



THE ROLE OF NATIONAL SPORT ORGANISATIONS IN INFORMING FEMALE SPORT UNIFORM DESIGN AND DISCOURSE

A RESEARCH REPORT PREPARED BY
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Executive Summary

Background and Objectives: While athlete/participant perspectives on female sport uniforms are a common focus for existing research within this domain, there is limited research on the individuals and groups that lead sport uniform-associated decisions, including the establishment of directives by sport governing bodies. This report presents current perspectives, decision-making processes, and directives pertaining to female sport uniform designs - as led by New Zealand National Sport Organisations (NSO's). It also establishes if any uniform changes have been contemplated in light of the rising attention on women in sport.

Literature Review Findings: Existing research suggests that uniform design elements (such as the cut, colour and tightness) can have a significant impact on self-perceived body image (Krane et al., 2004b; Nemeth et al., 2020b; Fang, Sun, Ahmed Laar & Lu, 2022). In alignment with these findings, Kosteli et al. (2014) suggest body dissatisfaction can be more prevalent in females participating in competitive sport due to associated social pressures regarding athletic physique. In many cases the fit of female sport uniforms is associated with sporting performance, i.e., it holds a particular function. Yet such designs can still reduce self-perceived body image and a loss of confidence (Nemeth et al., 2020b). The integration of stakeholders' perspectives is key to an overarching understanding of the ways that body image can be addressed for females involved in sport (Koulanova et al., 2021b). Common stakeholders identified in female sport uniform design include the athlete (or participant), coaches, parents, peers and sport organisations. Coaches can be key agents within sport when it comes to the development of body ideals (Murphy et al., 2012; Warner et al., 2013).

Findings: Of the original 30 NSO managers contacted, 26 completed the survey link. This equated to an 87 per cent response rate. 81.8 per cent (n=18) were aware of female sports uniforms style aspects that were affecting player confidence or anxiety. 59.1 per cent (n=13) noted that they had subsequently made changes to female uniforms. Survey respondents were presented with a list of seven possible uniform-design-related reasons for player loss of confidence and feelings of anxiety. Responses varied depending on the organisation and sport.

Conclusions: Our findings acknowledge the key role NSO's hold in leading sport-uniform associated decisions, thus providing an alternative viewpoint to existing studies on female sport uniform designs that primarily incorporate the athlete voice. The study also provides insight into organisational approaches to female sport uniform designs at regional and national levels of competition/representation, while factoring in requirements that may fall outside of the decision-making processes of NSO's.

1.0 Introduction

There has been much research confirming that females are more likely than males to experience high levels of body dissatisfaction and appearance-related self-consciousness, when participating in sport (Fischetti et al., 2020; Vani et al., 2020). Female player beliefs regarding their bodies, and how they look when playing sport, also significantly influence confidence levels (Lauer et al., 2018; Steinfeldt et al., 2012). Some research suggests that such feelings can be exacerbated by the design of sport uniforms, in-turn, fueling additional body-related comparisons, negative body image concerns, and feelings of anxiety (George, 2021; Koulanova et al., 2021a). As a result, certain uniform designs can act as a barrier to female sport participation (Lebel & Vidotto, 2021; Slater & Tiggemann, 2010). While athlete/participant perspectives on female sport uniforms are a common focus for existing research within this domain, there is limited research on the individuals and groups that lead sport uniform-associated decisions, including the establishment of directives by sport governing bodies. Koulanova et al., (2021a), offers one of the few studies that reviews the body image concerns of girls involved in sport from a coach, referee, and administrator perspective. In doing so, they note that 'the integration of all stakeholder's perspectives is key to an overarching understanding of the ways that body image can be addressed for girls involved in sport' (p.2).

Of late, female sport uniforms have received heightened media attention. In November 2022, Wimbledon announced they would be relaxing all-white clothing rules for women, in an attempt to reduce anxiety levels of female players (Foster et al., 2022). In December 2022, Netball Australia released guidelines for a more flexible uniform to be introduced across all levels of netball in Australia (Hytner, 2022). The ripples of such media attention extended to New Zealand, with a popular sporting column (*Stuff's Sporting Predictions for 2023 | Stuff.co.nz*, 2023) predicting that the New Zealand Football Ferns would switch their white shorts for black in an attempt to align with research demonstrating how the colour of sport uniforms can impact player confidence and performance.

This report presents current perspectives, decision-making processes, and directives pertaining to female sport uniform designs - as led by New Zealand National Sport Organisations (NSO's). It also establishes if any uniform changes have been contemplated in light of the rising attention on women in sport. Presenting a magnified assessment of contextual considerations and international influence is intended to assist in developing a clearer understanding of the different perspectives on, and approaches to, addressing the needs of female sport participants. To our knowledge no formal research has previously been conducted in New Zealand linking sport governing bodies and the suitability of female athlete uniform design.

2.0 Literature Review

“Internationally, there is consistent evidence that males are more likely to participate in sport than females” (Eime et al., 2016, p.2) and that gender is a key factor influencing sport participation (*ACTIVE NZ MAIN REPORT-The New Zealand Participation Survey 2018*, n.d.; Eime et al., 2014; van Tuyckom et al., 2010). One of the reasons for this gender-split is that females experience more barriers to sport participation than men (Sport New Zealand, 2023). The terms ‘body-image’, ‘body-satisfaction’ and ‘appearance’ are synonymous with the literature associated with observed gender differences in, and barriers to, sport participation, particularly in relation to body shape and size (Slater & Tiggemann, 2011). Collectively, such terms confirm how an individual evaluates their body and the degree of importance that one places on the body (Sabiston et al., 2020).

A wealth of international research exists in relation to sport participation barriers for females, with many studies exploring traditionally male dominated sports, aspects of masculine hegemon, and social norms – across Europe, Asia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (English, 2017; Fowlie et al., 2020; Krane et al., 2004a; Migliaccio & Berg, 2007; Nemeth et al., 2020a; van Tuyckom et al., 2010). In addressing uniform design as a barrier to female sport participation, this literature review is guided by perceived body image factors in relation to uniform fit and colour. A further assessment of existing literature reflects on the different stakeholders associated with sport uniform design and provision, whilst also addressing the existence of sport uniform related policies and directives.

Examining the Relationship Between Sport Uniform Fit, Colour and Body Image

The fit of a sports uniform can factor in the tightness and cut of a garment. Existing research suggests that such design elements can have a significant impact on self-perceived body image (Krane et al., 2004b; Nemeth et al., 2020b; Fang, Sun, Ahmed Laar & Lu, 2022). In alignment with these findings, Kosteli et al. (2014) suggest body dissatisfaction can be more prevalent in females participating in competitive sport due to associated social pressures regarding athletic physique. Some research focuses more specifically on gender perspectives when it comes to garment fit. In some sport-based circumstances females wear the same fit as the males. For example, a recent study in Australia confirmed that young girls would prefer a sport uniform specifically designed for females, i.e., not a unisex cut (Victoria University, 2022). Comparatively, a more recent study, conducted by Howard (2023, p.2) in the United Kingdom (UK), assessed how gendered school sport uniforms contribute to the disciplining of the ‘ideal feminine body. In their study, the findings confirmed that style of school sport uniforms played a major role in drop-out rates of school sport due to uniform fit-associated negative psychological experiences. Other research supporting this notion suggests that when a female is required to wear a ‘revealing’ uniform, defined as tight/form fitting, and that exposes the shape of an individual’s body, then a reduction in comfort and positive body image can typically arise (Krane et al., 2004b).

In many cases the fit of female sport uniforms is associated with sporting performance, i.e., it holds a particular function. Yet such designs can still reduce self-perceived body image and a loss of confidence (Nemeth et al., 2020b). It has also been suggested that in situations where a requirement for tight clothing exists, when it does not necessarily influence performance, negative impacts can be heightened for those who compete in the associated sport (Nemeth et al., 2020b). Such negative impacts can vary. On one hand, an individual may withdraw from participating in a sport (Victoria University, 2022). Anxiety associated with the fit of sport uniforms can turn some women away from team sports and into situations where they elect to be physically active in the safety of their own home, so as to avoid judgement on how they look (Sport New Zealand, 2023). On the other hand, an individual or group may choose to question the directives and perspectives associated with the uniform design (Nemeth et al., 2020b).

With regard to sport uniform colour, few research studies have investigated the influence of colour of the sporting uniform on female body/appearance satisfaction. While there is reference to the traditional “black and white sport uniforms imitating the colour schemes of most New Zealand national sports teams” (Sturm, Kavanagh & Rinehart, 2021, p.2030), the female sport uniform studies that have recently taken place offer perspectives external to the New Zealand sport industry. For example, recent research from Australia suggests young girls would prefer sport uniforms consisting of material that hides sweat marks, are dark in colour, and specifically have dark colour bottoms (Victoria University, 2022). Additional study findings suggest that the colour of sport competition garments, specifically bottoms, may be a source of anxiety and self-consciousness

for female athletes due to increased worry and stress associated with break through menstrual bleeding during menstruation (Foster et al., 2022; George, 2021).

Female Sport Uniform Stakeholders

Aside from the female sport participants themselves, there is an identified need to examine all the influences when assessing sport participant perceptions of body-image (Beckner & Record, 2015). The integration of stakeholders' perspectives is key to an overarching understanding of the ways that body image can be addressed for females involved in sport (Koulanova et al., 2021b). Common stakeholders identified in female sport uniform design include the athlete (or participant), coaches, parents, peers and sport organisations. Coaches can be key agents within sport when it comes to the development of body ideals (Murphy et al., 2012; Warner et al., 2013). Beckner and Record (2015) suggest that a coach's influential role includes matters of body image – along with the ability to positively or negatively influence an athletes' self-perception of their body. In cases where children are concerned, parents can impact a child's self-perception of body image and how they feel they look in their sports uniform (Bremer, 2012) and are often identified as the most important body image agents peripheral to the sport (Murphy et al., 2012; Smoll et al., 2011). The pressure and expectations they place on their children (whether that be in terms of performance or how they physically look) can be a contributing factor to stress and anxiety in female sport participants (Wolfenden & Holt, 2006). Peers can play a similar role, when they comment on having an athletic (e.g. muscular) or non-athletic (e.g. slim) body (Beckner & Record, 2015). Casey et al. (2019) suggest that sport organisations also hold a significant role in the design and provision of sport uniforms, especially sport administrators embedded within governing organisations.

Female Sport Uniform Policy and Directives

Sport policy can shape physical activity behaviours (Bocarro et al., 2012) In doing so, certain sport policies can result in unintended outcomes, such as having a negative impact on sport participation (Hoekman & Scheerder, 2021) While there is a multitude of literature covering sport policy (Grix, 2010; Houlihan et al., 2009; Keat & Sam, 2013; Sam & Jackson, 2004.; Skille, 2008), little research exists in relation to sport policy and sport uniforms. Such a determination is supported by Howard (2023) who notes that based on research coming out of the UK, the sports uniform is often neglected in policy documents and government initiatives. One of the few examples of a sport industry organisation, solely focussed on female sport participation, is the New York based Women's Sport's Foundation. The Foundation presents their own guidelines on appropriate athletic uniforms for females, specifically noting the need to consider the differences in female body types and the potential impacts uniform design can have on female psychological readiness (*Appropriate Athletic Uniform Guidelines - Women's Sports Foundation*, n.d.). The guidelines themselves state that

Larger and/or heavier athletes or exceptionally thin athletes may not feel comfortable or may feel self-conscious in form fitting uniforms, briefs or minimalist apparel. An athlete's psychological attitude is an important aspect of performance. [Furthermore,] Female athletes wearing pads during menstruation may feel uncomfortable in form-fitting apparel with such discomfort possibly inhibiting freedom of movement.

(Appropriate Athletic Uniform Guidelines - Women's Sports Foundation, n.d.)

Casey et al's, (2019) recommendation that a systems-level understanding is needed comes into play again here, with the suggestion that it addresses the knowledge gap between body image, research and practice. This makes sense in a sporting context, as many sport uniform design aspects and decisions (including for example, representative team colours) are confirmed and made by sport organisations. Furthermore, directives for sport uniform design tend to be issued by the associated facilitating organisation, such as a school, sports club, event organising committee or national sporting body.

New Zealand Research Context

In a New Zealand context, female participation in sport is declining (Sport New Zealand, 2023). One of the most recent assessments of sport participation rates in New Zealand is presented in the 2018 Active New Zealand Report (Sport New Zealand, 2023). These findings confirmed that male sport participation rates were generally higher than those of females, noting the most significant gender participation differences were between the ages of 15 to 17 years and 18 to 24 years. In accordance with similar international studies, the

report acknowledged obstacles to sport participation as a reason for the differing gender participation rates. More specifically, the New Zealand study confirmed that females frequently referenced a lack of time or lack of self-motivation (*Active NZ Main report - The New Zealand Participation Survey, 2018*).

To date, a number of efforts to support female participation in sport have been made. In 2018, the New Zealand Government released their *Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation Strategy*, with a call for gender equity in sport and active recreation (Sport New Zealand, 2018; New Zealand Government, 2018). This was followed in 2022 by Sport New Zealand launching their #ITSMYMOVE initiative that emphasised that young women are more susceptible to feelings of body confidence and judgement, particularly in a sport setting (*For Providers - #ITSMYMOVE*, n.d.) The initiative aims to assist sport providers of physical activity in providing positive environments for young women (*For Providers - #ITSMYMOVE*, n.d.). #ITSMYMOVE also aims to address the contributing factors to falling female participation rates, such as body image, judgement, and motivation (*Sport NZ to Address Declining Numbers of Teenage Girls in Sport | RNZ News, 2022*).

This study takes a step towards remedying Howard's (2023) noted lack of research on female sport uniforms. To our knowledge, no New Zealand studies have confirmed that the colour and design of female sport uniforms can be an obstacle to sport participation within New Zealand. With the increasing level of interest in many of New Zealand's national women's sport teams, and that level of interest being comparable to male national sports teams - with the exception of the All Blacks (Sport New Zealand, 2022), there is an urgency for a more informed approach to designing and implementing female sport uniforms.

3.0 Method

NSO's were identified through the publicly available (online) Sport New Zealand 'Sport and Recreation Directory' (Sport New Zealand, 2023). As of the date of data collection there were 65 NSO's acknowledged by Sport New Zealand (2023). For the purposes of this study, a set of criteria was applied in order to determine the feasibility of participating NSO's. This ensured the collection of relevant and consistent data. Applicable NSO's (and corresponding sports) were identified based on their established platforms for female participation, and an existing spectrum of grassroots participation through to national representation. Additionally, water-based sports were excluded (that is, where primary or sole uniforms included swimwear). Sports incorporating individual participants in vehicles were also excluded (e.g., flying, gliding, motorcycling, motorsport, speedway and powerboating). Based on this selection criteria, 30 NSO managers, representing 30 different New Zealand sports were contacted. Individual survey respondents were identified through corresponding NSO websites, with all respondents holding a management role within their NSO, thus holding the ability to comment more generally on the sport that their organization governed. Survey respondents were emailed individually, with information detailing the purpose of and background to the study, along with a link to the survey. Participation was noted as voluntary. Of the original 30 NSO managers contacted, 26 completed the survey link. This equated to an 87 per cent response rate. NSO's and representative sports are identified in Table 1.

Table 1: National Sport Organisation (NSO) study participants

NSO's (A-NZF)	NSO's (NZI-Z)
Athletics New Zealand	New Zealand Ice Figure Skating Association
Basketball New Zealand	New Zealand Rugby
Bowls New Zealand	New Zealand Rugby League
Cycling New Zealand	Rowing New Zealand
Equestrian New Zealand	Snow Sports New Zealand
Golf New Zealand	Softball New Zealand
Gymnastics New Zealand	Squash New Zealand
Hockey New Zealand	Surf Lifesaving New Zealand
Karate New Zealand	Table Tennis New Zealand
Netball New Zealand	Tennis New Zealand
New Zealand Cricket	Triathlon New Zealand
New Zealand Curling Association	Volleyball New Zealand
New Zealand Football	Waka Ama New Zealand

Differing approaches to, and perspectives on, female sport uniform designs, were collected by way of a short on-line survey. The survey was distributed to New Zealand NSO's, along with a request for an applicable manager to complete the survey and provide comment on behalf of the sport their organisation governed. This approach further supports the research findings of Casey et al. (2019), by factoring in a governing organisation perspective, when reviewing sport policy and directives. The survey results assisted the researchers in establishing the need for, and focus of, a second research phase involving qualitative interviews that collated the perspectives of NSO staff, athletes, and additional stakeholders, which will follow during the 2023/2024 sports season, when current international female sporting events (including world cups) have finished and can be reflected upon.

The online survey comprised of five short questions, with an estimated completion time of three to five minutes. The length of the survey factored in the exploratory information being sought, along with the available time of respondents and likelihood of survey completion. To borrow from Brinkmann & Kvale (2018), if one knows what to ask for, why one is asking, and how to ask, one can conduct research that is informative and rich in meaning. The first question of the survey asked the respondent to confirm the sport they were representing. The second, third and fourth questions reflected 'tick box' answers, with questions designed to (a) determine the levels of awareness to address concerns regarding female sport uniform designs across different New Zealand sports, and (b) to establish if any specific sports were planning (or had already conducted) steps to make changes to their female sport uniform designs. Lists of predetermined attributes were garnered from prior research relating to female sport uniform design (Lebel & Vidotto, 2021; Slater & Tiggemann, 2010; Victoria University, 2022). A fifth question presented respondents with an opportunity to make further comments.

The survey was designed and distributed using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, Novo, UT, 2022). Following completion of the survey, many survey respondents opted to provide additional in-depth feedback in relation to their sport, via email. These qualitative responses were regarded as 'further comments' and treated as extended responses to Q5 of the survey. In eight (8) cases, the primary recipient of the study email and survey link advised that they had forwarded the email and survey link to an alternate manager within the NSO, who was better suited to respond on behalf of their sport.

The quantitative and qualitative results were analysed separately and then combined. Quantitative results were analysed using SPSS (IBM Corp, Version 29, 2022). The quantitative results were reviewed and descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency counts, percentages for categorical data and percentages for categorical data) were calculated for questions 1,2, 3 and 5. The willingness of survey respondents to offer extended feedback and description was insightful. Value was placed on the narratives provided, and the additional points they raised (Armour & MacDonald, 2012; Gournelos et al., 2019). Qualitative responses (i.e., longer comments) were analysed using NVivo (QSR International Pty Ltd., Version 12, 2022). Analysis of respondent comments incorporated identification of the frequency or variety of the most salient themes (Cohen et al., 2007), and the placing of the raw data into logical meaningful categories (Edwards & Skinner, 2009).

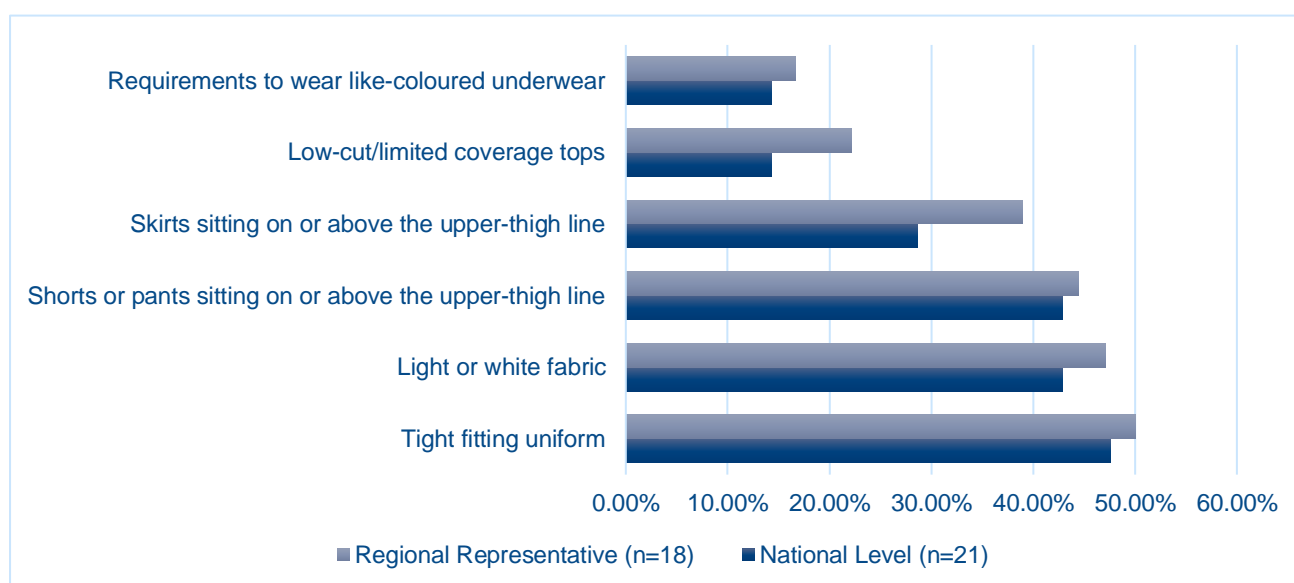
4.0 Results

The results of the study incorporated a mix of quantitative and qualitative results. While the quantitative results presented foundation information on female uniform situations across the different NSO's, it was the qualitative results that offered deeper insight into sport organisation uniform considerations and decision processes. Results are presented under four primary themes: sport uniform design attributes; awareness of sport uniform impact on player anxieties; female uniform design considerations; and, uniform decision-making processes and directives. In some cases, there is also noted overlap between these themes.

Uniform attributes

To initiate consideration and encourage informative responses, NSO's were initially asked to identify the types of female sport uniform attributes predominantly associated with their sport. In doing so, they were asked to identify attributes associated with uniforms at a national level, as well as any regional representative uniforms associated with NSO led regional tournaments (i.e., where NSO influence existed). In noting that club level sport frequently opted individualized approaches to female sport uniforms (i.e., separate to any NSO overreach), this level of sport was omitted from the study. Percentages associated with the identification of different attributes are presented in Table 1.

Figure 1: Frequency of design attributes associated with female sport uniforms across surveyed NSO's



Awareness of sport uniform impact on player anxieties

The identification of design attributes was followed by questions designed to assess awareness of sport uniform impact on player anxieties. In terms of a quantitative summary of NSO responses, 81.8 per cent (n=18) were aware of female sports uniforms style aspects that were affecting player confidence or anxiety. When it came to New Zealand sports detailing that awareness, survey respondent replies incorporated a spectrum of understanding of female sport uniform design issues and impacts, in addition to current practices. Furthermore, 59.1 per cent (n=13) noted that they had subsequently made changes to female uniforms. Extended qualitative comments from this latter cohort are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: NSO's aware of attention/concerns regarding female sport uniform designs - who have made changes.

National Sport Organisation	Extended Comment
Tennis NZ	<i>"Coaches provided feedback that the 11 and 13 year old girls did not like singlets last year. . . Mainly due to the gap under the arm, and for obvious reasons at that age, singlets can make them feel self-conscious. So we switched the younger age group to a t-shirt and have received positive feedback."</i>
Triathlon NZ	<i>"We are very aware that the required uniform for representative levels in triathlon are firm fitting. We regularly get feedback on design and colours to ensure the best outcome for our athletes"</i>
Surf Life Saving NZ	<i>"We acknowledge that the general style aspects of swimwear mean that large amounts of a participants' body are easily visible and [that it is] therefore likely that some will experience issues with body confidence of anxiety because of this, and so may choose to not engage in our sport or withdraw because of it. With this in mind, we have recently adjusted our uniform regulations to ensure as much flexibility while maintaining safety and equity."</i>
Softball NZ	<i>We are "ensuring we have specific female cut playing uniforms."</i>
Snow Sports NZ	<i>"Athletes self-direct their own kit with their sponsors, so we don't have to get involved. For the Olympics and youth Olympics / Paralympics, they get involved in the design and last year their only requests were "baggy and black" this is mainly a style and functionality decision over everything else, with it being a freestyle sport. However, this is different in ski racing where they need super tight and streamline kit - but again this is self-managed with sponsors directly."</i>
NZ Rugby League	<i>"The concerns around the cut of our national women's teams jerseys and team kit to have styles that are a women's cut and designed specifically for women were addressed approximately 3-4 years ago."</i>
Netball NZ	<i>"We have published [a] NSO Uniform Position statement recently to encourage Centres, Clubs and Schools to loosen uniform requirements and offer a larger range of uniform options"</i>
NZ Rugby	<i>"We have completed multiple consultation processes with our national female players that have resulted in changes in style and fit of their uniforms"</i>
Bowls NZ	<i>"We are introducing a skort for our women's high-performance team this season to give the option as well as shorts in a short and longer length style. We also offer playing pants for those who prefer to cover up for various reasons."</i>
Gymnastics NZ	<i>"- Some . . . females feel uncomfortable about competing in a standard gymnastic cut leotard style due to body image and periods. Our sport now allows for bike shorts or leggings to be worn over the top of their performance leotards. . . Athletes often feel uncomfortable in white or light-coloured leotards due to their transparency. While there is no ruling against these colours, clubs and provincial teams have moved away from these colours/shades for these reasons"</i>
NZ Football	<i>We have "introduced women's sizing on all our coaching courses. Although the Ferns home Kit is white the choice from players is to wear black where possible"</i>
Golf NZ	<i>"Yes, we are aware colour, size, fit, and material can impact players confidence and anxiety levels."</i>
Rowing NZ	<i>"Athletes have full collaboration with staff for the entirety of the uniform design process. Men and Women have the same uniforms and we stay away from certain colours for the bottom portion of the row-suits for both genders."</i>

Separate to those sports who were aware of the attention and concerns regarding female sport uniform designs, and had already made changes, an additional 18.2 per cent (n=4) of sports were planning to make changes to their female uniforms at the time of completing the survey. Their reasoning for such intention was extended upon in the qualitative comments the sports provided. For example, Cricket noted that they

. . . aim to encourage clubs and associations to move away from wearing cricket whites and to offer a variety of sizing and different cut options, so participants feel comfortable and confident. We are also working with Sport NZ through the #It'sMyMove Campaign to create a video case study documenting the introduction of coloured clothing for players through the Dunedin Cricket Female League.

Equestrian noted that some of their sub-organisations were navigating requirements to wear light coloured (fawn or cream) breeches. *'Pony Club have recently allowed dark-coloured breeches and Equestrian NZ is considering this'*. Additional sports within this category included Curling and Squash.

Ice Figure Skating was the only sport who noted that they were aware of the attention and concerns regarding female sport uniform designs, yet, had no plans to make changes. It is important to acknowledge that the reasoning for such a stance was down to the nature of the sport, existing policy considerations, and varying uniform-based stipulations at competition level.

We are very aware that this might be a concern. However, we don't have any colour stipulations for skating costumes and skaters can wear long pants if they choose in most disciplines. Costumes are generally very form fitting and that could be a source of anxiety, however the need for costumes to be form fitting is largely to address H&S concerns. Costumes that the judges consider too revealing receive penalty points. We're not quite sure what other steps we can take, but happy to consider any suggestions.

Interestingly, 13.6 per cent (n=3) of survey respondents were 'unsure' if the current uniforms for the sport they were representing were impacting female athlete confidence or anxiety. In these instances, no additional qualitative comments were made.

Primary female sport uniform considerations

Survey respondents were presented with a list of seven possible uniform-design-related reasons for player loss of confidence and feelings of anxiety. The list was compiled based on findings noted in a review of the existing literature. NSO representatives also provided a considerable number of corresponding comments that offered extended insight into the loss of confidence or feelings of anxiety, with regard to current female uniform designs. Such comments focussed on body image (including looking good), uniform sizing, fit and comfort, and uniform colour.

Body image

29.5 per cent (n=18) of sports, noted that the female athlete's perceptions of body image were likely to be a contributing factor for athletes' loss of confidence or feelings of anxiety in relation to current uniform designs within their sport. With regard to the provided list of possible uniform-design-related reasons for player loss of confidence and feelings of anxiety. Body image considerations were ranked highest in the combined results. While body image considerations were noted by Gymnastics, Waka Ama and Rowing, such considerations were supported by different reasoning. For example, Gymnastics noted that feedback from their female athlete advisors *"highlighted that body image was the greatest issue amongst female athletes"* whilst participating in their sport. Alternatively, Rowing referred to image issues associated with *"how the uniforms may look while on the podium at events or around the boat park . . . [including the] possibility of an underwear line showing"* (as opposed to the actual underwear itself). In reflecting on a more holistic approach, Snow Sports suggested that that if an athlete *"felt that they looked good, they [felt] good, and therefore had confidence to perform better"*. Representative NSO thoughts and perspectives associated with body image were also highlighted with regard to uniform sizing, fit, comfort and colour, and are further detailed in the sections below.

Size, fit and comfort

In referring to the provided list of possible uniform-design-related reasons for player loss of confidence and feelings of anxiety, a lack of comfort was ranked the second highest in the combined results, identified by a total of 23 per cent (n=14) of sports. An extended breakdown of thoughts and perspectives relating to size, fit and comfort of female sport uniforms were provided by survey respondents (Table 3). Such comments relate to uniform size ranges, the necessity for tight fitting uniforms (i.e., performance and safety), and additional reflection on athlete comfort.

Table 3: Uniform size, fit and comfort qualitative comments

General Stance	Example Comments
Sizing range/gender considerations	<p><i>"We're always conscious of having garments available in a wide range of sizes and women's cut as opposed to generic/unisex cut which can be very unflattering". (Bowls)</i></p> <p><i>"Male and female uniforms are identical with just the fit tailored to suit each gender. Issues such as chafing occur with both men and women". (Rowing)</i></p> <p><i>"Our male and female players have the same uniforms. The only difference for our females being that they wear a breast protector under their uniforms". (Karate)</i></p> <p><i>"Female sizing doesn't cater for XXL sizes or taller athletes" (Football)</i></p>
Fitted uniforms	<p><i>"Some players prefer more fitted uniforms [from a] performance perspective". (Rugby League)</i></p> <p><i>"Standing on the podium in skintight rowsuits is definitely putting yourself out there, [however] loose clothing does cause a safety issue in the boats". (Rowing)</i></p> <p><i>"Sizes that are too small, short or tight are the biggest factors affecting players comfort". (Squash)</i></p> <p><i>"Athletes in ski racing [had to] wear tight kit in order to be more streamlined, and fast when racing downhill". (Snow Sports)</i></p> <p><i>"Most tops for players at a national level are fitted. They have the capacity to make female players anxious – [based on] the movements required of athletes during a game". (Curling)</i></p>

With some sports highlighting preferences for tailored designs, Table Tennis noted that there was a lack of such designs for their female players. Many sports also mentioned a lack of consistency when it came to supplier sizing for female sport uniforms. For example, Hockey acknowledged that issues with sizing were often dependent on where the uniforms were made. Softball and Football also made similar comments.

Colour

With regard to the list of possible uniform-design-related reasons for player loss of confidence and feelings of anxiety, light or white colours and the potential for visibility of blood if players were menstruating was ranked the third highest in the combined results, at 19.7 per cent (n=12). Survey respondents provided several examples where the colour of female uniforms] (especially white or light colours) for their sport required careful consideration. For example, Curling stated that

at top level competition we must wear a light colour and a dark. Therefore, often our white tops for females need to be looked at in case they are see through. We now ask for samples for all uniforms when we can, before purchasing, to make sure this issue is avoided.

Meanwhile, Equestrian noted that they were considering a move away from fawn or white coloured breeches due to athlete concerns about the visibility of blood if a female athlete was menstruating. Cricket were 'aware of instances where some females wearing cricket whites for their club and/or representative cricket teams may feel anxious and/or uncomfortable in their sports uniform' for similar reasons. Similarly, Snow Sports confirmed that white was the least preferred colour for their female athletes. Comparatively, Squash didn't believe there were many concerns from players who needed to wear white playing gear. *"Although, squash skirts tended to always have inner linings."* Meanwhile, Rowing noted that they were *"very aware of [uniform] colours and how they look when wet"*. This was paralleled by Athletics who noted that one of the main requirements for their athlete uniforms is that they do not become transparent, if wet.

A significant number of comments regarding female sport uniform colours centred on representative colours, especially noting that black, white and silver were predominant New Zealand sport team representative colours. Rugby League noted that, *“regarding colour for our code/sport, our females feel valued and included when they wear the same representative colours relevant to the club, region or country they are representing”*. Tennis specifically noted that their national representative teams were restricted by national colours (i.e., black, white, and silver). Golf and Bowls confirmed that their national representative female sport uniforms were predominantly black.

Interestingly, despite survey respondents identifying that lack of comfort, body image issues, visibility of menstrual blood, and visibility of underwear were all possible contributors to increased female player anxiety, only 5 per cent (n=3) of sports felt that their current uniform design would impact players’ mental wellbeing.

Uniform decision making: Processes and directives

While qualitative comments pertaining to directives and responsibilities of female sport uniform design were varied, such comments were able to be categorised under three themes: governing authority/competition requirements, athlete consultations; and, sporting level responsibilities. The qualitative comments made by different sports in relation to these themes are collated in Table 4 and offer insight into the decision processes across differing New Zealand NSOs.

Table 4: Approaches and decisions relating to female sport uniform designs

NSO	Example Comments
Governing Authority /Competition Requirements	<p><i>We’re impacted by “governance from an international level. For example, wearing an all-white away kit”. (Hockey NZ)</i></p> <p><i>“Competition requirements may differ – can’t be changed”. (Gymnastics NZ)</i></p> <p><i>Triathlon NZ: “We work with our female athletes and then need to work in with the World Governing authority to follow the uniform rules.” (Triathlon NZ)</i></p>
Athlete Consultation	<p><i>“It’s a consultive process with athletes – it’s not just a gender base discussion.” (Rugby NZ)</i></p> <p><i>“Our players have a voice on the design of the uniforms”. (Softball NZ)</i></p> <p><i>“[Uniforms] should be athlete led . . . some enjoy this as a side project.” (Snow Sports NZ)</i></p> <p><i>“In the past [we have] tried to address uniform styles for our women players and sought input from our players and made some changes based on the feedback. We then found that the changes to a more tailored, fitting design was not as well received as expected and reverted back to the one fit all uniform. As we continue to work with our athletes, we will again seek athlete input for future designs.” (Table Tennis NZ)</i></p>
Sporting Level Responsibilities	<p><i>“Often at club level it’s usually just whatever [uniforms] they can get at a good cost.” (Hockey NZ)</i></p> <p><i>“. . . there are challenges for clubs and parents to find affordable suppliers that offer pants and tops to fit a wide range of different body shapes and sizes.” (NZ Cricket)</i></p> <p><i>“We only make decisions for our national team. We have recently [published] NSO Uniform Position Statement to try to encourage everyone to consider these aspects.” (Netball NZ)</i></p>

37.8 per cent (n=17) of sports, felt that the decision or directives for female sport uniform designs should lie with the athletes/players. 24.4 per cent (n=11) of sports also felt that NSO staff should have a role in determining the female sport uniform designs within their sport. There were mixed responses for input from external organisations (such as Sport New Zealand), NSO Boards, and regional/club-level organisations, when determining the design of female sport uniforms. Sports with an aesthetic element (n=3) to their performance noted that officials (with the examples of coaches, referees and scorers provided) may be required to inform decisions on female sport uniforms. Athletics was one of the few sports to mention that their athletes could “adapt their athletic attire to meet their cultural requirements, with the most notable example being a number of female athletes who wear [a] hijab while competing”.

5.0 Discussion

Similar to the findings of the female sport uniform study conducted by Victoria University (2022), this New Zealand-based study confirmed that uniform design attributes (and the processes associated with uniform decisions, as conducted by sport organisations), were perceived to impact female sport participant anxiety and confidence levels. Comparatively, sport representatives in our study suggested that body image pressure and expectations were a key driver for females experiencing a loss of confidence or increases in anxiety and could be exacerbated by certain sport uniform traits.

There were some noted disparities between NSO representatives confirming an awareness of sport uniform aspects impacting female anxiety levels, when combined with feelings that their current uniforms were not necessarily impacting female participant's mental wellbeing. Added to this, a number of NSO representatives were also unsure if their uniform designs were affecting their female athletes in any way. Such perceptions may reflect the biases in research within this area to date, with most of the research focusing on athlete perspective (Howard, 2023; Nemeth et al. 2020; Slater & Tiggeman, 2011; Victoria University, 2022), and minimal insight on how sport organisations may effectively integrate athlete perspectives into their current directives or policies with regards to uniform design.

Uniform fit

Desire for uniform fit tended to vary across sports. For example, some sports (including Tennis and Rugby League) sought more fitted uniforms that were tailored to the female figure. Other sports (such as Squash) looked towards a more relaxed fit. In contrast, sports such as Bowls, noted that a unisex cut was often unflattering. With regard to the latter, these findings aligned with those of Choi (2000) and Krane (2001a), in that there was a perceived notion that the uniform still distanced them from male counterparts and any masculine uniform designs.

While there is an accumulation of research that has investigated the 'athlete's voice' on uniform features and designs (Bagley & Liao, 2021; Howard, 2023; Reel & Soohoo, 2010), the insights provided within our study highlight that the ability of sporting organisations to adjust uniform designs is limited by clothing manufacturers. In also addressing the practicality of changing female sport uniform sizing, many of the sports who participated in our study noted that manufacturer inconsistencies can have considerable impact on uniform size and fit. For example, both Hockey and Softball noted that inconsistencies in sizing resulted in ordered apparel being more form fitting than in previous years, and that appropriate sizes were not necessarily available for taller female athletes. *"With a lot of apparel coming out of factories in China, there can be issues around sizing, etc. One season a size 10 might fit perfect, the next it may be more 'snug' than one would like"* (Hockey). These types of comments highlighted that uniform manufacturers are also a key stakeholder in the female sport uniform design process, due to the fact that they can impact uniform size and style concerns that subsequently result in increased anxiety for wearers.

Uniform fit was also acknowledged by some sports as a key factor in performance. With regard to Snow Sports, a tight uniform enabled an athlete to be more streamlined, and faster when racing downhill. Rowing offered similar explanations for their fitted uniforms, noting the required movement of athletes when they were in the boats. Such findings, in this case, are similar to those of Nemeth et al. (2020b) and emphasise that performance is an essential consideration in the design process of any sports uniform (McCann, 2005).

Uniform colour

With specific regards to female sport uniform colour, NSO's reiterated that the colour of their representative female uniforms was, more often than not determined by the representative country (or region) requirements. For New Zealand, national representative colours are traditionally either black, white, and/or silver, with participants in particular sports either required to wear all-black (e.g., Rugby, Golf and Bowls) or all-white uniforms (e.g., Cricket, Hockey, and Football). In Cricket, where female athletes are required to wear all-white uniforms for competition, the sport representative who participated in our study noted that they were *"aware of instances where some females wearing cricket whites for their club and/or representative cricket teams may feel anxious or uncomfortable in their sports uniform"*. The findings from this study reiterate the findings of those studies that have engaged the athlete voice (Foster et al, 2022) in that many NSO's recognise that the colour of sport competition garments (particularly shorts or skirts) can be a source of anxiety for female athletes due to the potential for break through menstrual bleeding. In adding to Foster et al's. (2022) findings,

our research also confirmed anxieties often exist for women wearing white tops when participating in sport, due to the potential display of sweat, or (in the circumstances of Curling) the tops getting wet and becoming see-through.

Decision making and directives

The NSO's who participated in this study provided a variety of responses pertaining to the responsibility for female sport uniform decisions and directives. The majority of NSO's felt that consultation with athletes/players and NSO staff was pertinent in relation to the development of any uniform policies associated with their sport. Many NSO's noted that they had recently enacted consultative processes, with others intending to do so.

Little reference was made by NSO representatives to a group focussed decision style, whereby the issues is shared more widely (with players and other possible stakeholders), with a joint decision taking place. This leads to a possible recommendation that NSO's should explore this decision style further. Seeking and utilising the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups when developing such policy can, assist in promoting inclusivity, comfort and greater female sport participation (Bocarro et al., 2012; Howard, 2023).

In many cases, NSO representatives highlighted the influence of international governing authorities when it came to female sport uniform decisions, noting that such influence (in the form of directives or legislation) often restricted the uniform decisions they could make. This finding implied that there was a level of autocratic decision making in place beyond the NSOs, whereby some information was being gathered to inform decisions, yet without consultation with players.

NSO representatives also identified directives at an NSO level as a primary area for ongoing consideration. This too would need to factor in decision processes, including the collection of information and consultation with athletes. The scope of such directives was something identified as requiring further thought and clarification, based on the existing mix of uniform decisions at national level and across regional associations. Such insight emphasises the importance of incorporating sport uniform considerations in policy documents and government initiatives for the purpose of clear communication and understanding (Howard, 2023).

6.0 Conclusion

This report offers insights into the perspectives and decision-making processes of NSO's within a New Zealand context and adds to the existing discourse on the wider issue of female sport uniform attributes and design processes. The study is the first, to our knowledge, to approach the topic of female sport uniform designs and implications in a New Zealand context, through collaboration with an extensive range of New Zealand NSO's, representing the full spectrum of recognised New Zealand sports. Our findings acknowledge the key role NSO's hold in leading sport-uniform associated decisions, thus providing an alternative viewpoint to existing studies on female sport uniform designs that primarily incorporate the athlete voice.

The study also provides insight into organisational approaches to female sport uniform designs at regional and national levels of competition/representation, while factoring in requirements that may fall outside of the decision-making processes of NSO's. An understanding of the most effective decision styles at these levels can inform the likelihood of athletes accepting a decision. In the context of female sport uniform decisions and directives, it is therefore proposed that decision styles incorporating athlete consultation or group decision making are not only more likely to be accepted by the athletes, but also hold the potential to reduce any negative connotations associated with the design of those uniforms.

There were some noted limitations to this survey, in that NSO representatives were identified solely based on publicly accessible contact information and were asked to respond to the survey within a short time frame. The willingness of NSO representatives to volunteer detailed (qualitative) insights was seen in a positive light. However, the unexpected amount of qualitative feedback required balancing against the quantitative survey questions.

Future research could also review the constraints associated with sports uniform colour choices that are primarily based on commonly identifiable national and regional colours. While water sports were excluded from this particular study, research on female uniforms within this area could offer some alternative and interesting insights.

In the introduction to this report, we highlighted the prediction made by the media that the New Zealand Football Ferns would most likely opt not to wear white when representing New Zealand at the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 (Stuff, January 1, 2023). It is fitting to note that that prediction came to fruition. The New Zealand team for the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 saw its players wearing either teal or black shorts (New Zealand Football, 2023). The colour change will be "the first time the Ferns will not be required to wear a playing kit that includes white shorts. This comes as part of the global shift away from female athletes wearing white shorts. . . In addition to the shorts colour change, players will also be offered Nike Leak Protection: Period innovation integrated into their playing shorts" (New Zealand Football, 2023). The shift is noted by New Zealand Football Chief Executive Andrew Pragnell as an important milestone in recognition and appreciation for women's health. Thus, exemplifying the relevance, importance, and evolving nature of female sport uniform designs. The change also signifies the first time a national representative sports team will be wearing a colour that doesn't align with the traditionally identifiable national colours of black, white, and silver, suggesting that NSOs do have the ability to enforce innovative uniform changes.

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