

Community highlights

Written by Cory Zaroni, Community Manager, The Conversation

The Conversation receives a lot of comments each day and you can't read everything. That's why we occasionally end the week with a selection of community highlights: comments we enjoyed or thought discussing.

[Your postcode shouldn't determine your health – or whether you're admitted to hospital](#)

Stephen Duckett's article explained the ways that, in his words, "Australia's health system is consistently failing some communities":

A Grattan Institute report, *Perils of place: identifying hotspots of health inequalities*, released today, identifies a number of geographical areas where high rates of potentially preventable hospital admissions have persisted for a decade. This is unacceptable place-based inequality.

Using data from Queensland and Victoria, the report identifies 38 places in Queensland and 25 in Victoria that have had potentially preventable hospitalisation rates at least 50% higher than the state average in every year for a decade. There is no evidence to suggest the pattern is any different in other states and territories.

In the comments, Georgina Phillips [shared her thoughts](#) on the potential solutions to the problems:

Thanks Stephen for highlighting this important research, but I wonder if your suggested solutions are only scratching the surface? We know the compelling evidence about the social determinants of health and surely these findings fit into that framework. Inequality in health outcomes in Australia is more likely to be because of lower socioeconomic status, poorer housing, unsatisfactory employment options and general social and political disenfranchisement more than access to community health networks - as important as this kind of healthcare is. Michael Marmot, in his latest book 'The Health Gap' outlines these issues eloquently; urging us to think beyond 'healthcare' as the solution to health inequalities. Perhaps the deeper response

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is to think about inequality across every aspect of life in Australia and make steps to address this in policy and planning, rather than focus solely on access to primary health care.

[How do you know you're not living in a computer simulation?](#)

Need a Friday afternoon thought experiment? Laura D'Olimpio challenged readers to prove they're not, in fact, living in a computer simulation.

The philosopher Hilary Putnam proposed this famous version of the brain-in-a-vat thought experiment in his 1981 book, *Reason, Truth and History*, but it is essentially an updated version of the French philosopher René Descartes' notion of the Evil Genius from his 1641 *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

While such thought experiments might seem glib – and perhaps a little unsettling – they serve a useful purpose. They are used by philosophers to investigate what beliefs we can hold to be true and, as a result, what kind of knowledge we can have about ourselves and the world around us.

G Owen Schaefer [shared](#) an updated version of Descartes' theory:

Nick Bostrom has gone a step further than Descartes - arguing in a provocative article that we may be living in a computer simulation on [non-skeptical grounds](#).

The argument goes like this: we can estimate (based on history, computer science, and other factors) a non-trivial probability of humanity surviving long enough to develop numerous historical computer simulations. If many simulations are built, there would be numerous simulated worlds, and only one real one. The odds of us being in the real one are vanishingly small, especially as more simulations are built. The probability of us being in a computer simulation thus becomes roughly the probability of us generating all those simulations.

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I was never convinced the argument goes through (not sure we can extrapolate from our own history to the history of our alleged simulators), but it's at least an interesting update on the old Cartesian worries.

To which Thomas Johnson [responded](#) :

Yes, Bostrom's argument relies on several premises that are quite speculative and improbable. There is also the question as to why some future generation would bother to undertake such a project. What would be the point?

To his credit, Bostrom does consider this and makes the reasonable point that as these descendants of ours would be 'post-humans', their motivations may be very different from ours, and so we cannot make any assumptions about them based on current human psychology.

But even granting that point, his assumptions about future computing power, and the power of those computers to construct simulations for every individual that would be indistinguishable from the singular experience of an agent causally interacting with their perceived environment - these all amount to a highly improbable scenario.

[Is netball a feminist triumph? Let's discuss](#)

The Grand Final of the ANZ netball championship is this Saturday and, in the build up, we asked if the sport was a feminist triumph and had an academic argue each side.

Leigh Boucher argued that netball disrupts gender norms to find new fans:

As feminist action challenged gendered ideas about bodily, intellectual and political capacity over the 20th century, the style and rules of netball have slowly changed. Netballers have

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transformed the game, pushing at the boundaries of these gendered rules to create a contact-heavy, fast-paced and tremendously athletic sport.

And Fiona McLachlan argued that the sport is a “feminist question” rather than an answer:

Within this context, netball wasn't born out of a political attempt to encourage women into sport and transgress the limits of sex, but actually to discourage them from playing rough “manly” sports, like hockey.

Netball was seen as an appropriate sport for females – they could be physically active whilst exercising feminine restraint – and it was promoted at the expense of other more physically demanding sports that so many of the 1920s “new women” were beginning to excel at, and enjoy.

Both authors took part in an Author Q&A and took questions from readers. Here's are a few highlights.

Elizabeth Bentley [shared](#) her experience of playing both hockey and netball: I was surprised to see that hockey was seen as less feminine. I played both at my English school in the 60s, and can remember being surprised when I found out that men played hockey too.

[Fiona McLachlan](#) :

Thanks for your responses - there's some really diverse experiences coming out in the discussions. For me, these further reinforce that gender is contextual - meanings about what is acceptable for males, and females shift over time and in different spaces (nations, rural, metro etc) - often in surprising ways. This is good to know though because if those meanings we attach to sex can change, we it means we can live in a more equal society.

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David Lee [asked](#) why some sports are viewed through a gendered lens and others aren't:

Great response Craig and as a male netballer I profess more than a little surprise at the authors 'feminist take' on this. Little more than a decade ago soccer was similarly deemed a non-professional sport in Australia, considered male dominated (although a great many women participated in the sport), and had a much higher youth participant rate than Rugby Union and many other professional sports. It was also (incorrectly) viewed as "less tough" than Rugby League etc..

The great many similarities between Soccer and Netball are plain to see yet one is viewed through a sexist lens and the other is not? I profess I don't really understand the authors take on this. My wife has played Netball for several decades and her injuries over the years attest to the toughness of the sport.

[Leigh Boucher](#) :

Hi David, again, I'd note my comments above about dominant cultural meaning associated with the sport. I too am a long time male netballer, and I'm sure, like me, you have had the odd joke made at your expense about this. This tells us something, namely, that even though many men play netball - it is still seen as, in some ways, a female sport. We are trying to think about why this is, and what the implications of this cultural and social gendering might be.

My point, though, would be that I think some of these gendered meaning are starting to give way and incohere. I think players like Sharni Layton are really challenging some of the norms that make gender "make sense," and this is a great thing.

Also - a research topic doesn't have to be about women to be open to a feminist analysis - frankly, feminist theory has much to say about our ideas about masculinity!

Jenni Reside [asked](#) why sports can't just be enjoyable:

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Why cant we have a sport that remains just enjoyable to play? Having played basketball since I was in Primary school and netball as a young adult, both until I was too decrepit to play anymore. I enjoyed both, in local competitions, mixed and female only. It was fun, energetic, social and while competitive there was no 'tanking' as there was no gambling. Do I want to see netball end up like the AFL? NO! If that is what 'professionalism' does to sport they can keep it. Sport should be about team work, respect and admiration for opponents better than you and fun. Play because you enjoy it, not as a career.

[Leigh Boucher](#) :

Hi Jenni,I don't think that the developments at an elite level will necessarily harm the local and amateur experience of the game - I would hate to see the kinds of joy you talk about disappear. But again, I think it important to ask questions about the political implications of our social practices. Who does and does not have access to the fun of local netball? Some research into the experience of local players suggests even amateur leagues can implicitly exclude women who don't perform the right kind of femininity.

Should artists pay their taxes in art?

Usman W. Chohan's article explained an interesting tax system in Mexico and how it could work in Australia to help facilitate the work of artists:

An innovative policy in Mexico allows artists to pay their taxes in the form of works of art. The program, Pago en Especie ("payment in kind"), allows for hundreds of artists across Mexico to pay tax in artwork in lieu of cash.

The design of the program is simple: donations to the government from artists for their work are made as a proportion of their reported sales. For example, if an artist sells 1-5 pieces of art per annum, they will donate one piece to the federal government. If they sell 6-8 pieces, they will donate two, and so on, up to a maximum of six art donations.

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Joanna Mendelssohn [explained](#) how the public can get a tax benefit from the work of artists:

Under the Cultural Gifts program, initiated by the Fraser government in the 1970s, people are able to gain a tax deduction of the full market value for works donated to public galleries (free of capital gains tax). The exception to this are artists, who can only claim the value of their materials. At the very least artists should be treated as well as collectors, but it would totally make sense if Australia adopted this policy.

Consider that your fun fact for tax time.

That's all for this week. See you on Monday.

Authors: Cory Zanoni, Community Manager, The Conversation

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