

**In Depth
Exploration
Gender & PL**

Adolescent Girls

Exploring How Gender Shapes
Physical Literacy and Physical
Activity Participation

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the Lifespan

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Question



Lets reflect!

As an adolescent, which barrier most affected your participation in physical activity?

- Lack of confidence
- Peer/social pressure
- Lack of opportunities
- Time constraints

My Personal Interest

- As a young female coach, I am passionate about developing the next generation of female athletes.
- Interested in how gender influences physical literacy, particularly in adolescent girls.
- Focused on motivation, confidence, and physical competence as critical aspects of PL.
- Observed firsthand how puberty-related changes impact coordination, confidence, and engagement.
- Curious about sport dropout: over 20% of adolescent girls disengage from sport (Canadian Women & Sport, 2025).

Goal: Use PL to support lifelong physical activity and educate young girls and coaches about individual differences.



Physical literacy for Girls

“The motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life”
(Whitehead, 2010)

IMPORTANCE

- Builds lifelong confidence & motivation to be active
- Supports mental health, resilience & body confidence
- Helps girls navigate physical changes (puberty, body image)
- Encourages leadership, identity formation & sense of belonging
- Reduces future health risks and inequalities

Gender Experiences in Physical Literacy

- Girls often report lower confidence in sports skills
- Gender stereotypes limit perceived competence
- Socio-cultural expectations affect girls participation

Dodd-Reynolds et al., 2024; Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010



Negative Changes Girls May Experience During Puberty

Physical Changes

- Increased body fat
- Acne and skin changes
- Menstrual discomfort (cramps, headaches, fatigue)
- Temporary decrease in coordination during growth spurts

Psychological & Emotional Changes

- Greater emotional variability
- Increased self-consciousness and body-image concerns
- Heightened stress and anxiety

Social Changes

- More sensitivity to peer evaluation
- Decline in physical activity

Susman & Rogol (2004); Patton et al. (2016); Compian, Gowen & Hayward (2004); Brooks-Gunn & Reiter (1990); Nadeau et al. (2008); Zimmer-Gembeck (2013); Slater & Tiggemann (2010)

This Girl Can



Empower girls and women to be active regardless of skill level, body type, or ability

#LikeAGirl



Societal messages can influence girls' self-confidence and willingness to be physically active.

CURRENT Research Findings

- Intersection of gender, socioeconomic status, and environment influences PL (Dodd-Reynolds et al., 2024)
- Girls benefit from supportive, inclusive, and safe spaces (Beni et al., 2023)
- PL positively correlates with motivation, self-esteem, and sport participation (Edwards et al., 2016)

Canadian Women in Sport

- Girls' sport participation rising but still lower than boys
- Major drop-off in adolescence
- Barriers: body image, appearance-based comments, menstrual health, access
- Sport participation brings strong mental & social benefits



Barriers



- Gender bias in sport participation and social norms (Pope et al., 2006).
- Low perceived competence and confidence (Telford et al., 2020).
- Body image concerns, peer pressure, and social expectations (Wyn et al., 2023).
- Time constraints and competing priorities (Pope et al., 2006).

Facilitators and Interventions

- Peer and family support enhances participation (Telford et al., 2020).
- Safe, inclusive, girl-focused programs increase confidence and engagement (Okely et al., 2017).
- Multi-component interventions can mitigate decline in MVPA (Beni et al., 2016).

Scenario

Designing an Inclusive Basketball Practice

Imagine you are coaching a group of adolescent girls in basketball. Some girls are confident and skilled, while others are hesitant, lack confidence, or feel self-conscious. Based on what you've learned about physical literacy and gender differences in participation, design a 15-minute warm-up or skill activity that encourages participation, builds confidence, and engages all players.

STRENGTHS

- Multi-country studies and large samples (Kretschmer et al., 2023)
- Holistic PL approach including affective and cognitive domains (Dodd-Reynolds et al., 2024).
- Qualitative insights on girls' experiences (Wyn et al., 2023).

WEAKNESSES

- Limited longitudinal studies; unclear long-term impact (Beni et al., 2016).
- Inconsistent PL assessment tools (Dodd-Reynolds et al., 2024).
- Underrepresentation of diverse populations and intersectional factors (Öztürk et al., 2023).

A decorative graphic featuring a light blue background on the left and a dark blue background on the right. A hand in a light pink sleeve points from the left towards the right. Several colored dots (purple, blue, orange) are scattered in the upper left. Three overlapping circles in purple, red, and white are on the right side, each containing text.

Implications for practice

Coaching Lens

Focus on confidence, mastery, and autonomy, not only competition (Edwards et al., 2016).

Provide female mentors or role models (Okely et al., 2017).

Encourage supportive peer networks and inclusion (Wyn et al., 2023).



FUTURE directions for Research

- Standardize PL assessment tools (Dodd-Reynolds et al., 2024).
- Conduct longitudinal studies to examine gender and PL (Öztürk et al., 2023).
- Evaluate interventions in real-world contexts, including clubs and schools (Okely et al., 2017).
- Consider intersectional factors: SES, culture, body image (Wyn et al., 2023).

Conclusion



- Gender influences physical literacy and participation.
- Girls face unique barriers but respond well to supportive, inclusive interventions.
- Coaches are key to fostering confidence, motivation, and long-term engagement.

Thank you!

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