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**OUTSTANDING SCHOLARSHIP  
EXEMPLAR**

## **Rangatiratanga and Equity: Shaping the Future of Gender Justice in New Zealand Sport**

The 2018 *Women and Girls Strategy*<sup>1</sup> developed by Sport New Zealand aims to address the gender disparities in sports by creating equitable opportunities for women and girls in participation, leadership, and media visibility. It views sport as a powerful social and cultural institution that shapes national identity and individual wellbeing, and is rooted in New Zealand's broader commitment to inclusivity, as outlined in other key government policies such as the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy* and the *Every Body Active Strategic Plan*, both of which emphasise the importance of physical activity as a pathway to overall wellbeing.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these intentions, systemic barriers continue to limit the participation and leadership of women and girls in sport. Gender inequities in media coverage, leadership roles, and community engagement reflect broader socio-cultural norms that perpetuate the marginalisation of women in sport. The integration of Māori principles such as *hauora* and *mana wahine* provides a culturally grounded framework for addressing this inequities. *Hauora*, as proposed in Dr Mason Durie's *Te Whare Tapa Whā* model<sup>3</sup>, presents a model of health that incorporates physical, mental, spiritual, and social dimensions - offering a comprehensive lens through which to evaluate the strategy's impact. Additionally, the concept of *mana wahine*, which highlights the empowerment and leadership of Māori women, offers another framework to assess the strategy's

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<sup>1</sup> Sport New Zealand, *Women and Girls Strategy 2018*, <https://sportnz.org.nz/about/news-and-media/news-updates/women-and-girls-strategy>

<sup>2</sup> *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy 2019*, New Zealand Government, <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy>

<sup>3</sup> M. Durie, *Whaiora: Maori Health Development*, Oxford University Press, 1994.

success of increasing female representation in governance and decision-making roles in sport.<sup>4</sup>

This report is designed to critically evaluate the *Women and Girls Strategy* by examining its efficacy in fostering leadership, addressing socio-cultural barriers, and enhancing media visibility. While the strategy has laid a foundation for promoting gender equity, its long-term sustainability and ability to affect systemic change will be assessed. The following sections will explore three key ideas: leadership and participation disparities, the issue of value and visibility in media, and socio-cultural barriers to participation, from sexualisation and objectification off the pitch to discrimination on the field.

## **1. Leadership and Participation**

### **1.1 Gender, Representation, and the Role of Mana Wahine**

Leadership within the sporting sector in New Zealand remains highly gendered, with women consistently underrepresented in governance, coaching, and executive roles.<sup>5</sup> While the *Women and Girls Strategy* explicitly calls for increased female leadership, progress in this area has been slow. For example, currently women occupy less than 30% of leadership positions within national sporting organisations in New Zealand.<sup>6</sup> This lack of representation not only limits the decision-making diversity but also impacts the

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<sup>4</sup> L. Pihama, "Mana Wahine as a Kaupapa Māori Theoretical Framework," *Women's Studies Journal*, Vol. 13, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> S. Shaw and J. Penney, "Gender Equity Policies in National Sport Organizations: An Analysis of the New Zealand Context," *Journal of Sport Management*, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Active NZ Survey 2019, Sport New Zealand, <https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/active-nz-survey-2019>

visibility of women in influential roles, reinforcing gender stereotypes within the sporting community.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, participation rates for women and girls in sport remain disproportionately low compared to their male counterparts.<sup>8</sup> According to the *Active NZ Survey 2019*, fewer girls participate in organised sports after the age of 14, with a steep decline in engagement during adolescence.<sup>9</sup> This is often attributed to societal pressures, a lack of role models, and limited access to resources, particularly in more rural or underserved communities. The gender gap in participation is accentuated by the fact that sports culture in New Zealand is traditionally male-dominated, with a focus on high-performance sports such as rugby and cricket.<sup>10</sup>

However, the issue of leadership is not solely about numerical representation. It is about the transformative potential of leadership when viewed through the lens of *mana wahine*, or the 'inherent authority and leadership of women', particularly in community contexts.<sup>11</sup> By failing to incorporate more Māori women into leadership roles within sport, there is a missed opportunity to integrate culturally relevant frameworks that could resonate with both Māori and non-Māori communities. The inclusion of Māori women in

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<sup>7</sup> K. Hovden, "Gender Differences in the Evaluation of Leadership and Sport Governance," *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Girls and Young Women Profile, Sport New Zealand, <https://sportnz.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Girls-and-Young-Women-Profile.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> S. Sporton, "Understanding Gender Disparities in Youth Sports Participation," *New Zealand Journal of Physical Education*, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> L. Pihama, "Mana Wahine as a Kaupapa Māori Theoretical Framework," *Women's Studies Journal*, Vol. 13, 2007.

leadership could bring forward diverse perspectives that align with the holistic principles of *hauora*, emphasising wellbeing across physical, mental, and social dimensions.

While Sport New Zealand has established leadership programs aimed at increasing female representation, such as the *Women in Sport Leadership Programme*,<sup>12</sup> these initiatives have not yet resulted in widespread changes at the governance level. The limited visibility of female leaders perpetuates a cycle where young women do not see themselves represented in sports leadership, further deterring them from aspiring to such roles.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, the strategy's emphasis on leadership must be critically assessed for its ability to not only create pathways but also sustain and normalise women's presence in governance.

A higher-level assessment of the strategy reveals that leadership is not just about placing women in influential roles, but about transforming the culture of leadership itself. The current hierarchical, often male-dominated structures in sports governance are a reflection of broader societal power dynamics.<sup>14</sup> Ergo, some feminist scholars argue that leadership in sport must move beyond token representation to embrace more inclusive models that prioritise collaboration, cultural inclusivity, and shared decision-making.<sup>15</sup> *Mana wahine* offers an alternative leadership model that emphasise collective responsibility and the wellbeing of the entire sporting community. *Mana Wahine* is not

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<sup>12</sup> Women in Sport Leadership Programme, Sport New Zealand, <https://sportnz.org.nz/women-in-sport-leadership-programme>

<sup>13</sup> S. Shaw and J. Penney, "Gender Equity Policies in National Sport Organizations: An Analysis of the New Zealand Context," *Journal of Sport Management*, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> K. Hovden, "Gender Differences in the Evaluation of Leadership and Sport Governance," *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> A. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports*, Routledge, 2000.

just about women occupying leadership roles: rather, it is about embodying leadership that aligns with the core tenets of our culture, such as *whanaungatanga* (relationships), *manaakitanga* (care and hospitality), and *rangatiratanga* (self-determination).<sup>16</sup> These concepts juxtapose the often hierarchical and competitive models of leadership commonly found in Western sports organisations, which can alienate both Māori and non-Māori women from leadership roles.

Incorporating *mana wahine* into the *Women and Girls Strategy* is critical for creating leadership pathways that are culturally responsive and reflective of the diverse communities in New Zealand. For example, Māori women leaders have traditionally held roles that emphasise communal cohesion and the wellbeing of the collective, aligning closely with the principles of *hauora*. This holistic approach to leadership could provide a model for sports governance that promotes not only gender equity but also cultural inclusivity, ensuring that leadership reflects the values of the communities it serves. However, the *Women and Girls Strategy* has yet to fully embrace these Māori leadership principles in its leadership programs. While initiatives like the *Women in Sport* Leadership Programme are a positive step, they lack the cultural nuance required to engage Māori and Pacific women effectively. A broader incorporation of *mana wahine* into leadership training would not only attract more Māori women to leadership roles, but also offer a model for inclusive leadership that could benefit all women in New Zealand sports. This shift would require a rethinking of leadership structures to prioritise collective wellbeing over individual achievement, a concept embedded in *hauora*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> M. Durie, *Whaiora: Māori Health Development*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> S. Sporton, "Understanding Gender Disparities in Youth Sports Participation," *New Zealand Journal of Physical Education*, 2018.

In addition, the concept of *whanaungatanga* emphasises the importance of relationships and networks in leadership.<sup>18</sup> This can be seen in the way Māori communities prioritise the connections between individuals and groups, rather than focusing solely on individual leadership. In the context of sports governance, this could mean creating leadership structures that are more collaborative, drawing on the collective strengths of communities rather than adhering to traditional hierarchical models. Ultimately, the strategy must consider how to integrate such models to not only increase female representation, but in order to transform the very nature of leadership in sport.

## **1.2 Culturally Inclusive Leadership: Implementing Collaborative Solutions**

The *Women and Girls Strategy* outlines various initiatives to address leadership disparities, such as providing leadership training and mentorship programs. However, a critical evaluation of these initiatives suggests that they have not yet achieved widespread impact.<sup>19</sup> A key limitation is that these programs tend to focus on formal leadership roles within national sports organisations, without addressing the sociocultural barriers that prevent women (and particularly Māori and Pacific women) from seeing themselves as potential leaders.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the strategy must broaden its scope to include leadership models that resonate with the values of *mana wahine*, thus granting equitable authority to both the Māori female population, as well as women as a

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<sup>18</sup> L. Pihama, "Mana Wahine as a Kaupapa Māori Theoretical Framework," *Women's Studies Journal*, Vol. 13, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> K. Hovden, "Gender Differences in the Evaluation of Leadership and Sport Governance," *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> S. Shaw and J. Penney, "Gender Equity Policies in National Sport Organizations: An Analysis of the New Zealand Context," *Journal of Sport Management*, 2003.

whole. Hence, I have four examples as to how exactly *mana wahine* can be integrated into our current model of sport in New Zealand. The proposals focus specifically on both maintaining our contemporary national framework, with the addition of the collaborative aspect outlined in *mana wahine*.

### **1. Culturally Responsive Leadership Training**

By developing leadership programmes that incorporate ideals such as *whanaungatanga* and *mana wahine*, a sense of cultural competence is generated. This would involve training that emphasises collective leadership and community wellbeing, ensuring that Māori and Pacific women are not only included but empowered within leadership structures.

### **2. Mentorship Programmes**

The establishment of mentorship programs that connect emerging female leaders with established Māori and Pacific women leaders in sport. These programs should be designed to support leadership development at all levels, from local community sports to national governance.<sup>21</sup>

### **3. Collaborative Leadership Models**

Redesigning leadership structures in sporting organizations to be more collaborative, aligning with the Māori notion of collective responsibility. This could involve creating leadership teams that share decision-making authority rather than relying on a single leader, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for women.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> L. Pihama, "Mana Wahine as a Kaupapa Māori Theoretical Framework," *Women's Studies Journal*, Vol. 13, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> K. Hovden, "Gender Differences in the Evaluation of Leadership and Sport Governance," *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 2010.



#### 4. Community-Based Leadership Initiatives

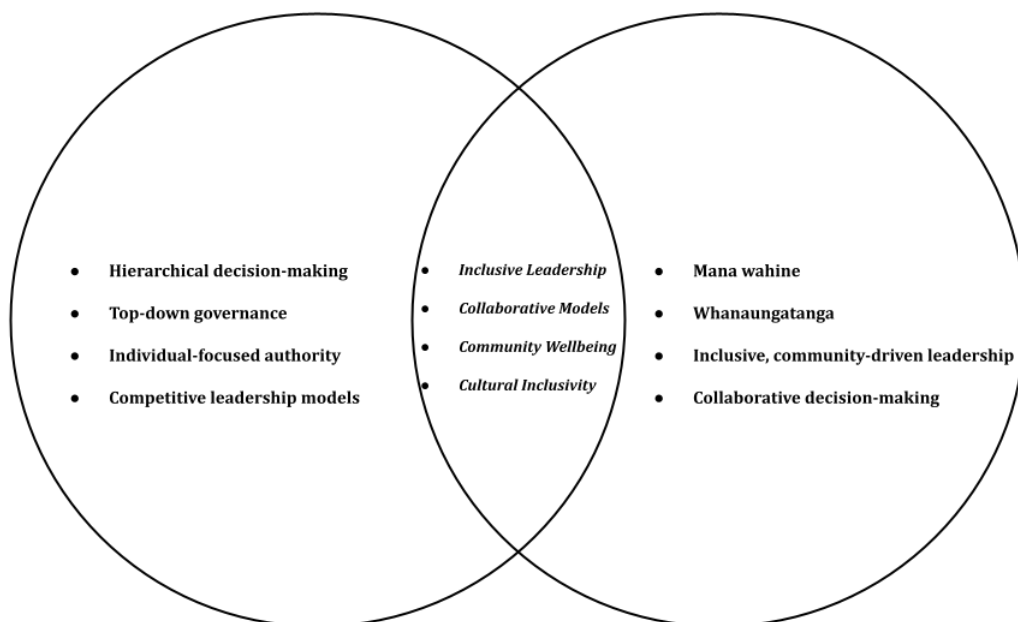
The encouragement of leadership initiatives that originate at the community level, particularly in marginalised or minority populations, such as Māori and Pacific communities, or even LGBTQ+ groups. This would allow leadership development to be more organic and culturally aligned, rather than imposed from the top down.<sup>23</sup>

Eventually, in the long run, this organic aspect would elicit a freedom of entrance to leadership among these groups, and ergo by extension, also encourage more women participation in leadership positions.

##### *Intersection of Traditional and Māori Leadership Models in Sport Governance*

###### *Traditional Leadership Structures*

###### *Māori Leadership Concepts*



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<sup>23</sup> S. Shaw and J. Penney, "Gender Equity Policies in National Sport Organizations: An Analysis of the New Zealand Context," Journal of Sport Management, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Created using Google Drawings <https://docs.google.com/drawings>

While these potential solutions represent a more culturally nuanced approach to leadership, one that would ultimately stimulate participation among wahine, their effectiveness will depend on the willingness of sporting organizations to adopt new models of leadership that challenge traditional hierarchies.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, sustained government funding and support will be essential to ensure long-term viability of these proposals. However, what is clear is that without structural changes at both the community and national level, the *Women and Girls Strategy* risks perpetuating the very inequities it seeks to address.

## **2. Value and Visibility**

### **2.1 The Visibility Gap and Its Consequences**

Historically, female athletes have been marginalised in sports media, with their achievements receiving significantly less attention compared to their male counterparts. This imbalance not only limits the financial opportunities available to female athletes—such as sponsorships and endorsements—but also reinforces societal norms that undervalue women's participation in sport.

A report by Sport New Zealand found that female athletes are underrepresented in media coverage: while coverage of women's sport increased from 15% in 2020 to 26% in 2023, 2023 was also the first year where gender balance has not improved year on year, even despite the monumental 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup:<sup>26</sup>

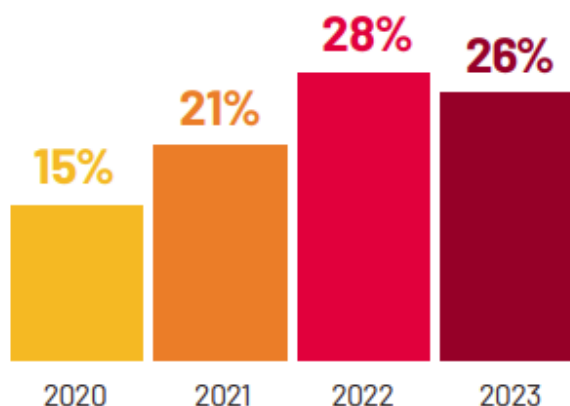
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<sup>25</sup> K. Hovden, "Gender Differences in the Evaluation of Leadership and Sport Governance," *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Media and Gender Study: 2023 Annual Report, Sport New Zealand, <https://sportnz.org.nz/about/news-and-media/news-updates/media-and-gender-study-2023-annual-report/>

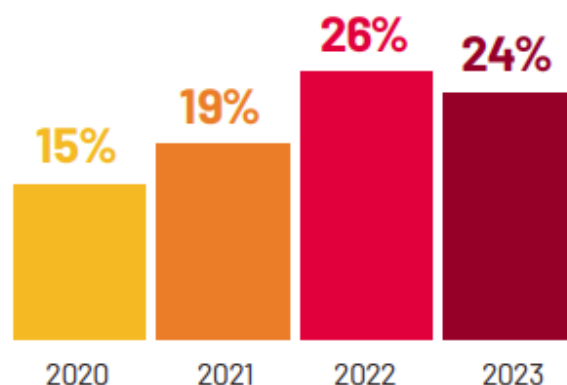
## BALANCE

### GENDER BALANCE – ALL SPORTS COVERAGE



## VISIBILITY

### FEMALE VISIBILITY – ALL SPORTS COVERAGE



This disparity is further compounded by the nature of the coverage, which often focuses on the athletes' appearance, personal lives, or roles as mothers, rather than their athletic achievements.<sup>27</sup> Such portrayals perpetuate harmful stereotypes, reducing the visibility of women's sporting accomplishments and undermining their value as professional athletes.

Moreover, the underrepresentation of female athletes in media affects participation rates among girls and young women. Research shows that young women are less likely to engage in sports if they do not see role models who look like them being celebrated and respected in mainstream media.<sup>28</sup> This creates a vicious cycle, where limited visibility leads to lower participation, which in turn perpetuates the narrative that women's sports

<sup>27</sup> L. Bruce, "Media Representation of Female Athletes in New Zealand," New Zealand Journal of Media Studies, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Sport New Zealand, Active NZ Survey 2019, <https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/active-nz-survey-2019>

are less valuable.<sup>29</sup> This, in turn, entails a profound effect on all four of the components of the *Te Whare Tapa Whā* model:

***Implications of Media Underrepresentation of Female Athletes on Hauora***

Taha Tinana (Physical)	Taha Hinengaro (Mental/Emotional)	Taha Wairua (Spiritual)	Taha Whānau (Social)
<i>Limited media visibility directly affects the financial sustainability of female athletes. Fewer sponsorship deals, endorsements, and media appearances result in women in sport often struggling to secure the financial resources necessary to maintain their physical health and peak performance.</i>	<i>Constant media focus on appearance or personal life rather than athletic ability reinforces negative body image issues and diminishes self-worth.</i>	<i>For many female athletes, their sporting career is not just a profession but a core part of their identity. The media's neglect of women's sports undermines this sense of identity and limits their ability to inspire the next generation of female athletes.</i>	<i>When female athletes are consistently undervalued, it affects how families, communities, and young girls view women's participation in sport.  This lack of representation creates a barrier to the social inclusion of women in sports communities and hinders efforts to normalise female participation at all levels of competition.</i>

From conversations with female peers who participate in sports at a school level, it is evident that the lack of media coverage for women's competitions has a profound effect on their sense of self-worth and visibility. For example, some who are involved in sports such as netball and football expressed frustration at how their achievements often go unnoticed compared to their male counterparts. One girl was disappointed in how, after winning a regional championship, the boys' team received substantial media coverage (on things such as the school newsletter and social media), while the girls' team barely got a mention. This discrepancy made her feel as though her efforts and accomplishments were less significant, affecting her *taha hinengaro*. She also mentioned how it impacted her view on the broader sports community, weakening the sense of *taha whānau* that is crucial for fostering support and belonging within sports.

<sup>29</sup> S. Sporton, "Understanding Gender Disparities in Youth Sports Participation," New Zealand Journal of Physical Education, 2018

The strategy's focus on increasing media representation is necessary, but hearing firsthand experiences reveals that it's not just about more coverage—it's about meaningful and respectful coverage that genuinely celebrates women's contributions. The mental toll of being consistently undervalued can lead to disengagement, highlighting the urgent need for a comprehensive media reform that promotes equitable visibility for women in sport.

## **2.2 Strengthening Media Visibility and Representation**

To rectify the visibility gap, the *Women and Girls Strategy* must adopt a more aggressive approach to media representation. While current initiatives focus on encouraging media outlets to provide more coverage of women's sports, more structured and enforceable policies are needed in order to induce a long-term effect.

### **1. Media Accountability Framework**

The development of a framework that holds media organisations accountable for equitable coverage of women's sports, such as quotas for coverage, requiring broadcasters to allocate a specific percentage of airtime to women's sports, and monitoring compliance through an independent body.

### **2. Culturally Inclusive Media Representation**

Increasing the visibility of Māori and Pacific female athletes by collaborating with Māori media organizations and community groups. The integration of Māori concepts such as *mana wahine* into media campaigns could help challenge the stereotypes that currently dominate sports media, creating a more inclusive narrative for all women in sport.

### **3. Public Awareness Campaigns**

Launching national campaigns aimed at raising public awareness about the achievements of female athletes. These campaigns should focus on shifting public perception away from the objectification of female athletes and towards their athletic achievements, leadership, and contributions to the sporting community.

#### **4. Mentorship and Role Models in Media**

Pairing young female athletes with established female athletes who can serve as role models in media appearances. This would not only increase visibility but also create a platform for female athletes to share their experiences and inspire the next generation.<sup>30</sup> Establishing more female-led sports shows, podcasts, and media content would ensure that female voices are at the forefront of sports discourse.

While the proposed solutions are necessary to bridge the visibility gap, their success depends on systemic changes within the media industry and the active participation of media organisations in promoting gender equity. However, what is certain is that without structural reforms and enforceable policies, the strategy will struggle to create the visibility needed to elevate female athletes and inspire greater participation among young women.

### **3. Socio-Cultural Barriers and Participation**

#### **3.1 Challenging Objectification and Sexualisation**

While the *Women and Girls Strategy* acknowledges the barriers to sports participation for women, it must engage more critically with the objectification and sexualisation of

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<sup>30</sup> S. Sporton, "Understanding Gender Disparities in Youth Sports Participation," *New Zealand Journal of Physical Education*, 2018

women in sport, which are deeply entrenched socio-cultural issues. Objectification theory, developed by feminist scholar Martha Nussbaum, highlights how women's bodies are often reduced to objects for the male gaze<sup>31</sup>, stripped of their agency and value outside of their physical appearance.<sup>32</sup> In the context of sport, this objectification not only reinforces harmful gender norms but also shapes the way female athletes are represented in media and society, often diminishing their athletic accomplishments in favour of their appearance.

This objectification is especially prevalent in the way women's sports are marketed and covered by the media. Female athletes are frequently sexualised in ways that male athletes are not, with media attention often focusing on their bodies rather than their skills:<sup>33</sup>



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<sup>31</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16/3 (1975), 6–18.

<sup>32</sup> M. Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 1995.

<sup>33</sup> L. Bruce, "Media Representation of Female Athletes in New Zealand," *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies*, 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Nolan P, 'Women's Sports Coverage in the Media: Insufficient and Inappropriate' (9 May 2023) *Jump Around Report*, accessed 30 September 2024  
<https://jumparoundreport.journalism.wisc.edu/2023/05/09/womens-sports-coverage-in-the-media-insufficient-and-inappropriate/>

A stark example of this emerged during the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, where Swiss footballer Alisha Lehmann was subjected to disproportionate media focus on her appearance rather than her athletic abilities. Despite being a talented and accomplished player, much of the attention surrounding Lehmann centered on her social media presence and her physical looks, reducing her to a figure of sexual appeal rather than celebrating her contributions to the game. This sexualisation was visible across both traditional and modern media platforms, where Lehmann's Instagram following and image as an attractive footballer often eclipsed coverage of her actual performances on the field. Instead of being recognised for her tactical skill and athleticism, Lehmann was framed as a marketable personality whose value to sponsors and the media stemmed from her appearance and social media influence. While it may superficially seem beneficial, this sexualisation of female athletes contributes to a broader culture in which women are valued for their beauty rather than their athletic achievements, perpetuating a cycle where women's sports are deemed less serious or important than men's.

Judith Butler's theory of *gender performativity* offers a critical lens for understanding this dynamic. Butler argues that gender is not a fixed identity but is performed through repetitive acts that align with societal expectations.<sup>35</sup> In our larger society, women are often expected to 'perform' a particular kind of femininity, one that aligns with traditional gender norms emphasising (sexual) beauty, grace, and submissiveness. These expectations are in direct conflict with the qualities typically associated with athleticism—strength, aggression, and competitiveness—which are culturally coded as

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<sup>35</sup> J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, 1990.



masculine traits.<sup>36</sup> This generates a 'double bind' for female athletes, who are expected to excel in sport while conforming to restrictive notions of femininity that undermine their authority and athleticism.

The objectification of female athletes also intersect with broader socio-economic and racial disparities. Black feminist scholar bell hooks has written extensively about the ways in which Black women's bodies are hypersexualised and commodified in Western culture.<sup>37</sup> In the context of New Zealand sports, Māori and Pacific women are similarly subjected to a racialised form of objectification, where their bodies are exoticised, reinforcing colonial narratives that frame Indigenous bodies as "other" and intrinsically different, often even subordinate, to Pākehā ideals.<sup>38</sup> For example, ex-Silver Ferns player Maria Folau was often described in ways that focused on her perceived exoticism rather than sporting capability. Media coverage tended to emphasise her "natural athleticism" or "innate talent"<sup>39</sup>, framing her success as the result of inherent physical traits rather than the product of her skill, dedication, and hard work. This intersectional objectification not only limits the opportunities available to Māori and Pacific women in sport but also alienates them from mainstream sports culture, which privileges Eurocentric standards of beauty and femininity.<sup>40</sup>

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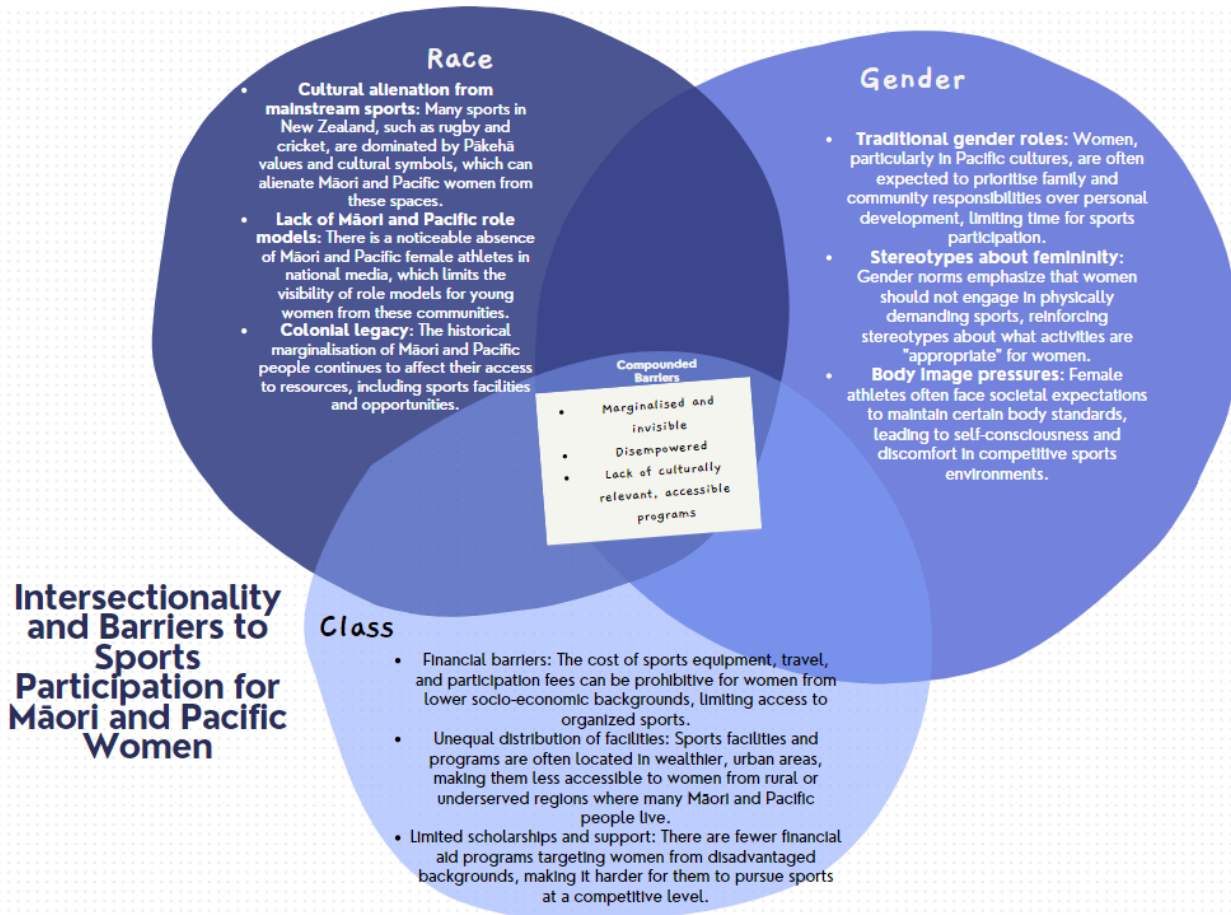
<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, South End Press, 1981

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Joy, Murray. "Netball: The Unstoppable Maria Tutaia." *New Zealand Herald*, 9 March 2015

<sup>40</sup> Bruce, Toni. "Reflections on Communication and Sport: On Women and Femininities." *Communication & Sport*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2014, pp. 125–137.



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Moreover, neoliberal ideologies that dominate Western sports culture often place the responsibility for overcoming these barriers on individual female athletes.<sup>42</sup> This focus on personal empowerment—rather than systemic change—fails to address the structural factors that perpetuate the objectification and commodification of women in sport. Female athletes are frequently expected to capitalise on their appearance to secure sponsorship deals and media attention, reinforcing the idea that their value lies

<sup>41</sup> Created using Canva <https://www.canva.com/>

<sup>42</sup> L. Harvey, "Neoliberalism and Sports: Individual Empowerment or Structural Inequality?" *Journal of Critical Sports Studies*, 2020.

not in their athletic abilities but in their marketability.<sup>43</sup> This societal (neoliberal) emphasis on self-branding compounds the pressure on women to conform to sexualised representations, as their financial success often depends on their ability to appeal to the male gaze.

Addressing the objectification of female athletes requires a paradigm shift, one that not only challenges dominant Western frameworks but also incorporates Māori and Pacific perspectives on gender and identity. In contrast to Western sports culture, which often objectifies women's bodies for commercial gain, *mana wahine* offers a more holistic understanding of women's power and authority. It emphasises the spiritual, cultural, and physical strength of women, viewing their bodies as sources of power rather than objects to be commodified.

The *Te Pae Mahutonga* framework also provides an alternative model for understanding the role of women in sport, one that challenges the objectification inherent in Western sports marketing.<sup>44</sup> *Mauriora*, or the promotion of cultural identity, encourages the recognition of Māori and Pacific women's athletic achievements in ways that honour their cultural heritage rather than reducing them to physical commodities. This framework suggests that the value of female athletes should be measured not by their appearance or marketability but by their contributions to their communities and their ability to inspire future generations of Māori and Pacific women to engage in sport.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> M. Durie, *Te Pae Mahutonga: A Model for Māori Health Promotion*, Massey University Press, 1999.

Moreover, the *Waiora* and *Toiora* components of *Te Pae Mahutonga* highlight the importance of creating safe and supportive environments for women in sport.<sup>45</sup> These components emphasise the need for sports environments that respect women's autonomy and agency, free from the pressures of sexualisation and objectification. Creating such environments requires more than simply changing media representations; it demands a restructuring of the sports industry itself, where the objectification of women's bodies is embedded in marketing strategies and sponsorship deals. A decolonising approach, which integrates *manaakitanga* (care) and *rangatiratanga* (self-determination), could help shift the focus from sexualisation to empowerment, ensuring that female athletes are valued for their skills, leadership, and contributions to the sporting community.<sup>46</sup>

### **3.2 Transformative Solutions for Addressing Objectification in Sports**

To combat the objectification of women in sport, the *Women and Girls Strategy* necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates both policy and cultural change, thus leading to the creation of a sports environment where women are valued for their abilities rather than their appearance.

#### **1. Media Representation Standards**

The development of a regulatory framework that requires media outlets to meet specific standards for the portrayal of female athletes. This would include guidelines to prevent the sexualisation of athletes in marketing and coverage, which could be enforced

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> L. Bruce, "Decolonizing Sports in Aotearoa: A Critical Approach," *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 2020.

through partnerships with media organisations, sports governing bodies, and government regulators.

## **2. Decolonising Sports Marketing**

The incorporation of Māori and Pacific values into sports marketing strategies to counter the objectification of female athletes. By emphasising *mana wahine* and cultural identity, marketing campaigns could shift away from commodifying women's bodies and instead celebrate their strength, leadership, and community contributions.<sup>47</sup> This approach would also help elevate the visibility of Māori and Pacific women in sport, challenging the racialised objectification that often marginalises these groups.

## **3. Public Awareness Campaigns on Gender and Sport**

The launching of public education campaigns that challenge the objectification of women in sport. These campaigns should focus on deconstructing harmful gender norms and promoting alternative representations of femininity that embrace athleticism, strength, and leadership.<sup>48</sup> Drawing on Butler's theory of performativity, such campaigns could encourage women to "re-perform" gender in ways that resist sexualisation and instead emphasise empowerment.

While these solutions represent a necessary first step in addressing the objectification of women in sport, their success depends on a broader cultural shift in how female athletes are perceived and valued. The integration of systems such as *mana wahine* and *whanaungatanga* could provide an alternative model of gender representation that challenges the neoliberal commodification of women's bodies. However, achieving

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, 1990.

these changes will require sustained efforts across multiple sectors, including media, education, and sports governance, to dismantle the structural inequalities that perpetuate the sexualisation of women in sport.<sup>49</sup>

## **4. Long-Term Sustainability and Policy Recommendations**

### **4.1 Rethinking Sustainability: Current Structural Issues**

The *Women and Girls Strategy* presents an ambitious vision for gender equity in New Zealand sport, but its long-term sustainability is contingent on its ability to address deep-rooted systemic inequalities and adapt to the evolving socio-political landscape. To achieve meaningful and lasting change, the strategy must not only promote surface-level reforms but also tackle the structural conditions that reproduce gendered and racialised disparities in access to sport. As philosopher Michel Foucault argues, power is not merely exercised through institutions but is embedded in everyday practices, discourses, and social norms.<sup>50</sup> For the *Woman and Girls Strategy* to be sustainable, it must engage in a Foucauldian analysis of power, recognising that the barriers women face in sport are not merely institutional but are also cultural and ideological.

One of the key limitations of the current strategy is its reliance on a neoliberal framework, which emphasises individual empowerment. However, this individual empowerment must be tempered with a more critical approach that acknowledges the role of systemic inequalities in shaping women's access to sport. As sociologist Nancy

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<sup>49</sup> M. Durie, *Te Pae Mahutonga: A Model for Māori Health Promotion*, Massey University Press, 1999.

<sup>50</sup> M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Pantheon Books, 1978.

Fraser argues, achieving true equity requires not only the redistribution of resources but also the recognition of cultural differences and the reformation of social structures that perpetuate inequality.<sup>51</sup> The *Women and Girls Strategy* must therefore shift from a purely redistributive model to one that also engages in *transformative recognition*—acknowledging and addressing the socio-cultural dynamics that devalue women’s contributions to sport.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, the strategy’s reliance on short-term funding models raises concerns about its long-term sustainability. Research by critical economists such as David Harvey critiques neoliberal policies for their focus on short-term gains at the expense of long-term social investment.<sup>53</sup> The *Women and Girls Strategy* needs to establish stable, long-term funding sources that are not subject to political fluctuations. This could involve securing multi-year government funding commitments, as well as partnerships with private and philanthropic organisations committed to gender equity in sport. Without sustained financial support, the strategy risks becoming a temporary solution to a long-standing problem, rather than a transformative force for change.

## **4.2 Proposed Policy Changes**

### **1. Structural Transformation through Intersectional Policy Design**

Building on Kimberlé Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality, future iterations of the strategy must prioritise policies that address the multiple and overlapping forms of

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<sup>51</sup> N. Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World*, Columbia University Press, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

oppression experienced by women from marginalised communities.<sup>54</sup> Intersectional policy design would ensure that the specific needs of Māori, Pacific, LGBTQ+, and disabled women are accounted for, recognizing that gender inequality does not exist in isolation but intersects with other forms of discrimination.

A sustainable policy framework would institutionalise intersectional analysis by requiring all sports organisations to assess the impacts of their policies on different groups of women.<sup>55</sup> This could be achieved by implementing mandatory intersectional audits of sports governance, participation rates, and media representation. These audits would help identify structural barriers and inform targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by different groups of women.

## **2. Decolonising the Sports System**

A sustainable strategy for gender equity must engage in the decolonisation of New Zealand's sports system. As theorist Frantz Fanon argues, colonialism is not just a political structure but a psychological and cultural one that continues to shape postcolonial societies.<sup>56</sup> Decolonising sport requires dismantling the colonial hierarchies that privilege 'Western' sports like cricket over indigenous and non-Western forms of physical activity.<sup>57</sup> The strategy could establish a 'Decolonisation Taskforce' within Sport New Zealand, composed of Māori and Pacific leaders, to oversee the implementation of culturally relevant sports programs that emphasise *whakapapa*, *manaakitanga*, and

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<sup>54</sup> K. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review*, 1991.

<sup>55</sup> L. Bruce, "Intersectionality in Sports Governance: A Critical Review," *New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 2020.

<sup>56</sup> F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, 1963.

<sup>57</sup> L. Pihama, "Decolonizing Sports in Aotearoa: A Critical Approach," *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 2020.



*mana wahine*. Such programs would not only increase participation among marginalised groups but would also challenge the dominance of colonial sports structures that have historically excluded these communities.

### **3. Collective Leadership and Horizontal Governance**

The current hierarchical governance structures within sports organisations often reproduce gendered power dynamics that exclude women from decision-making roles.<sup>58</sup> Drawing on bell hooks' concept of 'collective leadership', the strategy should promote horizontal governance models that prioritise collaboration, community involvement, and shared responsibility.<sup>59</sup>

Collective leadership challenges the traditional top-down approach to governance by distributing power more equitably across all members of the organisation. This model is particularly relevant to Māori and Pacific communities, where leadership is often conceptualised as a communal, rather than individual, responsibility. By adopting collective leadership structures, sports organisations can create more inclusive and participatory governance models that reflect the diverse voices and experiences of women in sport.

A key challenge of these proposals would be the implementation of intersectional policy design and decolonisation initiatives, which require not only institutional commitment but also ongoing education and cultural change. The strategy must therefore invest in

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<sup>58</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Vintage Books, 1995

<sup>59</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, South End Press, 1984.

long-term capacity-building initiatives that provide sports organisations with the tools and knowledge to implement these transformative policies effectively. Without sustained education and training, the risk is that these policies will be superficially adopted without leading to meaningful change.

Finally, the redistribution of resources and the promotion of economic justice within sport will require a shift in societal values, recognizing the inherent worth of women's sports as equal to men's sports.<sup>60</sup> This shift will depend not only on policy but also on broader societal changes that challenge the patriarchal and capitalist systems that devalue women's labour, both within sport and beyond.

## **5. Future Directions and Final Considerations**

While the *Women and Girls Strategy* has made significant progress in promoting gender equality, its future must embrace the more complex notion of 'equity'—providing resources and opportunities tailored to the specific needs of different communities, rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all approach.<sup>61</sup> As Iris Marion Young argues through her theory of 'justice and the politics of difference', future iterations of the strategy must prioritise 'equity' over formal equality, recognizing that not all women start from the same position of advantage.

Furthermore, as globalisation continues to shape the nature of sport, we must be aware of the inherent practical dilemma: while globalisation offers the potential for New

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<sup>60</sup> N. Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World*, Columbia University Press, 2008.

<sup>61</sup> I. M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton University Press, 1990.

Zealand's female athletes to gain greater visibility and recognition on the international stage, it also risks reinforcing Western, capitalist models of sport that prioritise profit over cultural diversity and community wellbeing.<sup>62</sup> The post-2024 strategy must navigate these tensions by advocating for the protection of cultural practices and ideology, like *mana wahine*, within global sporting arenas.

The *Women and Girls Strategy* is well-positioned to lead the way toward a more just and inclusive future for women in sport. By integrating principles like *mana wahine*, *rangatiratanga*, and intersectionality, the strategy can ensure that all women—regardless of race, class, or background—are empowered to participate, lead, and thrive in the world of sport. The post-2024 phase must build on the progress made, while boldly confronting the structural inequities that continue to limit women's potential. This must be achieved in order for the vision of a truly equitable and inclusive sports system for all women in Aotearoa New Zealand to be realised.

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<sup>62</sup> L. Pihama, "Globalization and Indigenous Sports: A Pacific Perspective," *New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Studies*, 2020.

## Outstanding Scholarship

**Subject:** Health and Physical Education

**Standard:** 93501

**Total score:** 20

Item	Score	Marker commentary
1	06	<b>Application of knowledge</b> This report effectively demonstrates a solid integration and application of relevant HPE knowledge, including hauora, attitudes and values, and sociocultural barriers. It successfully integrates advanced concepts of gender performativity, intersectionality, and mana wahine as a theoretical leadership framework. The context is strongly grounded in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, there are areas where HPE-specific knowledge could be explored in greater depth, and a stronger focus on health promotion concepts and socioecological perspectives would have enhanced the overall understanding. Primary research requires proper referencing, for example when using examples from peers' experiences. Section 2 lacks depth and could have benefited from the inclusion of a relevant theory or concept. There are strong conclusions drawn around future actions that could be taken to strengthen the application of the Women and Girls in Sport strategy (WGS) and address the issue of gender inequity in sport.
2	07	<b>Critical thinking</b> The report provides a thorough and critical evaluation of the issue of gender equity in sport, as well as a detailed critique of the WGS. Each section of the report links back to the WGS, with a more robust and insightful critique of WGS towards the end. The candidate's evaluation is sophisticated and uses their insight to propose clear and coherent future actions. Their analysis reflects divergent, high-level thinking, particularly regarding the contrast between hierarchical and collaborative structures in sports. The use of their own illustrations showed strong understanding of the issue.
3	07	<b>Communication</b> The report is well written with a clear structure. It is sophisticated without being overdone. The report is mostly well researched, and presents a compelling argument for the systemic changes needed to enhance the effectiveness of the WGS. The majority of the images add value to the report by demonstrating synthesis of key concepts.