

# SPORTS ARE NOT JUST FOR MEN: PERCEPTIONS OF MASCULINE HEGEMONY AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE CITY OF MEDAN

**Novia Khairin Zahra**

Sociology Program, University of North Sumatra, Indonesia  
Jl. Tri Dharma No. 9, Padang Bulan, Kec. Medan Baru, Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara, 20222  
khairinzahranovia@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This article discusses how stereotypes are formed, passed down, and impact women's participation in sports. The principle of sports itself is that it is an activity that can be done by everyone regardless of gender, age, or background, as previously explained by various relevant figures. Although sports should be inclusive, in reality there are still many stereotypes about masculinity and issues of gender inequality related to access to facilities, training, athlete income, and recognition of achievements. Through a phenomenological approach with an analytical lens using Social Representation Theory, the concept of hegemonic masculinity, and feminist theory, this study highlights how cultural norms, social constructs, media representations, and gender power relations shape the view that sports are a male domain. The results of this study show that female athletes experience symbolic marginalization, differential treatment, and a lack of appreciation despite their equal ability to compete. This study concludes by emphasizing the importance of raising awareness, equalizing opportunities, and changing social perceptions so that sports can become an equal and safe place for all genders.

**Keywords:** Sports, Masculinity, Gender Inequality, Stereotypes

## Introduction

Sports are activities that can be done by everyone, young and old, male and female. Suardi and Sitti Fatimah, in their academic paper on sports (2022), simply explain that sports can be done by anyone, anytime, anywhere, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, and so on, as also stated by Mutohir (2002). Sports themselves have no limitations whatsoever, because sports give freedom to anyone who participates in them. According to the KBBI (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia), the definition of sports is doing physical activities to strengthen and maintain a healthy body (such as soccer, swimming, javelin throwing, or archery). Giriwijoyo (2005:30) explains that sports are a series of regular and planned physical movements that are done consciously to improve functional abilities. Then, according to Kosasih (1985:4), sports are activities to develop physical and mental strength so that the body is strong and the energy is sufficiently trained to be agile in carrying out the struggles of life. Furthermore, Setiyawan explains in the PENJAS Scientific Journal that sports, as a branch of knowledge that is part of physical education, also have a role in developing quality human resources. In conclusion, sports are activities that can be done by anyone through conscious, regular, and well-planned physical activities, with the aim of improving health, strength, and bodily functions. Sports allow everyone to participate, while also serving as a tool for character building.

In today's modern era, the number of sports enthusiasts is increasing. People have begun to pay attention to their healthy lifestyles. Some understand the importance of exercising in between their busy schedules, some just follow the trend but still exercise properly, and some just treat exercise as a trend that must be followed. As reported by lamanrri.co.id (Angaela. K: 2025), sports have evolved from being just a hobby to becoming an integral part of modern society's lifestyle. These activities not only provide health benefits but have also become a popular trend. Furthermore, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in the 2024 Social and Cultural Statistics report shows a significant increase in health awareness, with 37.16% of respondents aged five years and above recorded as having engaged in physical activity at least once a week before the survey was conducted. However, in this modern era, some people still consider sports-related activities to be closely associated with masculinity or strength, bravery, agility, and toughness, which are identified with men. In fact, sports activists, especially female athletes, hope that the general public's understanding of sports goes beyond that. This is in line with what Triyaningsih said, as quoted by Kompas.com (March 15, 2025). Triya stated that, so far, there are still stereotypes that women in the world of sports have to face. Triya also expressed her hope that Indonesian sports can be more friendly to women amid the great challenges related to gender equality. This stereotype of masculinity has actually existed since long ago, since children are taught from an early age that sports are associated with things that are closely related to boys, who tend to be wild, and girls are taught to have feminine traits. According to the National Library of Medicine (Munirah, 2024), children learn to categorize sports as masculine or feminine based on cultural norms, and this categorization guides their attitudes and behaviors toward those sports.

The issues that arise in the midst of the active world of sports are not only about masculinity, which is synonymous with the understanding of the wider community, but also about gender inequality resulting from these stereotypes and other issues such as unequal access to facilities, training, income (salaries/wages for athletes), and recognition of achievements, especially among female sports enthusiasts or athletes. Various questions arise as to why these disparities and stereotypes exist, whether it is true that only women experience this form of gender inequality in sports, and whether it is true that the disparities experienced by female athletes are caused by other factors as well, and how women can ultimately dare to appear as professional athletes without changing their identity due to stereotypes of masculinity.

This article was compiled with reference to previous studies and research findings, including research by Venny Aulia, et al. (2023) entitled Public Perceptions of Gender Equality for Women in Sports, Aschari Senjahari. R (2025) entitled "Beyond Gender Boundaries: Discourse on Power and Representation of Women in the World of Sports," and a research article by Munirah. A (2024) entitled "Social representation of masculine and feminine sports among Saudi adolescents." These research articles were used as references because they are in line with the novelty of the research to be conducted, namely on masculine stereotypes and gender inequality as well as the role of the media in portraying women in the world of sports.

This article departs from the theories, concepts, and views of several related figures, namely Social Representation Theory (Moscovici: 1976), which states that the culture and history of a community shape beliefs, attitudes, and values, so that these representations influence perceptions of gender and sports and perpetuate stereotypes of masculinity and gender inequality in participation and performance in the world of sports. Then there is a connection with the Concept of Gender Power Relations and Masculinity (Raewyn Connell: 1970) where, in the context of gender relations, hegemonic masculinity is at the top, so this dominance recognizes the position of women as subordinate or below men globally. The connection between power structures and gender can be seen through physical activity, so that physicality plays an important role in defining femininity and masculinity in sports as a means of observing the role of the body in gender relations. Next is Feminist Theory, which links stereotypes and gender inequality as issues of

injustice, making it a focus for experts in the struggle for emancipation. This theory legitimizes sports as an arena for marginalized groups (women) to participate in achieving success.

The questions raised in relation to this research article are certainly not something that the author simply ignores. Based on this research article, the author hopes that all questions regarding the issue of gender inequality in the world of sports that is being discussed can be answered properly and thoroughly, with the aim of finding verified answers to the issue of gender inequality and disparity. Therefore, this research article uses data based on phenomenological studies as primary data and case studies through various websites, articles, books, and related journals as secondary data sources. It is also hoped that in the future, this article can be useful as a reference for conducting further research and as teaching material to open up critical thinking and empathy among the wider community, especially regarding the issue of gender inequality

## **Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. According to Sugiyono (2018:213), qualitative research methods are research methods based on philosophy used to conduct research in scientific (experimental) situations where researchers use qualitative instruments, data collection, and analysis to emphasize meaning. This qualitative research method aims to analyze and describe phenomena or research objects through social activities, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals or groups. Qualitative methods present data as it is without manipulation. The purpose of this research is to provide a complete picture of a phenomenon or to expose and clarify a phenomenon that occurs. This study interprets and describes data related to the issue under discussion regarding the views of sports activists on the gaps that exist in the world of sports and the persistence of stereotypes of masculinity.

Then, there are two main sources used in collecting information, which come from primary data and secondary data.

### **1. Primary Data**

Conducted using interview and documentation techniques. The interview itself represents a form of two-way communication to obtain accurate information. The documentation process was also carried out by collecting information, which included notes from direct interviews, documents related to the research topic, as well as photos and recordings taken in the field. The purpose of this step was to improve the accuracy of research data related to perceptions of masculine hegemony in the field of sports and related gender inequality.

### **2. Secondary Data**

Secondary data is information obtained from various other sources that can supplement primary data. These sources can be found through a literature review covering various types of scientific papers, research publications, books, and previous studies relevant to the objectives of this study.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **1. Perceptions of Masculine Hegemony and Apparent Gender Inequality in Access to Facilities, Training, Wages, and Recognition of Achievement in the World of Sports**

The word masculinity, which is synonymous with things related to male characteristics such as strength, toughness, agility, etc., is often associated with sports activities. In reality, however, sports themselves allow anyone to participate in these activities. The hegemony of masculinity in sports creates a

view that things like strength, aggressiveness, and competitiveness are the main characteristics of an athlete, and this has historically been associated with men. Sports then become a symbolic place that emphasizes male dominance, where an athlete's identity is often seen through the understanding of physical strength that is considered "natural" in men. Through the media, sports organization policies, and training culture, the idea of dominant masculinity continues to be repeated as the main benchmark for success. In this situation, female athletes experience marginalization. This is certainly not something that female sports activists want.

In an interview (December 7, 2025) with one of the informants, Luwigita Susilo (26), a 63kg weightlifting athlete and member of PABERSI (All Indonesia Weightlifting Association) who is still active in the world of athletics today, revealed the following regarding the above discourse:

*"Yes... actually, in my opinion, this sport does not discriminate based on gender. Both girls and boys are free to express themselves... I agree that sports are related to stereotypes of masculinity, but in reality, it does not change women to have masculine traits. No, they (women) still return to their true selves, as women. But when they become athletes, they are professional athletes, and they still have their feminine qualities. As for me, I don't feel like I'm a guy, no, I don't feel that way. I actually feel like I can do it too"*



**Picture 1.1** Interview session with informant Luwigita Susilo (26), an active 63kg weightlifter and the first female weightlifter to win a medal in North Sumatra. East Medan, (12/07/2025).

In a separate interview (12/01/2025), similar information was obtained from informant Yehezkiel (22) regarding stereotypes of masculinity in sports.

*"...I think it's normal and not taboo. Everyone is free to exercise if they want to. In relation to sports, I think it's only related to masculinity... it's just a low opinion of human resources, that girls are not suitable to be athletes."*



**Picture 1.2** Interview session with informant Yehezkiel (22), retired athlete in aquatic sports from North Sumatra. Medan Johor, (12/01/2025)

When women join sports that have long been considered a male domain, such as soccer, weightlifting, boxing, or futsal, they face not only the technical challenges of the sport itself, but also cultural barriers in the form of stereotypes that they are "not strong enough," "not competitive enough," or "just complementary." This view influences the attention given by sports institutions, from facilities and sponsorship support to media coverage. Male athletes receive more attention and recognition, while the achievements of female athletes are often narrowed down to physical aspects, appearance, or the value of "femininity" as judged by the public. This is in line with the results of an interview (04/12/2025) with an informant named Ghibran Oemar (19), a young soccer player who is a member of SSB DISPORASU (North Sumatra Youth and Sports Agency Soccer School), the young athlete, who is fondly known as Iban, stated that:

*"...there is a different perspective, in my opinion. Perhaps there is a view that women are weak, as I mentioned earlier... women have a different capacity for strength than men, so the audience (the public) is not very interested in women's sports competitions, and there are few spectators at women's tournaments. Also... in terms of recognition of achievements, it can be different in my opinion because championships won by women's teams, for example in soccer, are only small championships, at most at the inter-team level, whereas men's teams have won championships up to the governor's cup. So maybe that's one of the reasons why women's matches are less interesting to watch because the matches are less exciting."*



**Picture 1.3** Interview session with informant Ghibran O. Maftuh (19), active soccer player for SUMUT. Medan Baru, (12/04/2025)

In a separate interview (December 7, 2025) with Muhammad Fahri Akmal (18), a karate athlete, he also stated something similar:

*"...in men's competitions or tournaments, there are often disputes or fights (brawls). Competitions that feature fights are what sell, which is why they are so popular."*

According to another informant, Muhammad Sulan Virzi Nasution, he said that:

*"I think spectators at men's and women's competitions are more interested in the professionalism of the sport. For example, soccer has been popular since ancient times..."*



**Picture 1.4** Interview session with informants M. Fahri Akmal (18) (in the upper right corner) as a passive karate athlete for SUMUT 2024 and M. Sultan Virzi (19) (on the large screen) as a former weightlifting athlete for SUMUT 2022. Via online, East Medan, (12/07/2025)

Marginalization is also evident in the fact that prizes and bonuses for female athletes are often much lower than those for male athletes, even though they have achieved the same or even better results. This injustice sends a subtle message that the contributions of female athletes are less valuable in a sports system dominated by masculine hegemony.

During the same interview session with informant Luwigita, it was revealed that:

*"...we (weightlifters) are paid based on our ranking, so it's not based on gender inequality, but on achievement."*

Based on interviews at different times (12/01/2025) with Yehezkiel (22), a retired aquatic athlete, he stated that:

*"...in aquatic sports, there is no difference in the distribution of prizes or rewards between men and women. Men and women are equal; the only difference is between provinces."*

In addition, the issue of training disparities and access to facilities for female athletes has also been widely discussed in previous studies. Some mention that female athletes or sports enthusiasts tend to receive inadequate facilities, while male athletes always receive new facilities. Regarding training time, it is also discussed that the training time given to male athletes tends to be longer than that given to female athletes. This indirectly shows inequality and distrust of female athletes, who are considered weaker than men. Responding to this, informant Luwigita provided the following explanation:

*"At our training facility, the facilities are actually inadequate and do not meet SNI standards for training. We train with whatever facilities are available, so there (at the training facility) are three sets of training racks, but there is no distinction between men using the new ones and women using the old ones. So we just make do, and all the athletes understand each other."*

Thus, based on the results of the interviews, stereotypes and inequality of access in the world of sports for women in the city of Medan are not very prominent or even tend to be almost non-existent. From the interview results, 1 in 5 mentioned that there was inequality felt by women, and this was only visible and prominent in soccer or futsal. However, in other sports, the attitude of upholding equality for female athletes still exists and is maintained among athletes in the city of Medan.

## 2. The Role of Media in Shaping Women's Character in the World of Sports

The media plays an important role in how society understands the character and identity of women in the world of sports. The representation provided by the media not only shows female athletes as successful individuals, but also often creates a certain image that influences public opinion. Much of the time, the media emphasizes the physical aspects, appearance, or femininity of female athletes rather than their technical abilities and competitive achievements. As a result, women who pursue careers in sports are often trapped in narratives that do not fully represent their professionalism and athletic qualities. International media research shows that female athletes tend to receive less coverage than male athletes, and the content is also more often geared toward gender stereotypes than analysis of athletic performance.

The media also plays a role in other ways, such as maintaining or challenging stereotypes of masculinity in the world of sports. When women participate in sports that are considered masculine, such as soccer, boxing, or weightlifting, the news often contains biases that highlight women's incompatibility with the "character of the sport." Terms such as "less aggressive," "not as strong," or "less competitive than men" still frequently appear in public narratives and comments on social media. These stereotypes directly affect the recognition and legitimacy of female athletes, which in turn can influence support, sponsorship, and opportunities to appear in mainstream media. However, this narrative is refuted by the response given by informant Luwigita, who explained that, as a female weightlifter, she feels proud of her achievements rather than thinking about her appearance as discussed by the media and articles.

However, this turned out to be inconsistent with her personal experience, and Luwigita believes that none of her fellow female weightlifters feel inferior in this way.

Speaking of inferiority and lack of confidence among female athletes, based on the results of an interview with Iban, it was found that:

*"...the girls' team doesn't feel inferior, based on what I've seen on the field and what I've heard. They may also want to be like the boys' team that won the governor's cup, but they haven't achieved that yet. However, our girls' team is even more ambitious."*

Based on this, it was found that the imbalance in recognition of achievements and media coverage of matches actually led to greater ambition rather than a lack of confidence.

Several reports on the success of female athletes in international competitions show that the media can open up new opportunities for women to emerge as inspirational figures. With more equal representation and freedom from gender bias, the media can help build the confidence of female athletes, increase women's participation in various sports, and change the way society thinks about gender identity in the world of sports. Therefore, the role of the media is very important in shaping the character of women in the world of sports, both socially and individually. The media can be a source of marginalization through

stereotypes and bias, but it also has the power to challenge the dominance of masculinity and build a more inclusive narrative. Efforts to improve standards of objective, equitable, and gender-sensitive reporting are essential to expanding the space for women to be fully recognized as successful professional athletes.

## Conclusion

This study investigates the dichotomy between the essence of sports as a universal activity that is inclusive of all genders and the social reality of hegemonic masculinity stereotypes, particularly in Medan. Theoretically, sports are understood as a means of self-development that is free from gender barriers, but in practice, social constructs and media representations often perpetuate the view that sports are a male-dominated domain. Through a case study approach and social representation theory, this study reveals that despite legal policies such as Law No. 3 of 2005, which guarantees equality, women still face symbolic marginalization and cultural barriers. A surprising field finding is that, in the field, there is a positive anomaly that should be noted. The stereotype of hegemonic masculinity is still dominant there, but the practice of gender inequality in terms of access to facilities, training, and wages is not found significantly in most sports. The only exceptions are soccer and futsal. Feminine narratives are the most effective tool for disguising male dominance in sports, but athletes are not affected; they are instead becoming more ambitious and professional, making great efforts to prove their achievements in sports currently dominated by men.

The implication of these findings is that a transformation of social views is only possible if the achievements of female athletes are represented by the media and sports institutions in a gender-neutral manner. Theoretically, these findings require an understanding of a female athlete's identity as something more than a "gender device" and more of a challenge to the "gender order." Based on strong feminist activism, it is recommended that policymakers continue to increase their efforts to ensure that female athletes are protected and have the same rights and opportunities as male athletes. In addition, the mass media must play a major role in developing a "liberatory desk" that will provide clear technical information that is not gender biased. In this way, various systemic efforts can be carried out together and sports will once again become a form of social emancipation that brings physical health to every participant. The conclusion of this study reveals that the future of sports in Medan, Indonesia, is highly dependent on public awareness, gender-sensitive government policies, and, in some cases, the competitive spirit of the athletes themselves.

## References

- Afida, Ifa. CASE STUDY (John W. Creswell) By Yani Kusmarni. Academia.edu. Accessed on December 6, 2025, via [https://www.academia.edu/download/50467309/Laporan\\_Studi\\_Kasus.pdf](https://www.academia.edu/download/50467309/Laporan_Studi_Kasus.pdf)
- Alsamih, Munirah. (2024). Social representation of masculine and feminine sports among Saudi adolescents. National Library of Medicine. *Frontiers in Psychology*. Retrieved December 7, 2025, from <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11002895/>
- Astuti, Sri. Parulian, Togi. (2019). GENDER AND FEMINISM IN SPORTS. Digital Library of Medan State University. Accessed on December 7, 2025, via <https://digilib.unimed.ac.id/id/eprint/35753/>
- Colleen. (2017). Toward sport reform: hegemonic masculinity and reconceptualizing competition. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*. 44 (2), 183-198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2017.1300538>

Divinubun, Siti. (2016). PARTIALITY IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE. Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Patimura University. Journal of Education Publications. 6(3), <http://download.garuda.kemdikbud.go.id/article.php?article=1565748&val=4327&title=KEBERPIHAKAN%20PENDIDIKAN%20JASMANI%20OLAH%20RAGA%20DALAM%20PERSPEKTIF%20GENDER>

Habali, Venny, A., F. Kharisman, V., A. Friskawati, Gita, F. Supriadi, Dedi. (2023). Public Perceptions of Gender Equality for Women in Sports. Physical Activity Journal (PAJU). 4(2), 155-172. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/126b/aa551a7db82b2457e631db73cf7490c23b2a.pdf>

Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language. Definition of Sports. Accessed on December 6, 2025 via <https://kbbi.web.id/olahraga>

Mutohir, T., C. Pramono, Made. (2021). STUDY OF SPORTS SCIENCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE. Zifatama Jawara. Accessed on December 6, 2025, via [https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=UAlhEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA191&dq=feminist+theory+i+n+sports&ots=C2D2FKtuxd&sig=K\\_T3AfGOkov1xhJ3KK1Slsfo7ms](https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=UAlhEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA191&dq=feminist+theory+i+n+sports&ots=C2D2FKtuxd&sig=K_T3AfGOkov1xhJ3KK1Slsfo7ms)

Pau, Angaela, I., K. (2025). Running Becomes Indonesia's Favorite Sport in 2025. rri.co.id Radio Republik Indonesia. Accessed on December 6, 2025, via <https://rri.co.id/index.php/kesehatan/1955463/lari-jadi-tren-olahraga-favorit-masyarakat-indonesia-2025>

Pristiandaru, D., L. (2025). Stereotypes Still Exist, Indonesian Sports Expected to Be More Women-Friendly. Kompas.com. Accessed on December 7, 2025 via <https://lestari.kompas.com/read/2025/03/18/090000786/masih-ada-stereotip-olahraga-indonesia-diharap-ramah-perempuan>

Raewyn Connell. MASCULINITIES. Accessed on December 6, 2025, via [http://www.raewynconnell.net/p/masculinities\\_20.html](http://www.raewynconnell.net/p/masculinities_20.html)

Setiawan, M., O. (2017). Vision of Physical Education and Sports. PGRI University Semarang. Journal Scientific PENJAS. 3(1). <https://ejournal.utp.ac.id/index.php/JIP/article/download/543/527>

Smith, Jonathan, A. (2021). SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS Rethinking Psychology. NUSAMEDIA. Accessed on December 6, 2025 via, [https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=gMdwEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=t+eori+representasi+sosial+moscovici&ots=jMDu1tHBM2&sig=9Q-a\\_LAE\\_zzCrHd3W62jwxeaYRE](https://books.google.com/books?hl=id&lr=&id=gMdwEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=t+eori+representasi+sosial+moscovici&ots=jMDu1tHBM2&sig=9Q-a_LAE_zzCrHd3W62jwxeaYRE)

Suardi, Achmad, Sitti, F. (2022). ACADEMIC PAPER ON SPORTS. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT DIVISION OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING, RESEARCH, AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF MAROS REGENCY. Accessed on December 7, 2025 via <https://ppid.maroskab.go.id/assets/dokumen/e3d4a6bf2bfb5fcc2201e53d5a8955ce.pdf>