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**Female athlete perceptions of food and beverage sport sponsorship:  
An exploratory study of health connotations and nutrition factors  
in a New Zealand context**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in  
Nutrition and Dietetics

Massey University, Albany  
Aotearoa New Zealand

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2024

## Abstract

*Objectives:* Sponsorships are commonly used as a medium to market products that are not aligned with a healthy lifestyle (Batty et al., 2016; Batty & Gee, 2019; Dixon et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2011; Maher et al., 2006). Parallel to this is the transformative shift in the landscape of female sports, whereby female participation and visibility in sports have increased drastically, driven by wider media coverage and the growth of public interest in female athletic achievements (Morgan, 2018; Navaratnam, 2017). Consequently, it is important to explore the specific realm of food and beverage sponsorship in the context of female athletes in New Zealand. The aim of this research is to establish an understanding of female athlete thoughts and perspectives relating to food and beverage sponsors of female sport in New Zealand. In alignment with this aim, a specific focus will be placed on the perceptions of health connotations and nutritional composition of food and beverage sponsor products.

*Methods:* A small exploratory case study was conducted that involved a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews with female athletes from the Massey University Sport Academy. A total of 14 athletes were interviewed. Athletes who took part in the study were engaged in sport at various levels of their careers. Study participants were questioned in regards to their perceptions around sport sponsorships, particularly of food and beverage, the alignment (or misalignment) of sponsorships with their values of health and athletic performance, and the influence of sponsorships on their athletic image.

*Results:* Key findings suggest that while female athletes perceive sponsorships positively for financial backing and viability, there is a growing concern surrounding the endorsement of sponsor brands that do not align with the personal values of the female athletes. Findings revealed that many athletes feel discomfort in sponsoring 'unhealthy' food and beverage brands, such as fast food chains and sugary beverages, as it contradicts the health-centric image they endorse as athletes in the field of sports. Female athletes expressed the need for sponsorship arrangements that offer products beneficial for their athletic performance and overall health. The objectives of this study were further supported by a series of hypotheses, with the results supporting those hypotheses to varying extents.

*Conclusion:* In noting that this study was designed as an exploratory case study, the results offer initial insight into female athlete perspectives of sport sponsorship and the types of food and beverage products that may be more appropriately aligned with female sport. The findings of this study suggest there is justification for further research into this area. Further research could include focus upon broader government-level frameworks to promote ethical sponsorships in sports sponsorships.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Rachel Batty for her kindness, patience, and the abundance of support she provided throughout this project. It has been a privilege to have worked alongside an exceptional role model and brilliant supervisor in this experience. Your mentorship has guided me through the complexities of research and academic writing and you continue to be a constant source of inspiration in my academic and professional career.

I am profoundly thankful to the Massey University Albany library staff for their assistance in accessing the vital research materials, and the university's School of Sports, Exercise, and Nutrition faculty for fostering the growth of my intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and academic excellence. Thank you to all of my classmates in this degree who took the precious time to provide support and feedback that gave me invaluable insight to perform exceptionally well in this project. What a truly outstanding class I am most grateful to be a part of.

To Genevieve Suerte Felipe, Michael James Asquith, and Antonio Suerte Felipe, thank you for the unwavering support and encouragement that became the foundation of my motivation, commitment, and passion in this challenging journey. You have always believed in me and your support has sustained me through the ups and downs of this degree. Moreover, I am deeply indebted to my family and friends for your unwavering support.

To my siblings Andrea, Alfonso, and Angelu Suerte Felipe, and my partner Joshua Dela Cruz, you have been the pillars of my strength and motivation to this degree. Your steadfast support, patience, understanding, and belief in me have been an indispensable part of my achievements to this degree and I am profoundly grateful.

I extend my gratitude to the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics. I am grateful for my acceptance into this university to complete my Dietetics qualifications. I could not speak more warmly of this program and the professors who provided adequate support across the two years of studying. Professor Reena Soniassy, Rozanne Kruger, Maria Casale, and Kathryn Beck, your support, critique, and encouragement have enriched the quality and rigor of my work which has been an integral part of my academic journey.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

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This chapter sets the scene for the study. It first discusses the gender disparities in sports and the surge in female sports participation and media coverage. Next, a general overview of the current scope of sport sponsorships is provided, along with the nexus of sport sponsorship and health connotations, in the context of female sports. The chapter ends with the introduction of the research objectives, set hypothesis, and the structure of the study.

### 1.1 Background and focus

The number of female athletes participating in sports has drastically increased in recent years (Tanaka et al., 2021), signifying a transformative shift in the athletic landscape of sports and fostering a deeper understanding of equality and empowerment (Shaw & Amis, 2001; Maher et al., 2006; Alay, 2008; Caple & Greenwood, 2011; Antil et al., 2012). The 2024 Paris Olympics exemplify this, with organisers noting that the event became the first Olympic Games to achieve a 50:50 participation split between male and female athletes (IOC, 2024). Although sports continues to be a male-dominant field (Henry, 2023), new research is showcasing an increase in female participation and audience viewership. This was evident in the 2020 Women's T20 Cricket World Cup Final held in Melbourne which gathered a live crowd of 86,174, surpassing the previous attendance recorded at the 2019 AFLW Grand Final at Adelaide Oval at 53,034 (AAP & Cricket Network, 2020). Additionally, the recent FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023 held in Australia and New Zealand reported an attendance of almost 2 billion (InsideFIFA, 2024) live attendance, a significant increase from the previous World Cup in 2019 viewers of 1.12 billion (Euromonitor International, 2023). Such reported increase undeniably captures the attention of sports sponsorships (Morgan, 2018; Navaratnam, 2017). This is also reflected in the results of the Australian Football League Women's (AFLW) in 2017, where the unprecedented success of reaching a crowd capacity of over 24,000 attending the ground, and a 2.6 million viewer report (Hickman, 2017) exceeded the expectations of sponsors, sponsorship agents, as well as official broadcasters. In light of the increase in female participation in sports, girls and women have begun to see themselves as being accepted for their strength, effectiveness, competitiveness and being skilled athletes, breaking away from the ideal female stereotype (Xu et al., 2021).

Sponsorship is defined as “the provision of assistance either financial or in-kind to an activity by a commercial organisation for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives” (Meenaghan, 1983, p. 9). Sports sponsorship is also a marketing communication tool used by companies to promote brands and products (Cornwell, 2020). Sponsors are increasingly becoming more motivated to engage with sponsorships to reinforce brand meaning and promote consumer affiliation (Copeland et al., 1996). There are many driving factors for brands to sponsor sports. Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013)

found that the attributes that were labelled most important by companies choosing sponsors included cost-effectiveness; the fan-base demographics of the sports property; media coverage at the local, regional and national levels; and the ability to reach the audience (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013).

Sponsorship alignments can be influenced by gender. For example, literature by Shaw and Amis (2001) explores why firms choose male or female sports sponsorship. They found that sponsorship alignment decisions were based on the values and beliefs of decision-makers, media representation of the sport, and pressures on the management. Moreover, they emphasise the significant differences in financial status between male and female sports deals (Shaw & Amis, 2001). Consequently, Nielsen Sports have identified three key growth drivers in female sports (The Nielson Company, 2018). Firstly, with the history of commercially underexploiting female sports, there is significant opportunity for growth. Secondly, there is demand from brands towards sports organisations to focus on female sports to promote access to a female fan demographic. Thirdly, there is a growing demand for sports to be seen as socially conscious and promoting equality, as opposed to a masculine space (The Nielson Company, 2018). Considering these potential drivers for female sports, it seems timely to further understand sponsorship in this context.

When it comes to sponsoring sport, another consideration for sponsors is the fact that sport elicits a healthy lifestyle, and promotes both physical, physiological and psychological well-being (WHO, 2024). This sentiment is also supported by existing literature that notes that sports are associated with stereotypical values related to fitness, healthy living and an active lifestyle (Lamb et al., 1988; Moeijes et al., 2019). Consequently, sports sponsorship continues to grow as a popular marketing tool, contributing to 75 percent of all worldwide sponsor arrangements (Kelly et al., 2011). Sheth and Bibiak (2010) suggest that the development of “communication power, youth appeal, positive health association and social interaction” can be assisted through a corporate alignment with sport (Sheth & Bibiak, 2010). Consequently, sports sponsorship is commonly used as a medium to market products that are not aligned with a healthy lifestyle (Batty & Gee, 2019) seeking to promote consumption. In light of these positive associations, sport is increasingly becoming an effective medium for promoting sponsored products that are not consistent with a healthy lifestyle. This is evident in the increasing research being conducted on and around healthy sports sponsorships (Batty et al., 2016; Batty & Gee, 2019; Dixon et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2011; Maher et al., 2006). For instance, a study in New Zealand that assessed the website platforms of clubs, and national and regional sporting organisations found that, compared to all other types of sponsorships, there are more unhealthy food sponsorships in junior sports (Carter et al., 2011).

The alignment of food and beverages through sponsorship with sport is prominent, often questioned, and continues to be a topic of substantial investigation (Long et al., 2024; Zorbas et al., 2023; Boelsen-Robinson et al., 2022; Dixon et al., 2019; Batty & Gee, 2019; Maher et al., 2006). The



interplay between the promotion of these products within the sports settings and the nutritional considerations raises questions about the potential impact on the athletes' health, societal perception, and the broader discourse surrounding the sport-health nexus (Batty & Gee, 2019; Kelly et al., 2011). Companies that manufacture products known to pose a risk to health, including fast food and sugar-sweetened beverages are frequently investing in sports (Maher et al., 2006). An example here includes the findings of Maher et al. (2006) where foods that were classified as “unhealthy” were twice as common as sponsorships associated with sponsor' products that were classified as “healthy”. Additionally, rugby significantly had more “alcohol” sponsors compared to other sports (Maher et al., 2006). In light of such findings, organisations are being criticised by scholars and advocates for promoting unhealthy foods and beverage products, primarily owing to the global health concerns surrounding the growing prevalence of heart disease, diabetes and obesity (Maher et al., 2006). In New Zealand, many sporting organisations are aware of the criticism and lack of alignment of a sport-health nexus of sponsor arrangements with ‘unhealthy’ food and beverage companies (Batty & Gee, 2019). In some cases, this is due to the financial benefit of sponsor arrangements outweighing their ability to align with ‘healthy’ sponsors (Carter et al., 2013).

In light of the transformative shift in the athletic landscape of female sports, it is important to explore the specific realm of food and beverage sponsorship in the context of female athletes. While extensive literature emphasises the general dynamics of sponsorships, there is a notable gap in understanding how sponsorships align with the experiences and perceptions of female athletes. The growing prominence of female sports participation highlights the need for a nuanced exploration of sponsorship in this domain.

This research will contribute to the understanding of the sponsorship landscape that involves food and beverage sponsors in female sports in New Zealand. The primary focus is how this sponsorship environment is perceived by a crucial group of stakeholders within the realm of female sports. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is presently the only regulator of food and beverage sponsorship in New Zealand. It is evident that community sports organisations predominantly organised by volunteers may have little to no expertise in designing or implementing the necessary guidelines around food and beverage sponsorships (Donaldson et al., 2019). The findings of this research can further assist in the development of sponsorship-based recommendations for New Zealand sports organisers and athletes.

## 1.2. Objectives and Hypotheses

The objectives of the study were to:

- To conduct an online review of promoted professional New Zealand female athlete sponsorships in order to determine the current situation of food and beverage sponsor product alignments with female sports.
- To conduct a brief comparison between the food and beverage sponsor products aligned with female athletes versus male athletes.
- To conduct a series of exploratory qualitative interviews with female athletes in order to determine the influence of perception on food and beverage sponsor alignment.
- To utilise the findings of qualitative interviews with female athletes to determine if there is justification for a wider study within the area of female sport sponsorship alignments.

This research also aims to formulate recommendations for organisers and sports facilitators to guide future sponsor alignments, ensuring that any such alignments meet the needs of female athletes and do not compromise or conflict with current public health agendas; ensuring sponsor alignments consider the views of female athletes.

In acknowledging the exploratory nature of this study, four hypothesis were proffered:

H1: Food and beverage sponsors who align with female sport in New Zealand tend to be healthy in nature.

H2: The health considerations of female athletes (such as the nutritional composition of sponsor food and beverage products) play a role in sponsorship alignment with female sport.

H3: Female athletes prefer to avoid alignment with unhealthy food and beverage sponsorships

H4: There are noted differences when comparing the food and beverage sponsors associated with male sport to female sport.

### 1.3 Structure of Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. This initial chapter outlines the purpose of this research and an overview of current food and beverage sponsorships in female sports organisations in New Zealand. The second chapter of the thesis presents a literature review and sets the scene for the importance of quality food and beverage sponsorships for female sports. Chapter three details the chosen methodology, and emphasises the research design, the procedures for data collection and the

analytical tools used. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. Chapter Five reflects upon the results and offers a nuanced interpretation and contextualisation of female sports sponsorship, within the existing literature in the form of a discussion, addressing the proffered hypothesis as outlined in Chapter One. The final chapter outlines the study in the form of a conclusion, presents a list of recommendations to stakeholders, and identifies the key strengths and limitations of the study.

#### 1.4 Researcher contributions

*Table 1.1 Researcher’s contribution to this study*

<b>Researcher</b>	<b>Contribution to the thesis</b>
Alyanna Suerte Felipe	<b>MSc Nutrition and Dietetic Student</b> Primary researcher and thesis author. Responsible for the development of surveys, Massey University Ethics application, development of information sheet of the study, recruitment for survey pretesting, conducting, transcribing and coding participant interviews, and synthesising the research findings into the following thesis and manuscript.
Dr Rachel Batty	<b>Primary Supervisor</b> Supported the conceptualisation of the study. Provided the guidance for the thesis concept, structure, ethics application, survey design and development. Provided feedback on all elements of the thesis.

#### Chapter Summary

Having presented an initial overview and parameters of the research conducted for the purpose of this thesis, the following chapter presents a comprehensive literature review that will provide the foundation for understanding the current landscape of food and beverage sponsorship arrangements in female sports in New Zealand. It delves into the evolution of sports sponsorships and existing historical perspectives; the implications of aligning sports with sponsors; and provides a detailed background to contextualise the research study’s objectives and hypothesis.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

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This literature review initially presents a summary of the history of sports sponsorship (situated in the scope of the research topic). It then turns to address gender disparities in sports and the recent surge in female sports participation. The literature review then highlights the nexus between sponsorship and health connotations, as well as female health perspectives (within the context of sponsor products). Emphasis is then placed on the combination of such considerations in a New Zealand context. Lastly, this literature review will reconfirm how the research conducted for the purpose of this thesis will contribute to existing discourse.

### 2.1 The scope of sport sponsorship

Sport sponsorship traces back to its establishment as a means for companies to “invest in an event, person or activity, typically with the expectation of recognition or collaboration that supports the marketing goals of the investor” (Cornwell, 2020, p.3). The sponsorship of sports and sporting events continues to be one of the fastest growing tools in marketing communication utilised by organisers to promote their goods and services making up the majority of the global sponsor arrangements (Kelly et al., 2011). Sponsorship is the process of exchange between the sponsor and the sponsee whereby the latter will receive a fee (or value), allowing the former to obtain the right to associate itself with the activity sponsored (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). In other words, sponsors are required to provide financial, or in-kind assistance, to allow sports to be delivered and in return gain indirect exposure and associations with the sporting activity to enhance their brand visibility and consumer affiliation (Dixon et al., 2019; Peluso et al., 2019). This form of sponsorship extends across various sporting categories, ranging from grassroot to elite levels, including individual athletes, teams, events, and governing bodies. Sponsors are often presented on a signage displayed at the sporting grounds or on player uniforms (Colantuoni, 2013). Sport sponsorship is a medium that provides crucial revenue that benefits both brands and sporting participants at all levels, sports, and the wider community. Across the community setting, companies can utilise sport sponsorship as a Corporal Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative. CSR will allow companies to showcase their commitment to social and environmental responsibilities, going beyond maximising profit. Through actively participating in and supporting the community through CSR initiatives, companies can therefore establish a positive image of giving back to the communities. Not only can this strengthen their connection with stakeholders and consumers, but it also generates greater consumer loyalty (Danylchuk & MacIntosh, 2009), enhances public awareness, and establishes a connection between the company’s products and the values upheld by the sponsored organisations (Batty et al., 2016).

On an international level, the spending on sport sponsorship has drastically increased. This is evident in the findings of Statista (2024) where the market for sports sponsorship exceeded 100 billion US

dollars in 2023, surpassing 2022 from 97 billion dollars (Statista, 2024). Similar patterns were also prevalent in Australia where the market for sponsorship and advertising is expected to increase in the near future. Here, the Nielsen 2022 Sponsorship Outlook Survey reported an increase in sponsorship spending in 2022 by 21.3 percent compared to 19 percent in 2021 (Nielsen, 2022). The increase in sport sponsorship as a medium for advertising has coincided with the change in the status of sporting figures, reaching a level traditionally associated with music and film stars. It is also evident that elite athletes are earning more from sponsorship agreements compared to their direct athletic earnings. For example, Tiger Woods partnered with Nike in 2006 that contributed 100 million US dollars to his income from 2000 to 2006 (ESPN, 2012), while his income was valued at 11 million US dollars in 2000 as a professional athlete (Statista, 2022). Nevertheless, despite the financial benefit this brings to athletes, there is a notable gap in sponsorship earnings between male and female.

Many driving factors for brands affect sponsors of sports. Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013) found that the attributes that were labelled most important by companies choosing sponsors included cost-effectiveness; the fan-base demographics of the sports property; media coverage at the local, regional and national levels; and the ability to reach the audience. Gender is another contributing factor that affects a brand's decision to sponsor sports teams or athletes. Literature by Shaw and Amis (2001) explores why firms choose male or female sport sponsorship and found that the decisions were based on the values and beliefs of decision-makers, media representation of the sport, and pressures on the management. Moreover, they emphasise the significant differences in financial status between male and female sports deals (Shaw & Amis, 2001). In fact, no woman was listed in the 40 highest earners in the world, according to *Forbes* magazine in 1997. In light of these findings in current findings, it becomes evident that underlying factors that influence sponsorship choices can also extend to broader issues including gender disparities in sport participation and media coverage.

## 2.2 Gender disparities in sport participation and media coverage

In recent years, sports have played a role in driving social change. However, the context of sport does not always lead to positive outcomes. Many sports scholars have investigated the world of sport with a critical eye to reveal a “dark side” of sport (Kane et al., 2013). While sport has provided opportunities, it has also reinforced dangerous social patterns still common to this day, including gender disparities. Existing literature recognises and continues to highlight sports as originating from ‘male practices’ (Kidd, 2013). The exclusionary capacity of sports is well-documented (Spaaij et al., 2014), with critiques revealing how certain sports perpetuate dominant masculine norms that operate to exclude or marginalise other gender identities (Elling & Knoppers, 2005). However, changes in the contemporary sports landscape are potentially leading to the reshaping and reimagining of gender relations within sports (Pavlidis & Connor, 2016). The perception of sports as a masculine space, reinforced by historical norms and stereotypes, contributes to these gender imbalances

(Postow, 1980). Numerous literature have thoroughly examined the exclusionary nature of certain sports to reveal how dominant masculine norms are perpetuated and reinforced, consequently marginalising gender identities (Spaij et al., 2014; Elling & Knoppers, 2005).

Notable gaps continue to exist between male and female athletes in the number of opportunities available for female in sports, regardless of position. For example, for 30 years, the percentage of female as coaches of men's intercollegiate teams remained under two percent (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). However, the media also contributes to the gender disparities in sports, and has a negative effect on female athletes who are portrayed as being at odds with such stereotypes (Koivula, 1999; Pirinen, 1997; Kane & Schnippers, 1996; Creedon 1994; Birrel & Cole, 1994; Duncan, 1990; Rintala & Birrell, 1984). The overwhelming media coverage of men's sports creates, reflects and refracts the dominant form of masculinity, particularly evident in routine sports reporting (Daddario, 1994; Pedersen, 2002). Female sports accomplishments are often undermined and trivialised, reinforcing that sports continue to be a masculine space. In fact, existing literature highlights that female sport is greatly underreported in media (Bishop, 2003; Cooky et al., 2013). Sport sponsorship affects consumer attitudes through the sponsor's message, the type of brand or product, and the event or organisation that the sponsor is associated with (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998). Thus, for brands seeking corporate sponsorship for a sports product will initially need to provide sufficient data relative to the size and strength of the consumer base or target market that will be reached through the sponsorship relationship. The male-dominant sports field may suggest why sponsorship and media coverage contribute to the prioritisation of men's sports. Additionally, the gap in earnings between male and female athletes, with males often earning more substantial contracts, magnifies this disparity as sponsors may view male athletes as more lucrative investments (Shaw & Amis, 2001).

Additionally, potential sponsors often favour athletes who are perceived as being powerful and successful. Shaw and Amis (2001) argue that female in sports are rarely portrayed as active participants but rather shown in appreciative roles, such as cheerleaders, girlfriends, mothers, or wives. The history of sports, rooted in male-dominated practices and reinforced by societal norms and stereotypes, contributes to the perpetuation of gender imbalance within the realm of sports (Kidd, 2013; Postow, 1980). As the number of men participating in sports is traditionally greater due to cultural expectations and constructions of masculinity (Kidd, 2013), sponsors perceive male athletes as more lucrative investments, ultimately resulting in increased financial support and endorsement opportunities for males. This was evident from 1995 to 1996, when female only received 26.6 percent (\$16,322,470) of the total \$61,413,179 spent by colleges and universities on recruitment (Sabo et al., 2004), emphasising that NCAA institutions are not as committed to recruiting female athletes compared to male athletes. Additionally, a nationwide survey of NCAA

institutions found that female athletes received \$142,622,803 less in scholarship aid than their male counterparts during 1995 and 1996 year (Sabo et al., 2004).

This perpetuates a cycle where the prominence of men in sports is further magnified through heightened media coverage and sponsorship agreements, reinforcing the perception of sports as a masculine space. Nevertheless, as we navigate through the intricate interplay of sports participation, sponsorship focus, and societal expectations in the context of the sports landscape as a masculine space, concurrently, it is becoming increasingly evident that there is a transformative surge in female sports participation unfolding. Changing dynamics that challenge the aforementioned narratives entrenched in sports culture, hinting at a shift towards a more inclusive and diverse athletic landscape and attracting the attention of sponsors.

### 2.3 The surge in female sport participation and media coverage

Recent literature has recognised the growing prominence of female participation and achievement in sports, along with an increase in media coverage of female sports teams. For example, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) has reported a six percent increase in viewership for nationally televised games across ABC, CBS, ESPN and ESPN2 in 2023 compared to 2022 (WNBA, 2023) with an increasing trend across previous years. Additionally, the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup held in Australia and New Zealand reported its highest audience engagement at 53.9 million viewers internationally for a single match between China and England (FIFA, 2023).

Recent literature has emphasised the surge in female sports participation, viewership and media coverage (WNBA, 2023; FIFA, 2023). However, a gap continues to exist in understanding how the shift in this landscape intersects with sponsorship practices, particularly in the context of New Zealand. This research will aim to bridge these gaps by exploring the food and beverage sponsors in female sports across the New Zealand context. By employing qualitative research in a case study approach, this study will provide insights into how sponsorship arrangements align with the experiences and perceptions of female athletes. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the sport-health nexus, highlighting the need for more responsible and equitable sponsorship practices that can support the well-being and athletic performance of female athletes. The heightened viewership and increased participation of female in sports can further be attributed to a confluence of factors that reflect the changing dynamics and growing interest in female athletics. Such an increase in viewership and participation is evident in current literature. For instance, in the United States, over three million girls now participate in high school sports, with 46 percent of intercollegiate scholarships being female, while the number of professional sports opportunities is

continuously increasing overtime (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012; National Federation of State High School Associations, 2024).

With the surge in female sports participation, media coverage and viewership, sponsors have the opportunity to align their brands with a broader and diverse audience, tapping into a market that has long been underrepresented. The transformative shift in the field of female sports is therefore becoming a strategic avenue for brands to, not only contribute to societal changes but engage with a broader audience to drive the evolution of sports sponsorship practices.

#### 2.4 The nexus of sport sponsorship and health connotations

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), sport is a major component of a healthy lifestyle, promoting both physical and psychological well-being (WHO 2024). Existing literature underscores the stereotypical norms associated with sports, including fitness, healthy and active lifestyles (Lamb et al., 1988; Moejies et al., 2019; Richman & Shaffer, 2000). For example, Tracy and Erkut (2002) reported that school sports had positively impacted girls' global self-esteem to the extent. In light of these positive associations, sports and sport sponsorship is increasingly becoming an effective medium for promoting sponsored products that are not consistent with a healthy lifestyle. The marketing of such products therefore raises concern from a public health perspective.

Sport sponsorship continues to grow as a popular marketing tool due to its association with health and wellness, contributing to 75 percent of all worldwide sponsor arrangements (Kelly et al., 2011). Literature has indicated a growing trend of companies, including those who manufacture products known to pose health risks, investing in sport sponsorships (Batty & Gee, 2019; Kelly et al., 2011; Dixon et al., 2018). This includes associating sports with products such as fast food and sugar-sweetened beverages (Maher et al., 2006). In New Zealand, the sponsorship of sports by alcohol companies and products with poor nutritional value appears to be widespread. For instance, rugby teams such as the Hurricanes, Highlanders, and Crusaders are supported by a New Zealand-owned brewery (Speights); while McDonald's supports junior sports teams including netball, touch rugby and cricket. Additionally, McDonald's is known to engage with community sporting events by providing player-of-the-day certificates that are accompanied by free vouchers, forming a link between grassroots sports and fast food consumption. Such findings of the current association of sports with unhealthy foods have subjected companies and brands to heightened scrutiny and criticism by scholars, citing concerns around the potential influence on societal health, and the broader discourse surrounding the sport-health nexus, particularly in consideration of the global health concerns related to such consumptions. It therefore becomes important to consider the impact on consumer behaviours in light of such associations. The development of awareness, image enhancement, exposure, brand recognition, product sales, and loyalties were reported as primary



sponsorship objectives associated with sport (Irwin & Sutton, 1994). Spectator exposure to the name and logo of sponsors has been attributed to product awareness and may lead to product consumption (Turco, 1995). Research has recognised the significance of consumer attitude towards the sponsoring brand for sponsorship outcomes for the sponsor (Speed & Thompson, 2000). However, there is limited research has been conducted on the influence of consumer attitudes towards sport sponsorships. Thomas et al. (2022) found that there is a positive connection between a consumer's attitude towards the sponsor and the motivation for sports consumption is heightened when consumers perceive a higher fit between sponsor and event. Thus, the misalignment and inappropriate use of sport sponsorships in the context of nutritionally poor food and beverages can have significant health implications for a wider audience. Such pervasive associations of sports with unhealthy products contribute to the normalisation of nutritionally poor products, potentially exacerbating the prevalence of non-communicable diseases across the public setting.

## 2.5 The female health and perspective

The intersection between female athletes' involvement in sports and an active lifestyle is frequently clouded by prevalent stereotypes (Sabo et al., 2004), shedding light on a critical inquiry: Do women engage in sports primarily for health and body image concerns, or do the participation in sports foster a more health-conscious mindset? Traditional stereotypes often depict female athletes as solely motivated by a pursuit of a particular body image, adhering to societal beauty standards. For example, there is a continuing emphasis on "perfection" as always being presented as thin (Wiseman et al., 1992). Mass media theories argue that audience members internalise and attempt to mimic the ideal images, especially with prolonged exposure (Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Martin & Gentry, 1997). In this context, fostering a positive body image for girls becomes challenging. (Pope et al., 2000). A Harvard Medical School survey of fifth- to twelfth-grade girls reported that 59 percent were dissatisfied with their bodies, 66 percent wanted to lose weight, 47 percent expressed interest in losing weight after looking at fashion magazine pictures, and 69 percent claimed that such pictures had influenced what they now consider as their ideal body (Field et al., 1999). Moreover, literature suggests that the impact of media on body image is stronger for girls compared to boys (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004).

Self-esteem is another global self-concept that reflects the extent to which an individual feels positive about herself. Girls are likely to experience a decline in self-esteem during their teenage years, although the causes are complex and catalysed by various factors such as age and life events triggering stress (Baldwin & Hoffman, 2002; Block & Robins, 1993; Chubb et al., 1997). Dunton et al. (2003) argue that many girls will have low self-esteem due to their negative perceptions of weight, body fat, and mass. The decline in female self-esteem is partially linked to perceived attractiveness and self-worth. Today's society's ideal beauty standards for female are nearly impossible (Marzano-Parisoli, 2001). It is not uncommon that exercise has been shown to have positive impacts on body image, health and self-esteem (Gauvin & Spence, 1996; Boyd & Hrycaiko, 1997). As concerns about body image are widespread, exercise may be an effective remedy for this problem. Literature suggests that participation in exercise and sport can be used as a therapeutic and preventative measure for enhancing girls' physical and mental health by offering them positive feelings surrounding body image, self-esteem, and increased self-confidence (President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, 1997). A limitation of existing literature is that not many randomised, carefully controlled research studies do a better job of isolating the influence of exercise itself. Eating disorders continue to rise in the US, whereby the highest risk category falls in adolescent and young adult women groups (Taub & Blinde, 1992). A high proportion of girls do not meet the formal criteria for eating disorders on a clinical level but engage in pathogenic weight control techniques, including excessive exercise (Thompson & Sherman, 1999). Pathogenic weight loss behaviour is associated with nutritional deficiencies, chronic fatigue, lowered self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (Beals et al., 1999). Female athletes are mainly at higher risk for pathogenic weight control. In fact, the adopted "female athlete triad" is a triad of medical disorders that is made up of eating disorders, amenorrhea, and osteoporosis (Beals et al., 1999). However, it remains unclear whether participation in sports is creating a risk for disordered eating or whether girls and women are already at a higher risk for such behaviours or are more likely to be attracted to participating in sports (Sundgot-Borgen, 1994); this is because specific characteristics tend to be associated with both eating disorders and athletic participation: competitiveness, drive, self-motivation, perfectionisms and preoccupation with body shape and composition (Taub & Blinde, 1992). Some scholars suggest that some aspects of participation in sports may buffer girls against disordered eating, including enhancing self-esteem, fostering a positive body image, or an emphasis on mass and power rather than conforming to a feminine ideal of thinness (Fulkerson et al., 1999; Hausenblas & Downs, 2001). While literature continues to identify factors that strongly link to body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and global self-esteem, Tiggemann M., 2001 emphasises that sports participation can potentially protect against such prevalent perceptions (Tiggemann, 2001).

Traditional stereotypes often portray female athletes as being motivated solely by the desire to achieve a particular body image, conforming to ideal societal beauty standards. Acknowledging the aforementioned factors becomes significant in appreciating the multifaceted nature of women's engagement in sports and its impact on their health (Jagim et al., 2022). In light of the transformative shift in the athletic landscape of female sports and its impact on health perspectives, it becomes significant to explore the specific realm of food and beverage sponsorship in the context of female athletes. A notable gap to bridge lies in understanding the contention between female sports participation and the health-conscious mindset. Additionally, the evolving landscape further raises questions about whether the progressive perspectives align with the promotion of the athlete's associated brand sponsors. As we navigate bridging such gaps, it raises the question: Do female athletes recognise that they might be endorsing products through sponsorships that do not align with their values and health beliefs? This question underscores the need for female athletes to assess the alignment between the products they endorse and their authentic values and health-focused narratives, further allowing us to investigate sports sponsorship from the perspective of the athletes.

## 2.6 Perspectives on sport sponsorship in a New Zealand context

Sport sponsorship continues to be a prominent marketing tool utilised by companies to promote products and services, including foods that lack nutritional value, alcohol, and gambling (Maher et al., p.2). Currently, the sponsorship of alcohol in New Zealand is tightly restricted, complying with the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) Alcohol Advertising and Promotion Code, which requires limited exposure of alcohol sponsorship to minors (Advertising Standards, 2020). A Private Members Bill was established aimed to put an end to alcohol sponsorship in New Zealand, an “opportunity to support sport as a whole to become the health promoting setting that it is” as described by Chambers et al. (2021, p.2). In addition to alcohol sponsorships, companies are being recognised as a source of concern as they begin utilising sport sponsorship as a space to promote unhealthy foods without regulations (Pettigrew et al., 2013). It is becoming more prevalent that unhealthy food brands are increasingly investing in sports due to its “widespread popularity and reach, and its unique potential to align unhealthy products with a health-enhancing activity (Dixon et al., 2019, p. 481). Current examples of food and beverage sponsors in New Zealand include Auckland Rugby Football Union sponsored by Coca-Cola, New Zealand Football sponsored by McDonald’s (Auckland Rugby Union, 2024; New Zealand Football, 2024). Recently, New Zealand is recognising the potential inappropriate use of sponsorships to endorse unhealthy products. For example, the call for change is echoed by the Ministry of Health’s Childhood Obesity, acknowledging the need for restrictions on marketing of low-nutrient, high-energy food and beverages (WHO, 2015). As we continue to confront the misalignment of sport sponsorship and

products that pose a risk to health, it becomes evident that a transformative shift in the practice of sports sponsorship is imperative for promoting a healthier and more responsible sporting landscape.

In light of the transformative shift in the athletic landscape of female sports in the context of participation, media coverage, and health perspectives, it becomes significant to explore the specific realm of food and beverage sponsorship in the context of female athletes. While extensive literature puts an emphasis on the general dynamics of sponsorships, there is a notable gap in understanding how sponsorships align with the experiences and perceptions of female athletes. The growing prominence of female sports participation highlights the need for a nuanced exploration of sponsorship in this domain. Thus, this research aims to investigate the intricacies of food and beverage sponsorships of female athletes in New Zealand, uncovering the broader discourse surrounding the sport-health nexus and contributing significantly to understanding the symbiotic relationship between sports, sponsorships, and the health and well-being of female athletes.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided insight into the literature exploring the multiple facets of sport sponsorships, including historical evolution, implementation and regulations in New Zealand. Implications for gender disparities and health connotations are also established. Sports has emerged as a powerful marketing tool to facilitate brand visibility while providing essential financial support to sports organisations (Cornwell, 2020; Kelly et al., 2011). Despite its growth, disparities continue to persist, particularly in the context of female sports which continues to receive less financial support and media viewership compared to its male counterparts (Shaw & Amis, 2001). Additionally, the alignment of sport sponsorship with health-related issues has raised concerns as sponsorships continue to become a medium for the promotion of unhealthy products, further undermining the health benefits associated with sports (Maher et al., 2006; Dixon et al., 2019).

The following chapter will outline the research methodology utilised in this study. It details the design of our research, methods used for data collection, and analytical tools used to explore the dynamics of sport sponsorships specific to food and beverage in female sports within New Zealand.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

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This chapter details the rationale of the exploratory qualitative case study approach utilised in this research, including the selection of participants, and sets the stage for the subsequent chapters that will further present and analyse the results before offering an initial understanding of the current landscape of sponsorships and its implications for female athletes in the context of New Zealand.

### 3.1 A qualitative research approach

A qualitative research approach, incorporating semi-structured interviews, was utilised for this study. Qualitative research incorporates non-numerical data gathering and analysis to further understand the perceptions, experiences and behaviours of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Pascale, 2011) and enables researchers to collect a comprehensive insight into the participants' experiences and attitudes. The use of a qualitative research approach was considered appropriate due to the nature of this research study which aimed to uncover the subjective experiences of female athletes on sports sponsorships specific to food and beverage that may not often be apparent in quantitative research and is supported by existing literature highlighting the significance and effectiveness of qualitative methods in understanding the attitudes and sociocultural dimensions of stakeholders regarding sports sponsorships (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p.101). The use of qualitative research is particularly suitable for this study as it captures the potential views on sponsorships while taking into consideration factors such as cultural and socioeconomic factors, that are often not adequately captured through quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016). By engaging directly with athletes, this method allowed the primary researcher to address the gaps in current New Zealand literature by revealing insights into personal experiences, attitudes, and beliefs around food and beverage sponsorships. Lastly, the use of a qualitative methodology is justified by its ability to understand the subjective perspectives of athletes and detailed insights that may often be missed in quantitative research.

### 3.2 A case study approach

Case studies involve 'the intensive study of a single unit or a small number [of cases], to understand a larger class of similar [cases] (Gerring, 2007, p.37). Case studies are widely used in research to provide in-depth insights into the specific contexts that can represent broader trends. Case studies are used to capture complex phenomena, and contextual factors, and provide comprehensive qualitative data that may not often be captured with quantitative measures (Hartley, 2004, p. 323). The research conducted for this thesis focused on a case study of the Massey University Academy of Sport and its female athletes. Qualitative interviews with female athletes explored the different perceptions and

experiences on sponsorships specific to food and beverage in female sports. This research project was submitted to the Massey University Human Research Ethics system and deemed as Low Risk, ensuring that guidelines and considerations for working with human participants were followed appropriately.

### 3.3 Data set identification

Female athletes who trained under the Massey University Academy of Sport were invited to participate in the study. The primary researcher created a study advertisement (Appendix 1) that was distributed through Outlook Email by the Massey Academy of Sport High-Performance Coordinators to their female athletes. Participation was voluntary and questions regarding the study were encouraged. All female athletes who belonged to the Academy were eligible to participate. The level of sport across female athletes differed between silver, gold or platinum levels. Levels indicated that athletes were either a recipient selected without a scholarship in their second year and above (silver); athletes selected of the Gold-level Academy of Sport Scholarship of \$7,500 for first-year students and above or Elite Sports Scholarship of \$2,500 for second-year students and above (gold); or were Prime Minister’s Scholarship Recipients and other elite level athletes who are professional or franchise-level players (platinum) (Massey University, 2024). The advertisement asked athletes who were interested in taking part to contact the primary researcher directly via email for further information. Athletes who contacted the primary researcher were then sent an information sheet and consent form (Appendix 2, Appendix 3). A total of 17 athletes expressed initial interest in participating. Of those, 14 athletes agreed to participate, while three (who originally expressed interest) did not respond to follow-up emails. The characteristics of study participants are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. *Female Athlete Study Participant Characteristics*

Participant	Code	Sport Represented	Level of Sport	Geographic Base	Age (Years)
Athlete 1	AF	Roller-skating	Silver & Platinum	Upper Hutt, New Zealand	19
Athlete 2	EH	Cycling	Platinum	Girona, Spain	25
Athlete 3	HA	Canoe Polo	Gold	Palmerston North, New Zealand	18
Athlete 4	GW	Canoe Polo	Gold	Palmerston North, New Zealand	24
Athlete 5	CF	Badminton	Bronze	Auckland, New Zealand	22
Athlete 6	JC	Kayak	Silver	Auckland, New Zealand	18
Athlete 7	FN	Roller-skating	Silver	Wellington, New Zealand	18
Athlete 8	AS	Canoe Polo	Gold	Palmerston North, New Zealand	21
Athlete 9	AM	Swimming	Silver	Auckland, New Zealand	18
Athlete 10	AD	Netball	Bronze	Sydney, Australia	21
Athlete 11	KR	Canoe Polo	Bronze	Palmerston North, New Zealand	26
Athlete 12	RM	Kayaking	Gold	Rotorua, New Zealand	22
Athlete 13	BG	Taekwondo	Silver	Palmerston North, New Zealand	19
Athlete 14	PR	Roller-Skating	Silver & Platinum	Palmerston North, New Zealand	23

### 3.4 Data collection

Participants were encouraged to ask the primary researcher questions and seek clarification regarding the focus of the study. Interview dates were discussed and scheduled with athletes before a calendar invitation (using Microsoft Outlook) was sent. All interviews were conducted using Zoom video conferencing software. Participants were assigned anonymous codes for the purpose of de-identifying.

The use of online interviews was appropriate for this research as the information that was collected from athletes was not sensitive nature. Therefore, the physical proximity with participants to sympathise (Salmons, 2015) was not a requirement. Conducting participant interviews in this manner also provided the flexibility of interviewing athletes training locally and overseas (such as in Europe).

During interviews, participants were asked a number of pre-determined questions (Appendix 4) about the sponsorship of female sports specific to food and beverages. These included how sponsors are involved in the athlete's sport currently and in the past, their perceptions, experiences and beliefs of sponsors and sponsor products, appropriate and inappropriate sponsors, and preferred sponsor involvement. Depending on the information shared in the interview by participants, follow-up questions were formulated where necessary (Salmons, 2015). The first series of questions focuses on the perceptions and experiences of participants with sponsors. Hypothetical questions were also asked. Interviews took 30 minutes each on average.

Data saturation is the point where a collection of sufficient data has been achieved to draw a comprehensive conclusion (Quantilope, 2024). Data saturation was identified by the primary researcher as having been achieved based on identifying key information and insight through thematic analysis, and observing any repetition in themes or patterns consistent across participant responses. No new or relevant insight emerged after the 14<sup>th</sup> interview, indicating that sufficient data had been collected to comprehensively address the research objectives and research. Furthermore, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) note that ideal sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research tend to fall between 9-17 interviews. This finding supports the identification of saturation being reached at 14 interviewees for this research. Zoom's (Zoom Video Communications, 2024) recording feature captured the audio of the interviews conducted. Audio recordings were uploaded to Otter.ai (Otter.ai, 2024), which transcribed the interviews and produced a transcript. Each transcript was assessed by the primary researcher accuracy, with changes made where inconsistencies were found. Participants

were offered the return of their transcripts should they wish to obtain this. No transcripts were returned as participants did not express interest in receiving this document.

### 3.5. Triangulation

Denzin (2010) identified four key types of triangulation including data, investigator, theory, and methodological triangulation. Triangulation is the process of using multiple research methods to explore a phenomenon (Denzin, 2010) and develop a comprehensive understanding of a situation. The goal of this method is to improve the robustness of research findings by reducing the risk of potential bias. In this study, triangulation was applied to provide diverse and comprehensive perspectives on food and beverage sponsorships and applied in the form of research, summary and comparison review.

In addition to the qualitative interviews with female athletes, a separate review of promoted sponsors associated with male and female New Zealand sports was also conducted to diversify perspectives. This methodology involved a quantitative online review of sponsors arranged with both male and female New Zealand sports teams and athletes. It entailed an examination of a wide range of sources including online platforms, websites, and public announcements. The Sports New Zealand website was utilised as the primary platform to identify the male and female sports teams and athletes, which included sports such as rugby, netball, cricket, basketball, and rowing. The choice of sports teams and athletes was informed by the level of participation, popularity and representation in national and international sports contexts, suitable for a 90-credit thesis (Sport New Zealand, 2020; School Sport New Zealand, 2023). Once sports teams and athletes were identified, websites were explored to identify their respective sponsors. Keywords used in search of sponsorships included: ‘partners’ and ‘sponsors’, for instance, ‘New Zealand All Blacks Sponsors’. Sponsors were listed under various categories as shown in Table 4.3 and Table 4.4. This method aimed to uncover the potential disparities between male and female athletes and the current landscape of sport sponsorships, particularly in the context of food and beverage sponsors. The data was collected to offer a comparison to the nature of female sport sponsorship. As a stocktake of male sport sponsors was not the primary focus of this study, the intention was to identify the notable differences in sport sponsorships, particularly of food and beverages, as part of the exploration of existing gender-based disparities in the current landscape of sport sponsorships. The use of a triangulated approach ensured that the research findings were not purely based on subjective perceptions of the interviewed athletes, but reinforced by objective data gathered from an external review.



### 3.6 Data analysis

Open, axial and reflective coding took place using the data collected (See Table 3.2). While it is increasingly common for data analysis software to be utilised (such as NVivo) for analysis, the number of transcripts and time and credit limitations of the thesis, supported a manual coding method. The use of coding enabled the collated transcripts to be organised concisely to a set of key themes (Williams & Moser, 2019).

**Table 3.2. Example Coding Process for Interviewee statements**

<b>Open code</b>	<b>Axial code</b>	<b>Reflective code</b>	<b>Representative quotations</b>
Appropriate sponsors for female sports	Supplements	Protein Powder and Bars Electrolytes Supplement	“if I could receive hydration drinks, like Powerade, that type of stuff for my sport because it takes a lot of short bursts of energy. So, having those electrolytes or high sugar levels, like high glucose, that type of thing, those type of foods, would really benefit” [Athlete 13]

### Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined and justified the methodological approach adopted in this study. The rationale for the use of a qualitative case study was explored, emphasising its ability to reveal the subjective experiences and perspectives of female athletes surrounding sports sponsorships specific to food and beverages. The following chapter presents the data collected from the semi-structured qualitative interviews, along with the results of the review of gender-based sports sponsorships. The results contribute to a deeper understanding of how the current sport sponsorship dynamics relate to female athletes and provide insight into underlying gender disparities in sport sponsorship.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter focuses on the perceived alignment of food and beverage sports sponsorships with the health, nutritional, and sports performance-enhancing needs of female athletes. Firstly, it presents the findings of the qualitative semi-structured interviews that took place with female Massey University Sport Academy athletes. Secondly, this chapter presents the findings of a review of male and female professional New Zealand athlete sponsorship alignments, as promoted online.

### 4.1 Study participant sponsorship alignments

The female athletes interviewed for this study noted a plethora of personal sponsor alignments (past and present), including a range of food and beverage (and other) sponsorships. These alignments are summarised in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1 Study participant sponsorship details**

Athlete Code	Sport	Product	Characteristic	Sponsorship Type	Status
AF	Roller-skating	One Square Meal	Food	Individual	Past
		Harroway's Oats	Food	Individual	Past
		Arepa Drinks	Beverage	Individual	Past
EH	Cycling	Life Plus	Supplements	Individual	Past
HA	Canoe Polo	Local Restaurant	Food, Beverage	Sports Team	Past
		Local Cafe	Food, Beverage	Sports Team	Past
		Car Dealership	Automotive	Sports Team	Past
		Hunting	Hunting Goods	Sports Team	Past
		Tumu Timbers	Farming	Individual	Current
GW	Canoe Polo	Cleaning Co.	Services	Sports Team	Past
		Subway	Food, Beverage	Sports Team	Current
		Property Brokers	Real Estate	Sports Team	Current
CF	Badminton	Sal's	Food, Beverage	Sports Team	Current
JC	Kayak	Swolefoods*	Food	Individual	Current
FN	Roller-skating	Local Bakeries	Food, Beverage	Sports Team	Current
		Pak'N'Save	Food, Beverage	Sports Team	Current
AS	Canoe Polo	Pure Nutrition	Food, Beverage	Sports Team	Current
		Zespri	Food, Beverage	Sports Team	Current
AM	Swimming	Apollo Projects	Construction	Sports Team	Past
AD	Netball	Wahoo	Equipment	Sports Team	Current
		Provider	Food	Sports Team	Current
		Manuka Honey	Food	Sports Team	Past
KR	Canoe Polo	Asics	Sporting Goods	Sports Team	Past
		Pure Nutrition	Food, Beverage	Sports Team	Past
		Lululemon	Sporting Goods	Sports Team	Past
RM	Kayaking	Kayak Brand	Sporting Goods	Individual	Current
		Gear Brand	Sporting Goods	Individual	Current
BG	Taekwondo	Māori Fest NZ	Sporting Goods	Individual	Past
		24/7 Fitness	Recreational	Individual	Past
PR	Roller-skating	Local Cafés	Food & Beverage	Individual	Past

\*Swolefoods is a New Zealand based ready-made meals delivery service.

## 4.2 General -perceptions of appropriate sponsor alignments

The athletes who participated in this study identified a variety of sponsors they perceived as being appropriately aligned with their sports, health, and personal values. Supplements and sports performance-enhancing products, Subway and Beef and Lamb New Zealand were frequently mentioned by athletes in this regard. A full list of mentioned sponsor brand alignments is shown in Table 4.2 and is further expanded upon in the sections that follow.

**Table 4.2: Identified athlete preferred brand arrangements.**

Sponsor Brand	Product	Product Form	Frequency Mentioned
Pure Nutrition	Supplements, Electrolytes	Food and Beverage	12
Subway	Convenient Meals	Food and Beverage	9
Beef and Lamb NZ	Meat Supplier	Food and Beverage	8
Weetbix	Cereal, Breakfast Foods	Food and Beverage	7
One Square Meal	Ready-Made Meals	Food and Beverage	6
Pita Pit	Convenient Meals	Food and Beverage	4
Musashi	Protein, Supplements	Food and Beverage	4
Pak'n'Save	Grocery, Supermarket	Food and Beverage	3
Harraway's Oats	Oat Supplier	Food and Beverage	2
St Pierre's Sushi	Convenient Meals	Food and Beverage	1
Nutrigrain	Breakfast Foods, Cereals	Food and Beverage	1
Zespri	Kiwi Fruit supplier	Food and Beverage	1

## 4.3 Perspectives of fast food sponsorship alignments and female sport

For many of the female athletes interviewed, concerns surrounding food and beverage sponsorships were raised only when fast food companies sponsoring teams or events were mentioned. Many female athletes frequently expressed disinterest in healthier fast food chains. For example, Athlete GW stated that “I think like Maccas and kind of general like, not the healthiest places, I wouldn't really want to be representing them”. Athlete EH also expanded on this perspective, noting that it

Generally doesn't really raise an eyebrow until it's a brand that you think doesn't really align with a healthy lifestyle or sport. I don't think you'll ever question it or do a double take unless it's a brand like Burger King or McDonald's, or something that you associate with fast food or a brand.

Similarly, Athlete FN mentioned that “it can be contradicting if you've got some company trying to advertise the food that's not as healthy that you wouldn't want to be eating every single day if you were an athlete.” Additionally, Athlete HA questioned the current alignment of sponsorship of unhealthy fast food companies with sports, stating that for “Black Ferns, their whole vibe is women empowerment, women doing well, women athletes. If they had a sponsor like KFC, that'll just be a totally backwards thing”. Contrastingly, Athlete RM, stated that “as an amateur sport [athlete], I'd probably accept anything”. In extending her response, she noted she would consider sponsorships from McDonald's or Sal's Pizza, who are common sponsors for National Badminton events in New

Zealand. Comments directly pertaining to financial considerations and sponsorship scarcity are expanded upon further in Section 4.9.

There were several 'healthy' fast food chains that were identified by interviewees. For example, Athlete AF expressed her preference for "companies like PitaPit or St Piere's Sushi, those food chains that are not super unhealthy but are quick and easy". Subway was also mentioned as an example of a healthy fast food chain (Athlete GW, Athlete CF) as opposed to the likes of Sal's Pizza.

#### 4.4 Female health and nutrition needs, in alignment with food and beverage sponsorships

Many of the female athletes who were interviewed for this study shared similar perspectives on sponsor product preferences. When asked about the type of sponsor products that they preferred, Athlete EH mentioned that they "like to receive food that [they] know and use in [their] daily life . . . like peanut butter, cereals". Other interviewees shared an interest in nutritionally balanced meals such as HelloFresh. For instance, Athlete GW stated that the food service meant that it was "just one less thing to buy a week because that's a lot of money on food. And we know that they're going to be nutritious. [The boxes] are well-balanced." Additionally, athletes who were currently studying in university also expressed a strong preference for meals, supermarket, and grocery foods. Similarly, Swolefoods were mentioned. In this instance, Athlete JC stated "I prefer the food stuff, especially being a university student. Life's a lot easier, especially if it was good nutritionally and supported me to do the best I can" when she was questioned to specific the type of sponsor brands she would prefer. In this instance, as a university student, Athlete JC would prefer to have food and beverage sponsors that she describes as 'food stuff', that were nutritionally beneficial for her athletic performance.

Discussion also turned to the nutritional deficiencies of females. When asked about the Weetbix brand, Athlete EH noted that the product wasn't adding anything of nutritional value. The same athlete referenced the importance of encouraging females, in general, to eat meat to increase their nutritional intake of micro- and macronutrients.

I guess maybe a brand like the big meat company ANZCO meats, or I think more noticeable is Beef and Lamb New Zealand, and they sponsor Lisa Carrington and Sophie Pascoe. I think that could be seen as giving benefits to women's sports just because it's encouraging women to eat meat and add more nutrients into their diet.

This perspective was echoed by many of the female athletes interviewed for this study. Beef and Lamb New Zealand was identified as a crucial sponsor, important for addressing iron deficiencies in female athletes. Athlete PR pointed out that ‘female athletes are notoriously low on iron’. Additionally, when asked, Athlete HA expressed a preference for ‘Anything that’s really like protein and iron rich’.

#### 4.5 Sponsorship and female athlete stereotypes

While many athletes praised the opportunities for female athletes partaking in sponsorship arrangements, the majority of the athletes interviewed for this study continued to see a misalignment in the promotion of certain food and beverage products and sports – especially around supporting and promoting an active, healthy lifestyle. One athlete reflected on the existing stereotypes prevalent to female athletes. Athlete PR mentioned, “I think the lack of food and beverage sponsors speaks to the typical under-eating and body dysmorphia that female athletes have.” The importance of this response highlights the connection between sport sponsorship choices and the emphasis on harmful societal stereotypes surrounding female athletes. Athlete PR’s observation aligns with both the objectives and hypothesis of this study, exploring the misalignment between sport sponsorships and the values of health and wellness advocated in female sports. This insight is further unpacked in this discussion chapter that follows as it is suggested that there is a need to address societal stereotypes and the implications of misalignments for female athletes’ health messaging.

There was a noted link here with personal values. Athlete EH stated, “I think I would more feel uncomfortable promoting certain things just because it doesn’t align with my values or how I live my life, or it wouldn’t be incorporated at all into my lifestyle”. Such values and morals also impacted athlete decisions to avoid particular food and beverage alignments.

#### 4.6 Female athlete sport supplements and sport performance

Interviewed athletes placed emphasis on food and beverage products that enhanced their sports performance, provided energy during competitions, and were relevant to sports in general. Brands that were commonly mentioned included Vita, Pure Nutrition, and Musashi (Athlete GW, Athlete JC, Athlete FN, Athlete AM, and Athlete KR). Athlete GW stated, “if it is something like Pure Nutrition or the Musashi protein bars and they’re actually helping me, I’ll be so much more inclined to actually promote their business”.

Hydrating beverage brands were frequently mentioned, and included the likes of Arepa, Powerade, and Gatorade (Athlete AF, Athlete GW, Athlete FN, Athlete BG, Athlete PR). For example, upon

mentioning her preference for Powerade, BG stated that competing "...takes a lot of short-burst energy. So having those electrolytes or high sugar levels, like high glucose, would really benefit". When questioned about her current thoughts on food and beverages specific to female sports, Athlete AM suggested that "they're really good if it is healthy and helps their performance". Some interviewees shared an interest in Arepa drinks to target sports performance. Athlete FN shared her interest in Arepa drinks. "I like the idea of Arepa drinks that people get, which was the anxiety thing because that's very much targeting performance anxiety, which I think is prevalent in every sport". Another athlete (Athlete AM) drew her comparison between unhealthy food and performance-enhancing products, stating that "unhealthy foods and stuff can definitely cause performance to not be as good as it could be". One athlete also reflected on products that could be utilised in training

I think with high performance sport, things to do with supplements have a big impact. Even any brands that do meals or snack foods for training, during training. It's always good to always have muesli bars or protein bars. (AD)

While athletes shared their interests around products that could enhance sports performance, promoting recovery after training or competing was also frequent. Athlete CF acknowledged "protein powder, or muscle joint repair. Things that keep me in good condition as it helps me recover while I'm competing and afterwards". Similarly, Athlete EH mentioned a preference for "protein powder or muscle joint repair. That kind of stuff. Things that keep me in good condition is what I would ask for personally, as it helps me recover while I'm competing and afterwards."

#### 4.7 Drug and alcohol sponsorship of female sport

One major theme that emerged relevant to the identification of inappropriate sponsors for female sports included alcohol and drugs. Those athletes interviewed in this study highlighted the importance of ensuring that provided sponsor products are batch-tested for drugs and illegal substances. While noting that this would be an important consideration for any athlete (regardless of gender), it is reported as a theme identified by the female athletes in this study. For instance, when one athlete was asked if there were any sponsor products that she would prefer to avoid or not be associated with, Athlete AF mentioned "companies that aren't approved by Drug-Free Sport New Zealand. So, I have to be careful with it because I get drug tested when I go overseas." This was echoed by Athlete AS

We've done a lot of work on the drug-testing and batch-tested protein and making sure that they are right. So in saying that, I'd love to work with a protein brand, powder or bars that. I know have been tested.

Additionally, when asked about the types of sponsor products that she would prefer to avoid or not be associated with, Athlete PR mentioned “I would avoid alcohol or any sort of alcohol-associated products just for personal reasons. Contractually within Skate New Zealand, we’re not allowed to be affiliated with alcohol or bars”. Athlete EH also stated, “So I think it’s products like an alcoholic beer brand, or maybe even I know in America like CBD and cannabis oil is quite popular”. Similarly, Athlete AM mentioned avoiding “Unhealthy things like alcohol brands, or just things that don’t align with my values”.

#### 4.8 Sport sponsorship and conflicting messages

Some athletes identified a disconnection between the promotion of unhealthy food and beverage sponsors of sport and the health and well-being of female athletes. For example, Athlete RM suggested that

If there’s someone who is sponsored by food or beverage that’s not particularly good for you, and they’re going to market that and consume a bit of that, then that’s definitely going to have an impact on their health that’s noticeable or not.

Expressions of confusion were also raised around unhealthy fast food and beverage sponsors. Athlete EH recalls her experience of seeing a sponsored athlete in Europe. “[They’re probably top five in the world from Belgium, and sponsored by Belgium Pizza Hut. [They] do a lot of promotion for pizza and that seems a little strange”.

#### 4.9 Factoring in sponsorship scarcity and financial considerations

A number of athletes expressed a more pragmatic view of sponsorship, whereby accepting sponsorships from any available sources was necessary due to their limited options. For example, Athlete AD stated that,

I believe if we’re promoting high performance, and we’re doing high performance, those should always align regardless of what money looks like. But then again in this day and age, it’s always the struggle of people being underpaid. We need people to fund us.

Additionally, Athlete AF mentioned, “Like my sport, the smaller sports get left out. We don’t really have the opportunities, it’s quite sad”. This sentiment was echoed by Athlete PR, who stated, “Because I play a minority sport, I’ve never had any like experience with specific sponsorships, or any ongoing contractual agreements.”

Some athletes had proactively sought out local café and restaurants, dealerships and local businesses to secure sponsorships for themselves or teams, aiming to obtain financial support rather than partnerships that necessarily aligned with their health values. Athlete HA noted:

We just try get as many sponsorships as we can from local businesses, whether that's restaurants, car dealerships, hunting people. Just wherever we're currently being sponsored by. A lot on my team is based in Hawke's Bay, so a lot of Hawke's Bay sponsorships and one of them is Tumu Timbers or something pretty random nothing to do with my sport, but just trying to get money where we can.

This theme continued to emerge from some athletes who voiced their experiences. Athlete GW mentioned, "It's not really about what the company is. It's more about who's going to be willing to give us money." Poignantly, Athlete HA stated

It's just these powerful companies that are able to get in and sponsor these sports because it helped them. But I think it doesn't really align, not in the professional world because people are just taking what they can get for the money and stuff. The amateur world, I would say it's very different. But in the professional world of sports, I'd say it probably doesn't align very well.

Other interviewees voiced their frustration by being limited on the opportunities made available to them as grassroots athletes and shared their thoughts on seeing other high-profile athletes promoting unhealthy food and beverage sponsors to a larger fanbase. Consequently, some athletes remained neutral in instances where fast food companies would sponsor them as athletes or teams, particularly due to the limited opportunities available for smaller sports. Athlete PR noted, "because I play a minority sport, I've never had any like experience with specific sponsorships or any, like, ongoing contractual agreements or anything like that".

#### 4.10 An online assessment of male vs female New Zealand sport sponsorships

To enhance the findings of the female athlete interviews, an online search for sponsorships, specific to food and beverage brands was conducted for both male and female New Zealand sports teams and athletes. The approach taken is detailed in the previous chapter. It is important to note that this search wasn't inclusive, with results presented purely for comparative purposes, in line with the exploratory nature of this study.

##### **Example male sports team sponsorships in New Zealand**

The review revealed that male sports teams in New Zealand are sponsored by a variety of different companies across multiple industries, ranging from healthy food and beverages, such as Sanitarium, to alcoholic beverages, such as Asahi. The review revealed several notable trends. Of the five high-



profile male sports teams reviewed, four teams are sponsored by one or two fast food brand. This includes McDonald’s with the All Whites and Futsal Whites; and Burger King and Sal’s Pizza with the Tall Blacks alone. Of the sport that was not sponsored by a fast food company, a high-sugar confectionary brand (Cadbury) and alcohol brand (Steinlager) continued to sponsor the sports team. Such variation highlights a broad spectrum of companies and industries that invest in male sports teams today, including those that do not align with the health-centric ideals aforementioned. Such variation in sponsorships across male sports teams in New Zealand highlights a broad spectrum of companies that continue to invest in male sports regardless of the poor alignment with health-centric ideals. Appendix 5 provides an overview of current sponsorships in respective teams.

A broad representation of service-based industries are also prominent across male sports teams. Banking companies such as ASB (All Blacks), ANZ (Black Caps), and BNZ (Tall Blacks) are key examples. Additionally, automotive companies such as Ford, and telecommunication providers such as Sky and Spark NZ were also reported. Several charitable foundations and government-affiliated organisations also support male sports teams. For instance, The Lion Foundation and New Zealand Community Trust (NZCT) support the Tall Blacks. Such funding arrangements suggest that community-focused entities play a significant role in providing high-performance sports with support.

Another notable trend is the inclusion of both global and local sponsorship brands across the male sports teams. Examples of international brands include Adidas and SAP with the All Blacks, and Gillette with the Black Caps. Local brands included Sanitarium and Les Mills. This reflects New Zealand’s male sports’ teams profile on an international level and their ability to entice multinational corporations as sports sponsors.

### **New Zealand male sports athlete sponsorship alignments**

A review on prominent male athletes in New Zealand were examined. This review focused on sponsorships of athletes such as Steven Adams (basketball), Scott Barrett (rugby), Scot Dixon (motorsport) and Ryan Fox (golf). Table 4.3 provides an overview of the findings.

**Table 4.3. Example National Male Athletes and Food and Beverage Sponsorship Alignments**

<b>Male Athlete</b>	<b>Sports Represented</b>	<b>Active Sponsor</b>	<b>Product Category</b>
Steven Adams	Basketball	Powerade Meadow Fresh Adidas AB InBev	Hydration, Electrolytes Hydration Sporting Goods Brewing Company
Scott Baret	Rugby	Steinlager Sanitarium Powerade Cadbury MULTIMIN Heybarn	Alcohol Healthy Food and Beverage Hydration, Electrolytes Unhealthy Food Animal Trace Elements Farming
Scott Dixon	Motor Sport	PNC	Bank

		Honda Firestone Arai Helment Canteen Distinctive Holiday Homes Fisher & Paykel Fitfit Training Richard Mille TLC Troy Lee Design	Automotive Recreational Sporting Goods Support Network Program Leisure, Travel and Tourism Appliances and utilities Sports Trainer Luxury Goods and Jewellery Support Network Program Design
Ryan Fox	Golfer	Sports Inc. Taylormade Footjoy Srixon Golf	Management Company Sporting Goods Apparel and Fashion Sporting Goods

Sponsorship arrangements amongst individual male athletes revealed similar trends to those reviewed for male sports teams. This includes both healthy and unhealthy food and beverage sponsors, in conjunction with other sponsors from other industries.

### Comparison to female sports teams and athletes

To further support the statements of the female athletes interviewed for this study a corresponding search was conducted in order to identify primary sponsors of professional female athletes and teams. This search also helped align the findings of the similar male athlete and male team search. Findings are summarised in Table 4.4

**Table 4.4. New Zealand National Female Athletes and Food and Beverage Sponsorship.**

Female Athlete	Sports Represented	Active Sponsor	Product Category
Lisa Carrington	Kayaking	Beef and Lamb NZ Nexgard Spectra NZ Evolu Skincare 5+ A Day Toyota Under Armour Southern Cross NZ	Meat Supplier Animal Products Cosmetic Products Food and Beverage Automotive Sporting Goods Program
Lydia Ko	Golf	Ecco Gold PROTOCONCEPT	Sporting Goods Sporting Goods
Sophie Pascoe	Para-swimming	Beef and Lamb NZ Westpac	Meat Supplier Bank
Sarah Walker	BMX	Beef and Lamb NZ Avanti Deloitte	Meat Supplier Financial Services Financial Services
Zoi Sadowski	Snowboarding	Beef and Lamb NZ 100% Snow Burton Snowboards Monster Energy	Meat Supplier Sporting Goods Sporting Goods Sugary Beverage

The findings of this review indicated that male sports teams, such as the All Blacks and the Black Caps, tend to have a more diverse range of sponsors compared to female sports teams. For the male teams and athletes, this included unhealthy food and beverage sponsors, such as McDonald's, KFC, Burger King and Sal's; alcohol sponsors, such as Steinlager and Asahi; hydration and electrolyte product-based sponsors, such as Powerade and Milo, as well as gambling-based sponsors, such as

TAB. In comparison, the female athletes and sports teams, reviewed online, revealed the focus on food sponsorship arrangements that aligned with health, wellness and fitness, including Beef and Lamb NZ, and 5+ A day. The majority of the sponsors for female athletes were products and services that aligned with nutritional value, beauty products, and support for athletic performance, such as sporting goods, with fewer arrangements with “unhealthy” food and beverage brands. Only one sugary beverage (Monster) was endorsed across all five athletes.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings derived from a series of exploratory semi-structured interviews with female athletes. It has also presented a summary of examples of gender-based athlete and sports team sponsorship alignments, as advertised on the internet. These combined approaches aid in triangulating the data, and support a comparison between male and female sport sponsorship alignments. The following chapter discusses the findings presented in this chapter, within the context of the research objectives and hypotheses stated in Chapter One.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

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This chapter reflects upon the findings of the study conducted in alignment with this thesis. It is structured in a way that parallels the key themes presented in the previous results chapter. Such themes are discussed with reference to their significance, alignment with existing literature, and meaning for the New Zealand sport industry (and its female athletes). Furthermore, the key findings of the study are utilised to address the set hypotheses presented in Chapter One. For reference, the four hypothesis were:

- H1: Food and beverage sponsors who align with female sport in New Zealand tend to be healthy in nature.
- H2: The health considerations of female athletes (such as the nutritional composition of sponsor food and beverage products) play a role in sponsorship alignment with female sport.
- H3: Female athletes prefer to avoid alignment with unhealthy food and beverage sponsorships
- H4: There are noted differences when comparing the food and beverage sponsors associated with male sports to female sport.

### 5.1 Acknowledging female athlete sponsorship alignments

The findings of this study highlighted a number of trends in current sponsorship alignments across female athletes in New Zealand, with a primary emphasis on food and beverage sponsors. The female athletes interviewed for this study generally aligned with brands that promote “healthy” products. For instance, female athletes who were involved in this study have been sponsored by brands such as Swolefoods, Pure Sports Nutrition, and Zespi, which are recognised for their convenience and nutritional focus as a performing athlete. These sponsorship arrangements suggest that female athletes often gravitate towards food and beverage sponsorship products that align with their values of health, wellness and fitness. This insight is important as it emphasises the notion that female athletes tend to prioritise endorsing brands that align with their values of health and fitness. When questioned about brands that they prefer, the athlete interviewees most frequently mentioned brands included Pure Sports Nutrition and Subway, both of which offer healthier food and beverage options. Their expressed preference for health-centric brands is consistent with existing literature that suggests selective preference around sponsorships that often prioritise personal health and dietary preferences. For instance, Boelsen-Robinson et al. (2022) asked male and female participants about their perceptions around food and beverage sponsor brands and found that participants preferred “healthier” sponsor food brand products (Dixon et al., 2018).

The results of this study also showed that sponsorships promoting brands misaligned with the values of health, wellness and fitness of female athletes, tended to be avoided by female athletes. This typically included fast food, alcohol, and gambling companies, i.e., industries that are more prevalent in male sports. The online review of athlete/team sponsor alignments indicated that unhealthy food and beverage brands were more prevalent as sponsors for male sports teams. Contrastingly, the same data indicated that female athletes/teams were more likely to have sponsorship arrangements from brands that were more aligned with the message of health. This finding suggests that there are gender-based disparities in the current landscape of sports sponsorships. For example, female athletes such as Lisa Carrington and Lydia Ko, are sponsored by health-aligned sponsor products such as Beef and Lamb NZ and 5+ A Day. In alignment with the data collected from the female athlete interviews, female sponsorships tend to incorporate brands that emphasise health and nutrition and promote healthier lifestyles. On the other hand, male sports teams, such as the All Blacks, endorse a broader range of products from both “healthy” and “unhealthy” food and beverage categories whereas the All Blacks endorse Powerade and Sanitarium, alongside alcohol brands such as Steinlager and KFC. The differences in sponsor brands are not only a reflection of the market dynamics emphasising the gender disparities existing in sports in concerning the limited opportunities for female counterparts, but is an indication of the attitudes towards female athletes. Such clear disparities between male and female sports are not uncommon (Shaw & Amis, 2019).

The findings of this study support Hypothesis One, as they support the notion that female athletes tend to be more aligned with healthier food and beverage sponsors. For instance, Beef and Lamb NZ is a common sponsor among female athletes and is beneficial for addressing the nutrient needs of female athletes, particularly for iron. Additionally, Subway is a “healthy” fast food sponsorship that is frequently endorsed amongst female athletes. The sponsorship alignments identified in this study emphasise the focus on health-centre products endorsed by female athletes. Hypothesis One is also proven through the comparison of male athletes and sports team sponsorships, where the alignment of fast-food brands and alcoholic beverages, such as McDonald’s, Burger King, and Steinlager, are frequently endorsed by many sports teams and athletes.

The data collected in this study also proves Hypothesis Four, by addressing the noted differences when comparing food and beverage sponsors with male and female New Zealand athletes. Male sports teams and athletes tend to be associated with a broader range of sponsor brands, ranging between “unhealthy” and “healthy” food and beverage sponsors. For instance, the All Whites and Tall Blacks are frequently sponsored by fast food chains that do not promote the health and

nutritional needs of athletes. Similarly, alcoholic beverage brands are commonly endorsed in male sport sponsorships. Contrastingly brands that promote health and wellness are frequently endorsed across female teams and athletes. Such difference between male and female sports validates the hypothesis that food and beverage sponsorships differ.

## 5.2 Fast food sponsorship alignments with female sport

This study highlights some of the subtle differences between male and female athletes in current food and beverage sponsorship alignments. Many female athletes voiced their discomfort in being associated with brands that promoted “unhealthy” products and cited concerns towards the impact this may have on the wider audience, particularly the younger viewers. Athlete GW stated during the interview:

As female athletes, I feel like we get a lot of people looking up to us, like the younger kids. They might see us being sponsored by someone and say “Look mum, we’re getting McDonald’s tonight because GW is being sponsored by them, and she’s at World’s right now” [...] We’re responsible, in a way, for the younger generation. If we’re telling them that it’s okay to do these things, then it’s not the best.

This sentiment reflects the responsibility that female athletes may often feel and experience as athletes and role models for health, wellness and fitness, particularly towards the younger audience. Endorsing fast food brands contradicts such images they may often wish to display, sending conflicting messages to fans. Concerns surrounding the endorsement of “unhealthy” food and beverage brands continue to exist in literature. A study by Macniven et al. (2015) reported that of the 53 sports investigated in Australian Sporting Organisations, 39 had at least one “unhealthy” sponsor (Macniven et al., 2015), highlighting the widespread issues in the current landscape of sport sponsorships. The utilisation of athletes in sports-related endorsements serves as a convincing cue for associating the brand with success and prowess (Dixon et al., 2019). Furthermore, endorsements by celebrities are proven to influence the audience, particularly children, surrounding their preference and consumption of products (Boyland et al., 2013). Thus, the endorsement of “unhealthy” food and beverage sponsors, particularly fast food brands and sugary beverages, may normalise the consumption of “unhealthy” products with positive connotations, ultimately contributing to long-term health implications, such as diabetes, obesity, and other non-communicable diseases (Dixon et al., 2019). Issues surrounding the endorsement of fast food brands have also received greater backlash and attention. This tension is underscored by the media coverage of McDonald’s withdrawal as an Olympic sponsor in 2017 (IOC, 2017; The Guardian, 2017). McDonald’s had been a long-term sponsor and partner of the Olympics, with the fast food chain contributing to over one billion US dollars in every four-year cycle. However, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) have increasingly faced criticism due to the nature of its food and

beverage sponsorship landscape (CNN, 2012; Cotter & Mullin, 2024; WIRED, 2024) Such criticism and increasing public concerns surrounding the health implications of fast food may have contributed to the ending of McDonald's 41-year partnership with the IOC.

The findings of this study provides evidence to support Hypothesis Three, which posited that unhealthy food and beverage sponsorships prefer to be avoided by female athletes. The discomfort voiced by those female athletes interviewed, along with their shared concern for the impact this may have on the younger audience and public health, reinforces the validity of this hypothesis. The findings revealed a preference for sponsor brands that aligned and reflected the personal and professional values of health and wellness.

You've got a duty to be authentic, and not falsely advertise anything or how you are going about your daily life. You want to be authentic and true, cause some people might see you as a role model and some people might respect that. And make sure you are not misleading anyone. (Athlete HA)

This sentiment expressed by Athlete HA emphasised the ethical considerations and responsibilities that athletes feel as individuals with sponsorship arrangements. The avoidance of 'unhealthy' sponsorships is motivated by the desire to maintain an authentic image as an athlete, aligning with principles of public health, particularly for the younger audience. This highlights the role that female athletes play in shaping the perception of a broader audience and influencing behaviours surrounding health and fitness. By emphasising authenticity and prioritising sport sponsorship brands that align with their values, they contribute to public health messages that can further reinforce healthier lifestyles across communities.

### 5.3 Sponsorship, female athlete stereotypes, and perceived values

A prominent theme that emerged from the findings of this study is the relationship between sport sponsorship, particularly food and beverage products, and the societal pressures that female athletes continue to face surrounding health, appearance, and body image. While female athletes hold a high standard in their athletic performance, they may also do so in how they represent the pressures surrounding beauty and femininity. Athlete PR illustrated this case by noting: "I think the lack of food and beverage sponsors speaks to the typical under-eating and body dysmorphia that athletes have." This sentiment suggests that the limited food and beverage sponsors across female athletes may be a result of harmful stereotypes related to disordered eating. The perceived stereotype that female athletes must maintain a certain body physique to meet the expectations of societal beauty over athletic performance may be a factor that food and beverage companies consider, thus deterring them from forming arrangements with female athletes. Existing literature notes that female athletes

in particular tend to struggle more with issues surrounding body image compared to their male counterparts (Pope et al., 2000) which may further explain the findings of our review that revealed less sponsorship arrangements in female athletes and teams compared to male counterparts. Additionally, the findings of a Harvard Medical School survey resonate with the sentiment voiced by Athlete PR, suggesting that sponsor brands may deter from sponsoring female athletes as a result of the assumptions that they may not be the right figures for endorsing food and beverage brands due to the beauty ideals internalised by young women and desire to lose weight (Field et al., 1999). Athlete PR's sentiment highlights the intersection between food and beverage sport sponsorships, and the stereotypes and body image issues female athletes continue to face. Such tension may be a factor that influences decision-making processes on behalf of companies, ultimately deterring them from pursuing deals in acknowledgment of problematic body image concerns. Female athletes are frequently positioned as, not just athletes, but as role models for health and well-being (Kaskan & Ho, 2016). It is evident that female athletes continue to be scrutinised for how they align with the ideals of femininity and beauty while maintaining their performance as athletic figures (Fink et al., 2014).

Another recurring theme that emerged from the findings of this study is the importance of aligning food and beverage sponsorship with the athletes' personal values. Interviews revealed that female athletes tend to approach sponsorship decisions thoughtfully, acknowledging the health implications of products that are to be endorsed, not only themselves as high-performance athletes, but to the wider audience, particularly younger viewers; as well as if the sponsored product aligns with their beliefs and lifestyles. Athlete EH noted: "I think I would feel uncomfortable promoting certain things just because it didn't align with my values or how I live my life, or it wouldn't be incorporated at all into my lifestyle". This sentiment emphasises the discomfort female athletes experience in endorsing food and beverage products that contradict their beliefs, further reflecting a broader trend of maintaining authenticity and personal integrity as public figures. Furthermore, such approach can be seen as a movement where platforms are utilised by female athletes to promote the alignment of selective sponsorships with personal values and lifestyle choices. The sentiment by Athlete EH reflects the study by Cornwell (2019), who suggests that the genuineness of the relationship between sponsor and sponsee has positive implications towards consumers. The findings of this study also reported that perceived genuineness is influenced by the authenticity of the sponsorship relationship (Cornwell, 2019), thus positively influencing consumers' trust and perceptions to the endorsed brand. The sentiment by Athlete EH and the underlying importance of authenticity in the form of prioritising values and beliefs in decision-making is echoed by Athlete GW:



I feel like, as female athletes particularly, we get a lot of people looking up to us like the younger kids. [...] We're kind of responsible in a way for the younger generation so if we're then telling them it's okay to do these things, then it's probably not best. It's a bit of a fraud on us.

This sentiment emphasises the ethical considerations that athletes must acknowledge when deciding sponsors. When food and beverage products are endorsed that are not aligned with the personal and professional values of athletes and the health-centric lifestyle they advocate for, it sends conflicting messages to the wider audience who respect them as female athletes.

The shared discomfort expressed by athletes, such as Athlete EH, when endorsed brands contradict the personal and professional values and lifestyle choices contributes to proving Hypothesis One. For instance, Athlete EH's statement highlighted the importance of authenticity, thus proving that athletes prioritise personal values and the reflection of their own beliefs around sponsorship alignments. Moreover, Cornwell (2019). Additionally, Hypothesis Two hypothesised that the health considerations of female athletes, such as the nutritional composition of sponsor food and beverage products, play a role in sponsorship alignment with female sports. Athlete GW's acknowledgment surrounding the responsibilities that female athletes feel towards their wider audience, particularly the younger generation, proves Hypothesis Two. This consideration is further underscored by the athlete's to endorse "unhealthy" food and beverage products, including fast food and alcoholic beverages. Hypothesis Three, which hypothesised that female athletes prefer to avoid alignments with unhealthy food and beverage sponsorships, was proven by sentiments expressed in the interviews that emphasised the implications of endorsing brands that do not align with their commitment to health. Lastly, Hypothesis Four hypothesised the noted differences when comparing the food and beverage sponsors associated with male sports to female sports. This hypothesis was proven by the findings that shed light on the societal stereotypes faced by female athletes, as evident in Pope et al. (2000).

As suggested in the study, the scrutiny faced by female athletes surrounding beauty ideals, body image, and disordered eating may contribute to companies deterring from forming arrangements with female athletes. These findings reflect the contrasting dynamics in male athletes and sports teams who have access to more sponsorship opportunities from both "healthy" and "unhealthy" brands, thereby justifying the validity of Hypothesis Four.

#### 5.4 Female health and nutrition needs

The findings of this study highlights the interconnection of female athletes, health considerations, and the implications of sponsorship alignments. The findings suggests that food and beverage

products endorsed by female athletes and their values emphasises the embodiment of health and wellness across female athletes. For instance, athletes supported the endorsement of Beef and Lamb NZ as it addresses the iron deficiencies prevalent in females across New Zealand, especially high-performing athletes. Athlete EH noted: “They sponsor Lisa Carrington and Sophie Pascoe, and that could be seen as giving benefits to female sports just because it’s encouraging women to eat meat and add more nutrients into their diet”. This sentiment was echoed by Athlete PR who noted: “Beef and Lamb NZ is good because female athletes are notoriously low on iron”. The broader concerns surrounding nutritional gaps in diets is reflected in these sentiments. Athletes that were interviewed recognised the role of sponsorship alignments in mitigating deficiencies, particularly for iron. This observation aligns with current literature that underscores the high prevalence of iron deficiencies across female athletes, and the need for support to address such nutritional gaps (Ponorac et al., 2020; Holtzman & Ackerman, 2021; Sims et al., 2022). While Kelly et al. (2011) indicates that sponsorships can serve as effective marketing tools, the growing trend of “unhealthy” brands investing in this communication tool raises concerns from a public health view (Batty & Gee, 2019; Kelly et al., 2011; Dixon et al., 2018). Thus, the presence of “unhealthy” sponsorship arrangements undermines the health messages that female athletes may often seek to convey. Female athletes must navigate through these complexities, therefore the need for supportive sponsorships that reflect both personal and professional values, and health considerations becomes more apparent. The findings highlighted in this study underscores the importance of forming sponsorships that prioritises the health of athletes.

## 5.5 Female athlete sport supplements and sport performance

The findings of this study revealed that female athletes have a strong preference for sports supplements that provide energy before and during competitions, ultimately enhancing their overall performance during training and competitions. For instance, brands such as Pure Sports Nutrition and Musashi were frequently emphasised as essential products for athletic performance, as articulated by Athlete GW: “If it is something like Pure Nutrition or the Musashi Protein Bars, and they’re actually helping me, I’ll be so much more inclined to actually promote their business.” This sentiment further highlights the desire for products that are authentic and suitable for athletes, particularly performance. Additionally, athletes shared an interest in hydration products, specifically Powerade and Gatorade: “Having those electrolytes or high sugar levels, those types of foods would really benefit, I’d say, a lot of Taekwondo female athletes” (Athlete BG). This illustrated the athletes’ understanding of the physiological demands associated with their sports and athletic performance. Comments reported across interviews regarding the importance of electrolytes and hydration reflect existing literature that emphasises the impact of adequate intake of electrolytes and hydration on endurance, strength and recovery (Shirrefs, 2009; Batista & Dos Santos 2020; Halder &

Daw, 2020). Thus, the need for securing sponsorships that enhance athletic performance, such as Powerade, Gatorade, and Pure Sports Nutrition products is magnified. Moreover, the interviews revealed a shared interest for Arepa drinks, which addresses performance anxiety. As noted by Athlete FN: “I like the idea of Arepa drinks that people get, because that’s very much targeting performance anxiety which I think is prevalent in every sport”. This sentiment highlights the growing awareness of athletic performance and associated mental health components. Such acknowledgement by Athlete FN aligns with existing literature that indicates that mental health and performance anxiety impact athletic performance (Englert & Bertrams, 2012). Additionally, Athlete AM recognised that performance can be affected by unhealthy foods, noting: “Unhealthy foods can definitely cause performance to not be as good as it could be”. This sentiment aligns with current literature suggesting the importance of adequate nutrition for optimal sports performance (Saura et al., 2019, p. 113-122). Lastly, athletes also emphasised the need for recovery supplements, including protein powder and relevant muscle repair supplements. This was noted by Athlete CF: “Protein powders, or muscle joint repair, that kind of stuff. Things that keep me in good condition is what I would ask for personally as it helps me recover while I’m competing and afterwards”. The shared need for recovery products across athletes in the findings of our study is supported by literature that emphasises the importance of post-exercise nutrition in muscle repair and enhanced recovery (Beelen et al., 2010; Saura et al., 2019). The emphasis on recovery products demonstrates an understanding of athletes around the significance of recovery products, especially for training and performance longevity.

Hypothesis Two, which hypothesises the role of health considerations of female athletes in sponsorship alignment with female sports, is supported in these findings. Discussions surrounding the importance of sports supplements indicate the strong relationship between sponsorship products and perceived performance enhancement. By prioritising brands such as Pure Sports Nutrition, Musashi, and Arepa, female athletes are reinforcing the critical role of nutrition and supplementation in sports, while demonstrating an approach to health and performance.

## 5.6 Drug and alcohol sponsorship of female sport

A key theme that emerged from the findings of this study was the concern raised by female athletes surrounding the alignment of sport with drug and alcohol-related brands. Many athletes shared the desire to avoid arrangements with brands that may compromise their health and reputation, as well as compliance with Drug Testing policies required for certain athletes. Athlete AF articulated by noting: “Companies that aren’t approved by Drug-Free Sport New Zealand I have to be quite careful with, because I get drug-tested when I go overseas”. This sentiment was echoed by a number of other female athletes, putting an emphasis on the importance of ensuring that products endorsed by

athletes are batch-tested for prohibited substances. Athlete AS remarked: “We’ve done a lot of work on the drug-testing and batch-tested protein and making sure that they are right/ So in saying that, I’d love to work with a protein brand, powder, or bars that I know have been tested”. The emphasis on drug-free sponsorship reflects the broader concerns surrounding sporting communities regarding the integrity of prohibited, performance-enhancing substances. Such heightened awareness is rooted in the prevalent doping scandals reported in existing literature, where pressure to perform at high levels often leads to the use of prohibited substances (Murrah et al., 2013). The shared expressions by female athletes regarding drug policies reflect the growing recognition in the need for accountability in food and beverage sport sponsorships.

In addition to the growing concerns surrounding drugs in sports performance, female athletes interviewed shared their concerns about alcoholic beverages as sponsorship brands. As Athlete PR noted: “I would avoid alcohol or any sort of alcohol-associated products just for personal reasons. Contractually within Skate New Zealand, we’re not allowed to be affiliated with alcohol or bars”. This sentiment was echoed by Athlete AM who emphasises the misalignment of alcohol brands and personal values when questioned on sponsorship arrangements she would choose to avoid: “Definitely unhealthy things like alcohol brands, just things that don’t align with my values”. Such findings suggest a broader shift in the current landscape of sports amongst female athletes in prioritising personal health and well-being over financial benefits offered by alcohol sponsor brands.

Interestingly, the findings of this study report that male sports teams tend to be sponsored by more alcohol brands. This gender-based disparity is explored in existing literature and may be due to the traditional association of alcoholic brands with masculinity (Lemle & Mishkind, 1989). Meanwhile, female athletes interviewed in this study demonstrated avoidance for such sponsorships, gravitating more towards brands that align with their personal and professional values and integrity. The findings of this study support Hypothesis One, confirming that food and beverage sponsors who align with female sport in New Zealand tend to be healthy in nature. The findings revealed that several athletes will actively avoid alcohol brands as a form of sponsorships, seen as “unhealthy” brands that conflict the values of athletes in this study. The shared preferences across athletes for sponsors that align with their professional integrity and values justifies Hypothesis One. Moreover, the findings also revealed differences in sponsorship arrangements between male and female sports teams as evident in the online review of sport sponsorship alignments, particularly with regard to alcoholic beverages. Our study revealed that alcohol sponsors are more prevalent in male sports. While male sports endorse more alcoholic beverages, it is evident in this study that female sports continue to prioritise health-conscious brands that align with their health and athletic performance needs, ultimately underscoring the gender-based differences in the current landscape of sponsorship arrangements in New Zealand and thus justifying the validity of Hypothesis Four.

## 5.7 Sponsorship, sport, athlete values and conflicting messages

Findings in this study revealed that athletes shared concerns around conflicting messages outlined when “unhealthy” food and beverage sponsorship products are promoted in sporting events or by individual athletes, regardless of gender. An ethical dilemma is created when there is a disconnection between the promotion of health, fitness and athletic performance and endorsing products that are harmful to both the health and well-being of athletes and the wider audience. The confusion within conflicting messages is exacerbated when athletes, who are advocates for peak physical performance, are seen endorsing food and beverage products that contradict the values of health, wellness and fitness. For instance, Athlete EH shared her observation of a world-class competitor promoting an “unhealthy” food brand that emphasises this paradox: “He’s a world champion, one of the top five in the world from Belgium, and he’s sponsored by Belgium Pizza Hutt. So he does a lot of promotion for Pizza Hutt, and that seems a little bit strange”. Athlete EH found it ‘strange’ to see a high-profile athlete, whose athletic image corresponds to maintaining high physical and performing standards, publicly endorsing a fast food chain, thus raising questions surrounding his authenticity and alignment of value as an athlete. Such contradictions raises ethical concerns surrounding the role of sponsorship in shaping behaviours of public health. This tension expressed by athletes in the findings of this study is well-documented in current literature (Danylchuk & MacIntosh, 2009; Dixon et al., 2018; Dixon et al., 2019; Nuss et al., 2019). Scholars have continued to raise concerns regarding the ethical implications of utilising athletes, sports teams and events, that embody health and fitness, with sponsor brands that are detrimental to public health (Scully et al., 2020; Martino et al., 2021). On a community level, this misalignment is emphasised for guardians who are concerned about their children’s exposure to “unhealthy” food and beverage companies in junior sports (Zorbas et al., 2023). In this study, athletes consistently voiced their concerns surrounding the endorsement of “unhealthy” sponsorship arrangements, particularly those that compromise health, fitness and athletic performance.

The ethical tension female athletes experience when they are confronted with brands, such as Pizza Hut, demonstrates the considerations that female athletes acknowledge around the nutritional composition of products and their health implications justifies the validity of Hypothesis Two. Athlete EH’s visible discomfort illustrated the recognition by female athletes on the contradiction of unhealthy food and beverage brands and their role as advocates of health.

## 5.8 Sponsorship scarcity and financial considerations

The findings of this study highlighted the pragmatic approach that some athletes consider towards food and beverage sponsorships, particularly for grassroots-level athletes with limited opportunities. Although findings have underscored the clear preference for food and beverage sponsorships that align with the health and nutritional needs of female athletes, some are often compelled to accept arrangements from “unhealthy” sponsors for the purpose of financial survival to support their athletic endeavours, such as training and travelling. For instance, Athlete PR noted “Because I play a minority sport, I’ve never had any experience with specific sponsorships or any ongoing contractual agreements”, while Athlete AF echoed “Like my sport, the smaller sports get left out. We don’t really have the opportunities, it’s quite sad”. Such scarcity has directed athletes into actively seeking financial support from sponsors and local businesses that may not align with their personal and professional values and integrity. Shared frustration is expressed across various athletes from grassroots-level sports over the unequal distribution of opportunities for food and beverage sponsorships:

I feel frustrated when I see bad products being promoted, or ones that I've had the perception that are bad. I might not know a lot about it, but I feel frustrated as an athlete who is fighting to get sponsorships and often doesn't. I see them and I'm like, “these athletes just want money”. And then as someone from an amateur sport, this is so frustrating because we're just here trying to play our sport and stay true to ourselves. But in this professional world, they'll just exploit these athletes to make money when they're just trying to play this sport like us (Athlete AS).

Such pragmatism is evident in existing literature. where key themes from the findings of a study conducted by Donaldson and Nicholson (2020) included the reliance of grassroots-level sports teams on sponsorships, regardless of their nutritional value. Additionally, participants suggested that removing “unhealthy” sponsorship will have a negative impact on the cost of participation and opportunities (Donaldson & Nicholson, 2020), highlighting the financial reliance on such sponsorships. Such findings justify the validity of Hypothesis Two to a certain extent. While financial survival may often drive grassroots-level athletes into sponsorship arrangements misaligned with the health and nutritional needs of female athletes, some athletes continue to share frustrations over “unhealthy” food and beverage products despite their financial benefits. The sentiment by Athlete AS emphasises that even with the limited opportunities at the grassroots level they receive, female athletes are still aware of and share concerns around the implications of sponsored brands on health. However, it is the need for financial support that compromises their integrity, thus illustrating the complex relationship in the current landscape of female sports and health considerations.

Lastly, findings in this section prove Hypothesis Three to an extent, but is often overridden by financial needs. Athletes shared their preference for avoiding sponsorships from “unhealthy” food and beverage brands, as illustrated by Athlete PR and Athlete AF. However, it is often the scarcity of

sponsorship opportunities experienced by athletes in minority sports that leads athletes into compromising these preferences. As Athlete GW noted: “It’s not really about what the company is. It’s more about who’s going to be willing to give us money”, therefore reflecting the pragmatic approach to financial support and undermining the alignment of health in sport sponsorships.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis has explored the current landscape of sport sponsorships, specifically on the alignment of food and beverage sponsorships in the context of female athletes in New Zealand. The findings of this study have highlighted the key themes that surround sponsorship practices, perceptions of female athletes, and the inherent gender disparities that continue to be evident in the realm of sport sponsorships.

### 6.1 Study objectives and hypothesis

Four objectives were set for this study, in order to explore the current landscape of food and beverage sponsorships in the context of female athletes in New Zealand. First, a series of exploratory, qualitative interviews with female athletes was conducted in order to assess the influence of perceptions on food and beverage sponsor alignments, therefore achieving the objective. This assessment provided insights into the views around sponsorship practices, health implications, and the broader impact of sponsorships on the personal and professional identities and integrities of athletes. Second, an online review of sponsorships associated with high-profile female athletes in New Zealand was conducted to assess this current landscape. The objective was achieved and revealed key themes in the choice of sponsorships and assessed the equality of sponsorship arrangements across the female athletes. Third, a brief comparison between the food and beverage sponsor products aligned with female and male athletes and teams was conducted. The findings of this assessment indicated significant gender-based disparities in sponsorship opportunities and revealed the limited access female athletes have to high-profile sponsors that are often more prevalent and readily available for male athletes and sports teams. Lastly, the findings of the female athlete qualitative interviews determined that there was justification for a wider study within the area of female sport sponsorship alignments. Many athletes interviewed in this study shared concerns about the alignment of food and beverage sport sponsorships with the values of health, as well as highlighting the financial pressures that influence the decision-making of athletes, thus suggesting for the need for further research.

There were a total of four hypotheses proffered alongside the objectives of this study. They are noted in Chapter One and referenced in Chapter Five, about their alignment with the study findings. The review of current sponsorships in New Zealand across professional female athletes highlighted a notable prevalence for “healthy” food and beverage sponsors, thus proving the validity of Hypothesis One. This study also showed that while health considerations tend to affect the personal choice of sponsorship arrangements (especially for athletes with strong personal values for health, nutrition and physical demand) such preferences are undermined by financial constraints and



scarcity. Thus, Hypothesis Two was proven to an extent. Athletes expressed their desire for sponsors that reflect their health-centric values, but recognised that financial backing often necessitates the acceptance of sponsors that may compromise the health considerations. Similarly, Hypothesis Three was proven to an extent. While interviews suggested a general preference for avoiding “unhealthy” food and beverage sponsorships, such as fast food brands and sugary beverages, financial backing is often more prioritised over ethical considerations. Lastly, Hypothesis Four was proven. The comparison between male and female athletes and teams revealed gender disparities with regard to different sponsor products.

## 6.2 Strengths and limitations

Although this was a small (and exploratory) case study, the findings offer valuable insight into the dynamics of New Zealand female athlete sport sponsorships, particularly food and beverage. The noted key strengths of this study include the primary focus on female athletes, therefore addressing the gap in current literature, where gender disparities in sport sponsorships are often overlooked. Additionally, the utilisation of qualitative interviews provided rich insight into the exploration of female athletes’ perspectives, thus capturing the nuanced views on the alignment of sponsorships with their values of health and the impact of financial needs. The benefit of a qualitative online review of male and female team and athlete sponsors enabled an initial comparison between genders and added an alternate perspective to the qualitative data collected from the interviews.

Noted limitations of this study primarily relate to the parameters set by the nature of the qualification associated with thesis and the 90 credit value of this thesis. Limitations include the small size of the study and time available in which it was conducted. The time sensitive nature of this study did not allow for a systematic review of online sponsorships. The study was also limited to female athletes belonging to the Massey Sports Academy, and within a university environment. The qualitative nature of the interviews was beneficial in offering rich insight into athlete perspectives, but did mean that the findings, in this instance, are not generalisable.

With these limitations in mind, please refer to Section 6.4 for suggestions on future research.

## 6.3 Study implications

The findings of this study hold value from both an academic and industry standpoint.

Firstly, the findings add to the academic discourse relating to female sport, particularly addressing gaps in current literature surrounding sport sponsorship dynamics, gender-based disparities, and the

impact of ongoing societal stereotypes and pressures on female athletes. This study underscored the rising prevalence of female sport and female sport sponsorships, thus providing the necessary lens to explore the challenges that they continue to face in securing equitable sponsorship arrangements. The exploration of how female athletes navigate through the complexities of societal pressures, body image stereotypes and the alignment of sponsorships with personal values for health, wellness and fitness, this thesis research study captures the critical areas that have been underexplored in the current academic field of sport sponsorship, particularly of food and beverage. The findings of this study further contribute to existing literature that provides insight into exploring the attitudes and opinions of stakeholders across the sporting community in New Zealand. While studies have been conducted in New Zealand, these were not focused on female athletes (Signal et al., 2019), or were conducted on sport organisers (Batty & Gee, 2019; Carter et al., 2019).

From an industry perspective, this study adds to noted concerns and calls for establishing food and beverage sponsor restrictions and the viability of athletes and sports teams in New Zealand (Batty & Gee, 2019; Carter et al., 2013). Accompanying this is the high prevalence of obesity in New Zealand (Fallah-Fini et al., 2019) calls for the need for stricter policies to emphasise the health-promoting messages advocated in sports. Based on the findings of this study, one recommendation is for sports organisations to produce a framework of ethical standards surrounding sponsorship arrangements to ensure that female athlete values are acknowledged, thus maintaining their credibility as advocates for health and wellness and therefore maintaining trust across their audience through authenticity. Additionally, sport sponsorships and female athletes may be an impactful setting for the promotion of health initiatives directed by the New Zealand Government. Sponsorship policies in New Zealand are currently established by ASA, pertaining more towards marketing. Formulating a policy that monitors the quality (health connotations) of food and beverage brands sponsoring sports should be considered. While such policies could affect the viability of female athletes and sports teams, the investment in sport sponsorship from the government could promote public health messages and achieve objectives similar to the current Childhood Obesity Plan. Moreover, encouraging discussion between sponsorship managers, female athletes, and female sports teams could establish stronger and more appropriate sponsorship alignments. In doing so, this maximises the impact of sponsorships that create an authentic partnership through synergy between the athletes' values and their endorsed products.

#### 6.4 Future research

In noting that this study was designed as a small exploratory case study, the findings suggest that there is valid reasoning for further research into female sport sponsorship, from a range of stakeholder perspectives.

First, future research could be conducted that incorporates a larger sample size, and one that is more inclusive of a wider range of regions and sports across New Zealand - in order to increase the generalisability of the findings. Furthermore, future research should consider exploring the perceptions, attitudes and roles of athlete identity in sponsorship arrangements, specifically in the context of female athletes. Extended discussion is needed with sports clubs, team managers, sponsors, suppliers, national sport organisations, and a wider range of stakeholders on this issue. There is also potential to conduct research relating to mandates ethical sponsorships and equitable funding for female athletes competing in grassroots-level sports.

## 6.5 Closing statement

The convergence between financial necessity and ethical considerations in accepting sport sponsorship arrangements highlights the need for athletes to balance their personal values, careers and the requirements of the sports they represent. For female athletes, the findings of this exploratory study suggest that there are additional factors to consider when navigating the sport sponsorship landscape, such as personal and public image, female-centric health needs, and female values and preferences. These factors are compounded by the need to secure sponsorships and ensure financial stability. Addressing these challenges is important for creating an environment for female athletes that is more individualised and supportive to allow them to strive athletically without compromising their moral integrity.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Research advertisement



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA  
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Massey University School of Sports and Exercise Nutrition

# FEMALE ATHLETES WE WANT YOU!

**ARE YOU AN ADULT BETWEEN  
THE AGE OF 18 AND 45 YEARS  
AND CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN  
A SPORTS TEAM?**

You are invited to take part in our study examining the *dynamics of food and beverage sponsorships* in female sports in New Zealand.

This project will aim to explore your perceptions and experiences as female athletes regarding the choice of Food and Beverage Sponsorship in the Sports Setting.

**Interested? Have Questions?**  
**Please contact as detailed:**  
Mobile: 022 052 5609 text 'Study!'  
Email: [asuertef@massey.ac.nz](mailto:asuertef@massey.ac.nz)





## Appendix 2. Participant Research Information Sheet



COLLEGE  
OF HEALTH  
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

# An Examination of Food and Beverage Sponsors of Women's Sport in New Zealand Perceptions of Health Connotations and Nutritional Composition of Professional Stakeholders

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Kia ora,

My name is Alyanna Suerte Felipe. I am a postgraduate student at Massey University and am completing my final year of my Master's in Nutrition and Dietetics. As part of my degree, I am carrying out a research project that is focused on exploring the sponsorship landscape, focusing on food and beverage sponsors in the context of women's sports in New Zealand.

The aim of this research is to establish an understanding of female athlete thoughts and perspectives relating to food and beverage sponsors of women's sport in New Zealand. In alignment with this aim, a specific focus will be placed on the perceptions of health connotations and nutritional composition of food and beverage sponsor products. Furthermore, the findings of this research may help compile a set of informed recommendations that can assist women's sport facilitators in improving future sponsor alignments.

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

You are invited to take part in this study. The study will explore your perceptions and experiences as a female athlete, regarding the sport sponsorship environment. This Participation Information Sheet will help you decide if you would like to take part in the study. Please take your time to read through the information contained within this document carefully. Please don't hesitate to ask any questions or seek clarity on any aspects of the study.

### PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Participants will be contacted and recruited from the Massey Sports Academy following a specific inclusion criteria. The selection criteria for our research includes female athletes who are actively involved in individual or team-based sports in New Zealand. Participants must be aged 18-years or older.

### PROJECT PROCEDURES AND PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT

Your role as a participant will include reading this information sheet, signing the consent form and participating in an interview. One-on-one interviews will be conducted online (using Zoom or Microsoft Teams) and run for approximately 30 minutes. Interviews will be audio recorded for the purposes of transcription.

Participants will remain anonymous for the purpose of results reporting. Your role as a participant will involve participating in a discussion and sharing your perceptions and experiences of sponsor alignments in the context of women's sports.

### PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in the study. Should you choose to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question
- Withdraw from the study at any time, even after you have signed a consent form
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation



Appendix 3. *Participant Consent Form*



**An Examination of Food and Beverage Sponsors of Women’s Sport in New Zealand  
Perceptions of Health Connotations and Nutritional Composition of Professional  
Stakeholders**

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

I have read the Participant Information Sheet for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. Any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I understand that the audio for the interview will be recorded for the purpose of transcription
2. I agree/do not agree to the interview being image recorded.
3. I wish/do not wish to have a copy of my transcribed interview returned to me for proof-reading purposes
4. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Participant Information Sheet
5. I am aware that I will not be mentioned by name, or any other identifying features, in the reporting of research findings associated with this study
6. I wish/do not wish to receive a copy of the research findings

**Declaration by Participant:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to take part in this study.  
[FULL NAME]

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4. Participant Interview Questionnaires



### **An Examination of Food and Beverage Sponsors of Women's Sport in New Zealand Perceptions of Health Connotations and Nutritional Composition of Professional Stakeholders**

#### **PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW GUIDE**

##### **OPENING STATEMENT**

Kia ora, [NAME]. Thank you for deciding to participate in our project today. The following questions I will be asking you today are around sport sponsorship. I am interested in hearing what you, as a female athlete, think about Food and Beverage sponsorships in female sports. Have you had a look at the information sheet? Do you have any questions or comments regarding it? The information I am collecting today, alongside the information I will collect from other interviews, will be used to report back to female sports organizations about how Food and Beverage companies should support sports. I am really interested in hearing about your thoughts, feelings and/or experiences, and there are no right or wrong answers. Before we start, do you have any questions or concerns?

Before I start recording this interview, would you like to leave your camera on for this recorded section of our interview?

I will begin to record now. I have roughly eight to ten questions to ask.

##### **QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS**

- 1. Can you tell me about the sports you are currently playing at the moment?**
- 2. How familiar are you with sports sponsorship?**
- 3. Are you (as an individual athlete) or your team currently sponsored? If so, can you tell me a little about that sponsorship?**
- 4. What are your thoughts on food and beverage sponsorships of women's sports?**
- 5. Are there any sponsor products that you would prefer to avoid or not be associated with?**
- 6. How do you think food and beverage sponsorships align with the health and nutritional needs of female athletes?**
- 7. How do sponsored products make you feel as an athlete?**

8. Do you believe there's a connection between unhealthy food and beverage sponsorships of sport and the well-being/image perceptions of female athletes?
9. Hypothetically, if you were to receive free items or products as part of a sports sponsorship arrangement, what would you prefer? Why?
10. If you or your sports team was offered a sponsorship deal by a Food and Beverage company, what factors might you consider before accepting or declining that deal?

#### CLOSING STATEMENT

That brings us to the end of this interview. Thank you again for the time and effort you have put into this interview, you've provided me with some valuable input for our project. What I will do from here is to take the recording from today, along with the other interviews, to collate and analyze them. Would you like to receive a copy of this research project when it is finished

**ADD QUESTIONS FOR:** *uncovering the broader discourse surrounding the sport-health nexus and contributing significantly to understanding the symbiotic relationship between sports, sponsorships, and the health and well-being of female athletes.*

#### Appendix 5. Example male national Sports team food and beverage sponsorship alignments

Male Sports Team	Sports Represented	Active Sponsor	Product Category
All Blacks	Rugby	Steinlager Sanitarium Powerade Cadbury Altrad Adidas INEOS Hygienics Tasisho Pharmaceutical SAP TUDOR REPLAY Healthspan Elite Air New Zealand Bupa Ford ASB Ryman Healthcare Mitsui Fudosan DHL Sky Bunnings Warehouse Nissui Rexona StatSports Robert Walters Gilbert	Alcohol Healthy Food and Beverage Hydration, Electrolytes Confectionery brand Construction Company Sporting Goods Manufacturing Company Pharmaceutical Company  Software Corporation Luxury Goods Fashion and apparel Sports Supplements Travel Services Healthcare Group Automotive Bank Retirement Services Real Estate Company Logistics and courier Telecommunications Retail Seafood Products Personal Care Performance Technology Recruitment Agency Sporting Goods
All Whites	Football	McDonald's Milo TAB Puma Ford Xero Go Media ACC SportSmart NZCT Sport New Zealand Sporty House of Travel	Unhealthy Fast Food Hydration Gambling Sporting Goods Automotive Software Company Advertising Company Compensation Corporate Charitable organisation Government Agency Sports Management Travel Agency

		High Performance Sport New Zealand The Southern Trust The Lion Foundation	Athlete Organisation  Charitable Trust Charitable Trust
Black Caps	Cricket	Asahi KFC Powerade Tegel ANZ TVNZ SENZ Canterbury Dulux Dream11 Ford Gillette GJ Gardner Homes LifeDirect.co.nz Pals Spark NZ LesMills Hertz NZ Accor Live Limitless	Alcohol Fast Food Hydration, Electrolytes Meat Supplier Banking Television Network Radio Network Sporting Goods Painting Manufacturer Sports Platform Automotive Cosmetics Construction Company Insurance Provider Alcoholic Beverage Telecommunications Recreational Services Car Rental Hospitality Program
Tall Blacks	Basketball	Burger King Sal's Pizza TAB BNZ 2Degrees Foot Locker Schick Sky City Molten FIBA Sports New Zealand High Performance Sport New Zealand NCSA College Peak New Zealand.com BENE Sports Medical Budget The Lion Foundation NZCT One Foundation Pub Charity Pelorus Trust Four Winds Foundations Grassroots trust USANA SkySport Glory League	Unhealthy Fast Food Unhealthy Fast Food Gambling Banking Telecommunications Sporting Goods Personal Care and Cosmetics Entertainment and Hospitality Sporting Goods Basketball Federation Government Athlete Organisation  College Sports Program Sporting Goods Tourism Rehabilitation Products Car Rental Charitable Trust Charitable Organisation Charitable foundation Charitable foundation Charitable foundation Charitable foundation Charitable foundation Health and Nutrition Company Sports Channel Sports Technology
Canoe	Canoe Racing	Zhik SwoleFoods Go Media NZCT Grassroots Trusts High Performance Sports NZ Sport New Zealand Waipa District Council PAK'n'SAVE World Travellers Elliot Travel Vaaka	Sporting Goods Healthy Food and Beverages Consultancy Community Trust Community Trusts Government Funders Government Funders Government and Council Food and Beverage Suppliers Travel Agency Sporting Goods

## Appendix 6. Example national female sports teams food and beverage sponsorship alignments

Female Sports Team	Sports Represented	Active Sponsor	Product Category
Black Ferns	Rugby	Steinlager Sanitarium Powerade Cadbury Altrad Adidas INEOS Hygienics Tasisho Pharmaceutical SAP TUDOR REPLAY Healthspan Elite Air New Zealand Bupa Ford ASB Ryman Healthcare Mitsui Fudosan DHL Sky Bunnings Warehouse Nissui Rexona StatSports Robert Walters Gilbert	Alcohol Healthy Food and Beverage Hydration, Electrolytes Confectionery brand Construction Company Sporting Goods Manufacturing Company Pharmaceutical Company  Software Corporation Luxury Goods Fashion and apparel Sports Supplements Travel Services Healthcare Group Automotive Bank Retirement Services Real Estate Company Logistics and courier Telecommunications Retail Seafood Products Personal Care Performance Technology Recruitment Agency Sporting Goods
White Ferns	Cricket	Asahi KFC Powerade Tegel ANZ TVNZ SENZ Canterbury Dulux Dream11 Ford Gillette GJ Gardner Homes LifeDirect.co.nz Pals Spark NZ LesMills Hertz NZ Accor Live Limitless	Alcohol Fast Food Hydration, Electrolytes Meat Supplier Banking Television Network Radio Network Sporting Goods Painting Manufacturer Sports Platform Automotive Cosmetics Construction Company Insurance Provider Alcoholic Beverage Telecommunications Recreational Services Car Rental Hospitality Program
Kiwi Ferns	Rugby	PIRTEK DYNASTY MAINSTREAM Sky Sport GO Media RICOH Sport New Zealand High Performance Sport NZ NZCT ACC The Lion Foundation	Suppliers Sporting Goods Freight Company Entertainment Media Broadcast Information Technology Government Government Community Trust Insurance Community Trust
Tall Ferns	Basketball	Burger King Sal's Pizza TAB BNZ 2Degrees Foot Locker Schick	Unhealthy Fast Food Unhealthy Fast Food Gambling Banking Telecommunications Sporting Goods Personal Care and Cosmetics

		Sky City Molten FIBA Sports New Zealand High Performance Sport New Zealand NCSA College Peak New Zealand.com BENE Sports Medical Budget The Lion Foundation NZCT One Foundation Pub Charity Pelorus Trust Four Winds Foundations Grassroots trust USANA SkySport Glory League	Entertainment and Hospitality Sporting Goods Basketball Federation Government Athlete Organisation  College Sports Program Sporting Goods Tourism Rehabilitation Products  Car Rental Charitable Trust Charitable Organisation Charitable foundation Charitable foundation Charitable foundation  Charitable foundation  Charitable foundation Health and Nutrition Company Sports Channel Sports Technology
Football Ferns	Football	McDonald's Milo TAB Puma Ford Xero Go Media ACC SportSmart NZCT Sport New Zealand Sporty House of Travel High Performance Sport New Zealand The Southern Trust The Lion Foundation	Unhealthy Fast Food Hydration Gambling Sporting Goods Automotive Software Company Advertising Company Compensation Corporate Charitable organisation Government Agency Sports Management Travel Agency Athlete Organisation  Charitable Trust Charitable Trust