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## Scholarship 2021 Health and Physical Education

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### PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

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TOTAL	

Sport is microcosmic, encapsulating in miniature the patterns and paradigms of society. In the arenas of sporting achievement, these paradigms are reflected and amplified: the glaring spotlight that a raptured audience places on the playing field turns it into a stage and the athletes into characters. Armed with the storytelling ability of the media, the institution of sport is the most powerful narrative in modern society.

*“Sport is an expression of the sociocultural system in which it occurs; and sports mirror the rituals and values of the societies in which they are developed.” - Pamela J. Creedon .<sup>1</sup>*

We should not underestimate the extent of this narrative power: as a microcosm, sport itself is a powerful tool for analysing the relationships between it and society, and then within society itself. Sport is a product of the relationships in the society in which it is produced, but it also has a role in maintaining these relationships. Past literature that discusses the reflective power of sport has tended not to delve into this idea, to not move beyond the idea that elite sport is a mirror of society. I argue that through the narrative power of the media industry, the patterns of elite sport are reflected in youth sport. This connection is sustained because of the media’s ability to transmit cultural information, like paradigms, from society to elite sport, and elite sport to youth sport.

This transmission occurs through the adoption and internalisation of sports stories in the media: young people are socialised through sport. If this socialisation drives young

<sup>1</sup> Creedon, Pamela J. *Women, Media & Sport: Creating and Reflecting Gender Values*. 1994.

people's attitudes and values, then it has the potential to impact participation. Sport New Zealand's *Every Body Active* strategy<sup>2</sup> attempts to analyse the decline in participation in youth sport, but its effectiveness is reduced as it considers this issue in isolation. Though they acknowledge that their work is being disrupted by "broad societal changes and technological advances," they fail to connect these changes to the patterns of participation. One of their most obvious failures is that the report does not acknowledge the increasing rates of online engagement among youth: four in ten young New Zealanders currently use five or more social media platforms<sup>3</sup>. Through our high and rising levels of online activity, we are increasingly exposed to the stories of elite athletes, and through the crafting of media, these stories shape perceptions and participation in our own sports.

This evinces the demand for an improved, responsive solution to target disparities in youth sport participation despite "broad societal changes and technological advances." This report will bridge the gap, using the *Every Body Active* strategy as a platform for the evaluation of the relationships between youth and elite sport, primarily, but also between media and society. Looking first at the significance of these relationships in youth socialisation gives way to future opportunities. Where the narrative of sports media currently transmits cultural information and perpetuates disparities in participation, targeted systemic change could allow it to become a leveller of disparities.

<sup>2</sup> Sport New Zealand. "Every Body Active: Strategic Direction 2020-2032."

<sup>3</sup> Netsafe. "New Zealand teens' digital profile: A factsheet." 2018.

## ***The Great Sports Myth, Functionalism, and The Every Body Active Strategy.***

To investigate the sporting institution, I first draw on a fundamental principle of functionalist theory<sup>4</sup>. Proponents of this theory considered that all institutions have a central role in transmitting cultural information and upholding social norms. The founders of functionalism saw this as a positive, believing that the perpetuation of norms was essential for societal “equilibrium,” even at the expense of equity<sup>5</sup>. I wish to assert that I reject these traditional functionalist values, for institutional change must occur for positive change at the interpersonal level to occur: for our purposes, for harmful social norms affecting youth to change. Though I use the theory with a very different goal to its original founders, it remains a very useful lens through which we can understand how fixed institutions fix harmful norms.

In the *Every Body Active* strategy’s investigation into youth sport, they certainly do not intend to prescribe to traditional functionalist values. The statement that they wish to “focus on the system attributes that best impact participation” reflects a conscious awareness of the importance of systemic change for interpersonal change, which I commend them for. Yet, this statement is not supported by evidence of an evaluation of the system. Permeating the strategy, instead, is evidence of Coakley’s Great Sports Myth. Coakley defines this as the belief that sport is inherently a force for good. Participation in sport is seen as a way to bask in this goodness<sup>6</sup>. There is evidence of this view at the beginning of the document, where Sport New Zealand outlines that 73%

4 Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. “Functionalism.” Britannica.

5 “Structural Functionalism.” International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (Second Edition), 2020. Science Direct.

6 Lee, Norah. “Harmful Sports Myths Perpetuate Wealth Inequality.” Berkeley High Jacket, 2021.

of people agree that sport helps to build vibrant communities, and 88% believe that sport helps to promote confidence. The fact that the document does not balance this discussion with the negatives of sport, the specific “systemic attributes,” indicates that Aotearoa and Sport NZ’s perspectives of sport have been shaped by the Great Sports Myth.

Of course, the idea that sport can be a force for good is not untrue. Sport is capable of supporting all four dimensions of *Hauora*, as outlined in Dr Mason Durie’s *Whare Tapa Whā* model<sup>7</sup>. The connection to *taha tinana* is most obvious, but the links between the other three dimensions are also well understood: New Zealanders who undergo at least two and a half hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week are 51% more likely to have healthy mental wellbeing (*Taha Hinengaro*)<sup>8</sup>, social capital and community identity (*Taha Whānau*) and a strong sense of personal identity and purpose (*Taha Wairua*)<sup>2</sup>. But the idea that sport can provide positive benefits for wellbeing and communities can and should coexist with the idea that sport can harm. The belief that sport is innately and always a force for good creates the assumption that there is no demand for a critical evaluation of sport itself, only for the outside influences that affect sporting participation. I challenge this assumption, for without looking beyond this romanticised version of sport, we cannot accurately evaluate the factors that shape the youth participation landscape. The *Every Body Active* strategy fails here, and this means that their mobilisation of resources will not be thoughtfully targeted towards the most significant barriers to participation. Subsequently, without true systemic change,

7 Mental Health Foundation. “Te Whare Tapa Whā.” <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/te-whare-tapa-wha>.

8 Sport New Zealand. “New research confirms physical activity is tied to healthy mental wellbeing.” 2018,

<https://sportnz.org.nz/about/news-and-media/news-updates/new-research-confirms-physical-activity-is-tied-to-healthy-mental-wellbeing/>.

the functionalist lens tells us that the institution and the cultural inequalities promoted by it will remain fixed: youth participation rates will not rise. This means that large sectors of young people will not experience the aforementioned benefits to their wellbeing.

This report will see a solution developed that will use sport itself to identify and address cultural inequalities that shape the youth participation landscape. On this basis, it may appear that I am falling into the same trappings of The Great Sports Myth, in relying on sport to serve as a force for good. This is why a critique of sport and media is required first; as per the functionalist theory. sport cannot serve as a leveller of inequalities until it no longer upholds them.

## **Narratives of Sport.**

### ***The Growing Narrative Power of Sports Media & The Decline in Adolescent Participation.***

The trend that is best documented in the *Every Body Active Strategy* is the decline in participation throughout adolescence: activity levels drop from twelve hours per week to five and a half. To gather insight on this pattern, Sport New Zealand has conducted a survey in the strategy that is disappointingly narrow in scope, with the options limited to “too busy,” “don’t have the energy,” and “already doing a good amount.” I criticise this approach because it restricts the value of the insight that can be received from respondents. More significant than these individual factors is the increased access to

media. This is a major oversight, given how frequently heard the rhetoric is that adolescents are absorbed in devices and social media. This argument is not entirely false: with a third of New Zealand teenagers spending four or more hours online in a day, our lives are becoming more entwined with the media<sup>3</sup>. This is one of the most significant developments in later childhood, and yet Sport NZ makes no effort to link the “teenage decline” to this factor. It is important for my discussion to see this increase in the time spent online as an increase in the exposure to content, and therefore to the power of the media over the individual. Too often, when internet usage is linked to participation in sports, increasing participation is labelled the responsibility of the “lazy” individual that is absorbed in social media. This myopic approach is congruent with healthism. I reject this perspective because it ignores the systemic power of the media industry: so long as the scope of the analysis is limited to the individual, wider systemic change will not be achieved.

The significance of the increased exposure to media is compounded by recent evolutions to the media landscape. It is important to understand these evolutions to examine the changing relationship between media and the individual, as evidence of the growing narrative power of the media. One such evolution is a changing preference for the style of media content among young people. TikTok, a platform on which users can share short videos, has grown rapidly in popularity since its international launch in September 2017<sup>9</sup>: as of June 2021, TikTok has around one billion monthly active viewers<sup>10</sup>. Importantly, young people are the largest demographic on the platform, at

9 Smith, Georgina. “The history of TikTok: From Musical.ly to the number 1 app in the world.” 2021, <https://www.dexerto.com/entertainment/the-history-of-tiktok-1569106/>. 10 Wallaroo Media. “TikTok Statistics.” 2021, <https://wallaroomedia.com/blog/social-media/tiktok-statistics/>. Accessed June 2021.

60% of Tik Tok users<sup>11</sup>. Young people's dominance of this platform reflects a rapid shift in preference toward shorter-format media content. This general trend also maps onto sports media, with those in the sports media industry finding that generation Z and millennials "look for highlights on social media rather than tuning in for the entirety of a live event."<sup>12</sup> At present, there is little statistical evidence to support this; however, this statement fits with the shifting preferences in other aspects of media, as outlined above, so can be accepted as true.

One might think that the youth movement towards shorter-format content indicates that the narrative power of sport is waning, with less time watching sports meaning less exposure to sporting stories. In reality, it is amplified. For sports media to be commercially viable, it has to capture attention, crafting short and emotional stories. Dan Jones, head of the Sports Business Group at Deloitte, says "it is the best live, unscripted drama they can get."<sup>13</sup> For this reason, the narrative power of sports media must be built on the pillars of ihi, "positive energy within;" weihi, "the emotional reaction that acknowledges ihi;" and wana, "the collective energy that unites people."<sup>14</sup> In shorter-format content, each of these responses must be captured and amplified to new heights to ensnare the attention of young people. One particular example is the haka performed by the All Blacks: a representation of collective New Zealand identity (wana) through an emotional response. This is frequently represented in short format content,

11 Mulladi, Bradian. "What The Rise Of TikTok Says About Generation Z." *Forbes*, 2020,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2020/07/07/what-the-rise-of-tiktok-says-about-generation-z/?sh=7dc9638f6549>.

12 "How to embrace the digital landscape for the next generation of sports." Sportspromedia, 2021,

<https://www.sportspromedia.com/opinions/sports-digital-technology-gen-z-streaming-security-verimatrix/>.

13 Dunkley, Dan. "Why TV broadcasters pay such big money to screen sport." *Stuff News*, 2019,

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/opinion-analysis/116688420/why-broadcasters-pay-such-big-money-to-screen-sport>.

14 Sport New Zealand. "Te Ihi." <https://sportnz.org.nz/kaupapa-maori/a-matou-taonga/te-ih/>.

to great success: one two-minute-long video, entitled “The Greatest Haka EVER?” has over sixty-two million views .<sup>15</sup>

**@(Eli)minado:** *“I don’t know why, but watching haka videos makes me so emotional. There’s something so beautiful and meaningful...”*

**@Timmy Moutrie:** *“I’m an American who’s never played rugby, and I tear up every time I watch [the haka].”*

**@Angelo Sonza:** *“New Zealand: shows true power that they got from training.”*

These comments left beneath the video are just three of many in a similar vein, and are a good example of the reactions of ihi and weihi that are induced from a short video of the haka. Because these reactions have been condensed into a short format, the video symbolically connects the emotional reaction to New Zealand, and subsequently connects New Zealand to an image of power, connection, and rugby achievement. This shapes international perceptions of New Zealand culture. Therefore, the need for short format content to amplify ihi, weihi, and wana increases, not decreases, the ability for short-format sports media to transmit cultural information. When this is combined with the increased access to media in youth, the ability for sport to create and transmit

15 “The Greatest Haka EVER?” Youtube, 2015, Sport New Zealand. “Te Ihi.” <https://sportnz.org.nz/kaupapa-maori/a-matou-taonga/te-ih-i/>.

cultural information is significantly higher. Media, therefore, has a powerful role in shaping adolescent perceptions towards sport and society.

In this particular example, the image of New Zealand that is crafted by the media is positive. But it stands to reason that if sports media, particularly in this highlights-reel format, can transmit positive cultural information, then it can also do the reverse. Short format content is more curated, designed to put forward individuals, teams, and moments that produce emotional responses and hold attention. This means that it has greater power to selectively represent certain groups.

### ***Symbols & Archetypes of Sports Media.***

With the power of sports narratives growing, the content of these stories has a more meaningful impact on its audience. On the sporting stage, athletes become not only characters but also symbols. The audience's experience and interpretation of these symbols creates and communicates meaning about the group that the athlete belongs to.

*The lack of coverage of female athletes “can easily result in the ‘symbolic annihilation (Gerbner, 1978) of the female athlete... In short, the media reflect who and what has value and prestige in this culture. By their symbolic annihilation of the female athlete, the media tell us that sportswomen have little, if any, value in this society, particularly*

*in relationship to male athletes.” - The Media’s Role in Accommodating and Resisting Stereotyped Images of Women in Sport, Mary Jo Kane & Susan L. Greendorfer.<sup>16</sup>*

The term “symbolic annihilation” is an adaptation of symbolic interactionism<sup>17</sup>. It is argued that repeated interactions with media, and patterns across media such as the underrepresentation of female athletes, construct the idea that sportswomen are less valuable. Representation of sportswomen in the media is thereby treated as a symbol that influences the audience's perception of value. This article is an older one, but the points remain relevant. Although as many as 42% of New Zealanders believe gender equality has already been achieved, this is not true for the media stage<sup>18</sup>. Globally, an estimated 4% of sports coverage is focused on female athletes, while New Zealand has an estimated 15%.<sup>19</sup> The latter is an improvement on the global figure, but a clear disparity in representation, a “symbolic annihilation,” remains.

The question remains of whether this actually contributes to the perspective that female athletes have less value. One perception is that if women’s sports were interesting enough to earn more coverage, then they would receive it. But as professor Cheryl Cooky points out, “men’s sports are going to seem more exciting.. they have higher production values, higher-quality coverage, and higher-quality commentary. When you watch women’s sports, there are fewer camera angles, fewer cuts to shot, fewer instant

16 Kane, Mary Jo, and Susan L. Greendorfer. *The Media’s Role in Accommodating and Resisting Stereotyped Images of Women in Sport*. 1994. 17  
Carter, Michael J., and Celene Fuller. “Symbols, meaning, and action: The past, present, and future of symbolic interactionism.” *Sage Journals*, 2016,  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0011392116638396?journalCode=csia>.

18 “Results from second Aotearoa New Zealand gender attitudes survey.” 2020,  
<https://nzfvc.org.nz/news/results-second-aotearoa-new-zealand-gender-attitudes-survey>.

19 Sport New Zealand. “Media and Gender.” 2019, <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/3866/sport-nz-media-and-gender-april-2021.pdf>.

replays.<sup>20</sup> Broadly, this is part of a perpetuating cycle: media and highlights reels that focus on men's sport have "higher production values," because they have historically had more viewers, meaning more effort can go into the cuts and replays that evoke the visceral reactions of *ihi*, *weihi*, and *wana*, enticing more viewers and further increasing the money earned by production companies. The disparity between these emotional reactions is what contributes to the perspective that female athletes are less worthy of coverage.

Because sports media reflects onto society and youth sport, the subsequent impact of this is that young female athletes have fewer role models than their male counterparts. In Sport New Zealand's *Women and Girls* strategy<sup>21</sup>, they reveal that women and girls are more likely than males to *want* to participate more, but barriers exist that prevent the associated rise in participation. Yet like the *Every Body Active* strategy, the report does not explicitly refer to these barriers, and as such fails to lay out an effective and targeted strategy for alleviating them. The existence of fewer female role models is one of the most significant barriers to female participation despite the desire to be more active: the internalised view that female athletes have less value, combined with having fewer role models to aspire to, places constraints on female participation.

The significance of the effect of symbols does not begin and end with their presence or absence. The crafting of sports media plays a role in shaping other perceptions because patterns of symbolic representation form archetypes. At Wimbledon in 2015,

20 Bodenner, Chris. "Why Aren't Women's Sports as Big as Men's? Your Thoughts." 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/06/women-and-sports-world-cup-soccer/395231/>.

21 Sport New Zealand. "Women and Girls Strategy." <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1549/women-and-girls-govt-strategy.pdf>.

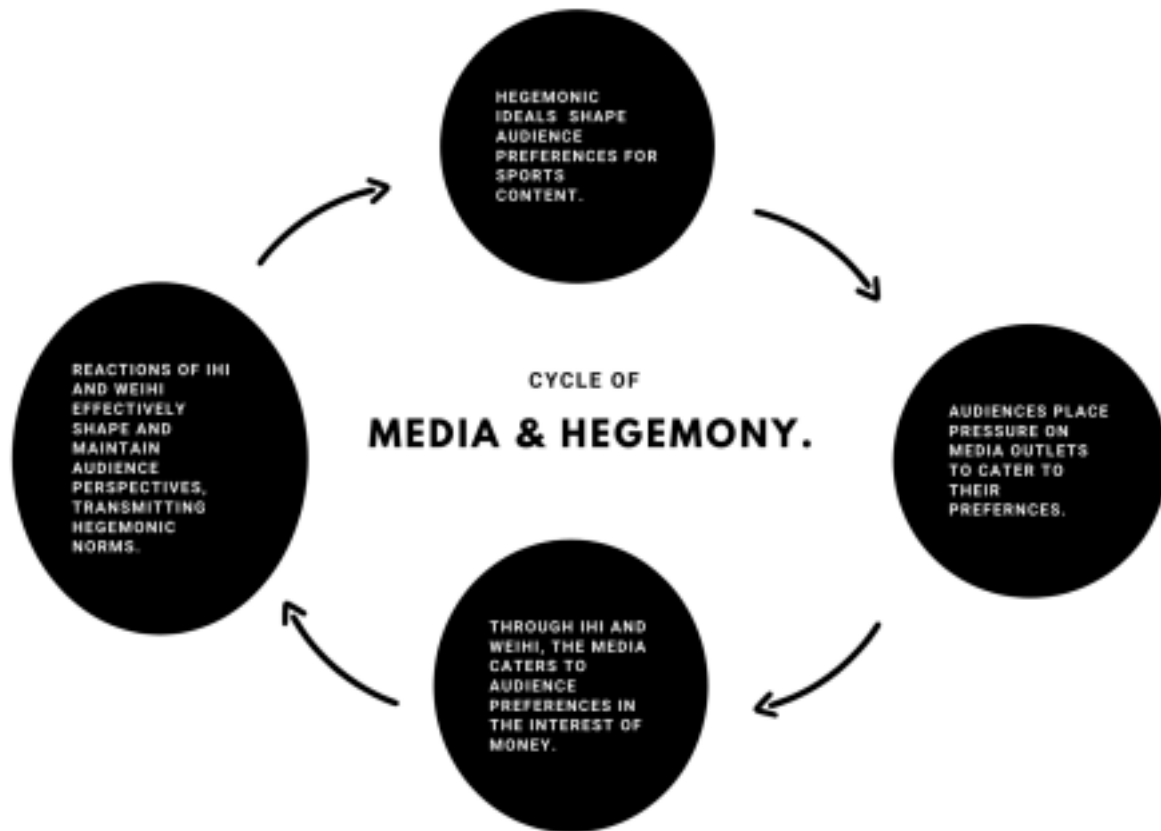
Agnieszka Radwanska was labelled “the smallest player in the top ten.” Her coach chose to say little about her athletic performance and more about her presentation and beauty: “because, first of all, she’s a woman,” he said, “and she wants to be a woman.<sup>22</sup>” In these words, Radwanska’s coach markets her to audiences not in terms of her sporting performance but in terms of her femininity. The commodification of athletes in sports media means that they need to appeal to audiences to gain sponsorship: the coach constructs an idealised and heightened picture of womanhood to emphasise her femininity and appeal to audiences. Hegemonic femininity, here, is caricatured womanhood. Radwanska is not an isolated symbol of femininity either: this is a pattern that runs through sports media and is reflected in social media. With the rapidly increasing usage of social media, many athletes have taken to a greater online presence to market themselves to their audience. This means that eighty percent of elite female athletes report that social media is the most significant source of pressure for them to conform to the traditional symbolism of femininity through body presentation and for audience approval, often at the expense of the muscular build required for success in their sports.<sup>23</sup> The struggle to balance the demands of the societal perception of femininity and the athletic demands of their sport is an example of the “female-athlete paradox.”

With the increasing popularity of social media, the audience has an even greater role in shaping the content that they interact with. The audience-athlete relationship is closer, therefore, than ever before; audiences feel that they have greater power to shape the

<sup>22</sup> Smith, Jamil. “There’s Nothing Boring About Women’s Sports.” 2015, <https://newrepublic.com/article/122304/theres-nothing-boring-about-womens-sports>.

<sup>23</sup> George, Zoe. “How social media is taking a toll on elite athletes.” 2021, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/women-in-sport/300312925/how-social-media-is-taking-a-toll-on-elite-athletes>.

sporting narratives that are played out in front of them. It would seem, again, that the narrative power of sport as an institution was waning in favour of greater audience involvement in sports stories, yet this is still not the case. As already established, audience preferences tend towards media that inspires ihi and weihi, and by-and-large perceptions of content have been shaped by the institutional narrative that has been imposed on us. And what has shaped the original and remaining narrative? Hegemonic ideals, such as those around femininity, that exist within broader society. This creates a kind of closed-loop as today's audience preferences now enforce staticity in the media narrative, increasing the power of wider sporting media to maintain hegemonic paradigms in wider society. I have created a diagram to illustrate this concept below.



One example of audience involvement in hegemony can be taken from the Instagram account of New Zealand women's sevens player Niall Williams. In the context of the female-athlete paradox, she has placed less emphasis on conforming to traditional images of femininity and more on the musculature

required to play her sport well. This comment is an example of online abuse as a viewer has attempted to shape the online sporting narrative back towards what they wish to see. The “many sports for womens [sic] to show their skills” that the author references are those that more easily allow women to maintain a more feminine appearance. In her chosen sport of rugby, one that requires a larger musculature to be successful, Williams is criticised for a lack of femininity and labelled as masculine.

We see here two potential pathways for elite female athletes: one could fit the caricatured archetype of femininity that Radwanska is marketed as, or one could disobey the societal expectation of femininity and be targeted online. I don't mean to suggest that media and audience involvement means that the femininity aspect of the female-athlete paradox always wins. There are certainly elite female athletes who have made it to the top of their sports without having to obey traditional conceptions of femininity: Niall Williams, for one. But it does win when it comes to media presentation of women. The trend in the media is to favour the “many sports” that better allow their athletes to maintain a more feminine appearance, as referenced by the commenter. There are a handful of sports that have a majority of female coverage in New Zealand, including netball (93%) and gymnastics (84%), and the reason for this is that it allows women to maintain a leaner, “feminine,” appearance while also being very successful.<sup>21</sup>

This is where the increasing access to media for young people becomes very important. Female athletes in New Zealand media are three times more likely to have their appearance or image commented on than their male counterparts.<sup>21</sup> This creates a

broader divide between the archetypes of “femininity” and “masculinity,” and a divide that young women are increasingly exposed to through the increased access to media. Young women are witness to both images and praise of the athletes that tend towards femininity, alongside online exchanges and abuse of those who don’t. The archetypes of “femininity” and “masculinity” are thereby perpetuated by the media, and then map onto the sporting landscape at the youth level. Overall, young and adult males are more likely to participate in competitive sports and activities than females, while the reverse is true for non-competitive sports and activities. Given this reversal, the difference in <sup>24</sup> participation cannot be the amount of time available or other reasons put forward in Sport NZ’s original survey: it directly relates to the image of women in media. More specifically, the barrier that limits participation in competitive sport is concern about body image, with eight out of ten girls with low body esteem avoiding trying out for a team or club. <sup>25</sup> Therefore, young women avoid progressing to greater heights in competitive sports if they do not fit the “feminine” image out of fear of abuse. Equally, the barrier to higher-level participation is the struggle to perform well enough to reach elite levels while maintaining the “feminine” image: 29% of girls aged fourteen to sixteen drop out of sports because they aren’t good at them.<sup>25</sup> While both of these pieces of evidence are from a sample of girls in the United Kingdom, these trends map onto New Zealand women and girls through the universality of the sports media system.

<sup>24</sup> Sport New Zealand. “Active NZ Main Report.” 2019, <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/3639/active-nz-year-3-main-report-final.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Sport England. “Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls: Building Strong Foundations for Their Futures.” <https://www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Reframing-Sport-for-Teenage-Girls-small.pdf>.

In my discussion of symbols and archetypes thus far, I have focused on issues of gender equality because these are some of the better-documented statistics and disparities in Sport NZ's *Every Body Active* strategy. But this is certainly not the limit of the narrative power of sports media. Take, for example, a sport close to New Zealand hearts: rugby. New Zealand youth rugby is increasingly dominated by Māori and Pasifika players, as Pacific Islanders make up the majority of youth rugby players in Auckland, at 55%, and for every one hundred youth players in Auckland, sixty-five will be Polynesian.<sup>26</sup> Given that Pacific Islanders make up only around 16% of the Auckland population, this shows a strong level of representation in rugby.<sup>27</sup> Former All Black Bryan Williams attributes the dominance of Pasifika athletes to the “physicality... and easily identifiable heroes.”<sup>26</sup> The idea that the abundance of role models increases participation is certainly no stretch: it works in the same way that the symbolic annihilation of women in the media decreases young girls' participation. Specifically, the display of strength and physicality is promoted as a media archetype because it induces *ihi* and *weihi*, awe and excitement, as I discussed earlier with reference to the haka. The characterisation of this archetype is relevant. For the young Māori and Pasifika players that can easily identify with and relate to these role models, this archetype can help to *improve* participation and success. This is in contrast with the symbols of caricatured femininity, which do not support youth participation as they often do not support success

<sup>26</sup> Cleaver, Dylan, and Liam Napier. “White flight – A detailed look at race and Auckland rugby.” Stuff, 2018,

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/special-report-white-flight-a-detailed-look-at-race-and-auckland-rugby/URB3DDW4DKE3KGSFBJACDLWUFI/>.

<sup>27</sup> Auckland Council. “Pacific Auckland.”

<https://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/plans-projects-policies-reports-bylaws/our-plans-strategies/auckland-plan/about-the-auckland-plan/Pages/pacific-auckland.aspx>.

through the female-athlete paradox. Archetypes, therefore, can inhibit or promote the participation and success of groups, depending on the kind of symbol that is promoted.

But even the seemingly supportive archetype for young Māori and Pasifika players can have harmful effects, depending on how it is crafted into the media narrative of elite sport. Like how female athletes are more likely than men to have their image commented on by media broadcasters, a study has found that nonwhite elite players are much more likely to receive praise for their physical qualities, with black players four times more likely than their white counterparts to be discussed in terms of their strength, and seven times more likely to be discussed in terms of their speed. While this may appear a compliment, the study reported that this created “the impression of a lazy athlete, one that does not have to work at his craft; <sup>28</sup>” one that has been endowed with natural athleticism. We can understand the truth and the repercussions of this statement when we apply it to a New Zealand context, to our Māori and Pasifika athletes who are used as ihi-inducing models of strength, when compared to our Pakeha athletes. The archetype of natural strength and talent may improve participation when it is applicable to the individual: young Māori are more likely to participate because they are “good” at their chosen sport. <sup>29</sup> But conversely, those who are less naturally talented, those who see themselves as not “endowed with natural athleticism,” are less likely to remain in youth sport and continue to participate. In this way, the effect of archetypes can be

<sup>28</sup> Smith, Rory. “‘Intelligent’ or ‘Strong’: Study Finds Bias in Soccer Broadcasts.” The New York Times, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/sports/soccer/soccer-racism-broadcasting.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Sport New Zealand. “Active NZ Main Report.” 2018, <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1440/published-final-active-nz-main-report-the-new-zealand-participation-survey-2018-12-august-2019.pdf>.

positive and negative, and a single archetype can have a very significant impact on the youth participation landscape because it can have a myriad of different impacts.

### ***Summary of Archetypes, Social Belonging, and Participation.***

The presentation of elite athletes in sports media is so patterned that their characters become archetypal. These patterns are generally shaped by the media's need to appeal to audiences and engender the reactions of *ihi* and *weihi*. Through the growing narrative power of the sports media, these paradigms are transmitted and shape the participation landscape at the youth-sport level. The microcosm of sport thereby is affected by and sustains the patterns within the macrocosm of society.

The easiest way to examine why the archetypes and symbols of elite sporting narratives are so significant is to return to the examples of young Māori or female athletes who don't naturally fit into their respective archetypes. This leads to a lack of confidence in one's ability to successfully compete in sport, and is an expression of the concentrated *ihi* that is engendered by the media. Sport NZ specifically defines *ihi* as the intersection between *te taha tinana* (the physical being) and *te taha wairua* (the spiritual realm): the connection between what we see and feel and our belief system, particularly our beliefs about ourselves and our confidence.<sup>30</sup> They express that "*ihi* begets *weihi*, that begets *wana*." *Wana* is collective energy that unites people and connects us to our environment and to *kaupapa*, or principles: from this, *wana* can be understood as the intersection

<sup>30</sup> Sport New Zealand. "Te Ihi." <https://sportnz.org.nz/kaupapa-maori/a-matou-taonga/te-ihii/>. 19

between taha wairua (beliefs and self-perception) and taha whanau (social structures). From ihi, the lack of confidence prevents the youth from feeling social belonging, connecting them to their environment by impressing on them the hegemonies of social structures and principles that then limit their participation in sport.

## **Towards the Development of a Responsive Solution.**

*“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire; it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does.” - Nelson Mandela.<sup>31</sup>*

Nelson Mandela presents here a different vision of the progression of ihi, weihi, and wana: to “inspire” is to induce ihi and wehi, to “unite” and “change the world” are expressions of wana. In the current model of sports and media, this is little more than a vision and is a return to the ideas of Coakley’s Great Sports Myth. From my discussion of this current model, the wana that is actually induced through media may unite, but it often does so behind hegemonic norms. Unifying perceptions of hegemony means that often even the individuals negatively affected by these perspectives internalise these ideas, affecting their confidence: as such, the unification through wana contributes to an overall picture of division and inequality. This materialises as disparities in youth sport participation. Clearly, then, there is a pronounced gap between what we believe that sport is capable of achieving, and what it is actually achieving.

<sup>31</sup> Gadais, Tegwen. “How sport for development and peace can transform the lives of youth.” 2020, <https://theconversation.com/how-sport-for-development-and-peace-can-transform-the-lives-of-youth-126151>.

The best way to realise Mandela's vision is to use the progressions of ihi, weihi, and wana that are already in place, ultimately changing the perspectives that people gather behind to create genuine unity. The reason that this is the most effective method is that it extends on the principles of the socio-ecological model: it considers collective action and the potential for institutional change through wana, the individual perception of the self through ihi and weihi, and the manifestations of this through interpersonal relationships and feelings of social belonging. Importantly, this means that connections are made between the individual and the media environment, avoiding the previously-discussed pitfalls of healthism.

This can be visualised through an adapted version of Dr Mason Durie's Whare Tapa Wha model.<sup>32</sup> The issue with the traditional conception of Hauora for this context is that although it effectively visualises how the four different dimensions contribute to overall wellbeing, it is less effective at portraying how the dimensions actively feed into each other. In other words, although we look at how its four walls hold up the whare, we don't examine the corners of the structure that bind the dimensions together. By integrating it with the concepts of ihi, weihi, and wana, this gap is bridged, as ihi considers taha tinana and taha wairua, weihi considers taha hinengaro, wana considers taha whanau and all three consider the progressions of these dimensions, one after the other.

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of Health. "Māori health models – Te Whare Tapa Whā." <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models/maori-health-models-te-whare-tapa-wha>.

*"The stories we tell literally make the world. If you want to change the world, you need to change your story. This truth applies both to individuals and institutions." - **Michael Margolis.***

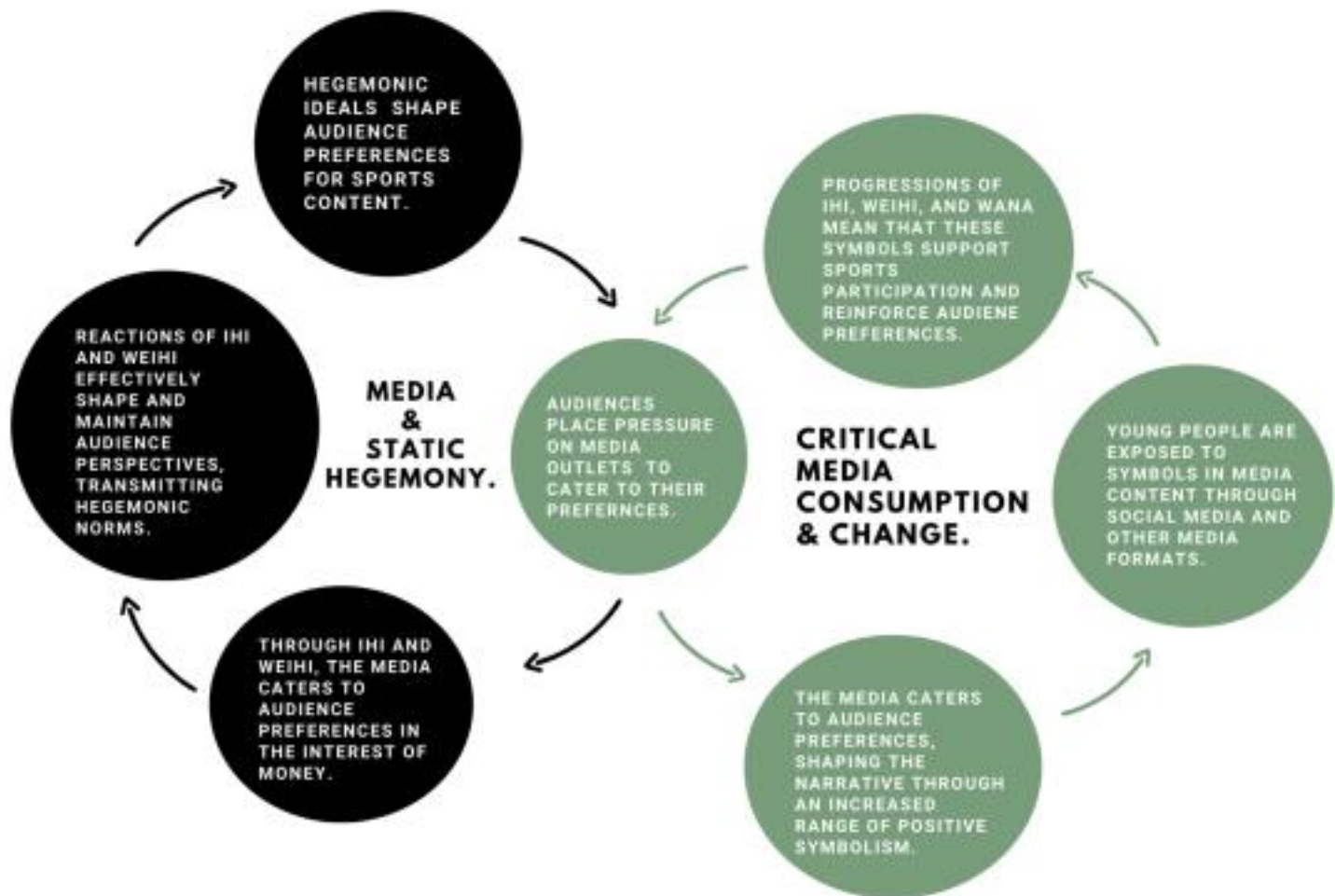
To begin at the individual and interpersonal level: one way that we can interrupt the negative cycle of ihi, weihi, and wana that contributes to participation disparities is to promote critical media consumption. This is the best way to bring about change at this level because it acknowledges the intersection of the individual and society through media usage. Canada's centre for digital and media literacy reports that "in order to be literate in today's media-rich environments, young people need to develop... a whole range of critical thinking, communication and information management skills.<sup>33</sup>" The most important of these skills for our purposes is critical thinking (individual) and communication (interpersonal), the "set of skills that help us comprehend, contextualise, and critically evaluate digital media." Through communication, young people can recognise and discuss how technology shapes the perceptions and beliefs of taha wairua and the feelings of taha hinengaro, through ihi, weihi, and wana. To achieve both of these elements, the development of improved critical thinking pedagogies should occur through the education system. Given that young people are increasingly exposed to media at younger ages, this should begin from early primary school, to limit the internalisation of ideas that negatively impact social wellbeing and the adolescent decline outlined in the Every Body Active strategy. This aspect of the solution is easiest to implement because it doesn't require institutional change.

<sup>33</sup> Media Smarts. "Digital Literacy Fundamentals."

<https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/general-information/digital-media-literacy-fundamentals/digital-literacy-fundamentals>.

Where critical media consumption will help to alter the responses to the ihi produced by media - the versions of negative weihi and wana - changes to the media at an institutional level will alter the original form of ihi that is produced. When media literacy prevents ihi from blindly shaping weihi and wana, ihi changes in form: my own critical evaluation of sport has supported my ability to see sports media critically, and ihi has been produced in a way that allows wana to connect me to the belief that we can change the media narrative. Critical media consumption thereby means that young people can be united behind a common vision of change rather than internalising old hegemonic norms, allowing for collective action. This provides a suitable place to break the cycle of media and hegemony, at the phase where audiences place pressure on media outlets to cater for their preferences. Instead of audiences enforcing staticity in the stories of sports, the media narrative must adapt, increasing the range of positive symbolism that will support the participation of groups that were once either symbolically annihilated or represented only in a narrow, archetypal way. Taking on the issue in this way means that institutional change is driven by people and their responses to their environment, following the progressions of ihi, weihi, and wana, but adapting them to produce a positive outcome. These progressions mean that the availability of positive symbols increases youth sports participation and subsequently reinforces these audience preferences through the desire for role models. The narrative of the sporting institution is adapted so that it becomes a leveller, not a promoter, of disparities.

## The Cycle of Media & Hegemony is Broken through Pressure from Audiences.



### Summary of the Solution & Recommended Action for Sport NZ.

The proposed solution to the falling rates of youth participation detailed by Sport NZ has two essential elements: developing young people's ability to analyse and evaluate media narratives, and from this, allowing collective action to reshape these narratives. In the context of the growing expanse of narrative power held by the media and sports institutions, what Sport NZ refers to as social and technological change, this response will be more effective than the strategy's current untargeted investment. This is because

the new solution develops on the Hauora model to include the concepts of ihi, weihi, and wana and inspire collective action. This allows for the interruption of the sports narrative, breaking up sequences that produce static hegemony and reinventing their progressions, producing a new narrative of ihi, weihi, and wana, that promotes participation and joy in sport. It is clear that this has the potential to produce widespread institutional and cultural change. Likewise, because the solution encourages constant evaluation of the relationships between sport and society - the microcosm and macrocosm - it will be responsive to societal changes. To catalyse the rate of institutional change, Sport NZ should develop on my evaluation of the relationships between media and sport, and use this to identify effective areas of investment to support the participation of demographics of young people. This operates on the societal level of the socio-ecological model.

### **Further considerations.**

The narrative of sports media has historically ensnared its audience by amplifying paradigmatic archetypes. In this report, I have used this relationship to support a critical evaluation of the connection between the presentation of these archetypes and youth sport participation, but this is not its only application. As a microcosm, sport's narrative power allows it to enforce hegemony and cultural perceptions, shaping societal dynamics in contexts totally outside of sport. If we use critical media consumption to produce changes in the sports media industry, the microcosm of sport can be used to

change the macrocosm of society. Positive representation in sports media can be used as the basis for strategies that address inequalities in society. For example, I would recommend my method be applied to the government's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy for the same reasons that it has proven so applicable to youth sport, through the increased media usage of our rangatahi.<sup>34</sup> I offer, here, a vision: a series of interrelated strategies that use sport to begin to address the broad and intersecting inequalities faced by New Zealand rangatahi.

<sup>34</sup>"Child and Youth Wellbeing." <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/>.