>1,038.8</td>
<td>435.0</td>
<td>676.3</td>
<td>1,473.8</td>
<td>1,715.1</td>
<td>1,715.1</td>
<td>81.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>329.6</td>
<td>1,004.4</td>
<td>718.5</td>
<td>1,392.9</td>
<td>1,722.5</td>
<td>2,440.9</td>
<td>2,440.9</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2,440.9</td>
<td>6,750.1</td>
<td>3,767.7</td>
<td>6,208.5</td>
<td>10,517.9</td>
<td>12,958.7</td>
<td>12,958.7</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Relates to persons aged 15 years and over who participated in physical activity for exercise, recreation and sport over a 12-month period prior to interview in 2007
(b) For any group, local participation rate is the number of persons who participated in the activity at least once in the last 12 months, expressed as a percentage of the population in the same group
(c) Participants’ activities are fully organised
(d) Participants’ activities are fully non-organised
(e) Participants’ activities are part organised and part non-organised

the role of the media in constructing meanings around femininity and masculinity in sport

The media has the ability to influence and encourage particular views and responses in the general public to certain issues. Traditionally, the media has been seen to place greater significance in promoting male sport to the nation than female sport. This is undertaken through the sheer volume of coverage, the positioning of sports articles, the wording of attention-drawing headlines, and the inclusion of great photography. Articles and photos for male sports usually depict strong aggressive action shots and have blazing headlines like ‘gut wrenching fight’ or ‘Master Blaster’ that conjure up ideas of strength and determination.

There are also many examples throughout the media of articles about sportswomen that have overtones promoting weakness, softness and sexuality. Headlines like ‘Beauty and the Grease’ for motor sports, and ‘Water Babes’ for water sports are commonplace; also descriptions giving physical traits of sportswomen, such as ‘the perky blonde’ and ‘the striking statuesque blonde’ pepper articles on women’s sports.
The Australian netball captain Liz Ellis has called on the Federal Government to provide tax incentives to companies involved in women’s sport to encourage greater sponsorship and professionalism.

She has also pushed for a legislative requirement for media groups to satisfy a certain quota of space or broadcast time to women’s sports.

Ellis told the first day of a state inquiry into women in sport and recreation that there were 3000 full-time jobs for men as professional sportsmen, but none for sportswomen.

On a day when the Australian Football League announced a 25 per cent pay increase – meaning each club next season can spend $6.22 million on player salaries—Ellis said there was no professional path for the leading female sport, netball.

‘When girls write to me saying they want to be a professional netball player, my inclination is to write back and say “I want to be one too”’ she said.

Ellis asked the inquiry to consider a mandatory requirement for the media to cover women’s sport in a similar vein to media regulations that mandate minimum levels of local content.

That view was also submitted by Football Federation Australia, the high-powered Women in Sport Media Group and the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation.

The media group, which is made up of the most senior female sports administrators in the country wants a minimum 30 per cent of media coverage devoted to women’s sport. Its spokeswoman, Ann Mitchell, told the inquiry that the 30 per cent level reflected data showing the number of female sports teams was 30 per cent that of men.

‘We are very concerned about the lack of coverage of female team sports and it is a situation that has not improved sufficiently to say there is fair coverage in the media … that vicious cycle needs to be changed.’

The media group has submitted that greater coverage would result in more female role models for young female athletes and make the sport more attractive to sponsors and enable to sports to become more professional.
challenges to the male domain, eg women in traditional male sports

examine the debate that surrounds the entry of women into traditional male sports, eg boxing, rugby. Compare this with the entry of men into traditional female sports, eg netball

The *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* opened up the arena for women to challenge the monopoly of certain sports by men and allowed women the opportunity to participate in sports that had been traditionally male dominated. Society has had mixed views about accepting women into sporting competitions such as rugby, football, basketball, boxing and wrestling, concerned that women may lack the physical and mental capacity to participate in these sports. Women in contact and pugilistic sports like boxing and wrestling still experience criticism and sometimes vilification from some sectors of the population. The stereotypes of women portrayed in the media have been challenged by these female competitors.

Women moving into positions of sporting officials have also found the transition difficult, as these roles were once a male’s domain. However, through perseverance, strength and resilience, sportswomen have helped to open doors for more young women to pursue their chosen sport. It is now not unusual to find women participating in motor sports, mountain biking, or as a jockey in what was the male-dominated world of horse racing.

Unfortunately, successful female athletes in male-dominated sports can often have their sexuality questioned. This can be distracting and hurtful and suggests that homophobic behaviours are still prominent in some sectors of society. At times, the media has encouraged the idea of homophobia through suggestive headlines and articles. Homophobia can also affect male athletes with instances of other players, coaches and officials discriminating against a male athlete because of his sexuality.

---

### Activities

**Activity 1 (Page 214)**

- **Compare** the sporting expectations of females in the early 20th century with those of today’s society.
- **Identify** why body shape is important to inclusion and success in sporting competition.
- **Identify** areas of change that have occurred in the sporting expectations of colonial Australian males to those in today’s society.

**Activity 2 (Page 214)**

Use Table 4.1 to answer the following:

- Suggest why females aged 15–24 years differ in participation rates for organised sport to non-organised sports.
- **Compare** the data for total female and male participation rates. Suggest why there is a difference in these participation rates.

**Activity 3 (Page 214)**

Enter the link below to access and review the entire ERASS document, *Participation in recreation, exercise and sport*, for 2007.

Activities cont.

- The ERASS report findings show that regular participation rates have increased for all people from 2001–2007. The increase has been greater for women than for men. Search the ERASS documents main findings and investigate the reasons for this increase.

- Locate pages 51 and 52 of the ERASS 2007 document. Compare the recent participation in any physical activity by duration and age and discuss the differences.

**Activity 4 (Page 217)**
Enter the web link below to access women’s issues in participating in sport. Research the areas of media, sexploitation, body image, vilification and transgender.


- Summarise the role of the media in its construction of female sport and its acceptance in the wider population.

- Evaluate the validity of the term ‘sexploitation’ when applied to female sport.

- Recommend reasons why body image affects the participation rate of women in sports.

- Examine the issues surrounding transgender and vilification in female sports.

**Activity 5 (Page 219)**
1. Choose a sport that challenges the notion of female participation. Select from sports such as, boxing, rugby, motor sports or horse racing.

   Identify a female competitor from the sport you have chosen. For example: Lauren Gray or Leanne Tander from motor racing; Claire Lindop a renowned Australian jockey; or Laila Ali, an international boxing star.

   Investigate any gender discrimination your chosen athlete experienced in her quest for success in her chosen sport.

2. Research the inclusion of males into netball. Discuss any problems that male netballers have experienced because of their participation in a female-dominated sport.

3. Compare the entry of men into netball to that of a woman competitor you researched in question 1.

**Review Questions**

1. **Discuss** why sport reinforces the traditional understandings of gender.

2. **Examine** the possible reasons the media has for presenting male and female athletes in stereotypical ways.

3. **Discuss** the effects of homophobia in today’s sporting world.

4. **Describe** how some forms of sport have come to be traditionally associated with each gender.

5. **Compare** the entry of women into male-dominated sports with the entry of men into female-dominated sports.