

LITERATURE REVIEW: EMPOWERING GIRLS THROUGH SPORT

This literature review summarises key findings from existing industry reports and academic papers from sports, business and governance sectors, both nationally and internationally, to understand the reasons underlying the influence of gendered stereotypes on girls' sports participation. Resources focused on gender stereotypes which girls, aged 11-18, are subject to generally and the co-factor of living within an area of deprivation were included and resources which specifically focused on stereotypes within sport and within areas of deprivation. Overall 29 resources were included in this review. Resources examined for this literature review were predominantly from English-language and UK based. English-language international studies have also been included where pertinent. The findings are focused into two themes; first, the role which sport plays with regards to girls and living in areas of deprivation and second, the impact and influence of gendered stereotypes on girls regarding sport.

The role of sport

Girls and sport

The World Health organisation details the benefits of sports participation for girls including increased physical health, mental health benefits, increased educational and intellectual attainment, benefits to reproductive health (lower rate of teenage pregnancy) and increased social inclusion.¹ Engagement with sport positively impacts girls' health and risk of non-communicable disease, especially in an increasingly sedentary world. Participation in sport also improves girls' self-perceptions, self-esteem, quality of life and leadership skills.² Sport England details how sport can also increase self-esteem and risk of re-offending in youths at risk of criminal activity.³

Girls in the UK are losing out on the multi-faceted benefits of sport. The UK Government recommends children exercise, moderate to vigorous, for 60 minutes per day, however, the UK is becoming less active with people becoming '20% less active in 44 years up to 2005...projected to reduce by a further 15% by

2030'.⁴ Women in Sport reported in their Girls Active figures 2017 summary that only 8% of girls (5-18 years) in the UK are meeting the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation of 60 minutes exercise per day. Whilst both girls and boys understand the importance of sport, fewer girls place importance on sport compared to boys.⁵ Calls to challenge gendered stereotypes and social norms associated with sport from a younger age and 'tailor[sic] initiatives to meet women and girls' diverse identities' is a priority for the sports sector.⁶

Living in an area of deprivation

Living in areas of deprivation impacts young people's lives and futures in many ways. Negative correlations between living in some deprived communities include; lower educational attainment, poorer health, higher crime and lower aspirations. Both parents and young people from deprived communities tend to have lower aspirations for their futures. The UK Cabinet Office detail that aspiration is crucial as it is linked to children and young people's attainment. Children's aspirations are influenced by their parents and peers, with the age range 11-14 identified by the Cabinet Office as a crucial period during the formation of young people's aspirations. Studies collated by the Cabinet Office suggest that aspiration is influenced by multiple, complex influences including parents, a lack of information, a lack of confidence, schooling, local employment, role models, wider societal influences like gender and racial stereotypes and social capital.⁷

Putnam (1993) first developed the term 'social capital' and it has since been used as a lens to investigate children's health and wellbeing. Social capital is a valuable tool for people's wellbeing as it prevents isolation and supports senses of being valued and therefore self-esteem. A person's social capital is concerned with the level of community and personal networks, sense of local identity, shared norms, support and sense of trust and a sense of belonging and engagement within local communities. Social capital is gained through social networks which include both informal (friends and family) and formal, and organised (including sports clubs) and non-organised groups. Morrow's 2004 research used qualitative methods with UK children 12-15 years old in an area in the top third of deprived local authority areas in England, to investigate the influence of social capital in the development of children's social networks, attitudes to institutions and facilities in the community, local identity and engagement. The results overall showed that the children did not feel they shared or participate in community life and local institutions or facilities, even when schemes to do so were present. This may foster disengagement and a lack of jurisdiction in their communities from an early age.⁸

Areas of deprivation and sport

Those living in deprived areas face barriers to engaging with sport; the cost of some sports can be prohibitive, local facilities can be in poor condition, lack of 'safe spaces' to play sport in the community and a lack of range of sports to play. Sport has many benefits for those living in areas of deprivation. Previous studies have identified the impact of sport on those living in areas of deprivation. Sport has been argued

as form of welfare specifically regarding achieving social participation and inclusion of underprivileged groups. Vandermeersch's 2015 Dutch study on children and adolescences (6-18 years), including those in deprived areas found that children from poorer backgrounds participated in sports clubs to a lesser extent than their peers. Possible reasons behind this engagement gap is theorised as the cost of organised sports to participants.⁹

Child Poverty Action Group conducted research in 2016 on young people aged 14-25 in five deprived communities to understand why they played sport or not. The results showed young people (and their parents) understood the many benefits of sport but faced many barriers to accessing sport in deprived communities including the cost of sports sessions, sufficient, adequate volunteer sports sessions, sufficient training volunteer sports coordinators, a lack of investment and funds in sports activities and facilities due to the austerity cuts in public funding. There were also reported difficulties of the integration of boys and girls due to 'anti-social behaviour from rough boys'.¹⁰

Pot et al.'s 2016 Netherlands based study investigated the socialisation of young adolescences from deprived areas (lower social economic status) into sport. They focused on children who played sport to understand why these children did engage with sport. Their results centred on the prominent influence of parents, and to a lesser extent, peers in the establishment of socialisation into sport whilst lessening the influence of school and PE teachers. They argue their results show a limited difference between children from deprived areas and those from higher social economic status groups in their socialisation into sports.¹¹ Despite Pot et al's findings, other studies highlight that children and young people in deprived areas are often excluded from or miss out on sport more than those from higher social economic status groups.

Gendered stereotypes and gender roles

Both genders are subject to a process of socialisation during which the stereotypes and gender roles found generally in society are adopted via osmosis by those living within it. Stereotypes can have 'positive' connotations and 'negative' connotations but all stereotypes have a restrictive element on people's behaviour, self-perceptions, roles and relationships with others. Normative behaviours are learnt and re-enforced via parents, schooling, peers, the media and society generally. Academic literature stipulates explanations of different terms, this review follows Chalabaev et. al 2013's definitions of stereotypes and gender roles as follows; 'stereotypes' refer to descriptions (e.g., men participate more in sport than women) and 'gender roles' refer to prescriptions (e.g., men are supposed to participate more in sport than women).¹² Gender stereotypes and gender roles are underpinned by the intersection of sex and gender. Sex is generally referred to as a biological category and gender a set of characteristics which are attributed

to either the masculine or feminine. 'personality traits stereotyped as feminine (e.g., affectionate, compassionate) and traits stereotyped as masculine (e.g., assertive, dominant) have been the most influential (Hoffmann, 2001)' which are internalised from early childhood.¹³

Gendered stereotypes

The stereotypes and associated affects, effecting girls have come under increasing scrutiny during the past decade by society more widely. This is reflected and/or led by prominent campaigns and advertising strategies used by corporate organisations to question and change narratives surrounding girls. Prominent examples of this change in narrative include the [#likeagirl](#) campaign by Always, [#banbossy](#) by the US Girl Scouts and Lean In, [I will what I want](#) by Under Armour, Dove's [#MyBeautyMySay](#) Nike Foundation's [GirlEffect](#), amongst others.

Sex differences in ability and behaviour are becoming increasingly questioned in many areas of social life during the past decades. Commonly held historical beliefs and stereotypes which explained differences in gender behaviour were largely based on posited biological differences between males and female. During recent decades, commonly understood explanations for many perceived differences between the sexes are now attributed to societal causes; gendered processes, expectations and stereotyping by parents, schooling and wider society from birth throughout life around what society constitutes as permissible feminine and masculine. Whilst gender was once scientifically viewed as a biological fact is now viewed as a societal construct. Where once girls were stereotyped as 'naturally' good at communicating and bad at spatial awareness and maths, we now understand this to be a result of societal conditioning.

The development and internalisation of gendered stereotypes has investigated and prominent models of explaining this process of socialisation include Bem's model of gender (Bem, 1974, 1981) and Eccles et al. (1983) expectancy-value model. Eccles et al. expectancy-value model outlines posits the two variables which effect a person's development of and internalisation of sex stereotypes is the likelihood of success in an activity and the perceived importance or value placed on it. Eccles at al. expectancy-value model is commonly used in studies investigating gender stereotypes in sport.

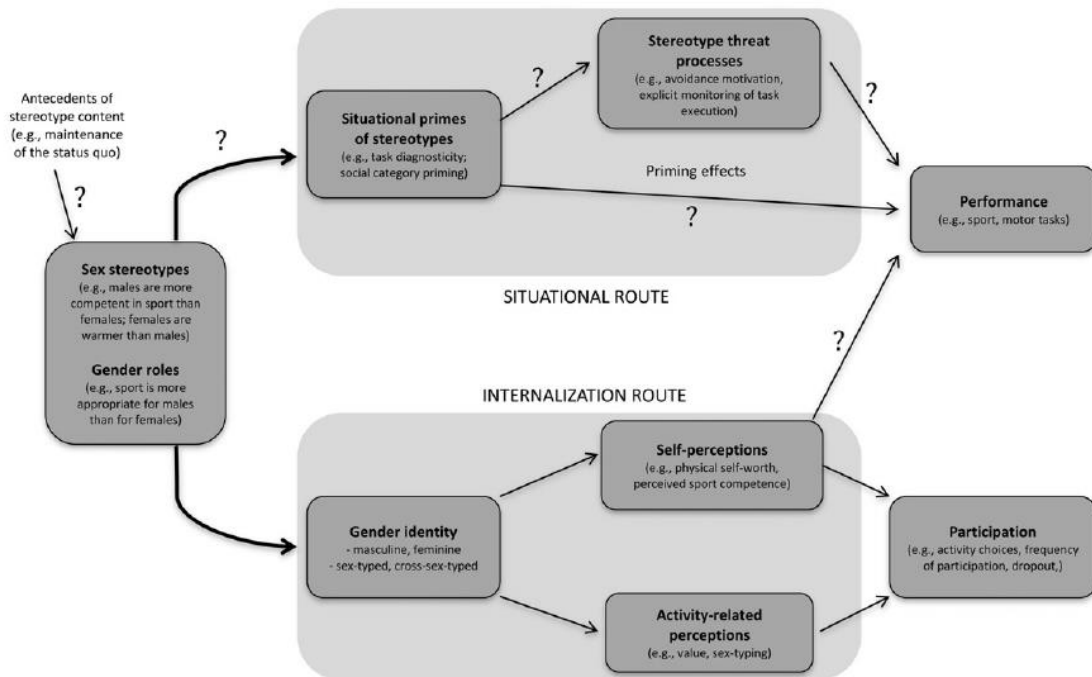


Fig. 1. Multiple-route model of stereotypes and gender roles influences on participation and performance in sport and exercise Note. Question marks refer to theoretical questions that need further empirical investigation.

Gendered stereotypes in sport

Girls' participation and involvement in sport is accompanied by additional, strictly gender-normative, sports-based stereotypes in addition to the general stereotypes girls are subject to. Sport is generally stereotyped as a 'masculine' arena. Gender stereotypes in sport are prevalent and historically based and continue to affect firstly how girls interact with all sport. The UN's 2007 report on Gender Equality in Sport details how the founder of the modern Olympics Baron Pierre de Coubertin felt that "No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks". These stereotypes have continued through to present day. The disproportionate focus of media coverage on men's over women's sport and the difference in style in which it is presented perpetuates the sporting stereotypes girls are subject to. Girls participation in the historically and traditionally highly masculine domain of sport can help challenge gender stereotypes in society, empower girls and challenge boy's perception of girl's capabilities.¹⁴

Boiché et al. use Eccles expectancy-value model to explore the development and effect of sex stereotypes during adolescence on the value teenagers place on sport and their competence levels by surveying 714 of French girls and boys over three waves. Their results found that sex stereotypes were broadly in favour of one's sex at the beginning of adolescence whereas by the end, both boys and girls are pro-male. In conclusion, they found that adolescence is period during which sex stereotypes 'relative to sport become stronger'.¹⁵

In a 2013 review of stereotypes and gender roles in sport, Chalabaev et. al builds on studies which detail the effect of internalised sex stereotypes and review future directions on the effect of sex stereotyping in sport (see Fig 1). First, the impact of 'stereotype threat theory', that the mere presence of stereotypes can affect people even if the person does not believe in or rejects the stereotype. Therefore, sex stereotypes influence people's motivation and performance in sport even if they have not internalised the stereotypes themselves. Second, the 'stereotype content model', that ambivalent stereotypes can still affect people negatively, which the authors argue is particularly resonant in a gendered environment/situation as sport. People may experience ambivalent or positive sex stereotypes in relation to sport e.g. girls are warmer/likable but not competent which pacify disparity in beliefs or sporting competence and maintain the status quo. In addition, the authors make reference to the effect of single sex comparisons on ambivalent sex stereotypes. When girls are judged by ambivalent 'feminine' stereotypes this can result in judgements which transgress permissible gender stereotypes more. For example, a girl who may be perceived as very aggressive when compared to her own sex but not aggressive when compared with boys (Biernat's 2003 shifting standards model). The authors suggest "intervention programs aimed at developing this incremental theory of ability in females would reduce the situational effects of stereotypes in sport".¹²

Women in Sport has examined the prevalence and effect of gender stereotypes during their 2015 research on seven and eight year old girls. The findings showed that gender stereotypes are already emerging with boys placing greater value on achievement and sport than girls, and perceptions of girls not having skills for sports and boys being faster and stronger are already beginning to be displayed.¹⁶

Results from a 2010 Australian study using focus groups of girls found a reason for non-participation in sport was that sport was not a feminine activity and therefore 'uncool' for girls to participate in. The sense of 'uncoolness' was policed by both sexes in their peer groups. Those girls who did play sport report difficulties in maintaining their 'femininity'. Those girls who played the most 'masculine' sports faced the largest perceived threat to their femininity.²⁴ Other studies have documented the informal policing of gender stereotypes of boys, including boys not letting girls join in 'boys' sports.¹⁷

Brown and Stone's wide-ranging chapter on gender stereotypes examines in childhood gendered stereotypes and discrimination in sport, focusing on USA. They cover many areas of gender stereotypes mentioned in this review but provide useful information on gendered stereotype-based teasing and negative comments in sports. Girls faced teasing and negative comments for participation in or excelling in sport, which is viewed as the number one barrier from girls' participation in sport, and only benefit from sport when they feel accepted by their peers. Three quarters of girls (13-18 years) experienced 'hearing disparaging statements' about girls in sport. The comments came predominantly from 'male peers (54%),

which were followed by female peers (38%), teachers/coaches (28%), fathers (30%), and mothers (25%) demonstrating the pervasive nature of these comments.¹⁸

Gender stereotypes have also been documented to effect girls drop outs of sport. Boiche´ et al.'s 2014 study examining the consequences of gender stereotypes in sports found that one's level of gender stereotype endorsement can predict the intention to dropout and they posit therefore the dropout rate. The authors conclude by recommending the challenging and avoidance of stereotypes and gendered language by parents, teachers and coaches to challenge gendered stereotypes in sports.¹⁹

Sex-typed sports

Research on the gender-typing of sports has been conducted since Metheny's 1965 research which first investigated the social gender stereotypes in sport and the resultant segregation of sport by gender. Sporting stereotypes affect which sports girls participate. Studies have demonstrated that some sports are stereotyped as 'masculine' sports which girls are implicitly and explicitly perceived as not suitable for girls and 'feminine' sports which are viewed as more suitable for girls. Csizma's 1988 American-based study surveyed college students on the appropriateness/acceptableness of males and females to participate in 68 different sports. The results showed that sex-typed and segregation of sports in their appropriateness for men and women correlated with the perceived masculinity or femininity of the sport, but not with the perceived simplicity or complexity of the sport.²⁰

Later studies have demonstrated that although the range of sports perceived as explicitly 'male' or 'female' is narrowing, sports which are perceived as masculine or feminine still exist. A 2006 study of girls' and boys' attitudes to and participation in sports showed that gender neutral sports received the greatest rates on participation with a noticeable difference in participation rates in those sports perceived as gender specific. The study found that a higher number of girls participated in 'masculine' sports than boys did in 'feminine' sports. This could be down to the range of sports available to the children in the study or there is less stigma for girls than boys in 'cross gender' sports participation.²¹ Although this study examined the behaviour and attitudes of younger children, it provides the earlier years context and sex stereotype construction before children enter their teenage years.

The gendering of different sports is influenced by the wider culture and history of each country, the participation rate of each gender, the amount of 'contact' in a sport (e.g. boxing and rugby), and the amount of aesthetics (e.g. dance and gymnastics). A 2017 French study which investigated the gender-typing of different sports produced results which demonstrated that sport is still perceived as a masculine domain with individual sports denoted as either feminine or masculine sports with adolescents of both genders and men generally more likely than other age groups to gender-type sports along traditional lines. Their results mirrored those of other 'western' studies thus demonstrating that gendered sporting stereotypes

are 'pervasive and similar across cultures'. Importantly, the study found women who participated in masculine sports were more likely to rate masculine activities as less masculine.²²

Gender stereotypes on the body in action

Whilst progression in understanding the cause of and impact of gender stereotyping in many aspects of social life is occurring, sport remains one of the most gendered areas of life. The persistence of sex stereotypes in sport may be affected by the physical requirements of sport and associated sex differences in physical capabilities. UNESCO's 2012 Advocacy Brief on girls and sport states that one of the reasons influencing girls exclusion from sport is the continued prominence of belief in 'biological determinism' (known as 'essentialism'), an assumption that girls are physically and physiological inferior to boys.²³

Males and females have the same physical capabilities until puberty. During puberty, some physical capabilities may develop more in males than females which means *on average* men have greater strength, endurance and speed than women. However, the biological difference in capability between men and women post puberty has been shown to be relatively small (sex has been shown to predict (only 5% of the variance in physical abilities (e.g., Eagly, 1995)) and does not in itself explain the difference in attitude, participation and stereotypes experienced between the two sexes. Thusly, participation gap in sport between girls and boys can be largely explained by the additional stereotypes girls face in sport.

Gender stereotypes on the appearance of the body

Girls are judged more on their looks in society and try to conform to the stereotype of an 'attractive' female. Adolescent girls in a 2010 Australian focus group study detailed that a reason for avoiding sport was a fear being negatively stereotyped as looking "buff", "manly", "muscly", "butch" or a "tomboy".²⁴ A 2017 Swedish study examined body image and the impact of gendered stereotypes on female bodies by interviewing young women in sport. They found girls who played sport often faced a balancing act of adhering to westernised concepts of feminine beauty (slim, slender and no muscles) and the bodies needed to perform in their sports.²⁵ Those who participate in sport are often stereotyped as not caring about their appearance as they may be sweaty, wear sports kit or not wear makeup.

Another Scandinavian study from Norway used a questionnaire on adolescence girls and boys to research the importance of feminine and masculine characteristics in sport. One of the results was the difference in value placed on the appearance of the body in line with stereotypical western ideals of feminine beauty. Girls placed high value on bodies which were slender, good looking and feminine whereas boys valued strength, endurance and masculinity, which the authors conclude conforms to gender stereotypes in wider society.²⁶

Girls are stereotyped for participating in sports, particularly if they participate in a perceived 'masculine' sport. A 'common understanding' of girls who participate in masculine activities is they are lesbian.²¹

Food gendered stereotypes

Gender stereotypes can affect girls attitude to food, changing perceptions of food from a source of food to a source of shame. A 2017 Swedish study which interviewed (through focus groups) 25 adolescence girls and women aged 15-20 years around sport, their bodies and social norms. Whilst not a key area of the study, one emergent finding drawn from their results was of the findings centred on the effect of the gendered stereotypes on food. Whilst all participants were active in sports, all of the focused groups mentioned the negotiation of having to eat large amounts of food sufficient to complete training whilst being highly aware they were contradicting a prominent feminine stereotype of eating small amounts. This added a negative component to eating and shame of eating "too much" and thusly reports of some trying to restrict their food intake at school.²⁵

Priorities gendered stereotypes

Girls are stereotyped to prioritise social activities and schoolwork. Findings in the recent Girls Active Survey found double the number girls to boys prioritise school work during adolescence compared with it being the dominant factor in barriers to sport for girls.⁵ Sport is stereotyped to be a less social activity for girls than for boys. Studies report girls, unlike boys, do not perceived sport as a site for socialising and thus separate and prioritise other forms of socialising (e.g. shopping) over sport.²⁴

Leadership stereotypes

Leadership programs aimed at girls, including sports leadership programs, alleviate some of the factors which affect girl and thus promote more positive attitudes to bodies, increase self-esteem and increase physical activity and associated health benefits. A UK based 2016 study focuses on the specific sports leadership barriers girls face and suggested options for overcoming them. They suggest girls are put off leadership from an early age as the qualities associated with leadership are perceived to be masculine qualities which girls avoid as these qualities are viewed to undermine their feminineness. They recommend that girls must be encouraged to become leaders and exhibit leadership qualities and that what constitutes leadership must involve from a masculine based concept. Examples of leadership interventions include the 'human knot' exercise in two teams with two leaders, with a debrief awards prompting group analysis of different range and style of leadership and their effectiveness. Girls are also negatively affected by a lack of women role models therefore and networking and mentoring experiences. Examples of role model, mentoring networking interventions include: inclusion of women examples and importantly, highlighting the comparisons between the women examples to the girls themselves so the girls do not view them as out of reach or unattainable. The authors also highlight the importance of facilitating and promoting the girls to

use their voice particularly in leadership roles and being mindful of the language used e.g. 'throw like a girl'.²⁷

Parental influence on stereotypes

Parental influence is seminal in children's development and is significant in the establishment of gender stereotypes and sports stereotypes. The WHO details examples of parental influence including by 'most commonly by providing gender-based toys and encouraging boys and girls to engage in gender stereotyped activities, usually with boys encouraged to play vigorously and girls quietly'.¹ A 2017 USA study identified and documented the impact of parents' gendered stereotypes on the promotion and support of sport for their daughters compared to sons by analysing survey data. The results showed that parents 'especially fathers, placed a small, but significantly greater value on sport for boys than girls, both ideologically and financially' however those parents with more progressive views on gender roles viewed girl's sport more favourably.²⁸

PE teachers/coaches influence on stereotypes

Clément-Guillotin et al.'s 2013 French study of primary school and senior school children investigated children's social value of sex categories in Physical Education classes via questionnaire. The study categorised value using Social Desirability (SD), a 'feminine' characteristic of the extent to which one is liked and Social Utility (SU) a 'masculine' characteristic of the extent to which one has the capacity to succeed). The results showed that children categorised as androgynous were perceived by PE teachers to have greatest SD and SU. Primary school children presented themselves as masculine or feminine to achieve SD whereas senior school children presented themselves as highly masculine or feminine to achieve SD with their PE teachers. The authors discuss this change during adolescence as children's as consistent with greater social awareness of gender stereotypical expectations of behaviour of the children and a change in the emphasis of PE classes from friendly, communal expectations during primary school, to more competitive and skilled expectations during senior school.¹³ Girls may also be held to lower standards than their male peers, by receiving equal praise for a lower result or by given 'second' chances to achieve in sport when boys are not. This preferential treatment reinforces stereotypes of girls' perceived inferiority as they require additional support and praise to achieve the same standards.¹⁸

Stereotypes in areas of deprivation

Living in an area of deprivation impacts the lives of girls further. Plan International UK's 2016 report on girls' rights detailed that girls' career aspirations and attitudes to gender stereotypes were negatively impacted by living in an area of deprivation.¹⁷ Chant's 2016 paper examines the link between general 'feminisation of poverty', that the characteristic of being female greatly exacerbates the vulnerability of poverty on a person, over the past couple of decades and the empowerment of women and girls. Amongst her discussion she discusses the impact of factors such as poverty and male joblessness in communities

which can perpetuate and enforce gender stereotypes and behaviour in both males and females.²⁹ Gender discrepancies in allocation of resources are also between the sexes is also prevalent amongst society from professional level down to community projects.¹⁴



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