

# Imagining New Zealand Through the Sports Media

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# What do we know about the mainstream sports media?

- Very conservative (behind the times)
  - where are the emerging ‘new’ sports?
- Support not challenge existing cultural ideas
  - about gender and race/ethnicity especially
- Reduce rather than expand ideas about what counts or what is possible
- But...huge growth in ‘new media’ challenging dominance of traditional media

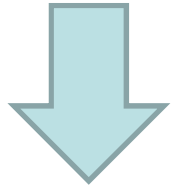
# Mediasport in the Curriculum

- HPENZC offers valuable chances for young people to “engage critically with the barrage of information” coming at them via the media (Jan Wright, 2004, p. 195)
- Analysing media representations of sport/physical activity not only valuable learning activities but...
- vital if we are “...to promote critical thinking and questioning about...movement culture within society” (Ian Culpan, 2000, p. 21)

# What do we know about young people and the media?

- Media is central in their lives, especially new media
- Many are passionate about sport
  - particularly in NZ
- Can be powerful site to engage them in learning and critique
- But...we don't know much about how they engage with sports media

passive  
vulnerable  
consumers



Reality probably  
about here

*youth  
believe  
here*

active  
creative  
users



Fast food ads  
Violence on TV  
Internet access/control

Youtube  
Bebo, Facebook

May shift over time (age, knowledge, skills) or  
between different issues or events or as new media emerge

- “Media culture is not merely consumed and discarded, but is utilised to construct personal identities...the material the media supplies is not passively absorbed, but is actively appropriated as the stuff of people’s sense of self, their place in the social world, and the bases of their hopes and expectations of the future...” David Kirk (1993, p. 18)

# Research: UK, USA, NZ

- Tend to reflect values, ideas embedded in media
- Value identification
  - affiliation to national (regional/local) teams, stars
- Value intensity – excitement/emotional connection
  - exciting, fast, tense, dramatic, best in world
- Both genders follow major media men's sports
- Both genders indifferent to women's sport
  - had trouble naming female athletes
  - see it as slower, boring, unexciting, unaggressive
  - but netball outranked rugby tests in most of last 5 years

# Gender: Young men/boys

- Enjoy being physically demonstrative/boisterous
- Enjoy demonstrating knowledge
- Enjoy technology (slow motion, replays, sound)
- Resist attempts to sexualise male players
  - “He looks like a poof”
- Indifferent about sexualisation of females but prefer focus on skills, stars
- Choose male athletes as heroes, role models
- Assume girls not interested in/know sport
  - “When we lost, everyone got upset but the girls go ‘so what’....girls don’t really understand do they?”

# Limited Resources for Girls

- Much lower coverage of female sport = fewer resources for girls to find same-sex role models/heroines
  - Watch more women's sports
  - Could name more women athletes
- Some articulate & knowledgeable – but mostly *about male sport*
- Some refused to be fans
- Some focused on 'sexy' aspects
- “Yum!...he's sexy....sexy legs!” “Yuk, he's so ugly”

- “the impacts of both mediated messages and social institution[s] appear to be shaping the beliefs and expectations of the sport audience” (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2009, Canada)

# The New Zealand sporting nation

- We can ask questions such as...
- What story does sports media coverage tell about New Zealand?
- What 'values' appear to be the most important?
- Who 'counts' as representative of 'us'?
- How has the sports media adapted to changes in cultural, racial, ethnic make up of New Zealand?

# 1. The male nation

<b>Usual Levels</b>	<b>Male Everyday</b>	<b>Male Major Event</b>	<b>Female Everyday</b>	<b>Female Major Event</b>
<b>1982 - 2002 average</b>	<b>80%</b>		<b>10%</b>	
<b>Major Event: 2002 Commonwealth Games</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>66%</b>
<b>Major Event: 2004 Olympics</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>27%</b>

- New Zealanders equate “masculinity with New Zealandness and New Zealandness with masculinity.... The heroic...is written in the masculine” (Cooper, 1999, p. 97).
- “It is this fact, the unusual social condition of a large surplus of men to women in the white population, which turned Pakeha New Zealand into a man’s country” (Phillips, 1996, p. 6).

## 2. The 'hard' nation

- Emphasis on violence, physical recklessness, enduring/inflicting pain and injury (Bassett, 1984, 1990; Pringle, 2001)
- Less verbal discussion of violence but plenty of visuals (Star, 1994)
- *“It is just not right to see a grown man with a chin quiver...it’s a foul thing”* (Marc Ellis, Sportscafe, 2005, in relation to an Australian rugby player showing emotion while apologising for a racial vilification incident)
- *“the sports fields of New Zealand are not going to empty overnight with young men eschewing rugby for the rumba...”* (“From Hooker,” 2005, p. B4, in relation to rugby player Norm Hewitt winning the first Dancing with the Stars).

# The hard nation (reprise)

- **Metaphors of war and physical domination**

(Rugby data from Jerome Sanson, 2009; Netball data from Jacqui Lawrence, Bailee Brandford, Brice Hoare and Dani Kilpatrick, 2009)

<b>Rugby Union (2009 Super 14 final)</b>	<b>Netball (2009 ANZ Championship)</b>
<p>Killed, killer blow, slaughtering, strike, onslaught, counter-attack, bombed, shell-shocked, firepower, massacre, crushed, thrashed, trampled, steam-rolled, hammer, mauled, hiding, dominated</p> <p>“Battered heroes”</p>	<p>Dismantle, challenge, terrorised, asserted dominance, attack, clash, stamp dominance, take the hits, thump, drub, thrashing, destroying</p> <p>“Neither side left anything on the court except for plenty of sweat and possibly a little skin”</p> <p>“battle for the ball”</p> <p>“fires a ball back into court”</p>

### 3. The white nation

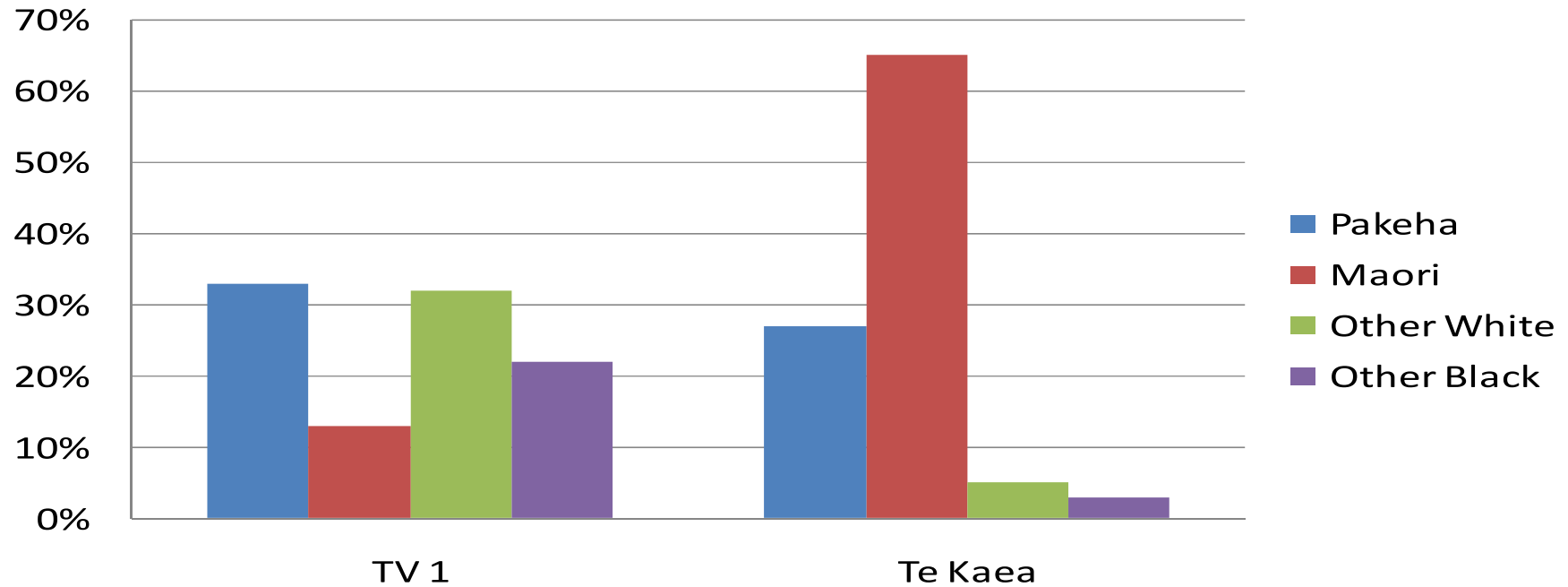
- Coverage of death of Sir Peter Blake in 2001:
- “He was the way New Zealanders would like to see themselves” (Sanson, 2001b, p. 4).
- Coverage reinforced old ideas about nationalism and masculinity – ideas most strongly tied to Pakeha identity
- May show that Pakeha feel threatened by shifts in New Zealand society (Bell, 2004)

## 4. The brown nation

- Positive images of Maori and Pacific athletes
- have a powerful and symbolic effect in challenging common-sense racisms that suggest that people of color “do not quite fully belong to the nation” (Carrington & McDonald, 2001, p. 3).
- *“I think our successful Polynesian footballers have really helped in terms of making Pacific Islanders acceptable to a big majority of middle New Zealand.”* Oscar Kightley, comedian, “Chinks, Coconuts & Currymunchers” (TVNZ, 2002)
- But men behaving badly is always a story (such as Tana Umaga hitting a teammate with a woman’s handbag)

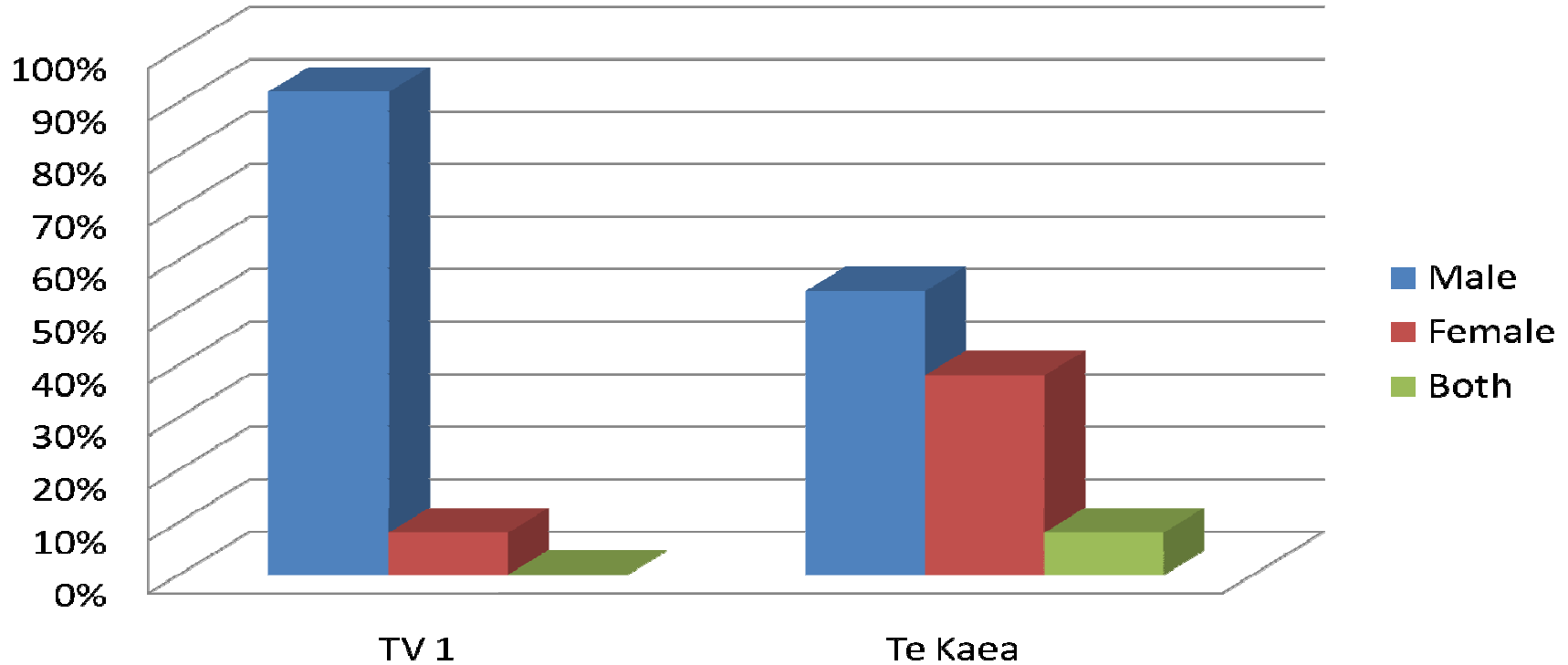
# Expanding representation

(Adam Steele and Te Whaiwhaia Ritchie, 2009)



Channel	Pakeha (Blue, left)	Maori (Red, 2 <sup>nd</sup> left)	Other White (Green, 3 <sup>rd</sup> left)	Other Black (Purple, right)
TV 1	33%	13%	32%	22%
Te Kaea	27%	65%	5%	3%

# Gender



Channel	Male s (blue)	Females (red)	Mixed (both genders) (green)
TV 1	92%	8%	0%
Te Kaea	54%	40%	6%

## 5. The (not) Asian nation

- Li Chunli, table tennis
- Won gold, silver, 2 bronze, 2002 Commonwealth Games, more than any other New Zealand athletes
- But she received much less coverage than other Pakeha, Maori or Pacific athletes who won fewer medals
- *“I think that the Asian community will really only truly be welcome when there is an All Black with the surname like Wong or Kahn, you know. It’s funny but rugby is so important to us that it’s like that’s the ultimate.”* Oscar Knightley, comedian “Chinks, Coconuts & Curry munchers” (2002)

## 6. The able-bodied nation

- Athletes with a disability almost invisible
- ‘Supercrip’ or pity angles
- But...New Zealand media = athlete first, disability second
- Public don’t care (27 interviews, based on research by Brenda Cockburn, Te Amohaere Hauiti-Parapara and Chrissy Sedon, 2009)
- >20 knew NZ Olympians
- <5 knew NZ Paralympians
- Low interest in TV watching

# Main findings

(Cathy Gibbs, 2004: TV3/TV1 news, Sports Tonight + 3 papers)

- **Emphasis on winning**
  - 47% headlines
  - “Shotputter blows field away for gold”
- **Women invisible**
  - No NZ women won (0.03% TV, 4% articles)
- **Strong emphasis on national identity**
  - “Wheel Blacks off to a flyer” “Kiwis”
- **Emphasis on regional identity in papers**
- **Controversy was news**
  - Almost 1/3<sup>rd</sup> headlines: “mass brawl” “Botched start ruins...medal shot”

# 7. The insecure nation

- Incredibly high rating for importance of sport to national identity
- Media focus on NZ medal winners
- 2000 Olympic 'failure' blamed on society in general & education system in particular
- Needed deep-rooted change from “politically correct attitudes” in schools where “taking part was everything and winning was nothing”
- Content to participate and have fun, lacking will to win or killer instinct, lacking determination to succeed

# A continuing discourse in 2006

- **Kiwis lack mental toughness, says Mallard** (newspaper headline)

Sports Minister Trevor Mallard says some Kiwi athletes have shown they lack the "mental toughness" needed to clinch a sporting victory and believes they need to adopt the Australians' "cut-throat" attitude.

# Canadian difference

- Similarly ‘unsuccessful’
- But not blame athletes
- Blame sport funding & sport system
- Numerous stories on lack of funding:
- *“...we, as a nation, are getting exactly what we pay for here. Years of government cutbacks have come home to roost.”*
- Not solely blame government
- Also blamed media and the ‘nation’
  - through being indifferent, not having right outlook or motivation

# Sibling rivalry

- New Zealand coverage focused very much on Australian success versus New Zealand failure
- Represented quite negatively
- Arrogant, boastful, cocky, brash, gloaters
- “even the Aussies, with their massive capacity for self-congratulation”
- “And New Zealand managed this without any of the bragging and chest-thumping which seems second nature to Australians”
- Envy morphed into despair at seemingly inevitable Australian wins
- “recurring nightmare but worse...[NZ] choke...”

# Australian Coverage

- Virtually ignored New Zealand
- Framed itself as competing on the world stage, as shaking off the colonial bonds (as a convict settlement)
- Australians were competing against:
  - 1. World and Games records
  - 2. World sporting events taking place elsewhere
  - 3. Themselves (State by State medal results)
  - 4. Occasionally the 'mother' country England (but mostly because of amount of \$\$ put into sport)

## 8. The loyal nation

- OK to join the Kiwi diaspora as long as you are ‘for’ New Zealand
- Not OK if you compete (& win) against New Zealand
- Peter Blake: a hero (even though he lived overseas for most of his life = won *for* NZ)
- Coutts: a traitor (even though he lived in New Zealand most of his life = won *against* NZ)
- *“To many in New Zealand his decision was seen as the act of a traitor, by a man who valued love of money above love of country”* (Phillips, 2000, p. 324).

# Conclusions

- Sport as a cultural practice is impacted by same forces as rest of society
- Because sport is so important to NZ identity, it is a great site at which to see these issues playing out
- It has the potential to challenge or to powerfully reinforce our cultural scripts – because it is so ‘visible’ and appears so ‘natural’ and ‘real’
- ...but...sports media is a conservative rather than emancipatory force