

Beyond ‘Good Enough for a Girl’

Understanding how mainstream media representations of the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku) have shifted over a decade.

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Abstract

The game of rugby has historically been seen as a man's game, particularly in Aotearoa New Zealand where the nation's identity is centred around the mythology that is the All Blacks. As a result, women in rugby and in particular the Black Ferns or Nga Mamaku have typically been sidelined in the landscape of sports media. Mainstream media have created an illusion that this pattern of marginalisation is no longer present and that equity in coverage has already been achieved for the Black Ferns. However, it is far from the truth. Rooted in patriarchal and colonial systems, the Black Ferns face systemic barriers that intersect to protect the masculine identity of rugby and maintain male dominance at the top of the sports media hierarchy.

The present research investigates how mainstream media have constructed representation of the Black Ferns across two distinct periods (2014-2015 and 2024-2025) which both includes a non-World Cup year and World Cup year. In particular, the study examines how visibility, framing patterns, and representation has shifted across the decade and what these shifts reveal about media attitudes and broader structures. Relevant literature and secondary sources of online articles have been used in this study to understand these shifts and expose what gaps still exists for media in their coverage of the Black Ferns. The study concludes that although mainstream media have made progress to move away from gendered stereotypes and limited visibility for the Black Ferns, there are still significant gaps in media coverage of the team. It uncovers subtle traces of gendered ideologies that frame women in a stereotypical manner, masked patterns of conditional visibility, and fragmented portrayal of the players indigenous identities.

Mainstream media still have a long way to go before they claim the illusion of equity in media coverage as a reality for the Black Ferns. It is recommended that media change the institutional structure to allow for more routine coverage of the team, build competency around the use of gendered stereotypes, and tackle more stories that speak to the cultural identity of a team that is predominantly Maori and Pasifika.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 18 June 2026

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Clearly state the AI tools used.	
AI Tool(s) Used:	Copilot
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Prompts Used:	Please suggest how I might make this better. What more should I consider to make my writing clearer or flow better, do not rewrite paragraph but just provide suggestions. Please provide a basic coding framework as a starter for my research.
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Describe how the AI output was used, edited, or transformed.	
Post-AI Processing Methods:	After the output was provided, I then wrote my own work with the guidance of how to make my writing better. The coding framework was refined as mentioned in the methodology.
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By signing you are confirming that the AI use stated in the table(s) above are accurate and follow AUT's recommended guidelines detailed in the AI Hub and Postgraduate Handbook.		
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		Date: 18 June 2026

1. Growing Up in a ‘Rugby Nation’

Growing up as a brown girl in South Auckland, some of my earliest memories involve my family gathering around the television, whether it was 7pm or 3am, to cheer on the All Blacks. I have always been drawn to rugby, not only for the excitement of the game but for the strong sense of community that surrounds it. For me, rugby has never been just a sport to watch; it represents a shared identity and collective spirit. In the childhood of almost everyone around me, rugby felt almost compulsory to the culture of Aotearoa New Zealand, and the All Blacks were at the forefront and the face of that true Kiwi identity. For a long time, that shaped my understanding of rugby and how it became an engrained part of our national identity. The All Blacks were the most prominent team when it came to thinking about rugby in Aotearoa New Zealand, no questions asked.

As I grew older, my knowledge on rugby broadened and I discovered there was a national women’s rugby team known as the Black Ferns or Ngā Mamaku and realised then how little I knew about them. I questioned why I had never heard their names spoken with the same respect as the All Blacks or why I saw the news rarely covering the national women’s team.

As a Pasifika girl from South Auckland, I became more aware of the media’s power to shape public perception especially as I stepped more into the communications space for work. I noticed early on in my childhood how news coverage of Pasifika people or matters related to South Auckland often relied on narrow narratives that reinforced stereotypes through selective storytelling. I had recognised a similar pattern in the limited coverage of the Ngā Mamaku compared with the All Blacks which further heightened my interest in the team and its representation in the media. My own personal experience with being misrepresented in the media at a broader level as a Pacific Islander who lives in South Auckland, led me to critically examine the way in which media construct narratives and influence perceptions. My cultural identity and lived experiences, and growing love for the sport of rugby, has therefore shaped my interest in analysing how Ngā Mamaku are represented in mainstream news media. It has deepened my understanding of the significance on the place of rugby, gender, and media in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.1 The Real Roots of Rugby

Rugby is deeply embedded in the national identity of Aotearoa, being heavily tied to normalised ideas of masculinity and tradition. The men's national rugby team, the All Blacks, is a mythological symbol for the nation and has been the face of a collective identity centred around the sport. The All Blacks are the team that comes to mind when people think of rugby in Aotearoa New Zealand. This narrative is driven largely by the media and, vice versa, actively shapes what the media prioritises when it comes to telling stories about the sport.

Although rugby originated as a sport designed for men, it has grown into one of the country's most dominant and culturally significant sporting institutions, taking up a large portion of mainstream sports media coverage. Governed by New Zealand Rugby (NZR) and supported by a system of grassroots, provincial, and professional pathways, rugby is widely understood as being central to what it means to be a "Kiwi." While the sport has increasingly embraced women's participation, there has always been a long-standing history of marginalisation of women's rugby in Aotearoa New Zealand. This issue continues to persist today with a lack of investment, visibility, and efforts towards professionalisation for women's rugby (Bruce, 2023).

Despite its history of marginalisation, the Black Ferns have continued to achieve major success including being the first women's team to be World Rugby's team of the year and bringing home more than half of all Women's Rugby World Cups, a record that surpasses that of the All Blacks by some distance. However, they continue to receive limited media coverage that is often episodic or only during major tournaments (Bruce, 2014). This lack of visibility contributes to a skewed public perception of their achievements and reinforces the idea that women's rugby is secondary to the men's game or is less exciting to watch than men's rugby. Nonetheless, the Black Ferns have elevated the standard of women's rugby globally and demonstrated their capability to perform at the highest level. Their achievements provide more than enough reasons for equitable media representation, yet mainstream coverage and representation of the team still fall short.

This same pattern – men being treated as the "real athletes" or men's sports being perceived as the "real" version of the sport – is not just found in local research. International research consistently highlights the gender hierarchy which positions men's sports as the cultural standard, receiving the majority of sports coverage, structural investment and analytical consistency (Cook et al., 2015). Globally, women in sports are often trivialised and

underreported or limited to episodic coverage driven by major tournaments (Fink, 2015). This body of literature demonstrates that although visibility has improved marginally over the years, media coverage of women's sports including women's rugby is still embedded in systemic marginalisation, lower visibility outside major tournaments, and framing biases. Grounded in agenda-setting, framing, and intersectionality theories, international and local literature examines the existing landscape and identifies a gap which this research seeks to fill.

1.2 Media Marginalisation of the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku)

While media coverage of the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku) appears to have somewhat improved in recent years, especially with the rise of digital platforms, and particularly after major tournament successes, there is still a significant gap in how often they are recognised and the type of recognition given. This can be understood by looking at how mainstream media actively constructs public perception of the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku) through three key concepts that are central to this study: visibility, framing, and representation. Visibility is important because it recognises how often and how prominently the team appears in the news. Agenda-setting theory offers a lens on visibility that seeks to understand what the media chooses to prioritise and has an impact on what the public believe to be a priority. Framing and narrative patterns are also significant because they look beyond what stories are told and instead dive more into how the stories are told. Framing theory offers a lens through which news stories are constructed by way of intentional selection, emphasis and organisation of information in ways that shape how audiences understand them. In addition to visibility and framing, representation is a key factor because it focuses on whose perspectives are included and excluded, especially with matters such as indigenous representation. The inclusion of noting indigenous representation will not be a key focus but is still important as the team consists predominantly of women who are of Māori and Pasifika heritage. Together, these concepts alongside agenda-setting and framing theories help us understand how public perception is actively being created by mainstream media through the stories that they tell and how they choose to tell them. It acknowledges that such patterns of storytelling are continuously reproduced through purposeful editorial decisions reinforcing gendered hierarchies. These decisions highlight the need to look beyond quantitative data and to dive deeper into qualitative data so we have an in-depth understanding of how representation of the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku) is constructed.

1.3 The Research Gap

This study analyses how mainstream media has represented the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku) across two intentionally selected Women's Rugby World Cup cycles a decade apart. Existing global research demonstrates that there is little known about how the media representation of marginalised groups, particularly women in sport, has shifted over time. There is even less research that focuses specifically on Aotearoa New Zealand's national women's rugby team, with little to no scholarship that analyses how they have been portrayed in the media or whether this portrayal has changed over time.

There is currently no longitudinal analysis on the media representation of the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku), and no comparative work across multiple World Cup cycles or multiple media outlets. Research in Aotearoa New Zealand is also limited in its examination of media framing, especially in relation to women's sport and indigenous or marginalised athletes. This study seeks to address these gaps by analysing how mainstream media has represented the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku), how their visibility, framing and representation has changed over time, and what changes are still needed. By comparing coverage across different World Cup cycles and multiple media outlets, this study provides a holistic picture of how the team have been positioned in public discourse. It concludes with recommendations for improving mainstream media coverage which remains limited, uneven, and shaped by persistent assumptions about women in rugby.

1.4 Research Aims

This study seeks to answer the following question:

How have mainstream New Zealand news media constructed representation of the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku) across two World Cup eras, and how have visibility, framing and narrative patterns, and representation shifted between 2014-2015 and 2024-2025?

The main research question will be addressed by answering the following sub questions:

1. How does the visibility of the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku) coverage, in terms of frequency, depth, headline emphasis, and image use, differ between 2014-2015 and 2024-2025 across Stuff, New Zealand Herald, and Radio New Zealand (RNZ)?
2. How do the framing devices, patterns in tone, narrative, and language used to describe the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku) differ between the two distinct World Cup eras, and what do these reveal about changing media attitudes towards women's rugby in Aotearoa New Zealand?

3. In what ways do changes in representation and voice reflect broader shifts in professionalisation, status, and cultural positioning of women's rugby in Aotearoa New Zealand?
4. Which aspects of the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku) representation have improved over the decade, which have remained consistent, and what gaps or limitations in coverage persist?

These questions together aim to address a gap in the literature by advancing an underdeveloped area of research on representation of women's rugby in media.

2. Literature Review: A History of Media Marginalisation

Limited visibility of the Black Ferns is an issue within Aotearoa's mainstream media that continues to drive stereotypes about women in rugby, further reinforces the idea men in rugby are more exciting to watch, and marginalises women and girls from the sport and media in general. The Black Ferns is a team with significant international success and public recognition that is still growing today.

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

This section sets out the theories which ground the research and the way it is being analysed. It looks closely at how agenda-setting theory, framing theory and intersectionality all work together to make sense of how media construct representation of the Black Ferns.

2.1.1 Agenda-setting and framing mechanisms.

Agenda-setting theory highlights the power of media to choose which sports stories get told and which remain on the sideline (McCombs, 2014). Media have the ability to tell its audiences what to think about by giving salience to certain topics that they push out in high volumes and are purposely placed to receive high visibility (McCombs & Shaw, 2023; Setiadi, 2024). Agenda-setting helps to understand that at a deeper level, there are decisions being made which are dictated (McCombs & Shaw, 2023) by patriarchal structures to keep women's sport in the margins and men's sports as the centre of attention. Ideologies of patriarchy have led to the lack of female sports journalists, justified commercial pressures driving men's sports further than women's, and normalised the idea that sport is a place made by men for men (Bruce, 2016; Kane, 1996). This hierarchy of importance and visibility then becomes embedded into the everyday practices of media (Brooks & Herbert, 2006; Bruce, 2016; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). As a result, women's sports are only afforded a small amount of airtime or coverage compared to men's sports, reinforcing this hierarchy. Gendered mediation intersects with agenda-setting theory to provide a lens on interpretations that try to justify this hierarchy. It leans into the idea that because women are only given a restricted amount of airtime or coverage, journalists have no choice but to reproduce stereotypical narratives about women's sports because they typically maximise engagement and capture more attention (Fink, 2015; Toffoleti & Mewit, 2012). These stereotypical narratives that focus on the aesthetics, personal lives, or individual empowerment become a way for journalists to utilise post-feminist worldviews to hide issues such as a lack of institutional coverage (Fink, 2015). This post-feminist lens is particularly important when

looking at the temporal shift between the two periods being compared (2014-2015 and 2024-2025). In the 2014-2015 era, women's sports were largely invisible with minimal airtime or coverage in comparison to men's sports (Bruce, 2016). By 2024-2025, the media landscape shifts to celebrating women's sports by significantly increasing coverage during major tournaments or events like the Women's Rugby World Cup (Bruce, 2016; Bowes & Culvin, 2025; Sport New Zealand, 2024). Through post-feminism, critical analysis reveals that this transient surge in visibility is conditional where the media only provide coverage for female athletes and women's sports if they conform to the heteronormative standards that continue to drive the market. So, while the 2014-2015 era was defined by breaking patriarchal structures, the 2024-2025 era keeps the Black Ferns stuck in a post-feminist dilemma of being visible but highly commodified and shifts the weight of institutional success onto individual players. As a result, these curated and stereotypical stories are continuously reproduced, conditioning audiences to perceive men's sports as the gold standard against which all other sports should be evaluated.

Framing theory offers a framework for analysing how media influences its audiences in interpreting the stories they choose to tell. Through intentional selection of what to emphasise, language choices, and prioritisation of certain themes over others, the media are often trying to tell a particular type of story that fits into the hierarchy of news values (Entman, 1993; Bruce, 2016). It provides a lens to look not only at the limited amount of coverage given to women's sports and more into the type of coverage given. The media often frame women's sports in a particular way by telling stories that focus on stereotypical qualities associated with females including emotional vulnerability, sexual appearance, or matters related to their personal lives, rather than stories that talk to their athletic and tactical abilities. Framing theory also highlights how intentional exclusion is even more significant than what is intentionally included in news stories (Entman, 1993). This act of exclusion causes audiences to have a limited or a curated view of data and are heavily influenced in the way that they interpret stories (Entman, 1993). Furthermore, when these patterns of media representation are consistently shown over time, such frames become a normalised way of thinking. The mind is trained to automatically find interest in stories that utilise these dominant frames and to dismiss any other stories which do not fit with the interpretation lens media has conditioned into its audiences (Bruce, 2016; Entman, 1993; Parry et al., 2023).

2.1.2 Intersectionality: A multi-layered problem.

Amongst all these theories, it is crucial that the research applies a lens of intersectionality to diagnose the colonial, patriarchal and post-feminist structures that exist within the media and help keep Ngā Mamaku marginalised. Research shows that gender, race, and cultural identity are all intertwined to shape the way in which women of colour are represented and valued within both sports and media institutions (Crenshaw, 1991; Nakhid & Enari, 2024). With Ngā Mamaku being predominantly Māori and Pasifika, there is a need to understand how sexism and racism intersect to impact the level of visibility and type of coverage given to these women in Aotearoa New Zealand's media landscape.

Intersectionality brings to the forefront the idea that a female athlete of colour is subject to different media biases and stereotypes than that of a white female athlete, let alone a Māori and Pasifika male athlete and a white male athlete (Crenshaw 1991; Nakhid & Enari, 2024). It highlights the unique set of intersecting challenges that Māori and Pasifika players in Ngā Mamaku continuously face in sports media, where they have to deal with colonialism, patriarchy and post-feminist framing from the media all at once. These ideologies are demonstrated in the way media frame Māori and Pasifika women by emphasising their physical abilities in a masculine way or highlighting their culture as an aesthetic which often becomes tokenistic coverage (Crenshaw 1991; Nakhid & Enari, 2024). Sometimes, media will also completely exclude their voices or dismiss any stories centred around issues that Māori and Pasifika female athletes are facing, to avoid taking accountability for the institutionalised racism and sexism that is deeply embedded in its practices (Crenshaw 1991; Bruce, 2016; Nakhid & Enari, 2024). Intersectionality helps to recognise the depth in the challenges that majority of the players within Ngā Mamaku are facing, where media are actively making it difficult for them to receive fair and equitable coverage.

2.2 The Global Media Landscape of Rugby

Patterns of marginalisation are present in existing international literature for women in sports and in particular women in rugby. By examining these patterns and situating this within the global media landscape of rugby, there is an opportunity to understand how mainstream media typically construct and reinforce the representation of minority groups.

2.2.1. One-and-done coverage of women's rugby.

Globally, research shows that women have historically been marginalised in sports media; a 30-year study showed that women only receive about 5-15% of media sports

coverage across television and digital platforms (Cooky et al., 2021). It is revealed that men's sports are often prioritised in global sports media which they claim is driven by commercial pressures and audience demand. This claim is grounded in the myth that women's sports receive less coverage because they do not bring in enough commercially or because not many people watch women's sports anyways (Cooky et al., 2021; Bruce, 2016; Fink, 2015). International research debunks this by revealing that media intentionally put out more content on men's sports which leaves little room for women's sports to be covered, therefore resulting in a lack of interest or demand from the public (Cooky et al., 2021; Antunovic & Hardin, 2015; Messner, 2010). It moves away from this imposed idea that there is little demand for coverage of women's sports because there is little interest in it. Instead, international literature shows that the responsibility lies back with the media because it is an active force that shapes the demand and supply for sports coverage (Cooky et al., 2021; Antunovic & Hardin, 2015). The same myth is used to justify the lack of funding and production value that is afforded to women's sports (Cooky et al., 2021). Women's sports often receive few sponsorships or little investment compared to men's sports. With this little coverage, women's sports are typically given low visibility, have less images, use low quality images, and lack depth or length (Fink, 2015; Cooky et al., 2021; Everbach, 2022). However, the literature again proves this myth to be just that, where the lack of funding and quality of coverage is a direct result of the media choosing to supply more content on men's sports than women. In addition to this, women's sports are also known to receive "One and done" coverage that breaks narrative continuity, intentionally keeping the audience small (Cooky et al., 2022). It is important for coverage to have continuity or 'follow up' stories being told because it allows readers to know more about the players, statistics, and rivalries. It brings readers and viewers along on a journey that they feel a part of and therefore create further interest, growing the audience for women's sports (Cooky et al., 2022).

Marginalisation is further driven not just by how often women are covered in sports media but also in how they are covered. At a global scale, media continue to frame women through a lens of emotion, aesthetics, or personal life rather than athletic skill (Rowe & Prates Silva, 2023; Scovel, 2024; Liu & Ahmed, 2023; Tuchman, 1978; Billings & Angelini, 2007). Furthermore, this marginalization is reinforced through the language used in women's sports coverage, which is typically "bland" or flat compared to the high-stakes, cinematic framing reserved for men's sports (Cooky et al., 2021). This disparity creates a self-perpetuating cycle of under-investment; by delivering uninteresting reporting under the belief that

women's sports in itself is unexciting, media actively produce and maintain the lack of demand they claim exists and produces what is known as "gender-bland sexism" (Cooky et al., 2021). These intentional choices contribute to the public perception of women's sports being less exciting and less important which continues to keep women's sport marginalised.

2.2.2 Digital media changes the game.

These patterns of marginalisation in media representation are present not only in traditional media but in digital media spaces that have grown in recent years, where they continue to reinforce gendered stereotypes by sharing stories of women athletes through femininity, personality, or vulnerabilities (Antunovic & Hardin, 2015). It is often assumed that the current media landscape which has grown in recent years has already 'achieved' a sense of 'gender equality' in sports media; however, a post-feminist perspective argues that a growth in visibility does not mean a shift in the way media have covered women's sports. Whilst modern digital media spaces have allowed for more coverage of women's sports, there are still biases that keep women's sports in the margins of a world driven by patriarchy (Thompson-Radford & Skey, 2025). A post-feminist view acknowledges that athletes can connect directly with audiences on digital media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook but much of the work then shifts to female athletes themselves to justify getting more coverage (Antunovic & Hardin, 2015). They are still required to work harder than male athletes to build and maintain a similar level of audience interaction, because of the gender inequalities that already exist within the system (Antunovic & Hardin, 2015; Crawford, 2025). These challenges become more complex for female athletes of colour who need to overcome other social barriers before being able to achieve the same level of visibility on digital media platforms as a white female athlete or male athletes (Crenshaw 1991; Nakhid & Enari, 2024; Bowes & Culun, 2024). Digital media platforms continue to drive algorithms that rewards stereotypical content focused on beauty, lifestyle aesthetics, and traditional femininity of athletes (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). It demonstrates that the same dynamics which exist in traditional media still exist in digital media, where the same demands for female athletes to fit the mould is no longer being pushed just by journalists in traditional media but also by the curated algorithms of digital media. This is evidence of the evolution of modern marginalisation with digital media spaces repackaging old stereotypes found in traditional media (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018; Antunovic & Hardin, 2015). A post-feminist lens recognises this evolution in the form of modern media using the language of female empowerment to create a facade of gender equality in coverage and masking the episodic

nature of coverage. The analysis of the non-World Cup years (2015 and 2025) seeks to explore how these post-feminist narratives tend to celebrate women's sports as a novelty that is temporary to avoid dismantling the underlying patriarchal structures of sports media. This reflects the deeply embedded cultural norms and perceptions around women's sports in a world that caters primarily for masculinity (Lutkewitte, 2023). A radical-feminist lens contextualises this masculinity within this study by arguing that patriarchy works alongside capitalism to purposely diminish the value of women's sports, keeping men's sports as the gold standard (Lutkewitte, 2023; Thompson-Radford & Skey, 2025). This has been routinely found in institutions such as newsrooms and sports media complexes (Bruce, 2016; Fink, 2015; Lutkewitte, 2023). Aotearoa reflects these same global dynamics, but the nation's deep-rooted rugby culture and media structures amplify them, a pattern well documented in Aotearoa scholarship (Bruce, 2008, 2016; McLeod, 2022; Enari & Nakhid, 2024).

2.3 Rugby and Representation of Ngā Mamaku in Aotearoa

This section will expose the institutional patriarchal structure of rugby in Aotearoa New Zealand through uncovering how the sport has become embedded into the national identity and what impact that has on the way in which women fit into the media ecosystem. It examines how women have continuously been marginalised specifically within the media landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.3.1 *A man's game in a man's world.*

In Aotearoa, New Zealand, rugby is more than a sport. It's a cultural institution tied to national identity, masculinity, and colonial history (Calabro, 2016; Nauright, 1999). Historically, rugby was used by the British to control the natural physical strength that Māori possessed and they viewed that as something to 'conquer and civilise', because the British feared losing their 'civilised ways' to the way of the Māori which they saw as lawlessness (Hokowhitu, 2004; Phillips, 1987). The sport was introduced through state and schools replacing traditional Māori practices with colonial practices of discipline and rule-following (Hokowhitu, 2004). Rugby became an institution that marginalised the Māori population out of academic and political opportunities by keeping them occupied and limited to doing physical activities such as sport and manual labour (Hokowhitu, 2004). When the game of rugby was first introduced into the country, women were intentionally excluded because their femininity posed a threat to the British attempts in conditioning Māori men into "civilised"

men (Phillips, 1987). Literature in rugby history reveals that women have always been systemically marginalised from the sport since its introduction into the country.

The All Blacks are part of a national mythology, and the media is largely responsible for driving the narrative that the team is a natural part of national identity, rather than being the result of a set of cultural choices (Hope, 2002). These public perceptions only reinforce prioritisation of coverage of the All Blacks and entrenches a hierarchy where men's rugby dominates the Aotearoa sporting culture especially across mainstream media (Hokowhitu, 2004; Nauright, 1999). Bruce (2016) highlights how media coverage of the All Blacks is maintained consistently, whereas media coverage of the Black Ferns is only ever episodic or event-based. Outside major achievements or tournaments, the Black Ferns are hardly covered by mainstream media, leaving visibility reactive, conditional and temporary for the team (McLeod, 2022; Bruce, 2016). The media coverage of the All Blacks is consistent despite inconsistent levels of newsworthiness. Much of the coverage will range across multiple news beats, including injuries, debates on selection, commercial partnerships, or even opinion pieces and more (Bruce, 2016). The coverage occurs even in the off-seasons where media will continue to cover the All Blacks in other aspects of their lives outside of the game of rugby. It shows that the issue around a lack of coverage on the Black Ferns is not due to the limited availability in coverage but due to the intentional decision that media makes to oversaturate the market with news about the All Blacks. A post-feminist lens helps us see that the coverage of the Black Ferns is limited to the small pool of what fits within pre-existing boundaries of the patriarchal, masculine, and colonial structures of media for women's rugby.

The All Blacks also have major influence in other areas of media where they are used as more than just sporting role models but as the face of campaigns, political speeches, advertising and the branding of Aotearoa as a whole. With this level of prominence and a large sphere of influence, people typically think of the All Blacks when they think of Aotearoa New Zealand. Evidently, the media are actively working to build and reinforce this brand of the New Zealand identity around the All Blacks (Scherer & Jackson, 2010). This same pattern of using rugby as an institution to drive patriarchy and colonialism has evolved over time and is now combined with capitalism to allow only a small group of people to benefit from this institution. It has become a heavily monopolised sport with commercial pressures and objectives driving decisions around who plays, who gets the spotlight, and who should get paid the most. Rugby continues to dominate front pages, sports bulletins, and talkback radio. It is often the forefront of sporting news in Aotearoa and contributes to this

prioritisation of men's rugby over women in media coverage. Instead of rugby being used to condition its players, it is now used by media to condition its audiences into their patriarchal ways of thinking.

Women's rugby remains sidelined in media narratives. This marginalisation is also evident in several of the other sports professionalised for women in Aotearoa New Zealand. There are several women's teams which have been marginalised despite having major success in their own respective sports. Unlike rugby, netball became socially accepted as a sport which females could play, because it did not involve physical contact nor did it threaten the Kiwi identity or the masculine and patriarchal systems within rugby (Nauright & Broomhall, 1994; Thompson, 1988). The media valued “feminine” sports such as netball and did not value women playing in “masculine” sports such as rugby (Ferguson, 2018). As a result, media were able to maintain the public perception of rugby being exclusive to males, increasing resistance towards women entering the world of rugby, let alone playing the game. The world of sports and media is tailored to always prioritise men and men's sport, reaffirming the idea that sport is an exclusive place that was made by men for men.

2.3.2 Women on the sidelines of rugby.

The history of the Black Ferns presents a profound paradox within New Zealand's sports media landscape, where their sporting dominance has historically coexisted with systemic media marginalisation and structural underinvestment. During the 2014-2015 era, despite entering this period as undefeated four-time world champions, mainstream media continued to limit their coverage of the team and framed them through a lens of amateurism (Bruce, 2016). This ideological framing often positioned the Black Ferns as a novelty and women's rugby as a hobby, constructing a public perception of the Black Ferns as non-elite athletes who were secondary to the All Blacks (Tovia, 2013; Bruce, 2022; Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013). Such intentional agenda-setting by the media protected the patriarchal hegemony of the All Blacks (Hokowhitu, 2004). It ensured that even though the women's national team outperformed the men's national team on the global stage, their visibility remains episodic, tournament driven, and structurally restricted. This exclusion is particularly evident in the analysis of New Zealand sports journalism, which reveal that coverage of women's rugby prior to the 2020s made up only 1% of coverage of all rugby news whilst men's rugby monopolised the remaining 99% of coverage (Bruce, 2016). As a result, this lack of visibility for the Black Ferns only reinforced this pattern of structural

inequities, removing opportunities for commercial sponsorship and institutional funding for the team (Bruce, 2016; 2022; Nauright, 1999; Antunovic & Hardin, 2015). Due to the All Blacks being historically prioritised over the Black Ferns, the media are able to preserve this narrative of rugby as being inherently masculine and exclusive to males in Aotearoa New Zealand. Consequently, the systemic marginalisation of the Black Ferns demonstrates a conscious effort by the media to protect the cultural and commercial monopoly of men's rugby and erase any threats that the Black Ferns posed against the national identity built around the All Blacks (Bruce, 2016; Hokowhitu, 2004; Antunovic & Hardin, 2015).

2.3.3 Changes in modern media coverage.

Media coverage of the Black Ferns has traditionally and historically been episodic or only visible during major international tournaments and achievements (Bruce, 2016; 2022). This pattern of conditional visibility was most prominent during the 2021 Women's Rugby World Cup (hosted in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2022), when media coverage had increased significantly from its historical 1% baseline to 21.9% of all rugby news (Bruce, 2022; Sport New Zealand, 2023). Documented as the largest increase in visibility in the history of women's rugby, this pivotal point in women's rugby history establishes the baseline for the comparative timeframes used in this research. This study specifically analyses media representation across two distinct eras, looking at a non-World Cup year and World Cup year prior to this shift compared to a non-World Cup year and a World Cup year following this shift.

The public demand for coverage of the Black Ferns and sold-out stadiums during the 2022 Women's Rugby World Cup shows a cultural shift that fragmented the normalised narrative of rugby being exclusive to a masculine domain (Hokowhitu, 2004; Bruce, 2022; Sport New Zealand, 2023). It validates the growth in legitimacy of women's rugby in Aotearoa New Zealand demonstrating that women's rugby possessed the same level of commercial appeal and excitement that rivalled men's rugby. However, despite this temporary spike in visibility, the coverage for the Black Ferns remained inconsistent and were still yet established into routine sports journalism like that of the All Blacks. Commercial incentives continue to drive mainstream media to prioritise tournament driven and episodic coverage of the Black Ferns because it yields immediate economic returns and feeds into the monopolisation of rugby (Sam & Jackson, 2019). Crucially, this episodic hypervisibility masks the profound lack of narrative continuity, as media coverage tends to

drop off once the tournaments have ended. This intense focus on tournaments or major events often obscures the ongoing gendered representations where media narratives prioritise heteronormative feminine traits such as motherhood and domestic lifestyle over athletic abilities (Antunovic, 2022; Bruce, 2016). A post-feminist lens argues that this modern visibility forces the structural burden on to the Black Ferns to cultivate curated individual and aesthetic brands which fit the system that allows them to secure financial sponsorship and cultural capital (Thorpe et al., 2017).

The coverage of professional women athletes has also been influenced by structural shifts in New Zealand's media landscape, such as mergers, digital adaptation, and shrinking newsrooms. McGregor and Fountaine (2006) argue that reduced resources lead to reliance on wire services and pre-packaged content, which prioritise men's sport and establishes them as the default. In addition to this, there have been structural changes to mainstream media outlets including the restructuring of major conglomerates like NZME and Stuff which resulted in a reduction of staff working in specialised sports journalism like women's rugby (Myllylahti & Meese, 2024). Furthermore, broadcasters prioritised the rugby rights package over the need to invest more in women's rugby. The intentional reduction of female reporters focused on women's sport, and an increasing reliance on material released by New Zealand Rugby allows the governing body to control the narrative and further marginalise women's rugby in Aotearoa's mainstream media (Jackson, 2013; Bruce, 2013). Obel (2010) adds that editorial decisions shaped by gendered assumptions about audience interest, creates a self-fulfilling cycle where low coverage is weaponised to justify ongoing marginalisation of minority groups in the sporting landscape. Media institutions have operationalised these gendered assumptions to rationalise staff redundancies and reduction of coverage on the Black Ferns. It is evident that commercial priorities and media ownership structures favour men's rugby due to being a highly commodified spectacle that generates reliable revenue, and therefore reinforces gender hierarchies (Sam & Jackson, 2019).

2.4 Finding the Gap and Seeing the Game

Whilst existing literature acknowledges that there has been a global shift in the representation of women's rugby from no visibility to hyper-visibility, there is still a lack of research capturing how this temporal shift operates textually within the unique landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand. Previous research frequently evaluates isolated mega-events or provides broad quantitative data that do not discuss specific ways in which language and

themes have evolved over time. This study directly addresses this gap by analysing and comparing mainstream New Zealand news coverage of online articles across two comparative periods, 2014-2015 and 2024-2024. It maps the structural shifts in visibility, interrogates the shift in specific framing and narrative patterns, and exposes how the mediated representation of the Black Ferns has changed across the two selected periods.

3. Methodology: Exploring the news

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to examine how mainstream media in Aotearoa New Zealand constructs the representation of the Black Ferns and how that has transformed over time. This study focuses on online news articles from three major media outlets in Aotearoa New Zealand: *Stuff*, *New Zealand Herald*, and *Radio New Zealand (RNZ)*. Through the comparison of two distinct eras, 2014-2015 and 2024-2025, the study analyses media coverage across both a Women's Rugby World Cup year and a non-World Cup year. The dataset in this research consists of publicly available online articles that have been purposively selected according to a criterion that was established for this study. To ensure analytical transparency and clarity, a structured coding framework was developed and utilised to systematically analyse the dataset.

A qualitative content analysis was used as the primary method for this study that is supported by descriptive counts to contextualise the qualitative findings. This mixed approach allows for the identification of broader patterns in media representation and a thorough interpretation of these patterns and what they mean.

Using agenda setting and framing theories along with intersectionality, this study evaluates how mainstream media actively shapes public perceptions of the Black Ferns. These theoretical frameworks are informed by existing literature regarding women in rugby, gender representation in sports media, and historical coverage of the Black Ferns.

Finally, it addresses the ethical considerations that define some of the boundaries that dictates the scope of this research.

3.1 Methodological Framework: Qualitative Content Analysis

A qualitative content analysis was used as the primary research method for this study which seeks to interpret meanings of text through a structured and versatile method of analysis (Schreier, 2012). The researcher organised data found in the articles into meaningful categories and the content was interpreted on a surface level, as well as a deeper level that examined underlying meanings, assumptions and frames that shape media representation. An interpretivist constructivism epistemology guided this study helping me to recognise the idea that meaning is socially constructed and that meaning can be interpreted from texts (Schwartz, 1994). This epistemology recognises that media actively constructs meaning rather than just reporting on neutral facts or reflecting reality. It examines how language constructs the

visibility, framing, and representation of the Black Ferns. Initially, I considered a quantitative content analysis; however I realised after reading through a first few articles and through a discussion with my supervisor, that a quantitative content analysis alone would not have been able to detect the deeper cultural and structural nuances of media representation. Therefore, the study is centred on a qualitative content analysis which provides an in-depth interrogation of the embedded meanings which media construct to influence public perception. While the core of this study remains qualitative, the analysis uses descriptive counting to contextualise the shifts in visibility (Schreier, 2014).

I have only analysed news articles that were published and available online. Around the time of the selected timeframes, particularly the earlier period of 2014-2015, news outlets had already begun shifting to online platforms as they grew to become a centralised part of media (Hollings et al., 2016; RNZ, 2015). In addition to this, news articles are more accessible and readily available online which means the sources are more reliable and the attaining this type of data is more feasible. My decision reflects the contemporary news environment and allows for a more concentrated and manageable study.

I carried out prior research that shaped the building of the coding framework used in this study but created iterative versions after closely reading the dataset, exemplifying the hybrid inductive-deductive approach (Cho & Lee, 2014). My initial ideas for the coding categories came about during early exploratory reading of the articles and were tested against AI to further develop them. After this initial exploration of the coding categories, the final framework was developed iteratively through repeated cycles of reading and coding. I had refined it several times to ensure that all the categories were grounded in the applied theory and could answer the main research question and accurately reflected the content in the dataset.

My methodological approach is informed by both agenda-setting theory and framing theory. Agenda-setting recognises that the media actively chooses what to prioritise and what to exclude through visibility and placement indicators that act as structural gatekeepers for media (McCombs & Shaw, 2023). I deliberately chose to analyse indicators like the frequency of articles, headline emphasis, article length, and article depth which were categories I had to refine during the research process. Framing theory seeks to reveal how media outlets construct particular narratives through a purposive selection of language, what is emphasised and whose voices are prioritised (Entman, 1993; Bruce, 2016). By diving into

the meaning of the texts in the articles, I was able to map out and analyse factors beyond visibility that media use to influence public perception and construct representation of the Black Ferns. Factors such as framing patterns, tone, proportion of voices and indigenous representation allowed an opportunity to discuss topics such as the stereotyping of women in rugby by mainstream media (Entman, 1993; Bruce, 2016). I utilised both framing theory and agenda-setting theory together to shape a cohesive coding framework that addresses the aims of this study.

3.2 Selection of articles and sampling strategy

Discussions with my supervisor and mapping out the media landscape helped to identify the potential dataset, drawn from three major outlets that would be able to efficiently capture national discourse on women's rugby. The major outlets I selected were Stuff, the New Zealand Herald, and Radio New Zealand (RNZ). 1News was also initially considered as an additional news source but was removed due to a lack of accessible online news articles for the 2014-2015 period. Stuff, the New Zealand Herald, and Radio New Zealand all had accessible online articles across the complete timeframe for this study, allowing for consistent sampling and comparison over time.

I built my dataset of articles from two distinct time periods, between 2014-2015 and 2024–2025 which are eras that were intentionally selected for this study. The 10-year timeframe was deliberate to help capture changes in women's rugby visibility, its growth in professionalisation, and the shifts in Aotearoa New Zealand's media landscape (Bruce, 2022; 2016; Sam & Jackson, 2019). Each period includes both a World Cup year and a non-World Cup year allowing an examination of the episodic or tournament-driven coverage that tends to be given to women's sport (Bruce, 2016; Kanemasu & Molnar 2014). The 2014–2015 period reflects a time in which the Black Ferns received comparatively limited mainstream coverage, operating within a media environment where women's sport was often marginalised or framed through stereotypical narratives (Bruce, 2016). On the other hand, the 2024-2025 period follows a decade of significant structural change, including increased investment in women's rugby, heightened public interest, and a broader societal shift toward recognising women athletes as elite professionals (Bruce, 2016; 2022; Sport New Zealand, 2024). Analysing data across the two periods helps to identify changes in reporting practices and to capture broader structural developments in women's rugby and the media landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand.

I carried out an initial search using Google News and each outlet's digital archive, with key terms such as "Black Ferns," "women's rugby," "New Zealand women's rugby team," and listing the outlets themselves in the search. Finding articles from 2014-2015 required more manual searching and additional support was sought from the Auckland University of Technology Library and my supervisor to ensure appropriate and thorough retrieval.

My first initial search revealed a pool of over 150 articles that were mostly from the 2024-2025 period. From this preliminary pool, a purposive sampling strategy was used to narrow down the selection to articles that were analytically relevant to the research aims of examining how mainstream NZ media has constructed representation of the Black Ferns and how that has shifted over time. I narrowed down the original pool to 70 articles through an initial process of filtering which was important for guiding the inductive and deductive development and refinement of the codebook. During a close reading and initial coding of approximately 70 articles, clear patterns began to show. Through repeatedly reading these articles, I was able to familiarise myself with the data and build a deeper level of insight into the texts, which helped me to generate initial thoughts (Braun & Clarke's, 2006). As I immersed myself in the data, I then realised the need for a more concentrated analysis of the texts by establishing a key requirement for the articles to meet from this filtered pool of 70. These key requirements included explicitly mentioning the Black Ferns (XV) either in the headline or within the article text, even when the primary focus was not on the team. I excluded any articles that provided live updates to games, were duplicate stories and touched on the Black Ferns sevens rather than Black Ferns XV. I did initially consider articles that discussed women's rugby or rugby in Aotearoa more broadly to capture a wider picture of the sports media landscape but decided not to. I then established a final concentrated dataset of 50 articles as a result of applying. This final dataset consisted of a split of 22 articles from the 2014-2015 era and 28 articles from 2024-2025. This distribution still naturally mirrors the historical reality where the growth in coverage of women's rugby had begun to occur within recent years (Sport New Zealand, 2024). The refined sample allows for a deeper dive into the nuanced meanings and framing patterns within the texts. Going through another round of reading and coding, after familiarising myself already with the articles in the larger sample provided support in understanding how I would carry out my analysis better with a smaller yet concentrated sample size of $n = 50$ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this round of reading and coding, I reached data saturation with any further coding of more articles not providing any

new data. Therefore, only articles that met the criteria established were used in the sample size of $n = 50$. The choice to use a sample of size of $n = 50$ is supported by past academic research where Wutich et al. (2024), who found that thematic saturation is often achieved at a sample size of $n = 9$ and full theoretical saturation can be achieved with a sample size between $n = 20$ and $n = 30$. Therefore, selecting a sample size of $n = 50$ is more than sufficient to identify reoccurring themes across the articles. Furthermore, Frugar and Potts (2015) reveals that using a sample size of $n = 50$ is sufficient to still provide a high statistical power of more than 80% to capture even low prevalent themes present in data sources across multiple instances. Coding all 70 articles would have caused analytical redundancy that would have not changed any of the overarching themes or coding framework. By choosing to stick with the 50, the research remains manageable and effective.

Combining this specific sample size with a focus on textual meanings, allows for my analysis to be positioned directly within my theoretical framework. Agenda-setting theory allows me to examine the visibility and placement of these articles, whilst framing theory allows me to analyse the language used to critique the patterns that shape how the Black Ferns are represented.

3.3 Developing the Coding Framework

The coding framework for this study was developed through a hybrid deductive and inductive approach. The initial categories of the framework were informed by the literature review and early reflections around the research question and sub questions. An AI language model was also used to support early conceptualisation of frames to explore possible themes and initial codes, that I then evaluated and revised through an analysis of the articles. Examples of themes which I developed theoretically include the tone towards the Black Ferns, whose voices were included in the articles, the gender of the journalist writing the articles, and the level of analysis given to the Black Ferns' games. The first iteration of the coding framework included metadata and categories that were split into three sections of visibility, framing and narrative, and representation. The visibility indicators included categories such as homepage placement and sports section placement. As I immersed myself more in existing literature and engaged in a closer reading of the 70 articles, some of these initial categories such as homepage placement and sports section placement were removed and replaced. It was evident whilst reading through the articles that such information could not be accurately collected, so categories like headline mentions and placement in headline

were developed from existing knowledge in the literature review to accurately capture data around headlines (McCombs & Shaw, 2023; Entman, 1993). In addition to the changing of these categories, other categories were developed inductively such as the inclusion of indigenous representation and how cultural identity was acknowledged within coverage of the predominantly Māori and Pasifika composition of the Black Ferns. Other categories that were also developed inductively include the presence of stereotypical language and imagery which has been highlighted as an issue in prior research (Bruce, 2014). There were clear criteria established for stereotypical language and indigenous language.

The criteria used in this study to identify stereotypical language is grounded in Beukeboom & Burger's (2019) framework, which notes that choices in language are often a reflection of existing stereotypes. Individuals are often described using stereotypical traits such as softness or emotionality, particularly for a female sportsperson, rather than relevant and objective attributes such as their athletic ability. From this understanding I was able to identify descriptive words that focused on female social traits (appearance, femininity, and emotions). Such language reinforces societal hierarchies and traditional gender roles. I was also able to actively identify terms that described the Black Ferns through their traditional feminine roles or relationships like "mother" or "wife/daughter/sister of [a man]". Through the application of Beukeboom & Burgers (2019) Social Categories and Stereotypes Communication (SCSC) framework, a clear criteria was established which allowed me to evaluate article based on words that prioritised gender-stereotypical language over the performance and skill of the Black Ferns players.

The inclusion or non-inclusion of indigenous values was important as the Black Ferns is composed of predominantly Māori and Pasifika women. Initially, the coding framework only sought to categorise indigenous representation based on depth of context and background. It identified whether representation was absent, implied (brief mention lacking cultural context), given moderate context, or explicitly framed with deep cultural context. However, a second round of reading revealed that simply recording whether representation was implied or mentioned failed to capture its substance. For example, coding a surface-level mention (such as merely stating a player's name) as "implied" or given "moderate context" would produce inaccurate data on how indigenous identity was actually portrayed. To address this limitation, a secondary thematic frame was developed to specify the type of representation present (1= cultural identity, 2 = name, 3 = community connection, 4 = tokenistic, or 5 = absent).

Each frame that was developed in this research was not coded from direct excerpts of data but was developed through an initial reading of all articles. While I read through the articles, I intentionally made note of what the focus or problem of each article was, who was driving the narrative, whether it was ethically sound according to my topic, and whether I saw a solution offered for any issues of representation on the Black Ferns by the selected media outlets. Once I had initially read through all 70 articles, I was then able to read through them a second time and used my notes from the initial reading to identify consistent themes that were then used as a frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Prior to the second reading, AI was used to provide ideas of what could constitute frames and prompts were based off of the notes I had already made in the first reading. These AI generated ideas were solely to provide support in initial brainstorming but was not used to create any of the final frames. A frame was only constituted when I had noted that a theme was consistent across more than 25 articles used in my sample (Entman's, 1993; Wutich et al., 2024). When I established this initial list of frames, they were then further refined by defining clear rules for each one and removed any overlapping codes as I immersed myself more in the data (Matthes & Kohring, 2008).

I iteratively refined the coding framework multiple times throughout the research process. Some initial categories were removed when they proved to be impractical or lacked analytical value. For example, homepage and sports section placement were removed and replaced with headline emphasis due to inconsistency of the information being accessible. These codes were then refined and changed to "Mentioned in headline" and "Position of headline. This process of re-reading through the coding and data extracts was repeated for several codes to allow for a consistent pattern within each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Headline prominence was defined through whether the Black Ferns were explicitly named in the headline of the article or not. If they were named in the headlines, the position of the team name 'Black Ferns' was then coded to capture the level of emphasis and significance media had placed on the team. McCombs and Shaw (2023) notes that there are levels to agenda-setting theory where media placement can influence an audience how to think about the topic. In the cases of headlines, placing a particular topic at the beginning increases its priority over others that are placed towards the end (McCombs & Shaw, 2023). Framing theory supports this by stating that front-loading highlights that particular topic as the primary frame. Agenda-setting and framing theories provided the grounds and explicit boundaries by which the codes for headline prominence were established after the second reading of all articles

The “systemic issue” category which sat under the framing and narrative section was also removed because it did not contribute meaningfully to the aim of the research because I found that it was not strongly present in the data. I thoroughly read through each article from my sample of 70 articles in its entirety to ensure I had a holistic understanding of the patterns in the data before applying the baseline codes. After further refining the categories, I completed a second round of coding to cross-check my initial interpretations and manage potential researcher bias, and at this point I had narrowed down my dataset to 50 articles. I then conducted a third and final round of coding for all articles to check for any further refinements of the subcodes and establish a final consolidated framework. An example of coding refinement was within the framing and narrative section, where the category “framing type” was initially divided into seven options. However, upon closer investigation, I saw the need to consolidate these further into five clearer and more analytically useful subcodes: 1 = achievement, 2 = underdog/inspirational, 3 = performance/professional, 4 = off-field matters, and 5 = structure/culture. This ensured that the coding framework remained consistent, manageable and reflective of the patterns that were appearing in the data.

Throughout this process, multiple versions of the coding framework were saved, and notes were kept to document decisions, reflections, and discussions with the supervisor. The consistency of codes was tested through my own continuous analysis of the coding framework as I continued to code each article for the second and third time. Through this analysis, I had changed and removed categories from the final coding framework that were already highlighted in another category or were redundant. Examples of these categories include image size, type of stereotypical image, and mentions of systemic issues. To maintain consistency and minimise researcher bias, clear coding rules were applied across all articles, and attention was given to ensure that the data matched the coding, and no personal assumptions influenced the interpretation of the articles.

Once I consolidated the data, the analysis moved from descriptive coding to identifying patterns within the articles and across the two eras. I systematically compared the articles from 2014-2015 and 2024-2025 by using printed spreadsheets, handwritten notes and visual mapping of categories on a wall to identify patterns, differences, and absences. As I made notes of these patterns, I continuously cross-checked new discoveries with the main research question to ensure that the findings and interpretations addressed the aims of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The findings section will directly use article extracts along with an in-depth analysis of the coding results to demonstrate how the representation of the

Black Ferns in mainstream media has changed over time (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.4 Methodological trustworthiness

Using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability, I established several measures to ensure trustworthiness of this study. The credibility of this study is supported through continuously comparing the coding framework with emerging patterns from the data. I constantly revisited the framework to ensure that similar articles were treated the same and interpretations accurately reflected the data, rather than my own personal assumptions. I made sure that the data was grounded in factual evidence by checking for any negative cases, comparing patterns across all articles and reflecting on earlier coding decisions. Clear documentation coding decisions as well as refinements to the coding framework were recorded, along with ongoing discussions that I had with supervisor. This helped to test the relevancy of emerging themes and kept my analytical decisions grounded and consistent throughout the research process, improving the dependability of the study.

Through reflexive practices as a researcher, especially as someone who is aware of the marginalisation of women's rugby in Aotearoa New Zealand, it was critical to maintain confirmability throughout the study. I actively monitored how my own assumptions might shape interpretation of articles by analysing each one with intentional effort and noting when my own expectations were challenged. I cross-checked my own interpretations against the raw data, emerging patterns and existing literature including Bruce's (2014) work on women's sports coverage to ground the study in evidence.

Lastly, to support transferability of this work I kept an audit trail through documenting the different versions of the sampling strategy, dataset, and coding procedures. As a result, other researchers will be able to understand how the qualitative content analysis was conducted.

3.5 Ethics and Researcher Positionality

Institutional guidelines for this research were complied with, and as a researcher I took a reflexive approach in the sourcing, interpretation, and representation of the data. Its ethical considerations were guided by principles of transparency, respect and reliable research practices, despite there being no human interaction or use of confidential information, either

of which would have triggered a need for formal ethical approval.

The online news articles that are used in this dataset are all publicly available, meaning there was no breach of privacy protections. I referenced and cited all authored texts appropriately in a methodical manner, without explicitly focusing on the individual authors because the study focuses on broad media narratives. All quotes that were included in the findings and discussions are contextualised to remove any misinterpretation which is significant, particularly when analysing representations of groups who have historically been marginalised in sports media. Providing contexts for all quotes also reduces the risk of reproducing any harmful or stereotypical language about the Black Ferns.

The articles and the coding framework for this study were stored securely on my personal one drive that is only accessible through my password-protected university login. Keeping the articles and coding frameworks along with all other documents saved on my personal OneDrive space maintained high integrity of data management. I also noted all decisions in relation to coding for transparency and stored them on my personal laptop.

Primary sources were not required for this research such as interviews or any interactions with human participants, eliminating the need for any ethics approval. Broader principles of responsible research were adhered to as outlined in the University's guidelines and qualitative research ethics literature. Despite there being no need for an ethics approval due to no human participants, the study still considers sensitivity around the people mentioned in the articles. The study does not address the personal character of any individuals mentioned in the articles and focuses on how the media constructs narratives around them and the Black Ferns. By doing so, it helps to mitigate any researcher bias that is potentially present through my own perception of the individuals.

There was consideration around ethics in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in this research. AI was used as a heuristic tool to support brainstorming and generating ideas for coding during the initial reading of the articles. Notes made from this initial reading of the raw data were provided to the model to generate initial broad categories and potential thematic structures. During the second reading of the articles, I was able to rigorously evaluate the ideas generated by AI and any that were lacking direct empirical grounding were not used. All outputs were treated as unverified information that were only used as insight when developing the final coding framework and was continuously refined throughout the research period. I was ultimately responsible for the final coding framework having defined

the codes myself, analysed the data, and drawing my own interpretive conclusions. It was also used to review draft sections for any improvements in clarity, flow, and structural cohesion, with Grammarly used for automated proofreading. Whilst AI provided suggestions for phrasing and editing, I reviewed every suggestion, iteratively refined every output and maintained independent authorship of all content and interpretations in this study. AI was only used to support interpretation where it was prompted to provide any alternative perspectives to minimise researcher bias and therefore led to my own refinement of the coding framework and discussion.

As the researcher, I constantly reflected on my positionality throughout the research process, acknowledging my own deep engagement in rugby, particularly for women and my commitment to challenging structural marginalisation in media. While I recognise that I have my own assumptions and values that may shape the interpretations of the data, I continued to make a conscious effort to ground my interpretations in the data to maintain transparency and credibility.

4. Findings: Changes That Look Back to The Future

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative content analysis and explores how mainstream New Zealand news media represented the Black Ferns across two distinct periods that compare a Rugby World Cup year with its adjacent non-World Cup year (2014-2015 and 2024-2025). The findings are guided by the research questions and emerge from consideration of how visibility and placement, framing and narrative patterns, representation have changed across a decade. The qualitative content analysis explores a purposive sample of articles published by three mainstream New Zealand media outlets: Stuff, the New Zealand Herald (NZH), and Radio New Zealand (RNZ). This sample of articles has been selected to provide a manageable and sufficient dataset for comparing coverage across the distinct time periods. This period has been selected because major tournaments typically attract heightened media attention, and it is reasonable to expect that coverage of the Black Ferns would be more prominent in World Cup years. By comparing these across a decade, it helps to test whether the expected patterns are consistent.

This chapter has been organised into three analytical sections which align with three of the study's four sub-questions. First, it will look at visibility by comparing the frequency of articles, analysing headline emphasis, article depth and length, and the prominence of Black Ferns coverage across the two eras and across the three outlets. It will directly contribute to the main research question by revealing whether the team became more routinely visible in mainstream sports news over the decade. It also considers whether their visibility increased in line with the growing profile and professionalisation of women's rugby, and whether the expected spikes in coverage during World Cup years are reflected in the data analysed.

The second section of this chapter will look at the framing and tone, addressing the sub question of how the Black Ferns were framed across the two World Cup cycles. It will analyse the shifts in the tone of reporting, the dominant frames used to describe the team, the level of context and the broader narratives that shaped their portrayal. There is a reasonable expectation that the media characterisations will have evolved from narratives of the inspirational and underdog-focused narratives in 2014-2015 to more professional, performance driven and more analytical coverage in 2024-2025. By combining the analysis of these patterns, it will show how framing contributes to the evolving representation of the team within Aotearoa New Zealand's sporting media landscape.

The third section will look at voices and representation of Nga Mamaku, by identifying whose perspectives are included or excluded, and how players and women's voices are positioned. It will analyse what these patterns might suggest about the evolving professionalisation, status, and cultural standing of women's rugby. This includes examining the presence of women's voices, Māori and Pasifika representation, the balance between the player, coach, and organisation perspectives, and the use of stereotypes in both language and imagery.

Through analysing and comparing all three sections, there is an opportunity to better understand what has improved, what has remained the same, and what gaps or limitations still exist in the media representation of the Black Ferns over the past decade. It will examine how visibility, framing, stereotypes, and representation work together to construct a particular portrayal and meaning around the Black Ferns.

4.1 Visibility of the Black Ferns

This first section examines the visibility of the Black Ferns across the two World Cup cycles. It presents the detailed patterns in article frequency, headline emphasis, article length and depth, and visual prominence across the articles selected from Stuff, NZH, and RNZ.

4.1.1 *Volume of coverage.*

Across the two World Cup cycles, the volume of coverage shows a clear shift in how frequently the Black Ferns appeared in the selected mainstream media within Aotearoa New Zealand. In the 2014-2015 cycle, only 22 articles could be found across Stuff, the New Zealand Herald, and RNZ which reflect the limited visibility that scholars like Bruce (2016) have already identified in Aotearoa New Zealand's coverage of women's sport. Despite being a World Cup year in 2014, only eight of the 20 articles were published that year, and more than half of these did not report on or reference the World Cup tournament. This supports Bruce's argument that even major women's sporting events have often in the past failed to generate the level of media attention given to men's competitions, with women's teams often receiving only episodic coverage.

The remaining 14 articles from 2014-2015 were published in 2015 which was a non-World Cup year. This 2015 anomaly reveals a pattern different from what was expected in that there was more coverage in the non-World Cup year than there was in the World Cup year. It aligns with the trend which Liu and Ahmed (2023) have highlighted around slow yet

steady expansion of women's sport visibility in the mid 2010s. Overall the volume of articles in this earlier era, 2014-2015 still remains low confirming this pattern of marginalisation , however the increase in the frequency of articles on the Black Ferns in 2015 compared to 2014 reveals early signs of this shift in baseline coverage. This reinforces Bruce's (2016) observations that women's rugby in this era was still treated as peripheral to the dominant men's rugby narrative.

In contrast, the 2024-2025 period demonstrates a substantial increase in both volume and consistency where I found over 100 articles as part of a baseline scan across the three outlets. This shows the significant expansion of coverage volume compared to the maximum number of 22 articles found in the earlier years (See Table 1). A purposive sub-sample of 28 articles from this modern pool was selected based on a criteria as mentioned in the methodology. Even with this refined sample, the data reveals that 18 out of the 28 articles were accounted for in 2025 which was a World Cup year. This shows how coverage overall improved because there were more articles written about the Black Ferns in 2025 (n=18) than in 2014 (n=8) which were both World Cup years. As Scovel (2024) and Rowe & Prates-Silva (2023) found in their international research, as women's sport becomes more professionalised over time, media coverage also becomes more event-responsive and has improved to now closely mirror the rhythm of mainstream media's reporting for men's sport. An interesting find when looking across the decade was that the volume for the earlier non-World Cup year of 2015 (n=14) is slightly higher than the modern non-World Cup year of 2024 (n=10). The non-linear increase in volume of articles throughout the later period highlights the gradual and incremental change in visibility (Liu & Ahmed, 2023).

Table 1: *Number of articles used and found for each period.*

World Cup Period	Year	Number of articles	Total
2014-2015	2014	8	22
	2015	14	
2024-2025	2024	10	28
	2025	18	

Patterns across the different media outlets also support the occurrence of these shifts. Stuff maintained relatively steady coverage across both cycles, but its reporting in the earlier cycle (2014-2015) often focused on achievements or inspirational stories. This is consistent with Bruce's (2016) findings in that women athletes have often been framed through personal narratives rather than sporting analysis. The New Zealand Herald, however, showed the most significant growth as it moved away from sporadic coverage in 2014-2015 (n=6) to regular, professional and more tournament-driven reporting in 2024-2025 (n=14). This reflects a shift towards what Billings and Angelini (2007) had previously looked at as "performance-centred" coverage which can indicate an increase in legitimacy. Stuff maintained relatively a steady amount of coverage in both of the 2014-2015 period (n=8) and 2024-2025 period (n=8) RNZ remained the outlet with the lowest number of articles across the decade, but its reporting changed from administrative or coach-focused stories in 2014-2015 (n=8) to more game-centred coverage in 2024-2025 (n=6) revealing a slight yet similar shift to NZ Herald.

Table 2: *Distribution of coded articles across media outlets.*

Media outlet	2014-2015	2024-2025
RNZ	8	6
Stuff	8	8
NZ Herald	6	14
TOTAL	22	28

4.1.2 *Headline prominence.*

A comparative analysis of the emphasis on the Black Ferns in the headlines demonstrates a significant shift toward framing the Black Ferns as a primary focus of media coverage. In the 2014-2015 era, the “Black Ferns” appeared in the headlines of 16 articles pertaining to them. The placement of their name was found to be distributed evenly with five placing them at the beginning, five in the middle, and six at the end. In the 2024-2025 era, not only did the volume of coverage increase but textual salience of the Black Ferns also increased. Out of 28 total articles, 26 featured the team in the headline with only two omitting them completely. There were 15 of the articles which used syntactic front-loading by placing the “Black Ferns” at the beginning, while seven featured them in the middle, and four at the end of their headlines. This trend clearly reveals a shift in baseline visibility where media moved away from framing the team as secondary or belonging in the margins to positioning them at the forefront of the narrative.

4.1.3 *Image presence and quality.*

Across both research periods, every article included an image, and all images were appropriate athletic images. However, the nature and quality of these images changed over time. In 2014-2015, images were often generic and showed fewer visuals of players in action, meaning that they often relied on basic file photos or photos of low quality (see Figure 1). This aligns with Cooky, Messner, and Musto’s (2015) findings that early coverage of women’s sport often relied on limited or recycled imagery.

Figure 1: Basic file photos and low-quality images used of athletes in 2014-2015.



Adapted from “New cap Vaughan to fulfil rare treble” (New Zealand Herald, 2015), “Meet the Black Ferns hard-nosed sisters” (New Zealand Herald, 2015), and “Sanita Levave makes Black Ferns squad” (Stuff, 2014).

Figure 2: Athletic and high-quality images used of athletes in 2024-2025.



Adapted from “Maia Joseph one of five new faces in Black Ferns contracts” (Pearson & Kermeen, 2024), “Black Ferns make change up front for Canada” (RNZ Sports Reporters, 2024), and “Portia Woodman-Wickliffe says positional switch behind Black Ferns Rugby World Cup bid” (NZ Herald, 2024).

By 2024–2025, imagery was consistently dynamic, high-quality, and contextually relevant. Some of the articles included more than two images including action shots, match day photography, and training images (see Figure 2). Whilst the majority of the images established the players as elite performers, there were still elements which reflected their personal lives, such as an image from an article that was heavily focused on a player’s engagement.

Nonetheless, the overall shift shows the fact that there is an increase in editorial investment and the broader professionalisation of women's rugby. Image presence is a key indicator of visibility (Antunovic, 2022; Fink, 2015), and analysing its use reveals how visual representation has improved across the two periods. The consistent inclusion of appropriate, athlete focused photographs frames the Black Ferns as elite performers and aligns with broader indications of legitimacy within mainstream sports media.

4.1.4 Article length & depth.

Article length and depth help us better understand the way the media representation of the Black Ferns has changed over time. In 2014-2015, the articles were shorter with majority being less than 500 words (n=16). The data shows that three of the 22 articles analysed from this earlier World Cup cycle had high depth analysis. These articles mainly provided background information and circumstances rather than deep analysis that was technical and performance based which is what the All Blacks have often received. For example, a New Zealand Herald article covering the Black Ferns victory over England in 2015 reported using a chronological point-by-point summary and omits any tactical information about how their performance led to the win. This reflects what Bruce (2016) describes as “novelty-stage coverage,” where women's sport was acknowledged in the past but not analysed with the same level of depth given to men's teams.

The level of depth and length of articles had shifted in 2024-2025 with 20 out of the 28 articles exceeding 500 words and written with high analytical depth (n=12). The articles released in this later World Cup period were focused on tactical insights, expert commentary and structural context revealing a change in towards more informed sports journalism. For example, RNZ released a detailed match report which provided tactical information highlighting the team's set pieces and defensive pressures as key factors to achieving their victory over the team. The change reflects movement from novelty to legitimacy which aligns with international research showing the professionalisation drives more meaningful treatment of women's sport (Fink, 2015; Antunovic, 2022).

4.1.5. From invisible to less invisible.

It is clear the data visibility of the Black Ferns improved substantially across the 10-year period for all indicators. This is evident in the fact that the earlier era (2014-2015) showed fewer articles available, less headline prominence and shorter articles that lacked analytical depth. In the later era (2024-2025) there were more articles published, an increase

in headline prominence, and longer articles with much more depth. In the depth of the articles itself, the media shifted away from focusing on administrative and personal matters to more performance-based articles that talked to the Black Ferns games and their athletic abilities. Imagery also improved throughout the decade where media used more high quality and action-based images in the 2014-2015 period compared to the 2024-2025 period reinforcing the framing of the Black Ferns as elite athletes.

These patterns show how visibility has improved over 10 years, shifting from being almost invisible to becoming more mainstream in media. This provides a foundation for understanding how the Black Ferns are framed and not just how often they appear in mainstream media outlets such as Stuff, NZ Herald, and RNZ.

4.2 Framing and Tone

This section examines how the Black Ferns were framed by media across the two World Cup cycles, focusing on the tone of the articles and the dominant narrative patterns that have been used by the outlets. It outlines the changes in the language, framing types, and depth of context across all articles.

4.2.1. Changes in tone.

Examining the tone used in articles pertaining to Black Ferns helps us further understand the way in which they were being portrayed in the media and the type of coverage given. In 2014-2015 there were 12 articles with a positive tone, 1 article with a negative tone, and 9 articles with a neutral tone. In 2024-2025, there were 22 articles written with a positive tone, none written with a negative tone, and 6 written with a neutral tone. The increase from 54% to 78% of articles written with a positive tone across the 10-year period reveals a clear shift in the tone of writing towards the Black Ferns.

In the earlier World Cup period of 2014-2015, the tone of writing was positive towards the Black Ferns, but the stories that were written using factual, administrative or straightforward reporting often covered off field matters. As an example, a Stuff article written about Black Ferns coach Greg Smith states facts and data with completely neutral language: "Referee Ryan Cox stepped in and after a further exchange then sent Smith from the ground. Smith retreated behind the fence at Mill St and continued coaching via his walkie-talkie" (as cited by Goile, 2015). Similarly, another article detailing the Black Ferns loss to England relies on factual language, excluding any emotional language to describe the

loss: "England, beaten in the last three finals, had drawn 13-13 with the Canadians in the group stage - a result that helped push out holders New Zealand..." (RNZ, 2014).

By the 2024-2025 World Cup period, there was a significant shift with journalism becoming more expressive and energetic towards the Black Ferns. Media sports reporters began using phrases such as ‘tasty matchups’ and ‘ability with ball in hand’ to describe the Black Ferns which meant that the language used now drives more hype around the way that the Black Ferns would play. A specific example can be found in a New Zealand Herald article by Christopher Revie where he uses more descriptive language to frame selection in a competitive light: " Loose forwards Tukuafu and Olsen-Baker have been consistent selections...so their absences provide an opportunity for others to stake their claims..." (New Zealand Herald, 2024). To further illustrate this modern depth, RNZ released a detailed match report during this period which provided tactical information highlighting the team’s set-pieces and defensive pressures as key factors to achieving victory. There is still some constructive criticism throughout this later period, however theses remain balanced and positive.

Ultimately, the tone in the articles regarding the Black Ferns has shifted to become more evaluative, performance focused and confident. In a 2015 New Zealand Herald article about the Black Ferns victory over England, the language is evaluative but lacks the confidence seen in the tone of articles from the more recent period. Using phrases such as “seldom got enough quick ball” and “disappointingly stilted game” shifted the focus to describe the mistakes of the opposing team rather than describing the high performance of the Black Ferns. In contrast, a Stuff article from 2025 discussing a motivational slogan used by the Black Ferns during the tournament shared: “The Canadians will be attempting to negate the Black Ferns’ attacking threat with unrelenting force...Mikaele-Tu’u will be in the thick of that physical battle.” (Stuff, 2025). By using more active verbs such as ‘negate’ and phrases like ‘unrelenting force’, the media directly emphasise the team’s capability and tactical performance. This demonstrates the vast difference in the tone and language used to describe the team in earlier years compared to the more recent years.

Although some articles were identified as neutral and one identified as negative, the tone from across all articles remains mostly positive across both World Cup eras.

4.2.2 Dominant framing types.

An analysis of the dominant frames in which the articles represent the Black Ferns

allows for a deep dive into the media coverage by looking beyond visibility and tone in mainstream but also knowing how the media construct meaning around the Black Ferns.

In 2024-2025, 16 out of the 28 articles in the sample were written within a professional/performance frame while 9 were structural/cultural. The rest of the articles fell within the achievement, underdog/inspirational, and off field matter categories with 2 or fewer articles. It was very rare to find any articles in this era where underdog/inspirational, achievement, and off-field matters were the most dominant frames in them.

When comparing these with articles from the earlier era, it is clear to see that the framing was generally more mixed. In the earlier era of 2014-2015, 9 of the 20 articles that were analysed focused on off-field matters. This was the most dominant frame in that era which was then followed by 5 articles which focused on an underdog or inspirational story such as the 2014 RNZ article discussing the physical abilities of Honey Hireme and comparing her to Sonny Bill Williams or the 2015 New Zealand Herald article sharing on the “hard-nosed” Itunu sisters and their childhood. There were four articles that used an achievement frame such as the RNZ article covering Black Ferns players who were inducted into the Rugby Hall of Fame. The article uses phrases such as “... part of 15 former players to be honoured in London.” to acknowledge their achievement as part of a legacy worth recognising (RNZ, 2014). The remaining four articles used a performance/professional frame (n=1) or a structural/cultural (n=1) frame which was less common in this earlier era than later.

By looking at the articles from both periods, there is an understanding of how framing has shifted from being focused purely on off field matters and administrative reporting to more professional/technical and structural.

4.2.3 Context provided.

The analysis of the context provided is significant because it indicates how much the media really understands about women’s rugby and can demonstrate the level of seriousness in the coverage.

In 2014-2015 there were very few articles (n = 9) with strong context. The rest had little (n=12) to no context (n=1) because the articles were often limited to administrative details or basic background information. By comparison, there are differences from what was found in the 2024-2025 era with 26 out of 28 articles having very strong context, 2

having moderate context, and 0 articles with little to no context. The context provided in these articles have shifted from basic background information to now including competition structures, professional pathways, and strategic detail. For example, an RNZ article covering the Black Ferns loss to England in the 2014 World Cup provides little to no context stating facts such as “The Black Ferns, who failed to reach the semi-finals of the tournament for the first time, outscored the Americans nine tries to one” (RNZ, 2014), with no elaboration on why or how they failed. It also states “England, beaten in the last three finals, had drawn 13-13 with the Canadians in the group stage - a result that helped push out holders New Zealand - but were more clinical this time around” (RNZ, 2014), without providing further context as to how the draw between England and Canada helped the Black Ferns. In contrast, an RNZ article from 2024 provides strong context covering the journey of Black Ferns player Ma’ama Vaipulu. The article goes beyond announcing her signing and dives into details such as her transition from volleyball to rugby: “In the span of four years Vaipulu has gone from wanting to play volleyball at the Olympics to picking up an oval ball with purpose to becoming a professional rugby player” (RNZ, 2024). It also mentions the role in which her father and coach played in her being signed to the Black Ferns. Furthermore, the article contextualises her journey through the modern rugby structure “Vaipulu is among a new generation of Black Ferns who have been exposed to the Super Rugby Aupiki pathway to the black jersey... made her debut for the Blues in 2023 after a standout season with the Auckland Storm in 2022” (RNZ, 2024). Many of the articles in this more recent period of 2024-2025 present this level of strong context across all three outlets. This increase in depth of coverage positions the Black Ferns within the broader rugby systems and professional environments, demonstrating the maturity shift in the coverage given to the Black Ferns.

4.2.4. Professionalisation.

Another aspect that was important to understand was the professionalisation framing of women’s rugby, particularly for the Black Ferns. Within the earlier World Cup period between 2014-2015, there was very little use of this framing. Only four articles applied a lens of professionalisation while the remaining 18 articles did not. A clear example in the lack of professionalisation framing from articles in this earlier period is the Stuff article in 2014 that discusses Sanita Levave being selected for the Black Ferns. Rather than focusing on her athletic abilities or providing structural development to her journey, the article subtly implies her selection due to informal matters such as her weight loss: “Sanita was 107kg, now she is 87kg. She is unsure of her height, but Faifili is 1.92m and she is not far below” (Stuff, 2014).

It also highlights traditional gendered narratives through opening the article stating who she is to a male “With plenty of support from her well known older brother, Sanita...”(Stuff, 2014), and highlights hers and her brother’s reaction through traditional narratives in phrases such as “I cried on the phone...” (as cited in Stuff, 2014) and “At heart she is really kind, really nice...” (as cited in Stuff, 2014).

This changes in the more recent period between 2024-2025 with 11 articles applying a lens of professionalisation. The rest of the articles (n=17) did not utilise this frame because they were only match reports or factual updates. In comparison to the story on Sanita, the 2024 article on Ma’ama Vaipulu’s journey into the Black Ferns reveals the vast difference in the use of professionalisation framing. The article notes her journey through a professional pathway of Super Rugby Aupiki and states Ma’ama as part of a “new generation of Black Ferns who have been exposed to the Super Rugby Aupiki pathway to the black jersey” (RNZ, 2024). Super Rugby Aupiki is the professional national competition for women’s rugby union that services as a high-performance pathway into the Black Ferns. The article also establishes a multi-tiered talent pipeline through mentioning of past Black Ferns player Anna Richards. In addition to this, it also explicitly highlights through the players point of view how the structure of women’s rugby mirrors that of men’s rugby where Ma’ama “struggles to comprehend that her mentors, like four-time Rugby World Cup winner Anna Richards, would have been selected for national honours from their club or provincial side” (RNZ, 2024). These are just a few examples of how a professionalisation frame has been applied in this particular article, but similar patterns were present across all articles in this later period. An increase in the number of articles that utilise a professionalisation frame demonstrates a shift in attitude towards reporting on the Black Ferns. The media now treats women’s rugby as a system and not a novelty. It is evidence of women’s rugby developing into a sporting system of its own with structure, competitions and professional pathways.

4.2.5 Less off-field coverage, more on-field.

The analysis of the framing and tone of the Black Ferns by mainstream media across the two distinct periods illustrates a clear progression in how the Black Ferns are presented in mainstream coverage. Across both periods, the tone remains largely positive but the nature of that positivity changes.

In 2014-2015, the positive tone is often delivered through straightforward, factual, or administrative reporting with a higher proportion of neutral articles and less instances of

expressive language. By 2024-2025, the tone shifts to become more enthusiastic and performance-focused with media using stronger descriptive language and providing more confident assessments of the Black Ferns. This shift is evident in the dominant framing types for both eras. Earlier coverage relies more on achievement-based and off field matters, whereas 2024-2025 is characterised by professional/technical framing and attention is given to structure and culture. The amount of contextual information provided also increases substantially with recent articles embedding the Black Ferns within wider competition, pathways, and structures. A clear pattern of evolution is present in the framing, tone, and context revealing the shift in how the team is positioned within the media landscape. It provides the foundation for analysing the voices that help to shape these narratives.

4.3 Voices and Representation

Across both research periods, most articles included a small number of quoted voices typically between 1-2, with occasional articles quoting three people or none at all. While the quantity of the quoted sources remained relatively consistent, the type of voices given prominence changed significantly across the decade.

In the 2014-2015 era, mainstream media were the most dominant voices in their own coverage, excluding input from the Black Ferns themselves. There were 13 articles which had no voices from women or the Black Ferns players present. When external voices were included in articles, it was often coaches that were asked for an input into the story. It is worth noting that out of the total 22 articles found for this period, only two were known to be written by female journalist, whilst seven were written by males and 13 did not explicitly state the author or their gender. This highlights the voices present at an author's level and the lack of female representation. The journalist and coaches were positioned as the primary authorities that were shaping the narrative through organisational or managerial perspectives rather than through the lens of the players themselves. The Black Ferns voices were still present, but they were less frequent and often secondary to institutional commentary. Only four articles from this earlier period included a high proportion of voice representation of women or the Black Ferns players, either at 66% (n=1) or 100% (n=3). The remaining five articles included a proportion of 50% or less.

In the 2024-2025 era there is a clear movement towards the Black Ferns having more of a say in the stories that were talking about them. More than half (n=18) of the articles in this period included input from women or the Black Ferns themselves. Players, particularly at

senior level for this later period such as Ruahei Demant and Portia Woodman-Wickliffe were quoted more frequently and more prominently than senior level players in the earlier 2014-2015 period. While coaches still appeared in this recent cycle of articles, they were no longer the dominant voices along with the journalist themselves. The journalists relied more heavily on insights that the players had to offer to support the framing of performance, preparation, and team culture in their articles.

In 2024-2025, players' voices were more prominent and were used to explain tactical decisions, team culture, leadership dynamics, and performance expectations. The articles allowed players to voice their perspectives of the rugby landscape: "It feels completely different, the change in the professional landscape of women's rugby has definitely changed. There's a noticeable lift of the standards, and that's all got to do with the level of resourcing now that has gone into so many of the unions across the world" (as cited in RNZ, 2025). Players such as Maiakawanakaulani Roos who had not been in the Black Ferns for as long as other senior players like Ruahei Demant was also included by providing her perspective on their opponent (Canada) rather than through a journalist interpretation: "They are very innovative with different shapes. They're good at the breakdown and have really good connections with each other. They play a game we haven't seen before, but that's exciting" (as cited in Stuff, 2025). This indicates a shift where the earlier period reveals the organisational figures having the most authority to tell these stories, and the later period prioritises the athlete themselves. Journalists increasingly positioned players as knowledgeable commentators on their own sport, reflecting a shift in how athlete expertise is recognised. However, despite this improvement, player voices still did not dominate meaning the proportion of voices sat at 50% or less, indicating that further progress is needed to fully centre athletes' perspectives in coverage of their own team.

When looking specifically at women's voices and comparing the two periods, there is a slight increase in the number of articles that include women's voices, but the proportional representation of women remains inconsistent. Despite the growth of women's rugby and the increasing visibility of female athletes and leaders, men continue to occupy a significant share of quoted space in both cycles. While progress is evident, the incorporation of women's perspectives in media coverage still lags behind the professionalisation of the sport.

4.3.1 Indigenous representation.

Indigenous representation and narrative framing shows limited change across the two

periods. It was important to analyse indigenous representation for Nga Mamaku due to the predominant Maori and Pasifika make-up of the team. As a national team, it is also crucial to understand the central role in which the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand plays in the team and its practices.

From the 2014–15 period, 19 of the 22 articles contained no Indigenous representation at all. Four articles implied Indigenous presence only through the naming of Māori or Pasifika players, without further cultural acknowledgement. Three articles briefly mentioned Indigenous identity, and only one article meaningfully incorporated cultural framing or Indigenous perspectives. Overall, representation in this period was minimal and often superficial, relying heavily on implied identity rather than explicit engagement.

In the 2024–25 sample, 10 of the 28 articles contained no Indigenous representation. Four articles included Indigenous representation through discussing cultural identity or community connection, while 14 articles implied Indigenous identity through naming alone.

Although the number of articles with no representation decreased, the inclusion of indigenous representation did not significantly improve. Most references remained implied rather than being explicit and telling culturally grounded storytelling was rare. The comparison across the decade shows that while Indigenous presence is more consistently acknowledged through player names, meaningful engagement with Indigenous perspectives remains limited. This lack of representation is particularly telling when compared to the team's internal culture centred on tikanga Maori. Black Ferns player, Ruahei Demant shared on the team's culture stating "What brings us together is our Maori culture. We always assembled on a karakia. We always have waiata, haka, and it's always something that unites us wherever we go..." (Healthspan elite, 2026). While they have established, institutionalised, and communicated the core values of the team, sports journalists still largely fail to engage with or report on this cultural framework. Only two articles across the entire sample talk to the cultural framework, and one of which was an opinion piece by Melodie Robinson. Such data suggests that coverage on cultural practices and indigenous representation in women's rugby coverage is an area where little substantive progress has been made.

4.3.2 Stereotypes.

Across the two selected periods of 2014–2015 and 2024–2025, there is a clear decrease

in the use of gendered stereotypes and reductive imagery within media coverage of the Black Ferns. In the 2014–15 sample, five articles contained explicit or implicit stereotypical language. The first article described a player using terms such as “feminine,” “gentle,” and “needs more mongrel,” framing her through traits associated with softness and emotionality rather than athletic capability. This language reinforces long-standing gendered assumptions about women athletes needing to “toughen up” to meet the expectations of a traditionally masculine sport. Another article implicitly discussed players through their childhood and family rather than focusing on their athletic abilities, reinforcing femininity and relational stereotypes. There was also another article that did not use overtly gendered descriptors but still framed the Black Ferns’ achievements as exceptional or surprising, women as “pioneers” in ways that emphasised novelty rather than normalised excellence. Although subtle, this framing aligns with a broader pattern in women’s sport reporting where success is treated as unexpected rather than routine. The same article also uses limited athletic or technical language and situated the team’s legacy within a “struggle narrative.” This framing tool more commonly applied to women athletes than to men, where perseverance and adversity are foregrounded over performance and skill.

In contrast, two of the articles in the 2024–25 sample contained stereotypical gendered language or imagery. Whilst majority of the descriptions of players were consistently athletic, tactical, and professional, with no reliance on infantilising terms, emotional tropes, or novelty framing, one article explicitly used stereotypical language and imagery. In the stuff article on Amy Duplessis’ engagement, the article frames the athlete around a personal milestone. The article uses phrases such as “Heartbreak on the field but joy off it” to compare her shoulder injury to her engagement which media rarely do with male athletes particularly in rugby. The second article describes Black Ferns coach Whitney Hansen in relation to her father. Whilst it was not explicit, the linking of Whitney to father and All Black coach Steve Hansen is a common gendered stereotype that views women’s legitimacy through their relationship with a male. Despite the decrease in articles using stereotypical language, it is evident that there are still traces of gendered assumptions in media coverage of the Black Ferns. However, this still marks a shift toward a fairer pay for women and that it is still moving more equitable and performance-based reporting.

A clear pattern of declination in gendered framing occurs across the decade. While the later period still reflected residual stereotypes commonly applied to women’s sport, the decrease in articles using stereotypical language in more recent coverage aligns with

expectations of professional, athlete-centred journalism.

4.3.3. *Painting half a picture.*

Across the two periods, the analysis of all voices quoted in the articles reveals a clear, though uneven, evolution in how the Black Ferns are represented in mainstream media. The earlier period (2014–15) is characterised by coverage relying particularly on coaches and administrator, while players' perspectives appear less frequently and with limited authority. By contrast, the 2024–25 period shows a noticeable change toward athletes with players, especially senior leaders, quoted more often and positioned more prominently within the narrative. Women's voices also become more visible across the decade despite their proportional representation remaining inconsistent and men continue to occupy a substantial share of quoted space even in coverage of a women's national team.

Indigenous representation shows no change and remains a large gap that mainstream media have not yet filled. While Māori and Pasifika identities are more consistently acknowledged through naming practices in the 2024–25 cycle, cultural framing and acknowledgement of players' cultural identity remains limited, and meaningful engagement with Indigenous perspectives is rare in both periods.

These representational shifts indicate a gradual movement toward greater legitimacy for women's rugby within the media landscape. The increased visibility of players' voices, the reduction of gendered framing, and the more consistent use of performance-based language all contribute to a portrayal of the Black Ferns that aligns more closely with contemporary expectations of elite sport. These patterns provide the foundation for the next chapter, where the implications of these shifts and the areas where progress remains limited.

5. So Close Yet Still So Far Away

This study examines how mainstream media has constructed its representation of the Black Ferns across two distinct periods and how visibility, framing, and representation has shifted over time. This final chapter synthesises the findings from a qualitative content analysis comparing media coverage of the Black Ferns in the 2014-2015 and 2024-2025 periods across three major outlets which are Stuff, New Zealand Herald, and RNZ. It will specifically evaluate how changes in media visibility, framing and representation reflect broader structural changes, growth in professionalisation, and the cultural positioning of Ngā Mamaku within the sporting media landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand.

5.1. Uncovering the Hidden Truths Around Visibility.

Media visibility plays in an important role in the representation of people and actively shapes what is normalised in sports journalism. A comparative analysis of visibility across Stuff, New Zealand Herald, and RNZ show a progression within the sport media landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand. This shift is evident in the volume of coverage, where the search within the 2014-2015 period only produced 22 articles, compared to over 100 articles found in the initial scan of the 2024-2025 period. This low-volume coverage affirms the expectation that the trends would mirror previous patterns of coverage for women in sports, showing institutional neglect. Furthermore, the earlier period of coverage (2014-2015) was defined by less headline prominence, the majority of articles being shorter texts of less than 500 words and providing low-depth analysis. The short form of journalism correlates with low-depth analysis present in the majority of these earlier articles, indicating how much women's rugby was treated as secondary in the earlier period. By 2024-2025, this shifted to more headline prominence, longform journalism, and more in-depth analysis which proves the growth in institutional weight that the media have given to the Black Ferns.

With media giving more visibility to the Black Ferns, there was also a change in how the team were framed and the topics they decided to cover about them. While the 2014-2015 coverage focused heavily on off-field matters or administrative reporting, the articles from the 2024–2025 period prioritises more on-field matters with reporting on their performances and tactical skills. By focusing their coverage on their athletic skill and tactical abilities, mainstream media transitioned away from trivialising the team and using gendered stereotypes to moving towards the normalisation of the Black Ferns as elite and legitimate

professionals in rugby. The imagery used in the articles also reveals this shift, where majority of the articles in 2024-2025 used high quality and athletic images, rather than the basic profile and low-quality images seen in the earlier period. The high action imagery helps to demystify gendered ideologies on women's rugby and reinforces this framing of the team as elite athletes. The shift in all of these visibility indicators reveal how mainstream media are making progress in shifting away from portraying the Black Ferns predominantly as novelty or secondary. Despite these positive changes, the data still shows major ongoing issues around the coverage of the Black Ferns still being driven by major tournaments rather than being routine. This reliance on major events is clear when you look at the numbers, where article volume jumped from 9 in 2024 to 19 in 2025 which was a World Cup year. This increase indicates that while visibility did improve overall, the media still does not cover the Black Ferns routinely, which is the way they cover the All Blacks.

The tournament driven and episodic coverage exposes that visibility for the Black Ferns remains strictly conditional. Mainstream media effectively use the World Cup and the Black Ferns' success to push an illusion of media 'gender equality' in Aotearoa New Zealand, masking the fact that daily baseline coverage on women's rugby remains completely disproportionate to the men. Essentially, they are able to capitalise on this illusion to escape institutional accountability that requires structural changes to genuinely create gender equity in coverage. There are still subtle traces of tokenism in modern day coverage which derive from the historical roots of patriarchal systems that seek to keep men at the top of the sports media hierarchy. Although the visibility has improved across the decade, the Black Ferns are ultimately and subtly perceived as a special occasion rather than a permanent priority in Aotearoa New Zealand's mainstream media.

5.2 Leaving Traces of Gendered Stereotypes

The analysis of framing, tone, and narrative patterns across the decade reveals an institutional move away from using historical, gendered stereotypes in coverage. There was a significant improvement where the number of positively toned article increased from 54% in 2014–2015 to 78% in 2024–2025. The later period presented no articles written in a negative tone with the earlier period containing one. The increase in articles written with a positive tone signals the shift away from flat, administrative reporting towards more energetic and high-performance based reporting. Where articles in 2024-2025 used phrases such as “tasty matchups” and “attacking with unrelenting force,”, earlier media reporting from 2014-2015

often minimised the team's achievements and performance through the lack of 'positive' tone and language. For example, rather than reporting positively on the Black Ferns' international victory over England, New Zealand Herald (2015) framed the match as a "disappointingly stilted game" with the Black Ferns' defence described as "paper-thin". The journalist goes on to describe one of the players as being "largely unemployed but she did twice cross the line..." and another as having "scooted away for an individual try". The article diminishes the victory and the tactical abilities of the team. By replacing traditional scepticism with high-energy, performance-based language, mainstream media can actively drive public anticipation and reinforce the Black Ferns' status as elite athletes. This public anticipation around the Black Ferns is evidently more present in 2024-2025 because of this increase in 'positive' tone and language.

With the change in tone and language across the decade, there was also a shift in the framing of the Black Ferns. In 2014–2015, the dominant narrative frame was almost exclusively around off-field matters, exposing a systemic lack of interest in the team's tactical capabilities. The public was influenced to perceive women's rugby as illegitimate and secondary to the men's game through this framing. A decade later, this pattern has mostly changed through media beginning to deconstruct old, gendered tropes and recognising women's rugby as a professional sport rather than a novelty. In 2024–2025, the framing of the articles became more performance-based/professional with over half of the articles in the data explicitly reporting on the Black Ferns' athletic skills, set-piece breakdowns, and defensive strategies. While the later coverage was overwhelmingly performance-based, a few exceptions that revealed hints of gendered representation stood out. For example, one article shifted attention away from the player's contribution to the World Cup happening at the time to focus entirely on a player's engagement, while another framed coach Whitney Hansen solely through her father's rugby legacy. These inconsistencies show that despite overall shifts in media attitudes, historical gendered stereotypes and patriarchal habits are still subtly present in sports journalism. Framing a female coach through her father directly implies that her authority is inherited from a man, rather than earned through her own merit. These few articles show that despite clear progress, underlying cultural mindsets continue to subtly dictate how the Black Ferns are represented in mainstream media. As noted in existing research, this is still a way for journalists to maximise engagement with the public and hide the lack of routine institutional coverage.

The lack of context also adds another layer to understanding the framing of the Black

Ferns. In 2014-2015, intentional editorial decisions around ignoring tactical skills were evident in the lack of context that was provided across majority of the articles. An example of this can be seen in *RNZ's* (2014) administrative reporting of the Black Ferns' semi-final loss, where the events were listed briefly in chronological order. Earlier media portrayed an inability to provide detailed and energetic coverage of the women's game. In contrast, 26 out of 28 articles in 2024-2025 provided strong context such as embedding individual players within multi-tiered rugby ecosystems. For example, *RNZ* (2024) contextualised Ma'ama Vaipulu's pathway into the national squad directly through the lens of the Super Rugby Aupiki competition. Through providing a strong context by talking about pathways and local competitions, the public is influenced to perceive the Black Ferns as a permanent and professional institution rather than a team talked about in some isolated "feel-good" story that is shared every now and then. Media attitudes towards the Black Ferns have shifted significantly where the team is no longer perceived as uninteresting but are now exciting to report on and just as important to provide further context on like they do for men's rugby.

The change in the level of context across the decade lines up perfectly with the growth of professionalisation framing in the articles, which increased from four in 2014 – 2015 to 11 in 2024 – 2025. It also mirrors the material and structural professionalisation of the sport in Aotearoa New Zealand, where the introduction of full professional contracts for the Black Ferns came in after 2014-2015 and the Super Rugby Aupiki launching in 2022. The institutionalisation of the sport forced mainstream media to recognise the Black Ferns as legitimate, professional athletes. However, despite these systemic improvements there is still a large portion of articles from the 2024-2025 era ($n=17$) which omitted a professionalisation frame. This portion of articles outweighed the portion of articles which did utilise this frame ($n=11$). This lack of framing serves as a reminder that the cultural repositioning of women's rugby is still a gradual and uneven process.

5.3 Part-time Indigenous, Full-time Rugby Player

The way the media treats the Black Ferns regarding professionalisation, status, and culture has changed throughout time. Representation has transitioned from framing the team as managerial by-product to recognising the players as autonomous, professional athletes. However, while this progress is real, the data exposes that this shift has largely occurred within a Westernised sports media model that still struggles to fully capture indigenous cultural representation.

The growing recognition of the players as legitimate professionals is directly reflected in whose voices get to tell the story. In the 2024-2025 period, more than half of the analysed articles actively included direct input from the players or women involved in the game. Bringing their perspectives to the forefront elevates their status in mainstream media, positioning them at the centre of their own narratives, rather than treating them as passive subjects in a traditionally male-dominated space. Quoting senior players like Ruahei Demant alongside developing players like Maiakawanakaulani Roos demonstrates that mainstream media are finally treating these players as technical experts in their field. On the other hand, the 2014-2015 articles included only nine with female or player voices. In fact, more than half of the early articles completely excluded women and player voices compared to more than half in the later period actively including them, highlighting how much the media's intentional decisions to portray the Black Ferns as legitimate players has improved from 2014-2015 to 2024-2025. However, more work could still be done to ensure that all articles actively include a women's or player's voice rather than turning to coaches or the NZ Rugby CEO to provide input.

Yet, despite this massive improvement in giving players a voice, a clear disconnect remains in how the media handles their cultural positioning. Even though the team is predominantly made up of Māori and Pasifika players, 10 out of the 28 articles from 2024–2025 completely omitted indigenous representation, while another 14 relied on superficial naming of the players. Simply naming the players without exploring their cultural identity shows that indigenous representation in mainstream media remains mostly surface-level.. Instead of genuinely elevating Māori worldviews and the collective culture of the team, mainstream media falls back on individual identity, failing to provide any real depth into the cultural core of Ngā Mamaku. While mainstream media have made some improvements to their frameworks to accommodate gender equity and player validation, they still seem to do so through a Westernised lens that ignores indigenous identity. This adds another layer of conditional visibility that the players have to navigate where although mainstream media have broadly shifted towards professionalisation, they still have yet to recognise and validate the athletes through a cultural frame. None of the articles ever refer to the team using their Maori name, Nga Mamaku and only one article mentions the player's iwi. As a result, the media captures only parts of players' identities where they celebrate their achievements as female athletes, while simultaneously marginalising their experiences as Māori and Pasifika women. The same mentality identified in existing literature on women's rugby threatening

the sport's masculine identity, is reproduced through the cultural representation of the Black Ferns, where their indigenous identity is a threat to the colonial hierarchy embedded at the very root of rugby.

The culture of Ngā Mamaku is built around tikanga Māori, which co-captain Ruahei Demant captured perfectly when she shared that their culture is what unites them, anchored constantly by karakia, waiata, and haka (Healthelite news, 2026). But even though tikanga Māori was officially institutionalised for the team through the Cultural & Environmental Review (Muir et al., 2022), mainstream media has failed to evolve alongside them.

By prioritising technical match coverage while stripping away the cultural context of a largely indigenous team, mainstream media captures only a fraction of who Ngā Mamaku actually are. It feels as though journalists are treating cultural elements as background decoration to dress up a story, rather than meaningfully engaging with indigenous narratives. Although broader shifts now recognise Ngā Mamaku as professional female athletes, mainstream media still fail to recognise them as indigenous professional female athletes.

5.4 Room for Improvement

Reflecting on the shifts across the decade, the data from 2014–2015 to 2024–2025 gives a clear picture of what has changed, what has stayed the same, and where the media still falls short. Overall, it is clear the visibility and framing of the Black Ferns have improved. But when you analyse the media texts themselves, the last 10 years reveal tension between genuine progress and deep-rooted institutional resistance.

One of the significant improvements is in the discursive shift in baseline respect afforded to the Black Ferns. Mainstream media has made progress towards eliminating the habit of treating women's rugby as peripheral to men's rugby or as just a novelty. Journalists throughout 2024-2025 were far more likely to provide better visibility, include more of their voices, and frame the Black Ferns as legitimate athletes.

However, while reporting improved in these areas, there are still major gaps showing mainstream media still operating within patriarchal structures that remain heavily embedded within their ecosystem. Firstly, coverage of the Black Ferns remains episodic, and tournament driven which they mask through hyper-visibility. Even though overall article volumes have improved, visibility still significantly decreases when the World Cup ends. This pattern is a textbook example of conditional visibility, where mainstream media in

Aotearoa New Zealand structure coverage around major event hype rather than sporting equality. Secondly, subtle gendered stereotypes are still used in modern framing of the team, such as shifting focus onto an athlete's personal milestones or framing a female coach's authority entirely through her father's rugby legacy. These show how deeply entrenched traditional mindsets continue to compromise objective reporting on the Black Ferns. It is recommended that for change to happen, the institutional structure of mainstream media needs to change so that there are enough of the right resources to create more routine coverage of the Black Ferns on a day-to-day basis. Otherwise, the structure should utilise and provide more visibility to existing smaller media organisations, such as Locker Room that are already covering the Black Ferns and are run by females. By doing this, mainstream media will acknowledge that there are some matters which are better left to be handled by others who are in a rightful position to do so. Until sports media normalise commitment to the same routine, day-to-day coverage handed to the All Blacks, the broader media ecosystem of the Black Ferns will remain caught between making progressive structural steps and reproducing old stereotypes.

An area which remains consistent is the lack of meaningful indigenous representation. mainstream media has barely moved the needle when it comes to integrating tikanga Māori or authenticating the cultural identities of a squad that is predominantly Māori and Pasifika. To achieve true cultural equity, everyday journalism practices must evolve to capture the cultural core of Ngā Mamaku and the full identity of its indigenous players. Furthermore, media organisations need to apply an intersectional lens to their reporting, recognising the unique, layered systemic barriers these players face along with actively creating spaces that disrupt them. The Cultural and Environmental Review in 2022 should be often revisited by journalists who cover the Black Ferns and should be a normal practice for them to do so. Prioritising the development of cultural competency within mainstream media is recommended to ensure holistic reporting that encompass the indigenous values and identity of players. This will also support to keep mainstream media accountable and responsible for their own tendencies to report with biases which is a practice that is strongly recommended so that these patriarchal and colonial systems can begin to break down.

5.5 Beyond the Coverage

Mainstream media coverage of the Black Ferns (Ngā Mamaku) in Aotearoa New Zealand has successfully evolved over time with significant changes in the way that they

portray the team. The representation of the Black Ferns that was initially constructed through patriarchal hierarchies and gendered stereotypes has begun to shift to an environment where the team are seen through a lens of athletic legitimacy and systemic professionalisation. Although the patterns of visibility, framing and representation have seen some improvements, it is clear that there is still room to continue along this route to achieve true media equity for the Black Ferns and more broadly, women in rugby. Mainstream media must learn to move beyond basic structural validation and episodic coverage to break down the barriers of conditional visibility and honour the tikanga that define Ngā Mamaku.

5.6 Limitations and Future Research

This research faced limitations throughout the process, which were mostly constraints related to the scope of the project. A key limitation was the limited timeframe and resources available to carry out the research. The study was carried out over four months and despite the sample being dictated by the time boundaries, it served as a concentrated overview of mainstream media coverage during peak and off-peak periods of visibility.

Initially, this study considered carrying out both a quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis. However, such an analysis would have required more time and financial resources. There was also a consideration to analyse all news articles from various outlets and not just those available online or limited to the three selected in this study. However, the process to access these news archives was time intensive and the resources needed to analyse articles from all other outlets would not have been feasible. Future studies can use this as a foundation to investigate alternative media ecosystems beyond online text articles, such as broadcasting and social media coverage or dive into indigenous platforms. This can help to evaluate media alternatives and the role that rising communication platforms play in the professionalisation of women's rugby.

The period and sample of articles analysed in this study also serve as a limitation where the findings are restricted to a certain period and a certain set of articles. It is recommended that any future research focused on a similar topic should investigate with a larger sample across a longer period from more media outlets to capture other sentiments that might have been excluded from this research.

The study acknowledges that there are opportunities for future research into the indigenous representation of women in rugby and the Black Ferns. Future researchers are

suggested to examine the cultural competency and awareness of mainstream media within Aotearoa New Zealand to understand in-depth the current cultural disconnect. Researchers are also encouraged to look into indigenous-led or iwi led media to understand whether they successfully bridge the gap between tikanga Maori and sports journalism.

I considered involving primary data by interviewing sports journalists and Black Ferns players themselves. This type of research would have included asking journalists on how they have perceived the Black Ferns over time and what contributes to their routines and writing styles of the Black Ferns. It would have also asked Black Ferns players of both eras on their perceptions around the frequency and type of coverage they have received. Again, this would have required more time, financial resources, and an ethics approval which would have been impractical for the scope of this research. Future researchers could look into carrying out a similar study using primary sources.

The limitations encountered throughout the research process did not decrease the quality and validity of the study. It still brings value and answers to the existing gaps in literature around the representation of the Black Ferns in mainstream media and the representation of women in rugby more broadly. The study still allows for an opportunity to provide insights on how media representation of the Black Ferns has shifted over time and what gaps still exist.

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Appendix

Coding Table & Sheet Sample

Category	Code
Outlet	Stuff, New Zealand Herald, RNZ
Period	1 = 2014 – 2015 2 = 2024-2025
Headline	Headline name provided
Link	Link provided
Date published	MM/DD/YYYY
Author	Name provided
Author's gender	M = Male F = Female U = Unknown
Name in headline	1 = Yes 2 = No
Position in headline	1=Beginning 2=middle 3= end
Multimedia use	1 = Yes 2 = No
Image use	1 = Yes 2 = No
Article length	Number of words provided
Depth of analysis	1=low 2= moderate 3=high
Tone towards Black Ferns	1=positive 2=neutral 3=negative
Tone justification	Description of article features through words

Framing	1=achievement 2=underdog/inspirational 3=professional/performance 4=off field matters 5=structural/cultural
Context provided	0=minimal 1=some context provided 2=strong context
Professionalisation framing	1 = Yes 2 = No
Total people quoted	Number provided
Women quoted	Number provided
Black Ferns quoted	Number provided
Proportion women/players voices	Percentage provided
Indigenous representation	1 = Yes 2 = No
Type of indigenous representation	1=cultural identity 2=naming 3=community connection 4=tokenistic 5=absent
Stereotypical language present	1 = Yes 2 = No
Type of stereotype	1=gendered 2=emotional 3=physical appearance 4=cultural
Stereotypical image	1 = Yes 2 = No
Athletic image	1 = Yes 2 = No

