



## Inclusivity in Sports: How brands can level the playing field

As awareness of prejudice and discrimination has increased across society, representation and inclusivity are topics that have swept the kids' ecosystem in recent years. Kids are aware of the importance of equality from a young age: 7 in 10 kids aged 6-12 in Australia surveyed by Kids Insights in the last six months agree that people of any gender, ethnicity, sexuality and background should be considered equal. These beliefs are not only shaping their interests and hobbies, they are also driving purchase decisions, with 60% of Australian teens agreeing that it is important for the products they buy to represent their values. Leading brands across all industries have had to rethink their advertising, marketing and product strategies to ensure that they are doing their bit in the fight against inequality.

The strive for equality has been a much-emphasised issue in the world of sports where many team sports have traditionally been stereotyped by gender. When choosing which sports to play, kids face assumptions about what their hobbies say about their character. Reforming these obstacles is crucial to a future where kids feel empowered to pursue their interests. Associations such as Sport Inclusion Australia look to ensure that all kids have the opportunity to be involved in sports regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or background. By investing in this vision, brands will be able to extend their audience and also help to level the playing field.

Across all 22 markets surveyed by Kids Insights, Australian kids are some of the most active. Kids aged 3-18 spend more than an hour exercising each day, taking precedence over other hobbies like playing video games (53mins) or going on the internet (43mins). Swimming is the most played sport amongst kids aged 6-12 (27%) and also teens aged 13-18 (15%), followed by soccer and basketball which rank as #2 and #3. More girls than boys report that they swim regularly whereas more boys than girls report playing ball sports. Tennis ranks as #4 most popular sport for kids aged 6-18, with an equal proportion of both genders playing this sport. This shows how team sports that have been traditionally stereotyped are the ones that still require effort to become more gender-balanced.

Beyond playing sports, mainstream media primarily focuses on male athletes, with men-only teams often getting much more screentime and attention. According to Kids Insights, whilst boys and girls between the ages of 3-12 are equally as likely to play sports, teenage girls are +32% more likely than their male counterparts to report no sports participation. This could be the result of less representation for women in the media, resulting in a lack of

empowerment and interest amongst teen girls. Sports brands are therefore losing out on 50% of their teenage audience, signalling a key opportunity to engage more girls.

This is not to say that there is not equal interest in sports across both genders. The gender gap between teen boys and girls playing soccer and basketball has decreased by at least 9% over the last six months. Moreover, although more teenage boys play soccer, the ratio split of teen boys and girls watching AFL football is more equal (56:44). Similarly, one-third of kids aged 13-18 in Australia who watch esports are female, an increase of +31% since the start of last year.

In order to promote gender equality, national institutions and brands have a part to play in encouraging girls to see themselves as belonging to a sport. At the end of 2021, Australia's top-flight men's and women's football competitions, the A-League and W-League, were rebranded under the merged banner of the A-Leagues, creating a more unified front and accessible, welcoming environment. As the #1 sports and clothing brand amongst Australian kids of all ages, Nike is leading by example with a series of pledges to enhance inclusion and diversity in sport. In its 2020 Impact Report, the brand laid out ambitious targets to promote and advance opportunities for women and people of colour within its workforce and customer base. These examples show how leaders in the industry are able to reshape a better future for the kids' ecosystem.

As both genders tune in to watch their favourite sports, it is key for adverts and sponsorships to represent and appeal to both genders. The market for sports-related merchandise is lucrative: 57% of kids aged 13-18 in Australia have bought something linked to their favourite sports, with the #1 licensed products being clothes. 35% of teens are more likely to support brands that advocate diversity and equality whilst 2 in 3 teenagers agree that it is important for the products they purchase to make them feel special. This underlines how important it is for brands to understand the values and beliefs of their audience.

Parents in Australia prioritise being outdoors and playing sports, both to keep fit and to bond as a family. Being active ranks as the #4 favourite family hobby amongst parents in Australia surveyed across the last six months, with 2 in 3 parents in Australia saying that they play sports as a family at least once a week. Engagement in sport has increased by +23% in this period of time, which is not surprising given the good weather and excitement amongst kids to get out and about. 41% of these parents say that it is a joint decision between them and their kids when deciding what sports to play as a family. Shaping the sports world to be all inclusive is likely to boost the success of sports brands, in terms of media broadcasting and product sales.

Kids today are some of the most conscientious consumers to date therefore brands that take an active role in pushing back against social injustices are likely to gain attention from young consumers. Ultimately, creating a sports world that is much more accessible, representative, and inclusive will prove hugely beneficial to brands in the sports world. By becoming appealing to a wider audience, brands can both increase their diversity credentials, build customer loyalty and grow their consumer base. Brands which ensure they are making themselves as open and accessible to a representative number of demographics are likely to sit at the forefront of future development.



# 7 IN 10 KIDS

## IN AUSTRALIA AGREE THAT PEOPLE SHOULD BE CONSIDERED EQUAL

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Kids Insights Australia | 6-18 | August 2021 - February 2022

\* All statistics taken from the last six months of data in the Kids Insights and Parents Insights portal (August 2021 – February 2022).

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*The Insights Family is the global leader in kids, parents, and family market intelligence, providing real-time data on their attitudes, behaviour, and consumption patterns.*

*Kids Insights surveys 7,780 children every week aged 3-18. Parents Insights surveys more than 3,800 parents of children between the ages of 1 and 16 every week. Both services operate in 22 countries across six continents and in total survey more than 469,040 kids and 228,800 parents a year. This means that the company interviews a new family member somewhere in the world every 45 seconds.*

*The Insights Family produced an exclusive “2022 Toy Report: The Year of STEM” for London Toy Fair, the UK’s largest dedicated toy, games and hobby trade show in January 2022. Sign up to receive your free copy here: <https://try.theinsightsfamily.com/austoy/>*