

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 4¹

Sporting capital and gender – mind the gap

Introduction

This Resource Sheet¹ explores how levels of Sporting Capital differ between men and women and how levels change as young men and women get older. It also examines how gender interacts with social class to particularly disadvantage women in terms of their relationship to sport. Going deeper, the Sheet then explores how the profiles of the Psychological, Social and Physical domains that make up Sporting Capital vary between men and women and what some of the 'building block questions' tell us about how men and women relate differently to sport. It concludes by examining the consequences that these gender differences have for those engaged in sports development, the challenges they face and some of the responses that could help to narrow the participation gap between men and women.

What is Sporting Capital?

Sporting Capital is analogous to the theory of Human Capital and may be defined as:

"The stock of physical, social and psychological attributes and competencies that support and motivate an individual to participate in sport and to sustain that participation over time." It is a theory that can help us to better understand and explain

sporting behaviour across individuals, communities and populations. More information about the nature of Sporting Capital and its important characteristics is provided in [Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 1](#).

What are the gender differences in levels of Sporting Capital?

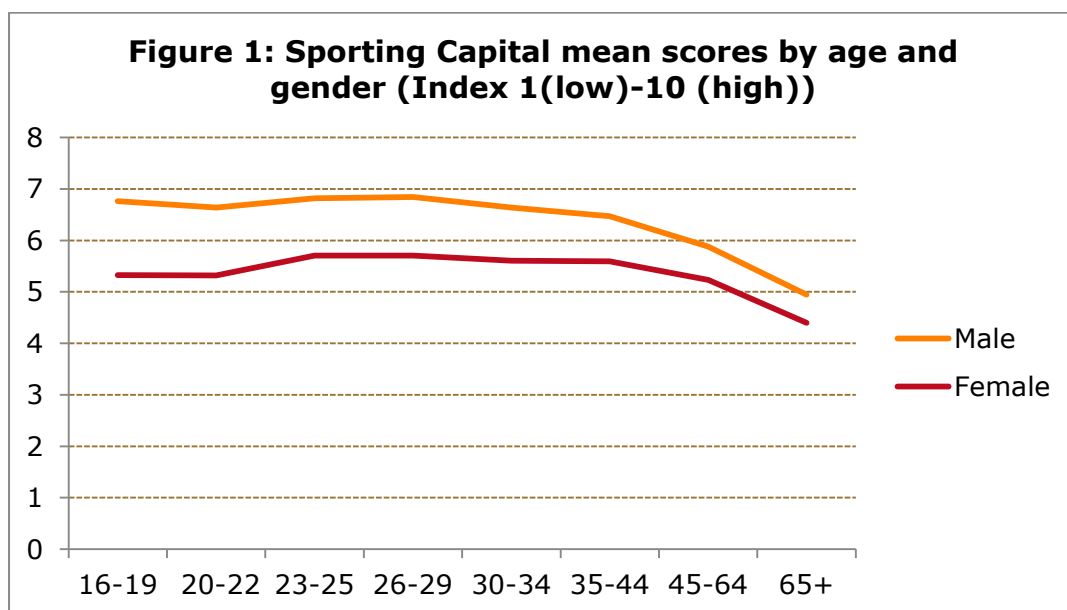
Since we began measuring sports participation rates in the UK back in the early 1970's, men have always had considerably higher levels of participation in sport than women. Despite the health and fitness boom in the 1970's and early 1980's when the gap narrowed, gender inequities have persisted to this day. The latest Active People Survey (6) results show a 10% absolute difference in participation rates between men and women (41.1% to 31.1% respectively).

Measuring inequities in participation between the genders tell us about the outcome – but in and of itself does little to help us better understand the causes. An examination of variations in the levels of Sporting Capital between men and women tells us something more profound

¹ This Resource Sheet was prepared by Nick Rowe with analytical support from Oliver Norden at TNS-BMRB. It was commissioned by StreetGames and published in April 2013.

about the underlying factors that lead to these inequities and the culture that shapes them.

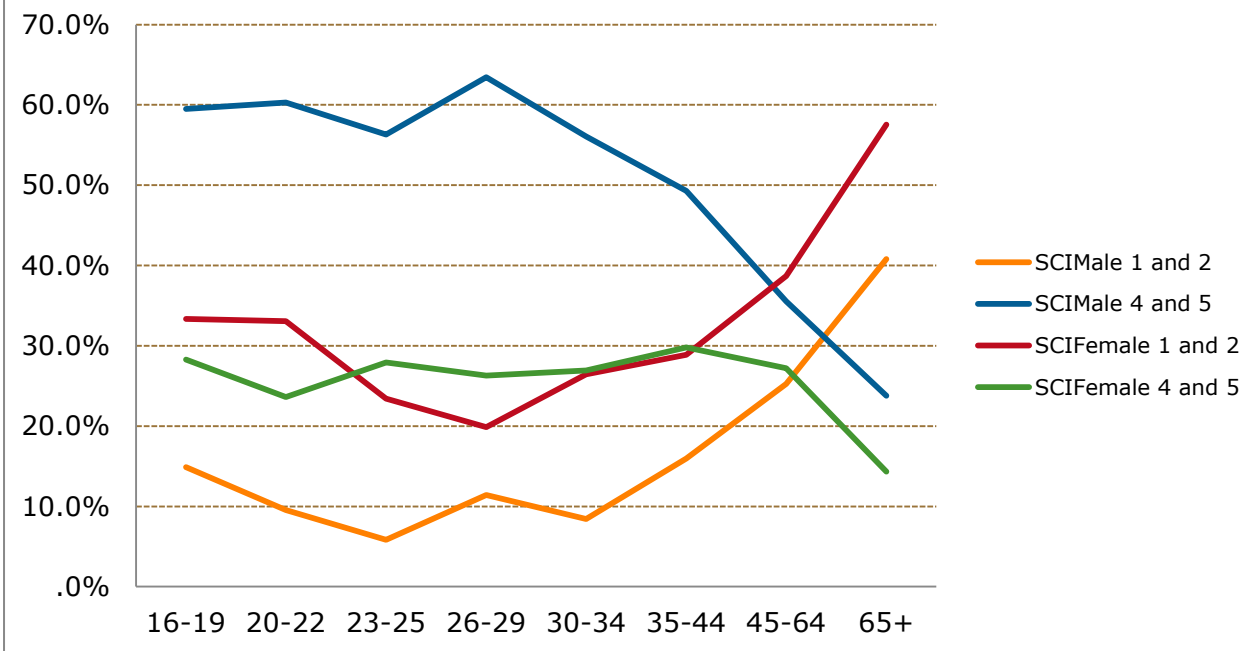
Resource Sheet 2 showed how the mean Sporting Capital Scores are significantly higher for men (6.1) than for women (5.3). Figure 1 shows how the mean Sporting Capital score changes with age for both men and women. Men have higher Sporting Capital levels than women at all ages – although interestingly the gap is at its biggest amongst the youngest (16 to 19 years) group. Both men and women show a slight increase in Sporting Capital into their early 20's but from the age of 30 levels decline for both genders until they reach their lowest in the 65 plus age group.



In Figure 2 the Sporting Capital scores have been combined using the 5 point scale². 1 and 2 are low levels of Sporting Capital and 4 and 5 combined are high levels. The results show a dramatic gender gap that starts at a young age and remains consistent until it begins to narrow in the late 20's to early 30s as men's levels start to come down to meet those of women (blue and green lines). So for example, at 16 to 19 years of age over 30% more men than women have high Sporting Capital scores of 4 to 5. In fact up until the age of 22 to 23 years the proportion of women with a low Sporting Capital score of 1 to 2 exceeds the proportion with a high score of 4 to 5 (the remainder have a score of 3 that is not included in the chart). The early low levels of Sporting Capital depress participation rates for these age groups and importantly sow the seeds of later drop out and longer term sedentary lifestyles as people move in to middle and older age. Although the profile for men is a much stronger one than for women it is not without its concerns as levels of Sporting Capital start to plummet (see the blue line) from the late 20's and early 30's.

² The 5 point scale has been used here and in other Sheets where there are sample size issues. It is conceptually and statistically no different from the 10 point scale index. So for example a score of 1 on the 5 point scale is the equivalent to a score of 1 and 2 combined on the 10 point scale; while a score of 2 on the 5 point scale is the equivalent of a score of 3 and 4 combined on the 10 point scale and so on.

Figure 2: Changes in Sporting Capital Index (SCI) scores by age and gender (on a 5 point scale with 1 and 2 combined and 4 and 5 combined)



Social class impacts differentially on men and women’s levels of Sporting Capital. Figure 3 shows that Sporting Capital is at its highest amongst men in the upper social class group and at its lowest amongst women in the lowest social class group.

Figure 3: Sporting Capital mean scores by gender and social class

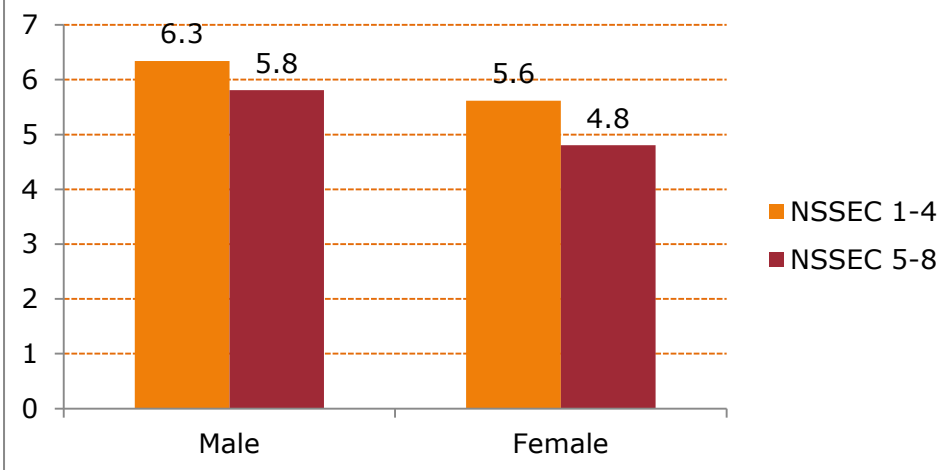
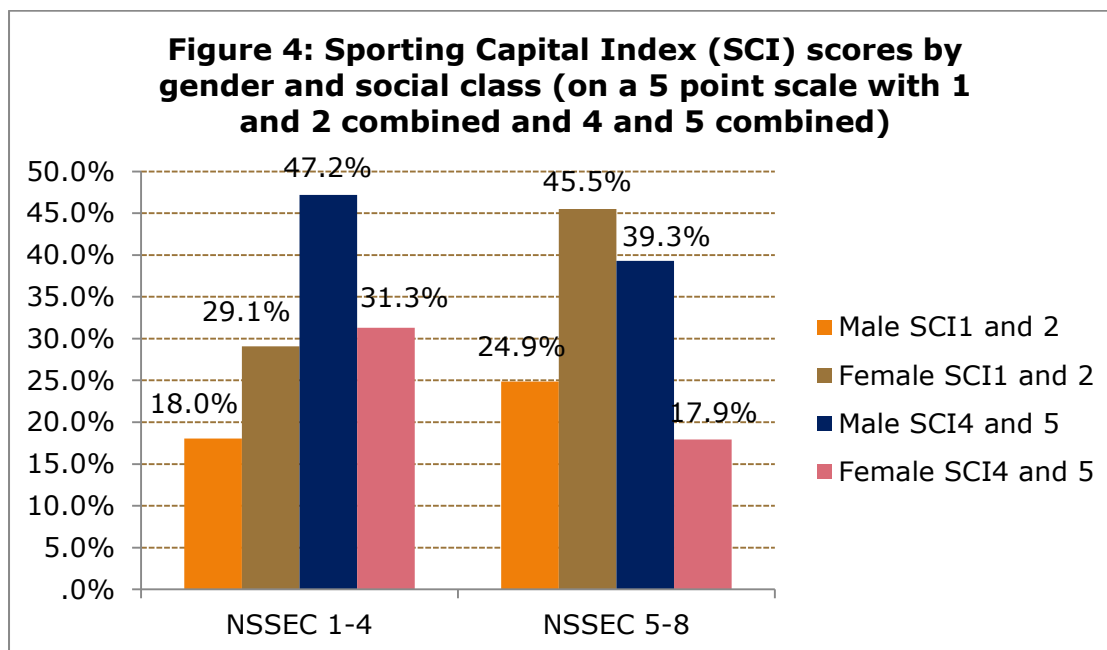


Figure 4 shows that for both men and women, those in the lower social class groups (NSSEC 5-8) have lower proportions in the high Sporting Capital category (score of 4 or 5) and greater proportions in the low Sporting Capital category (1 and 2) than their counterparts in the high social class groups (NSSEC 1-4) (see also [Resource Sheet 3](#)). However, the difference in the proportions in the high Sporting Capital scores is much more marked for women than it is for men. Only 18% of women in the lowest social class groups have a

Sporting Capital score of 4 or 5 while nearly half of the women in this group have a score of 1 or 2.

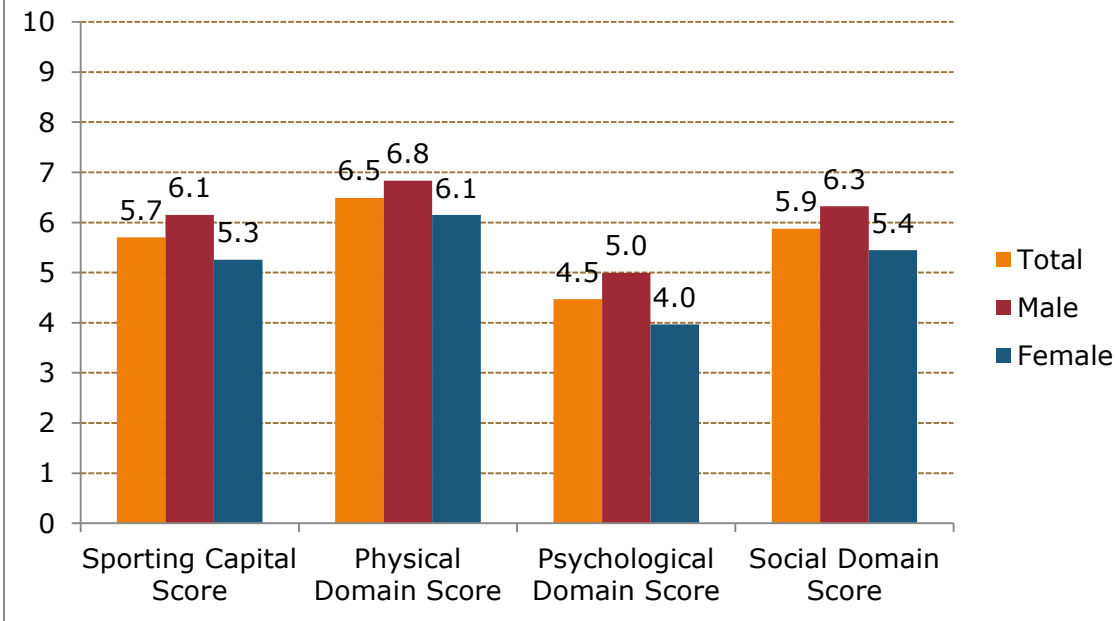


Do the 'building blocks' of Sporting Capital differ between men and women?

Sporting Capital is made up of three domains – the Psychological, Social and Physical. In turn these domains are measured by a series of questions that provide measures or markers that are relevant to each domain. For example in the psychological domain these questions address factors related to self efficacy in sporting situations, self confidence and identity. In the physical domain the questions seek to establish markers of peoples sporting ability relative to others of the same age and gender in a range of sport related skills and their overall physical health status. In the social domain there are questions related to social connectedness in sport ranging from how sporty other family members are to the sportiness of friendship networks and work colleagues ([see Resource Sheet 1](#)).

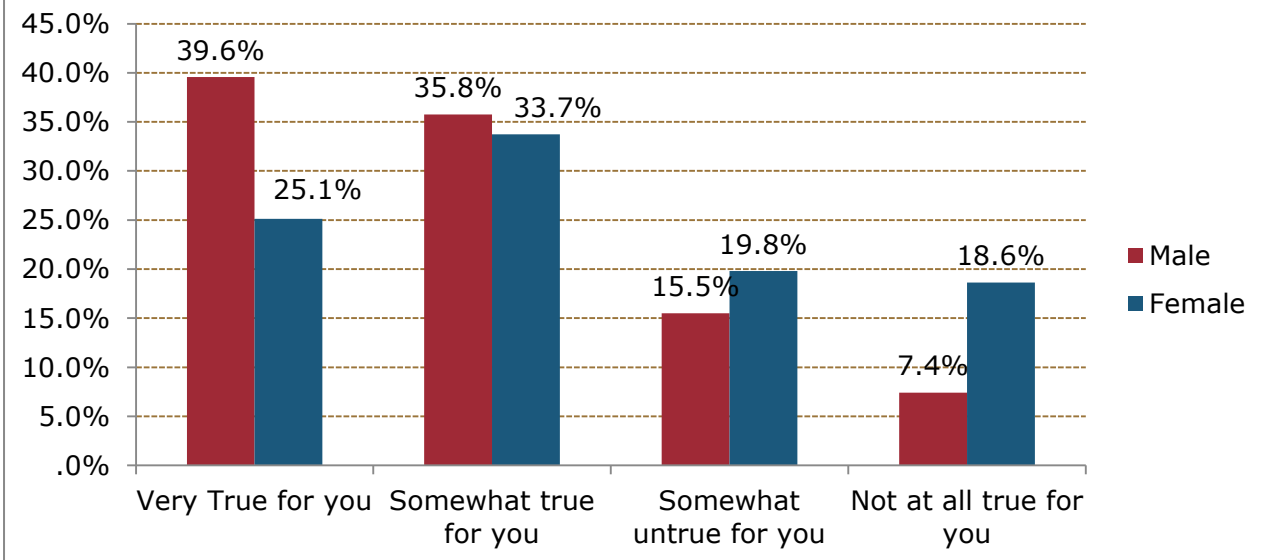
It would be expected that the building blocks (domains and questions items) of Sporting Capital would vary in their relative strengths and weaknesses between men and women. Figure 5 shows that men score more highly in all three domains than women but the gap is biggest in the psychological domain where the scores are relatively low for both men and women. This is important as it is the psychological domain that has the highest weighting and hence the largest relative impact on the overall Sporting Capital scores. It is worth therefore exploring some of the gender differences in the psychological scores in more depth.

Figure 5: Domain Scores total and by gender (on a 1-10 scale with 1 low and 10 high)



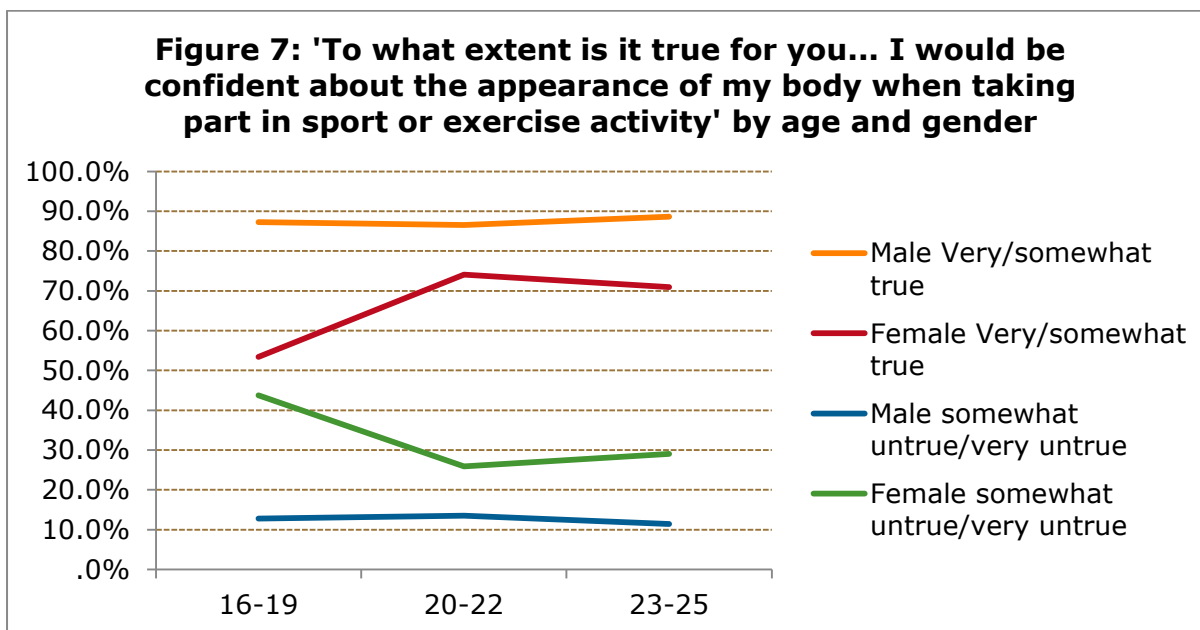
An interesting measure in the psychological domain relates to 'body confidence' (*To what extent is it true for you... I would be confident about the appearance of my body when taking part in sport or exercise activity*). Figure 6 shows that nearly 4 out of 10 women say that this 'somewhat untrue or not at all true' for them. Only a quarter of all women express a strong confidence in their body appearance in a sporting situation compared with 40% of men.

Figure 6: 'To what extent is it true for you... I would be confident about the appearance of my body when taking part in sport or exercise activity' by gender



This lack of confidence in body appearance in sporting situations is formed at a young age. Figure 7 shows the ratings amongst young men and women aged between 16 to 25 years. Male confidence in their body image is very high in these age groups but the picture is more mixed for women with 44% of 16 to 19 year old women expressing some lack of confidence in their body appearance. Interestingly this proportion falls as young women move into their

20s but remains at about the 30% level and significantly above that of their male counterparts.



Another question in the psychological domain sought to establish how important sport was as part of a person's personal identity. It asked 'To what extent is it true for you... I would feel a real loss if I was forced to give up playing sport or from ever taking part in sport in the future.' Figure 8 shows how men and women responded to this question. Again there are marked differences with 44% of men saying this is very true compared with 28% of women. Perhaps of more concern is the large proportion – a third of women - at the other end of the spectrum who would not feel any sense of loss if they were never able to play sport in the future.

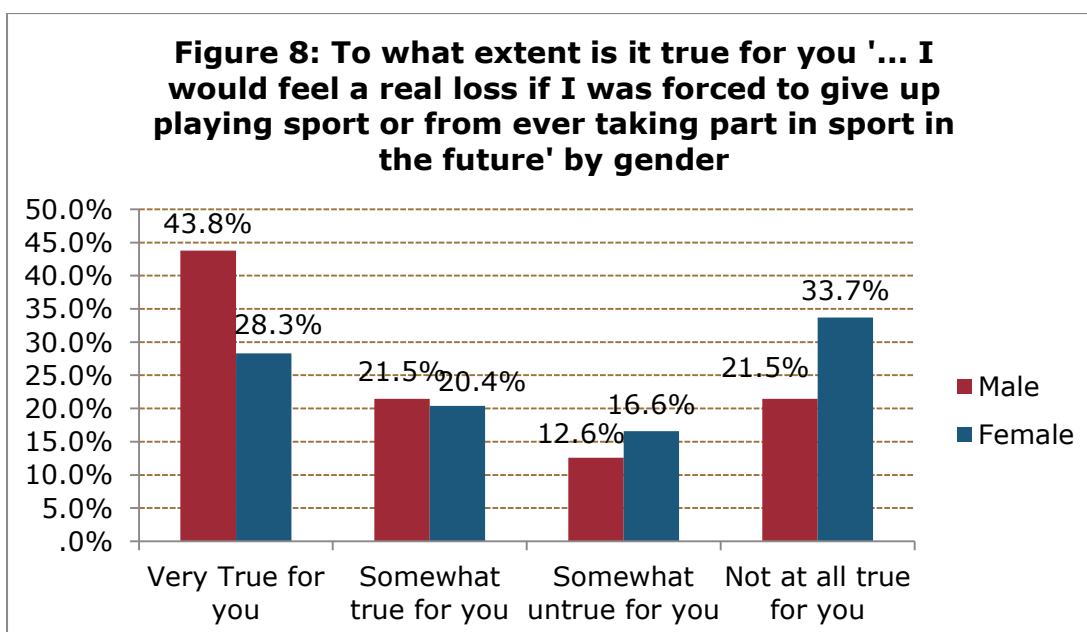
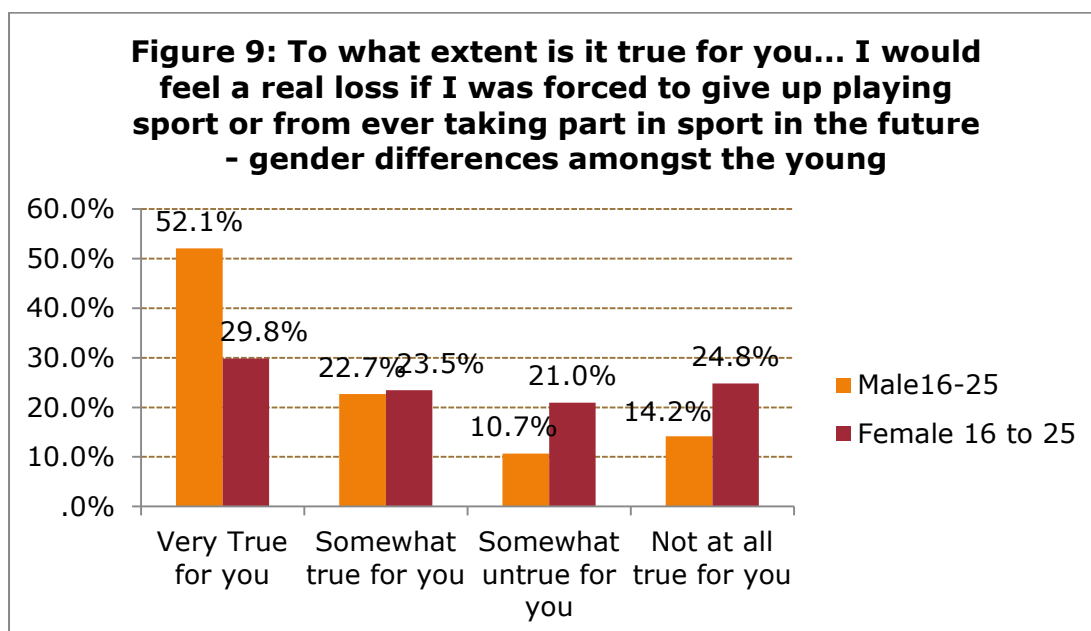


Figure 9 shows how young men and women aged 16 to 25 years responded to the 'loss question.' The results raise particular issues for the future with one in four young women saying that they would not experience any sort of loss if they could never take part in sport again.



Sporting Capital and gender – the implications for public policy and practice

Given the longstanding inequities in participation in sport between men and women it is little surprise to find that these are also seen in relation to levels of Sporting Capital. However, the fact that gender differences in Sporting Capital occur at a young age and persist throughout the life course provides us with a greater insight into the underlying causes of these inequities than a focus on participation alone can provide. There is nothing about Sporting Capital that would point towards any pre-existing genetic advantage or disadvantage that is gender related. We are all born with a Sporting Capital clean sheet. The gender inequities in Sporting Capital are therefore a reflection of the wider cultural context and early socialisation processes that shape and define men and women's relationship to sport.

The evidence would suggest that lower levels of Sporting Capital amongst women are shaped by lower scores in all three domains – Psychological, Social and Physical. Put simply, on average women tend to see themselves as less sporty than men, to have lower self confidence in their physical abilities, to feel less confident in sporting situations and are more likely than men to mix in non sporting social networks. The evidence also suggests that inequities in Sporting Capital are magnified for women in the lower social class groups.

If public policy is to be successful in narrowing the gender gap in sports participation it must address and narrow the underlying gender gap in Sporting Capital. Women may face particular challenges in relation to the external barriers to participation such as price, accessibility and time constraints – and addressing these would help reduce the gap. But it can only go so far. The most impact will be made by addressing those factors that more directly impact on Sporting Capital formation and maintenance. These are often more about the subtleties of how sporting opportunities are provided rather than simply the quantity and accessibility of opportunities.

In the earliest years of Sporting Capital formation the family environment is crucial. But from a public policy perspective the biggest opportunity to build Sporting Capital and to narrow gender inequities is in primary and early secondary school years with a focus on providing an education that helps form positive attitudes and values towards sport and recreational physical activity amongst both boys and girls. In the community all the key players, including local authorities, national governing bodies and their voluntary sports club networks must focus on providing a quality sporting experience that empowers women to express themselves physically by first attracting them into sport and then providing an environment that reinforces and builds Sporting Capital rather than one that inexorably chips away and diminishes it until drop out is the inevitable consequence.

ⁱ This Sheet is the fourth in a series of eleven 'Sporting Capital Resource Sheets'. The Resource Sheets are organised in way that move from the general to the more detailed and specific. The common thread is the theoretical concept of Sporting Capital and its application to public policy and practice.

Each individual Sheet has been designed to be freestanding and to make sense in its own right – the series of Sheets has been designed to provide a logical progression that builds knowledge and understanding about Sporting Capital, its characteristics, the relationship it has to participation in sport, its distribution in the population, its variation across different social groups and its potential to influence and shape future sports policy and practice.

The Sheets have been purposefully designed to be succinct and selective rather than long and comprehensive. Each should leave the reader with an interest to think further about Sporting Capital as an idea and what it may mean for their work in sports development whether at the higher strategic levels of policy making or delivering localised programmes on the ground.

All the analysis in the Sheets draws from empirical data collected by Sport England's Active People Survey (6). The analysis in these Resource Sheets is carried out on the household survey sample collected in APS6 (October 2011 to October 2012) of the APS6 survey period. The sample size used in this analysis was 4,527 cases. For more information about the methodology see the full Technical report available from StreetGames.

These Sheets build on earlier thinking and analysis in work carried out for StreetGames and available in the following publications:

Sporting Capital – a new theory of sport participation determinants and its application to 'Doorstep Sport' Nick Rowe, Sport Research Consultant, September 2012, A report commissioned by StreetGames

Part 1. What is Sporting Capital and how can its principles be applied to create a new generation of sustained sports participants?

Part 2. The Sporting Capital Index – exploring the levels of Sporting Capital in the English population and its variation across different social groups.

The following Sheets are available in this series:

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 1: Sporting Capital – what is it and why is it important to sports policy and practice?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 2: What is the relationship between Sporting Capital and participation in sport and why does it matter?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 3: Are we a sporting nation – what are the levels of Sporting Capital in England?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 4: Sporting capital and gender – mind the gap

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 5: Sporting capital and inequality – does social class make a difference?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 6: To what extent do levels of Sporting Capital impact on the frequency of participation and vary by the type of sport people play?

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 7: Sporting Capital and ethnicity

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 8: Sporting Capital amongst the young – a focus on 16 to 25 year olds

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 9: Sporting Capital - why it is important to public policy – a strategic perspective

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 10: Doorstep Sport - building Sporting Capital to increase participation in sport – applying the theory to practice

Sporting Capital Resource Sheet 11: Sporting Capital – testing and applying the theory - future research requirements.