

# SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

160%

Australians pride themselves on their sporting prowess and success. Most Australians could easily name ten famous Australian athletes, but struggle to name half that number of Australians who are acclaimed for humanitarian achievements. Although not all Australians feel passionately about sport, sport is undeniably linked to the Australian psyche.

The following chapters use Figueroa's framework as a tool to investigate how decisions to participate in sport are affected by socio-cultural influences such as our history, our values, the media and the allocation of sports funding.

## Focus questions

How has Australia's sporting culture developed?

What is the media's role in promoting equality in sport and recreation?

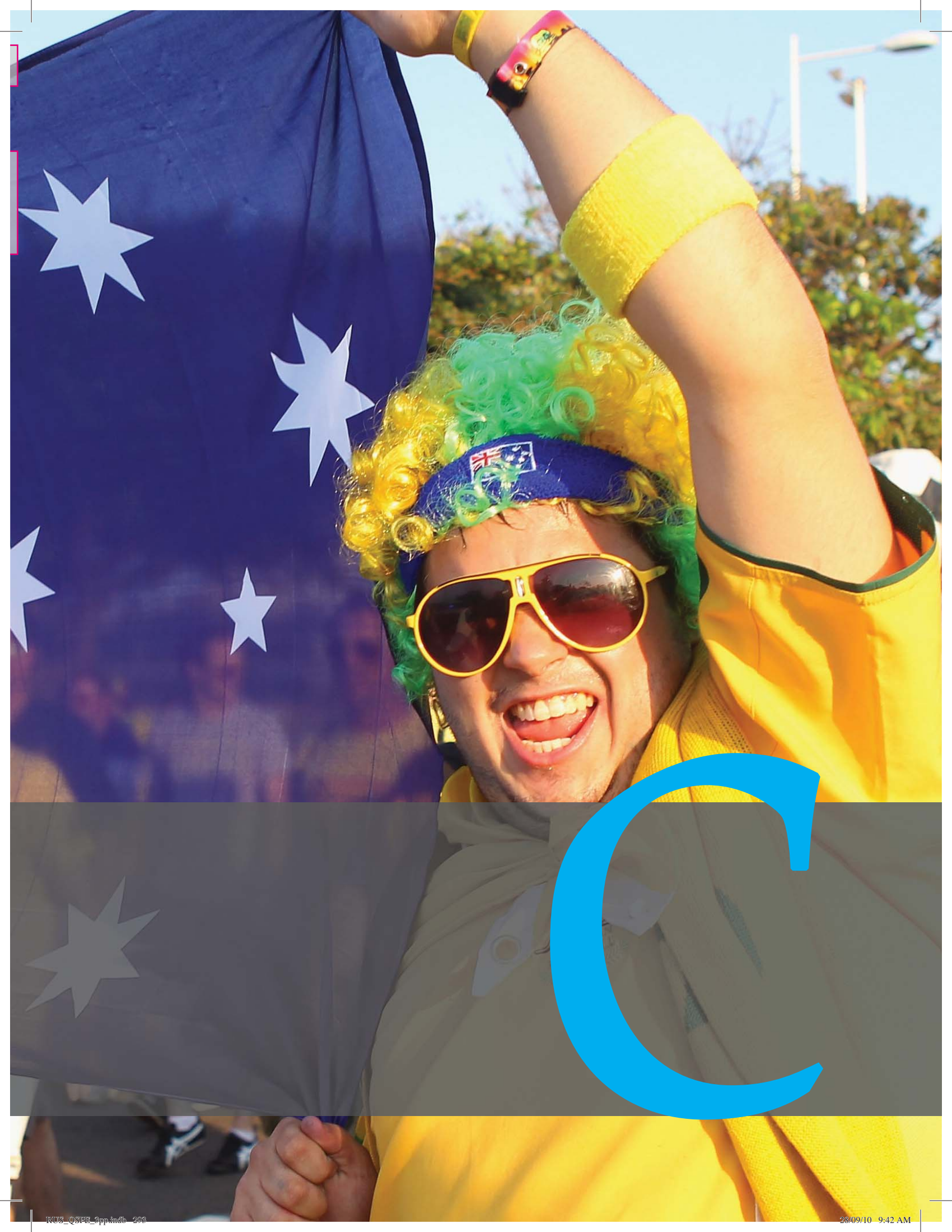
Do all Australians, regardless of race, religion, gender, socioeconomic status or education, have equal opportunities to participate in and enjoy sport?

Does providing access ensure participation?

## Coming up

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## 8

# Figueroa's framework: An introduction to sociology



## BEFORE YOU START

Have you considered the relationship between sport and society? Is sport influenced by society, or does society influence sport?

What factors determined your sporting choices? Were your choices shaped by family, friends, teachers and the media, and by opportunities you had as you were growing up? Have you stopped to consider what ultimately influenced these opportunities? Do all Australians have equal opportunities to participate in sport?

This chapter will provide a brief overview outlining the relationship between sport and society, and introduce Figueroa's framework, a sociological tool used to study the factors that affect equity in and access to sport. Each level of Figueroa's framework is studied in the chapters that follow.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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**Figure 8.1** Sociologists study sport as it reflects society's behaviour and beliefs.

## Sociology and sport

Sociology is the scientific study of how human society and culture are developed and organised. Sociologists try to find the relationship between significant features of society—such as money, politics, law, education, access and equity—and analyse how these features affect social groups. Social groups can be classified based on factors such as gender, class, ethnicity and race.

Sports sociologists analyse social and cultural influences through a sports perspective. Sports can be a microcosm of society: the relationships and behaviour that happen in society are also present in sport. Sport, in one form or another, is a part of societies and cultures throughout the world. So, as a branch of sociology, sociologists scientifically study the social and cultural structures, patterns and organisations within sport.

Sociology can be used to:

- identify and understand social problems and issues associated with sport
- understand sport as not just a physical performance but also as a social phenomenon, which affects people's feelings, thoughts and lives.
- learn about sport, to help individuals make informed choices
- think about how to challenge the ways in which sport disadvantages some people and offers privileges to others.

As we will discover in later chapters, sports sociologists can sometimes create controversy because their conclusions call for institutional changes in society. Many people are against such changes, as they would threaten those in power or upset what people see as the natural order of sport.

### EXTENSION

Read the article 'Caged Fury' on page 296 and discuss how changes in society have increased the popularity of this sport.

## Caged fury: brutal 'sport' a hit with fans

Yesterday afternoon Australian Anthony Perosh was beaten to a pulp by Croatian Mirko Cro Cop. He was punched, kicked and wrestled to the ground, his nose broken and his forehead split open by an elbow blow before finally, mercifully, the fight was stopped.

Bloody and violent as it was, this was no bar-room brawl. It was the opening bout in the 110th tournament of the Ultimate Fighting Championship in Sydney, which claims to be one of the world's fastest-growing sports.

All 16 500 tickets for the event, priced from \$50 to \$450, sold out in four hours, before the bill had even been announced, before tickets had gone on general release and before any ads had been run.

Channel One HD, which carried it live, expected a viewing audience of about 300 000. And in July last year, a record 1.6 million people paid \$50 each to watch UFC 100 on pay-per-view TV.

This is the first time UFC has come to Australia and despite serious concerns about its safety and impact on impressionable viewers, it almost certainly won't be the last. 'We'll be back, no question about it,' said Marshall Zelaznik, UFC's managing director of international development.

According to Mr Zelaznik, Melbourne was considered the logical place to stage the first

Australian event and discussions were held several years ago. 'But the Boxing and Combat Authority (the state government's regulatory body) decided they didn't want caged fighting in Melbourne.'

Sports Minister James Merlino's office was unable to confirm any approach, but reluctance to give the sport official sanction would not be surprising. While there is now a push to include it in the 2012 London Olympics, UFC's extreme violence prompted US senator John McCain to label it 'human cockfighting' in the late 1990s.

That's a view shared by Steven Hambleton, vice-president of the Australian Medical Association. 'It is simply not a sport. It's not about skill, it's not about strength, it's not about hand-eye co-ordination. It's about how you inflict damage most effectively.'

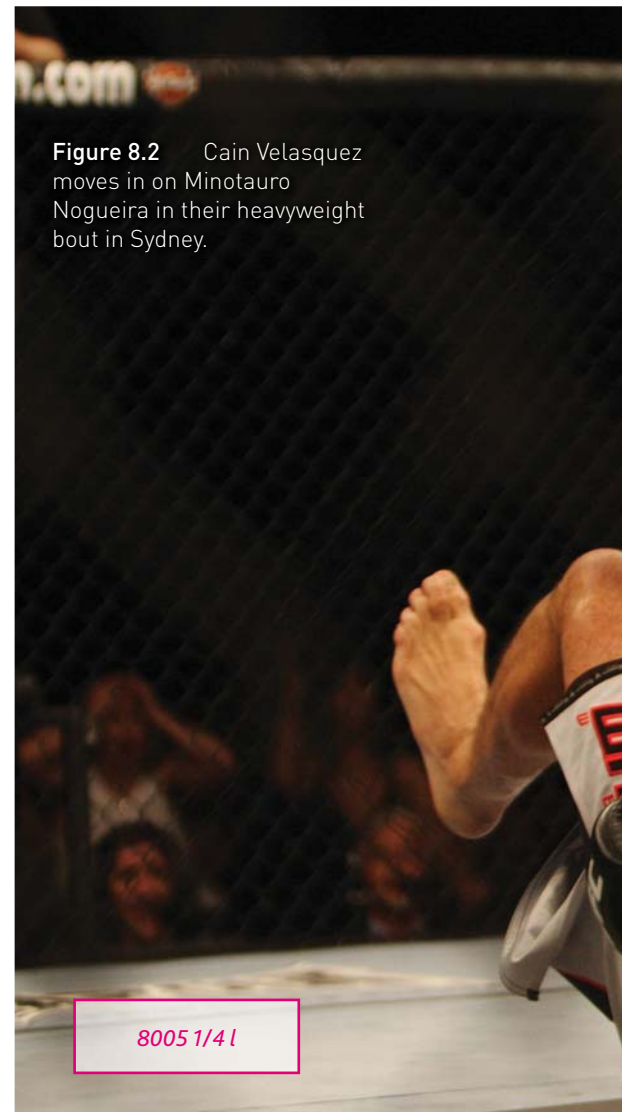
Mr Zelaznik said the sport had come a long way since the first UFC tournament in Denver, Colorado in 1993, when boxers, wrestlers and ju-jitsu champions held free-for-all scraps in the 'octagon', a caged, eight-sided ring. 'There were no rules, no time limits, no weight limits,' he said.

There was clearly an audience for the sport but it was a regulatory nightmare and had been tossed off TV by 2001, when boxing promoter Dana White and Las Vegas casino billionaires

Lorenzo and Frank Fertitta bought the rights for just \$US2 million.

The new owners threw money at UFC and by 2005 had standardised the rules to make it safer. They then developed a reality TV show.

*The Ultimate Fighter* was like *Big Brother* meets *Fight Club*: 16 men in a house, competing for a contract to fight in the UFC. 'We call it the Trojan horse,' said Mr



**Figure 8.2** Cain Velasquez moves in on Minotauro Nogueira in their heavyweight bout in Sydney.



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**Caged fury: brutal 'sport' a hit with fans (cont ...)**

Zelaznik. 'At first people didn't realise they were watching a show about UFC.'

The show was a hit and is now in its 12th season. UFC and its spin-offs are broadcast in 36 countries. Last year, the owners reportedly rejected a takeover offer worth more than a billion dollars.

But though UFC is growing, there are concerns even among fight fans. 'It's not boxing, it's just a gimmick to make money,' said

Sol Spitalnic, secretary of Boxing Victoria. 'There's a lot of people out there who want boxing banned and this doesn't help.'

The AMA's Mr Hambleton is among those calling for a ban: 'People are desensitised to violence all over the place. Kids are playing graphic video games and doing violent things to each other and boxing is part of that culture.'

But the sport's defenders say the perception of extreme

violence is out of step with reality. 'It's easy to use words like "barbaric", but these guys go to extraordinary lengths to make sure it's safe,' said Gus Seebeck, program manager at One HD. 'It's not for everyone but ... this sport is growing faster than pretty much any other. I think there is room for more product like this in the schedule.'

Source: Karl Quinn,  
*The Sydney Morning Herald*,  
22 February 2010



## Equity and access

Two concepts that are important to sociology are the closely linked ideas of equity and access. Equity is studied to determine whether resources are distributed fairly to all members of a society. Sociologists also study whether all individuals within a society have access to resources or whether barriers or obstacles are in place to prevent certain groups of people from accessing them.

**Figure 8.3** Studying equity and access helps us to recognise the unreasonable barriers that restrict sports participation.

In sport, studying equity and access helps us to understand why some people are less likely than others to participate in sport and physical activity. Different types of barriers—which can vary from the financial cost of sporting equipment to cultural attitudes about the types of activities that are appropriate for males and females—can restrict individuals' access to some sports and physical activities.

*Have any barriers prevented you from participating in a particular sport or activity? What opportunities do you need to succeed in your chosen sport?*

Many would argue that it is impossible to provide exactly the same opportunities and access to all members of society. For example, is it realistic to expect that a teenager living on a remote cattle station will have the same access to surfing as another teenager living in a coastal town? While some barriers, such as distance, cannot easily be overcome, many barriers that relate to people's beliefs and attitudes about sport and physical activity can be removed. The study of equity and access in sport is primarily about reducing and removing the unreasonable and irrelevant barriers to participation—such as discrimination, prejudices and stereotyping. This may require a shift in current attitudes.

For these reasons, the sociological study of access and equity in sport looks primarily at social attitudes and expectations that create barriers to participation—in particular, how such barriers are formed, how they are reinforced, how they influence individuals' behaviour and how they can be changed. Such barriers to equity and access exist at all levels of society.

### ACQUIRE

Look up the meaning of the words 'equity' and 'access' in a dictionary. Then, discuss the following:

- 1 Why are the concepts of equity and access to sport and other physical activities considered important?
- 2 What might be reasonable barriers to equity and access?

### APPLY AND EVALUATE

- 1 Which types or groups of people in our society might not have equal access to sport and physical activity? Why?
- 2 How might having limited opportunities and access to sport and physical activity affect these individuals?

## Figueroa's framework

Many social factors directly or indirectly shape opinions and influence an individual's decision to participate in physical activity. These factors change throughout an individual's life. For example, some children start playing sport because it is fun; others may join a sporting group because their older brother or sister plays that sport. A new sporting complex may open nearby and provide a chance to try a new sport. Coaching clinics might inspire some people to give a sport a go. Teachers can provide both positive and negative sporting experiences. At school, peers can change adolescents' attitudes about a sport that was previously enjoyed. Even students who are talented at a particular sport may quit it because a sporting career is not realistic or because of the social expectations of their gender. Work commitments, financial costs and equipment costs—such factors can have a negative effect on sports participation.

Peter Figueroa, a sociologist, developed a framework to analyse racism within society, particularly to look at how equity and access to society's resources are affected by a person's race. This framework can also be applied to other aspects of sociology, including equity and access in sport.

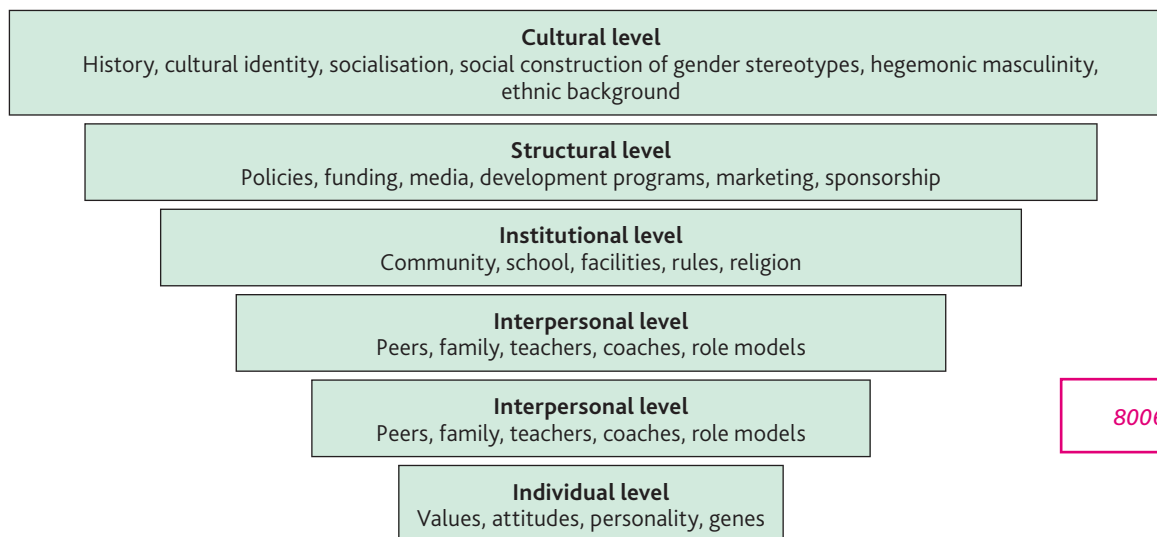
Figueroa's framework explored equity and access through five levels in society:

- 1 cultural level
- 2 structural level
- 3 institutional level
- 4 interpersonal level
- 5 individual level.

The levels look at all aspects of society, beginning with the 'big picture' of society and working down to the individual. They provide a starting point to analyse how Australian society affects Australian sporting participation.

It is important to remember that sports participation is a complex issue and that each person is affected differently. The level of Figueroa's framework that has the greatest influence on an individual's sports participation will vary. A simplistic response might say that only one level has affected an individual's participation; a deeper analysis will reveal that factors from each of the five levels have played a role.

Each of the five levels is summarised briefly below. They are all looked at in greater detail in the following chapters.



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**Figure 8.4** Figueroa's framework can be used to evaluate the influences on sports participation.



## ACQUIRE

Consider Figure 8.4.

- 1 Suggest reasons why the five levels of Figueroa's framework have been depicted in this way.
- 2 Why do the levels decrease in size, from cultural to individual?
- 3 Draw another concept map to depict Figueroa's framework.

## The cultural level

The **cultural level of Figueroa's framework** includes a society's values, beliefs and attitudes, which are the product of factors that include the social group's history, culture and ethnic background.

Society's values, beliefs and attitudes shape and influence equity in and access to sport. For example, consider the cultural attitudes to masculinity, femininity and sport. Traditionally, sport has been seen as a male domain; women have been seen as supporters or as people without interest in sport. Sports that are appropriate for men and those that are appropriate for women have been clearly differentiated. As these cultural barriers are slowly removed, women are gaining greater access and opportunities in sport.

A society's history and culture also affect sporting culture in other ways. Cultural factors can influence the type of sports that individuals within that society participate in. For example, consider the sports that are regularly watched or played in Queensland. Are they different from the sports preferred in Western Australia or somewhere further away, such as Canada? Such differences are the results of different sporting cultures.

## The structural level

The **structural level of Figueroa's framework** includes the influence of government, business and the media. Applying this level of Figueroa's framework to sport means investigating the relationship between the media and sports promotion, the allocation of government funding for sports programs, and how the corporate sector affects sport and sports participation through sponsorship and other funding.

For example, the Australian government funds and operates several organisations—such as the Australian Sports Commission—that aim to improve sports participation, promote equity and access to sport for all Australians, and improve Australians' sporting performance.

It is the structural level that provides many insights into how funding is allocated to sport.

## The institutional level

The **institutional level of Figueroa's framework** level examines the institutions within society that affect sport and physical activity. Institutions such as schools, community groups, sporting clubs, and religious groups are able to help shape positive attitudes to sport and physical activity.



**Figure 8.5** Cultural beliefs affect attitudes to sport and the types of sports we play.

Schools feature prominently when discussing how people's early attitudes towards sport are shaped. Some schools with strong sporting traditions reinforce participation in sport. The sports that students are encouraged to participate in can depend on the school's history and traditions, the facilities and equipment available, and the expertise of the teachers.

The institutional level is not just about the influence of schools; it also looks at the availability of facilities and the structure of organised sport within a community.

The rules of different sports are also considered as part of an analysis of the institutional level. Sporting rules, which are determined and standardised by sports' governing organisations, can restrict access to certain groups and individuals.

## The interpersonal level

The **interpersonal level of Figuerou's framework** is used to investigate the relationships that affect whether an individual will develop a lifelong association with sport.

Most of us are influenced, directly or indirectly, by the people around us. Whose role is the most crucial? Parents? Peers? Siblings? Teachers? Coaches? Sporting role models?

*Which three people have had the greatest influence on your sports participation?*

## The individual level

The **individual level of Figuerou's framework** examines why individuals choose to participate in physical activity. The reasons vary from person to person. For many people, the word 'exercise' is associated with images of unpleasant, vigorous activity that just makes them dirty, sweaty and uncomfortable. Others see exercise as something they must do to improve fitness or as a normal part of their daily life. For others, exercise is something that they do for enjoyment.

While each of the other levels has some bearing, decisions about sport and physical activity are ultimately made by the individual. Genes, values, attitudes and personalities are specific to each individual. This is reflected in differences between family members.

*How have Figuerou's levels affected how you participate in sport?*



**Figure 8.6** The interpersonal level is used to explain how relationships with family, friends and others influence sports participation.



# Applying Figueroa's framework: Sports-specific case studies

The following articles show how the levels of Figueroa's framework have an influence on athletes' participation in sport.

## Speaking with Torah Bright

NEWS

Because of snowboarding's soon to be increased profile and Torah's gold medal, Torah will have more marketing possibilities to endorse products. (Structural and interpersonal level)

Australia loves winners. Would the media coverage have been the same if Torah had won silver instead of gold? (Cultural level)

When Torah says how proud she was to represent Australia in the Torino Winter Olympics, she is showing the influence of her culture and her personal feelings. (Cultural level and individual level)

At the Olympics, Torah likes to support and encourage other athletes. (Interpersonal level)

Australia may not be the first place many people think of when it comes to snowboarding, but Down Under is where halfpipe specialist Torah Bright calls home. A 2006 Olympian, the 23-year-old is a strong medal contender in Vancouver. Yet while she makes her living on snow, Bright feels she was born to live by the beach and she finds her competitive juices flow most when driving a go-kart.

### Going back to the 2006 Games, what are some of your memories?

The main thing I remember about Torino is just how patriotic I felt. I was so proud to be

wearing the Australian uniform and happy to run around and watch all the other events and the other Aussie athletes competing. The Olympics is a special thing, I was just happy to be there and be a part of it.

### What are your memories of seeing your sister compete in Alpine skiing at the Salt Lake City Games?

I was living in Mammoth (California) that year of the Olympics and I came across to be with the family and go watch Rowena at the Olympics. We were so excited that she got there 'cause Mum had told us stories that she was four years old and looking at the TV



**Figure 8.7** Torah Bright hails from a small town in Australia, but she now spends most of her winters living and training in Salt Lake City.

**Speaking with Torah Bright (cont ...)**

Torah's involvement in snowboarding was initially influenced by her parents and siblings. (Interpersonal level)

and telling Mum she wanted to go to the Olympics. And in 2002 she did, and we were all there to support her. It's really hard to get all our family together because we all live all across the world these days, so the Olympics just seems to be a time when we come together and be a family, in 2002 and in Torino.

**What's the dynamic like between you and your brother, Ben, having him as your coach?**

Torah has the support of her coach, who is also her brother. (Interpersonal level)

We've always been great friends. Ben and I have been working together since before the last Olympics and he has definitely made me the rider I am today. He sees my potential and my ability more than I do in some cases, so he's been pushing me ever since he started working with me. And we are brother and sister, so yes we have our moments. They're far and few between but pretty much the most it is, I get frustrated with him on the hill and he'll be talking to me and telling me something to do. I'll pretend I didn't hear it and just keep walking.

**What are some of the biggest differences between where you grew up and now living part of the year in Salt Lake City?**

Living in Cooma in the Snowy Mountains provided plenty of opportunities for skiing, so skiing became her sport of choice. (Individual level)

Cooma has a population of about 8000 these days, so it's not the smallest town in the world but it's quite spread out because it's a rural area. The biggest highlight of the town is McDonald's, that's the hangout. And the local snowboard and skate store for sports, they're the main attractions. I'm glad I learned to drive in Salt Lake City rather than learning in a small country town with no stoplights and only roundabouts, then heading to the city and learning to drive. So really there's no comparison; Salt Lake's a decent-sized city and Cooma is a little dot on the map.

**What are your favourite things to do for fun off the mountain?**

Off the mountain I love to surf—I absolutely love surfing—tennis, pretty much any type of sport. I discovered this summer I don't really like hiking and camping. But everything else pretty much I enjoy to do. Just be with friends and family being goofy.

**Does snowboarding share any of those same qualities that you love about surfing?**

I think I love surfing so much because I'm a beach girl at heart. Coming from Australia, I should be a surfer. But it's something I didn't grow up doing at all; it's something I picked up in the past four years or so. And it's just being out in the water sitting on the board and the sun and turquoise water, it's absolutely beautiful. I think the only thing similar with snowboarding is the way you stand on the surfboard.

Torah identifies Australian culture with surfing. (Cultural level)

**We read that if you weren't a snowboarder you'd want to be a rally car driver?**

I love to drive cars and I've always wanted to learn how to drive and would love to race cars. So any chance I get, I love to go out to the [racetrack] and race go-karts.

**Do you get competitive on go-karts?**

Oh my goodness, I am a different person when I get in that go-kart. No mercy. It's like people will ask me if I'm competitive snowboarding—not at all compared to the go-kart. I will play dirty, anything. I will knock you off that track.

Torah says that she is extremely competitive, relating to her drive and commitment to excel. Torah's ambition and drive to succeed reflect her values and beliefs. (Individual level)

**What is it that brings that out of you?**

I don't know what it is but I really feel that I'm a totally different person. I get competitive and I want to win. But it's not really that way with any other sport I've participated in.

Source: Compiled by Matt Stroup, NBCOlympics.com, 9 February 2010



## Jharal Yow Yeh: Future state great

Jharal's physical capabilities and determination were necessary to help him achieve his goals. (Individual level)

Jharal had opportunities to represent his state in various sports. Support to do this was provided by the Queensland School Sport programs and his schools. (Structural level and institutional level)

Living in Queensland provided a greater opportunity for Jharal to be recognised by the Bronco scouts. (Institutional level)

Jharal says that a goal of his was to play for the Broncos. In Queensland sport, the Broncos have a huge following. (Cultural level)

Jharal states how proud he is to be representing Aboriginal culture through sport. (Cultural level)

His mother, family and coaches provided support and inspiration for Jharal to reach his potential. (Interpersonal level)

Every time my mother sees me run out for the Broncos, I know the pride she feels and the immense gratitude I have for the sacrifices she has made to help me get there.

Despite being a single parent, my mother worked tirelessly to support me and my brother and two cousins throughout our schooling years. I know that without her support and also the support of the Queensland school sports' system, my chance to play with the Broncos may never have been realised.

Like thousands of kids throughout Queensland, my childhood dream was to play for the Broncos. Now whenever I pull on the jersey, I feel that I not only represent a great football team but also my mother, my family, my culture and the thousands of other kids that haven't been as fortunate as me.

I'm truly lucky, but it was tough growing up seeing mum beg and borrow for the funds we needed to take my positions in Queensland school representative teams, while at the same time witness the many great coaches, teachers and the school sports' system all play their part in 'working' with mum to help me to compete.

I did compete while my mother conscientiously repaid our debts ... this placed great stress on us all ... especially mum.



**Figure 8.8** Jharal Yow Yeh is a Brisbane Broncos player who credits the support of his family and the Queensland School Sport Foundation for his success.

I strongly support the Queensland School Sport Foundation new initiatives and the Future State Greats program. The funding generated will relieve the pain and suffering on the families of less fortunate kids ... kids whose dreams can now become a reality with your corporate support.

Source: Queensland School Sport Foundation

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# 08: SUMMARY

- Sociology is the scientific study of human society.
- Sport affects society and society has an effect on sport.
- Figueroa's framework can be used to analyse society, particularly access and equity. It can also be applied to sport.
- Figueroa's framework breaks society into five levels of influence:
  - The cultural level includes a society's cultural values, beliefs and attitudes.
  - The structural level includes the influence of government, business and the media.
  - The institutional level includes community facilities and organisations such as schools, clubs and religious groups.
  - The interpersonal level looks at the effects of relationships with others, including family, friends, teachers and sporting role models.
  - The individual level includes factors that are unique to each individual, such as a person's genetic make-up and personality.
- Sports participation is a complex issue and each person is affected differently. The level that has the greatest influence on an individual's sports participation will vary.

## NOW THAT YOU HAVE FINISHED ...

- 1 a Sociologists study human society. List features of our society that can have an effect on sports participation.  
b Of the features you listed above, which might have a negative effect on an individual's decision to participate in sport? Suggest ways to reduce these barriers.
- 2 List the five levels of Figueroa's framework.
- 3 Explain why Figueroa's framework is a useful tool to analyse sport in society.
- 4 Read the following statements and:
  - agree or disagree
  - identify the relevant levels from Figueroa's framework
  - list the social aspects that make these statements difficult to solve.
  - a Problems in sport have steadily increased since more athletes turned professional.
  - b Parents are the real role models, not sports stars! Sports stars are just talented athletes and should not be placed on a pedestal for children to emulate.
  - c The easiest way to reduce obesity and inactivity is to provide more sporting facilities in each community.
  - d The media should provide equal coverage when representing male and female sport.
  - e Change can only occur when it begins at the cultural level.
- 5 Discuss how the following social determinants have influenced your opinions, beliefs and values.
  - family
  - peers
  - school
  - gender
  - media
  - ethnic background