

# **EXPLORING GENDER DYNAMICS IN SKI JUMPING: WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER ROLES AND (IN)EQUALITY**

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**Author: Anastasia Ikonen  
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Supervisor: Suvi Heikkinen**





## ABSTRACT

Author Anastasia Ikonen	
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<p>Even though Finland has made progress in matters of gender equality, gender inequalities still exist, especially in sport. This master's thesis delves into gender equality, particularly in the context of ski jumping organizations. Ski jumping has long been a male-dominated field of business, where women's participation has been low. This work provides an overview of the development of women's participation in ski jumping, identifying gender inequalities associated with socially constructed gender roles and their effect on women's position, development and career progression in ski jumping activities.</p> <p>Theoretical framework of this study comprises theories on gender norms as social structures that reinforce power dynamics and create inequalities in sport organizations, such as gender discrimination, limited opportunities, division of labor, and wage gaps between genders. To find out if gender roles exist and how they affect women's socioeconomic status in ski jumping, qualitative research methods are used. For this study, five women engaged in ski jumping have been interviewed, whose experiences of the prevalence of gender roles and their influence on gender equality in the field have been analyzed using the hermeneutic phenomenological method.</p> <p>The research findings reveal that gender roles remain deeply ingrained in ski jumping culture. Prevailing gender roles hinder women's participation in all sport-related activities within the ski jumping context. Gender stereotyping contributes to unequal resource allocation and task distribution, affecting women's career development as athletes, coaches, experts, officials, and leaders. Moreover, the results identify how low gender diversity and high male dominance in ski jumping organizations influence decision-making processes hindering individuals' and organizational performance. Based on the research findings, ski jumping organizations are provided with practical recommendations and encouraged to implement proactive measures to address gender equality issues and foster positive change in organizational culture.</p>	
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## TIIVISTELMÄ

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<p>Vaikka Suomi on edistynyt tasa-arvoasioissa, erityisesti urheilussa esiintyy edelleen sukupuolten välistä eriarvoisuutta. Tässä pro gradu -työssä perehdytään sukupuolten tasa-arvoon erityisesti mäkihyppyjärjestöjen kontekstissa. Mäkihyppy on pitkään ollut miesvaltainen toimiala, jossa naisten osallistuminen on ollut vähäistä. Tämä työ tunnistaa sosiaalisesti rakentuneisiin sukupuolirooleihin liittyvää sukupuolten välistä epätasa-arvoa ja sen vaikutusta naisten asemaan, kehitykseen ja urakehitykseen mäkihypyn toimialalla.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys sisältää teorioita sukupuolinormeista sosiaalisina rakenteina, jotka vahvistavat vallan dynamiikkaa ja luovat epätasa-arvoa urheiluorganisaatioissa, kuten sukupuoleen perustuvaa syrjintää, rajallisia etenemismahdollisuuksia, epätasa-arvoista työnjakoa ja sukupuolten välisiä palkkaeroja. Sukupuoliroolien esiintymistä mäkihypyssä ja niiden vaikutusta naisten sosioekonomiseen asemaan selvitetään kvalitatiivisten tutkimusmenetelmien avulla. Tätä tutkimusta varten on haastateltu viittä mäkihypyn parissa toimivaa naista, joiden kokemuksia sukupuolirooleista ja niiden vaikutuksista alan tasa-arvoon on analysoitu hermeneuttis-fenomenologisella menetelmällä. Tutkimustulokset tuovat esille, että sukupuoliroolit ovat juurtuneet syväälle mäkihyppykulttuuriin. Vallitsevat sukupuoliroolit tarkoittavat mm. epätasaista resurssien jakoa ja tehtävien jakautumista sukupuolten kesken, mikä vaikuttaa naisten urakehitykseen urheilijoina, valmentajina, asiantuntijoina, toimihenkilöinä ja johtajina. Lisäksi tulokset osoittavat, kuinka alhainen monimuotoisuus ja korkea miesten dominanssi mäkihyppyorganisaatioissa vaikuttavat päätöksentekoprosesseihin, jotka haittaavat niin yksilöiden kuin organisaatioiden toimintaa. Tutkimustulosten perusteella mäkihyppyorganisaatioille tarjotaan käytännön suosituksia ja kannustetaan toteuttamaan ennakoivia toimenpiteitä sukupuolten tasa-arvokysymysten käsittelemiseksi ja positiivisen muutoksen edistämiseksi organisaatiokulttuurissa.</p>	
Asiasanat Sukupuolten tasa-arvo urheiluorganisaatioissa, Sukupuoliroolit, Mäkihyppy, Vastuullinen urheilujohtaminen	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

There is often talk about the pioneers of women's ski jumping. But can every generation of women be considered pioneers in ski jumping? Given that according to Collins Dictionary (2024) pioneer is someone who is one of the first people to be involved in a particular area of activity and develop it, why is every generation of women in ski jumping considered pioneers, having to do pioneer-like actions for the development and appreciation?

Women have been jumping the hill for as long as men, although the opposite is often claimed. In the early days of the sport's history, women competed in ski jumping competitions alongside men (Hofmann, 2012). However, "something" happened and at worst women were excluded from the sport for a long time, preventing them from participating in all activities related to ski jumping, which has affected that ski jumping has become and still appears as a male-dominated field. In this study this "something" is associated with societal division of genders and gender roles which as proposed by West and Zimmerman (1987) have determined acceptable behavior patterns and customs for women. Throughout history, gender roles have prevented women from participating in several kinds of activities that were not perceived suitable for the role of woman and mother (Vuori, 2010), which ski jumping as a dangerous injury-risk sport appeared to be (Laurendeau & Adams, 2010). Although strict and direct gender roles might now be thought to be behind us in history, one can question what else and why could still influence the fact that ski jumping is still strongly a male-dominated field, regarding all activities and professional positions. Female athletes, coaches and officials are still often referred as pioneers in ski jumping. Would this mean women are still not supposed to belong in the masculine world of ski jumping?

However, ski jumping is emerging as a women's sport business (Stenseth et al., 2022). This study focuses on investigating the effects of assumingly prevailing gender roles on women's engagement and employment in ski jumping and therefore on women's social and economic status. The phenomenon is investigated via interviewing women engaged with professional activities in ski jumping and analyzed using qualitative research methods, guided by theory.

According to Vertinsky et al. (2009) ski jumping provides insightful discussions especially when it comes to gender roles and stereotypes in sport. On one hand, women were historically excluded from ski jumping competitions until relatively recently. However, on the other hand, they have consistently demonstrated their ability to participate at equal or even superior levels compared to men. These contrasting narratives highlight the complexities surrounding gender roles in ski jumping and gender equality.

Gender equality in this study is perceived as equal opportunities, capabilities, power and knowledge for all genders (UNESCO, 2023a) in the sport context and as a fundamental human right and a foundation and prerequisite for a sustainable world (United Nations, 2023). Lorber (1994) defines gender equality to be “justice and equality”, where the different qualities and skills of the sexes are valued equally. UNESCO (2015) recognizes women’s participation in sport, including decision-making processes as a right of every female that must be promoted. Moreover, Mikkonen (2023) points out that gender equality in sport is not only about human rights, rather it also represents democracy in modern societies as women represent half of population, thus need to be involved in all social and sport activities. This means participation at all levels of sport, including not only sporting activities but also participation in decision-making processes in sport organizations.

In turn, the discussion on gender roles and gender stereotyping in sport in this study bases on the theory of social consequences of segregation of the two sexes (Rossi, 2010). As West and Zimmerman (1987) propose, this study questions the need of social segregation to two sex categories when it is aimed to treat men and women as equals in ski jumping context. Therefore, in this study, gender roles and gender segregation are recognized to have connection with the multiple dimensions of discrimination and power relations which are connected to gender equality in ski jumping (UN Women, 2022). West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender creates, reinforces and legitimates a hierarchy that according to World Health Organization (2023) leads to inequalities between genders, which connect with other social and economic disparities. Such disparities include not only limited career options and bad career progression for women (Attila et al., 2018), but also unequal payment (Korvajärvi, 2010) resulting in economic inequalities throughout women’s whole lifecycle (Teräsaho, 2022). According to the European Commission (2014) gender roles and stereotypes are still present in European societies in sport, which affects women’s participation in sport as athletes and engagement in occupational positions in the field of sport, such as sport managers. Since that, several studies (Plaza et al., 2016; Palašćáková et al., 2020; Mikkonen, 2023) have indicated that gender stereotyping in sport has continued after that to recent days. According to Flink (2008) sport remains a potent tool for the creation and reconstruction of male hegemony. Moreover, Organista (2017) finds that women are still marginalized in sport organizations. Sport organizations appear to be opposed to women, valuing male hegemony. Therefore, Organista further notes hegemonic masculinity to structure sport and organize it on patriarchal principles.



Even though Finland is statistically one of the most gender equal countries in the world based on women's economic opportunities, education, health and political power (World Population Review, 2023), it appears as one of the most gender segregated country in terms of occupation and other civic activities (Teräsaho, 2022). Moreover, it is indicated that sport in Finland, as a highly gender segregated field lacks gender equality at all levels (Mikkonen, 2023). Several surveys and studies on gender equality in sport in Finland lately show only slow development towards gender equality and gender diversity in the field (Turpeinen et al., 2011; Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018), indicating that sport is still highly gender segregated field of business. The latest report by Lehtonen et al. (2022) shows that men still dominate all aspects of Finnish sport, not only as athletes, but also as sport managers, leaving women behind in positions of trust and other influential positions in sport field of business. Previous research on gender inequalities in sport indicates effects of gender stereotyping on women's professional engagement in sport, including lower resources and salary level for women (Hindman & Paulsen, 2022), poorer career development (Aalto-Nevalainen, 2018) and lower appreciation of female athletes and female managers (Spaaji et al, 2015) as well as lower media representation of females in sport (UNESCO, 2023) that appear as a consequence of gender roles and gender segregation in sport. Moreover, gender segregation in sport is associated with women's less engagement with influential or managerial positions in sport (Hindman & Paulsen, 2022; Meyer & Rameder, 2022), further affecting the economic status of women involved in sport business. Hence, gender inequalities in sport are connected to high gender segregation and ongoing gender stereotyping, which hinders women's professional development in the sport field.

Therefore, the inferior position of women at all levels of sports can be considered the result of stereotyping women and attaching assumed characteristics to them. Acker (2006) argues that in sport women often face gender stereotyping. Because of their gender, women are often not seen as fitting the perfect image of an athlete or a sports leader, which prevents them from obtaining such positions. Consequently, as Palaščáková et al. (2020) propose, promoting gender equality in sport and decision-making requires addressing and eliminating these gender stereotypes attached to women in sport. As claimed, eliminating gendered stereotypes is crucial for removing barriers that prevent women from reaching leadership positions in sport. Furthermore, based on Aalto-Nevalainen (2018) proposition, eliminating gender roles in ski jumping would be economically beneficial not only for individuals but also for sport organizations, sport development and in the final hand the society. Greater participation of women in ski jumping would open the sport's potential as a sport business (Stenseth et al., 2022).

## **1.1 Aims and objectives of the research**

This study focuses on gender roles and perceived inequalities in the male-dominated sport business of ski jumping. I will investigate how women in the field of ski jumping talk about norms, behaviours and roles associated with gender and how they perceive gender equality and related problems in the ski jumping organizations. The study aims to shed light on the gender equality problems in the traditionally male-dominated sports field, but also as a field that has recently emerged as a women sport. Based on my research results I will also make practical suggestions for gender equality work in a male-dominated environment of sport.

This study addresses the research problem with the two following research questions: 1) How women perceive the realization of gender (in)equality in ski jumping? and 2) How have gender roles and stereotypes been perceived to affect women's participation in ski jumping? To answer the research questions, qualitative research methods are applied. The research data is collected through personal interviews. As this study focuses on women's personal experiences on gender equality in the context of ski jumping, interview data is collected from five women who are engaged in different positions in ski jumping in Finland, as athletes, officials or coaches. The interview data is analyzed with a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to gain an understanding of the phenomena and themes raised by women about gender roles in ski jumping. The research analysis is guided by a theoretical framework that includes perspectives on the formation of gender roles, norms and behaviors and the influence of gender roles on the position of women in society adapted to the sports context. The results of the interviews are written openly with direct quotations. Based on the results, discussion is held, and the research questions are answered. The results of this study are also used for composing recommendations for further gender equality work in ski jumping organizations.

## **1.2 Motivation for the research**

Claiming that gender equality in sport in Finland has already been reached is inaccurate (Juvonen, 2010; Mikkonen et al., 2021; Lehtonen et al., 2022; Mikkonen, 2023). As Juvonen (2010) presents, as long as individuals are differentiated by gender, which is causing gender segregation, there is a need for a critical gender research. Current high gender segregation and male dominance in ski jumping indicates gender imbalance (Travers, 2011), suggesting the presence of gender inequalities and gender stereotyping in ski jumping. Despite the continuous women's engagement in ski jumping, women's representation in sport activities remains low and undervalued (Andersen & Loland, 2017). As a researcher, the personal motivation for this research lies in my personal interest and own activity in ski jumping. As a woman involved in ski jumping activities, I am aware of the

challenging operating environment of the sport for women. The motive of the research is to raise the voice of women working in the sport and raise awareness on the challenges women face in ski jumping from the perspective of gender equality and gender stereotyping. With this study I address the research gap identified by Plaza et al. (2016) where they investigate gender stereotypes in sport activities and propose that future research should investigate conjointly the explicit and implicit pathways by which gender stereotypes may influence individuals' behaviour in the sport context. This study addresses the influence of gender stereotyping on females' behaviour in professional settings in ski jumping as well as the influence on women's careers in sport.

Since the topic is rarely discussed in public, this study also serves as a conversation opener for ski jumping community. In this study, participants are given a safe and low-threshold opportunity to talk anonymously on their experiences on gender inequalities in ski jumping. The research findings in turn offer women of ski jumping with a peer perspective on the realization of gender equality and enables comparison of experiences, conversation, and peer support. Instead, for the ski jumping community, this research offers perspectives and practical insights on improving gender equal management policies. The main ideology behind this research is to initiate a cultural change to make the sport culture more equal for future generations (Alsarve, 2024). In a better tomorrow, ski jumping is inclusive, where everyone's work is valued, and everyone can realize professional goals regardless of their gender or other attributes.

### **1.3 Structure of the research**

In this chapter, the delineation of the content within each section is provided to facilitate the reader's orientation among the various segments of the study. In the current Chapter 1 the background, motivation, and objectives of the research are introduced to the reader. Chapter 2 delves deeper into the theoretical framework of the study by examining the theory of gender role formation and its influence on women's status in society and sports. Chapter 3 examines in greater detail the influence of gender roles on gender diversity and occupational segregation in sport organizations and consequently on women's socio-economic status and employment in sport field. Additionally, a glance is cast upon gender equality efforts within various sport organizations. In Chapter 4, the reader is afforded an extensive overview of women's involvement in ski jumping, the culture and operational environment of ski jumping organizations, and contemporary challenges from the perspective of gender equality. Chapter 5 introduces the research questions of this study, the rationale behind the chosen methodology, as well as ethical considerations and limitations of this research. In the following chapter 6 the results of the study are presented, including direct quotations from the interview data of this study. Chapter 7 in turn provides a discussion on the results of the study, answering the research questions. The practical recommendations for increasing gender equality in ski jumping organizations

are presented in the end of the chapter 7, followed by a conclusion of the study in chapter 8.

## 2 GENDER ROLES

This chapter presents and describes the concept of gender and gender roles and stereotypes. Gender is considered as a socially constructed term that includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman or a man that varies depending on a culture, society and time (World Health Organization, 2023). In this study gender and gender roles are investigated in Finnish sport context, thus the point of view is kept in how concept of gender correlates with Finnish society and sport.

### 2.1 Definition of gender

In this study, the terms of sex and gender are distinguished apart. According to World Health Organization (2023) gender and sex are related but distinct concepts. Sex refers to the biological and physiological traits such as chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs that differentiate females, males, and intersex individuals. Instead, Howson (2005) emphasizes the social nature of gender, recognizing that it differs not only from biological sex but also as an empty category shaped by social practices and cultural assumptions. This perspective views gender as fundamentally social and cultural performance. According to West and Zimmerman (1987), gender is a product of social activity rather than a characteristic, factor or a role of a person. Gender is not a trait of individuals; rather, it is a socially constructed aspect. It accomplishes this by legitimizing one of society's most essential separations and acting as a result of different social configurations. Importantly, gender is not merely an extension of biological differences; it arises from specific social contexts and historical epochs. (West & Zimmerman, 1987.)

According to Rossi (2010) concept of gender was first introduced broadly to discussion in the 1960s-1970's. It aimed to demerge the concept of "sex" that depended on mostly humans' biological features from social and cultural

definition of gender. Howson (2005) describes that the concepts of sex and gender has evolved significantly within sociological knowledge. Initially, the focus was on women's subordination and their unique experiences compared to men. However, West and Zimmerman (1987) note that even though, gender is seen socially constructed, "gender", much like "sex" is fixed, unvarying and static. Rossi (2010) describes "sex" as relatively unambiguous and "gender" as more complicated to define as it may vary mainly depending on time, place, political, social and cultural environment. Howson (2005) notes that although distinction of sex and gender may be viewed as problematic or unstable, its initial value was that it denaturalized accounts of women's bodily experiences and relocated those experiences within social structures and processes. Howson (2005) also claims that if gender is emphasized as a social construct, some critics argue that this approach overlooks the body's role. Nevertheless, understanding gender as dynamic and socially situated remains crucial for addressing inequalities between women and men in this study. West and Zimmerman (1987) point out that gender is a powerful ideological tool, that generates, perpetuates, and validates the decisions and constraints based on sex category. The assumptions on female and male natures achieve the status of objective facts, which determine how men and women are treated differently in the social hierarchy. In summary, gender is not solely a product of biology; it is intricately woven into social and cultural contexts, shaping our understanding of difference and power dynamics in the sports organizations.

## **2.2 Shaping gender roles**

While gender in this study is considered to be socially and culturally constructed, Rossi (2010) proposes gender roles to appear as a consequence of such social separation of sexes. She points out that gender roles are not built based on the biological differences between men and women, but as a result of social division. Howson (2005) recognizes gender to encompass practices, identities, and division to gender roles while West and Zimmerman (1987) define gender roles as behavioural aspects of being a woman or a man. West and Zimmerman (1987) present a theory of "doing gender". They argue that gender is "done", carried out by both women and men, whose societal acceptance depends on conforming to these roles. This involves a series of socially influenced actions and interactions that portray certain activities as being either masculine or feminine. For instance, Butler (1990) argues that gender is performed by carrying out and repeating certain culturally considered masculine or feminine behaviour such as gestures, body positions or manners of speaking. As one of the earliest tomes on gender roles, Liljeström (1966, as cited in Rossi, 2010), states that gender inequality is about the oppression of individuals who do not correspond to gender roles, in other words the concepts of femininity and masculinity prevailing within a certain culture.

While gender roles and stereotypes are often associated with masculinity and femininity, both Jokinen (2010) and Saarinen et al. (2022) however argue that masculinity or femininity are not a universal law of nature but rather constrained and ideological structures and meanings for sexes that can be learned differently and are subject to change. West and Zimmerman (1987) agree that “doing gender” is not only living up to the norms associated with femininity or masculinity, but rather engaging in behaviour at the risk of gender assessment. Doing gender is constructing and creating unnatural and non-biological differences between men and women that reinforce the “essentialness” of gender. Moreover, West and Zimmerman note that doing gender is unavoidable. The social consequence of belonging to a sex category make it inevitable: power and resources are distributed not only within the political, economic, and domestic domains but also within the larger context of interpersonal relationships.

Gender roles are often connected to a form of social activity. As West and Zimmerman (1987) claim gender is not an aspect of what a person is, but rather what one does regularly, in interaction with others. In her work “Undoing Gender” Judith Butler (2004) further reflects the idea of “doing gender”. She notes that if gender is considered as a form of action—an ongoing activity performed partly without conscious awareness or intention—it does not follow that it is automatic or mechanical. Quite the opposite, it involves a practice of improvisation within a context of limitations. Furthermore, one’s gender is not something done in isolation; it is always enacted in relation to or on behalf of another, even if that other exists only in the realm of imagination.

As gender roles are associated to be performed as an activity, such models for activity are not incidental but rather learned. Howson (2005) highlights that women are not born feminine but taught to become. Moreover, Uusikylä (2008) argues that girls are often raised to conform a woman’s role defined by society. Plaza et al. (2016) describe gender roles and stereotypes to be shaped without an individual’s conscious awareness and activated automatically to impact subsequent social judgment, perception or behavior. According to Lempiäinen (2010) gender roles and stereotypes are learned from the prevailing culture automatically through upbringing in private life and family, often without individual’s consciousness creating cultural values and building personal identities. The process of learning gender roles is composed of ordinary and everyday activities that contain self-evident operating models. Such procedures often contain gender biased meanings that may include presumptions of boys’ and girls’ acceptable behaviour. (Lempiäinen, 2010.)

Such acceptable behaviour for genders reinforces formation of gendered traditions that are passed through generations, being repeated by the society and media (Howson, 2005). Paasonen (2010) describes such phenomenon with representation of gender. Representation relies on various social norms that produce, reproduce and market understandings of gender. Representation of gender has a strong influence on cultural perceptions of gender as well as self-perception, on how women or men are seen by others and how women or men see themselves. Especially symbolic representations such as pictures, films and

texts appearing in the media have an essential role in gender representation and therefore formation of gender norms and roles. (Paasonen, 2010.) While language is also one of the most important aspects of culture, Engelberg (2018) proposes that a lot of gendered expressions can be found in language, both visible but also hidden and unconscious. She argues that the male gender is more visible and dominant in the Finnish language. To this she refers, for example, to words ending in -mies (Engl. -man), which often tend to express established personal or professional titles, which reinforces gender normative behaviour and confirms the gap between genders.

### **2.3 Gender roles in sport**

As discussed previously, society sets standards and expected behaviors for women, which defines women's role in society. There have been different expectations towards males and females that Harjunen (2010) describes to reflect different roles, statuses and expectations for men and women have in society. According to literature, women's role in society and expectation towards women's behavior often come down to women's role in family. Vuori (2010) argues that image of motherhood has had a strong influence on image and role of women in society and labor. Historically as mothers, women have been receiving appreciation and support from the society. Thus, traditionally, women have received appreciation when their civic activity involved characteristics typical to motherhood such as caring and educating. This way, it was seen appropriate for a woman to get involved in a caring profession, such as nurse or teacher as long as her activity remained typical for women and stayed in "feminine questions". On the other hand, McDonagh and Pappano (2007) find that historically, physicians insisted that women were physically not strong enough to involve with stressful careers and higher education, which would make women infertile. This way, involving with other professions than a nurse, teacher or a secretary, were seen as inappropriate for women. Vuori (2010) further argues that this approach can be seen as restraining women from all other activities that did not involve such expected qualities. Everything that could not be included in image of femininity or role of motherhood, was prohibited for women. One of such prohibited activities that did not confront to image of motherhood or involve feminine qualities, was sport. (Vuori, 2010.)

When talking about gender roles in the sport context, Harjunen (2010) emphasizes the social division of concepts of masculinity and femininity. Hence, discussion on different expectations towards male and female body in society comes down to division to masculinity and femininity, especially when it comes to sport as a framework for gender roles. Paasonen (2010) notices that male's and females' bodies have been assessed differently through history. Body of a male athlete was seen as an ideal archetype of masculinity while females' body was especially appreciated for feminine associated qualities as aesthetic beauty. Several studies show that the features that are valuable and beneficial in sport



are often associated with masculinity (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007; Plaza et al., 2016; Mikkonen, 2023). Ryba and Saarinen (2023) argue that sport is generally and widely associated to be a masculine field. Such association evolves from expected and valuable features in field of sport. Moreover, Goffman (1977, as cited by West & Zimmerman, 1987) describes sport as a constructed framework for expression of masculinity with such associated qualities as endurance, strength, and competitiveness. On the other hand, it is also shown that different sports may be categorized either as masculine or feminine, which further emphasizes the differences between the genders and contributes to gender segregation. Plaza et al. (2016) describe how sport tend to be associated with masculinity when they involve physical contact, force, or the manipulation of heavy objects (e.g., rugby, team sports, combat sports), while activities emphasizing gracefulness and expression (e.g., dancing, ice skating, gymnastics) are often regarded as feminine. Sports focusing on strength, endurance, and physical interaction are predominantly aligned with masculinity, whereas pursuits emphasizing aesthetics (characterized by concentration, dexterity, and suppleness) are commonly perceived as feminine. (Plaza et al., 2016.)

McDonagh and Pappano (2007) shed light on the intricate relationship between sport and gender. They argue that while the concept of sport often upholds the male body as superior, it doesn't merely reflect social and gender realities; rather, it actively shapes and constructs them. A central issue highlighted by McDonagh and Pappano (2007) is the influence of policies in sport that enforce gender segregation. These policies have perpetuated traditional perceptions of females to be physically inferior to males, even if women have demonstrated their capabilities in sport. Despite offering more opportunities to women, the system has still hindered their recognition as equal athletes to men. This phenomenon assumes that males are inherently athletically superior to females, despite evidence to the contrary. McDonagh and Pappano (2007) further argue that especially in masculine associated sports, male athletes' performance is often considered as a standard performance, which makes female athletes appear biologically and physically disadvantaged. Moreover, Saarinen et al. (2022) found that coaches tend to position male athletes as the ideal and desired norm for an athlete while female athletes are expected to adapt a superwoman ideal to keep up with the increasing pressure. Saarinen et al. (2022) study shows that coaches in cross-country skiing have been proven to discursively reproduce and thus support gender stereotypes and hierarchies, confirming unequal power relations in ski sport. Their findings are in line with Spaaij et al. (2015) who note that sport is still governed by hegemonic masculinity and organized on patriarchal principles. A large portion of social reproduction of hierarchy and social stratification takes place in sport. Through its interactions with other social institutions, rules, and values, it replicates the social structures that already exist. It propagates patriarchy via internal mechanisms. (Spaaij et al., 2015.)

Discussion on socially constructed hierarchy and patriarchy leads back to idea of masculinity and femininity as part of gender stereotyping in sport. Mikkonen (2023) finds that contemporarily, gender equality work in sport is

focused especially on “fixing” women to better fit the ideal masculine image of an athlete or a sport leader. Saarinen et al. (2022) however point out that this discourse reinforces patriarchal gender order in sport, viewing women as inferior to men. Such patriarchal gender order extends not only to athletic performance of women but also concern other sport-related activities including sport leadership. McDonagh and Pappano (2007) argue that female athletes’ inferiority to male athletes is taken as self-evident fact, strengthening i.a., the idea that female sport is less interesting for public. They claim that as long as the phrase “you play like a girl” remains an insult, females’ abilities in sport context are undervalued. Therefore, as Mikkonen (2023) argues one of the most important actions for promoting gender equality is changing gendered cultures inside sport. She notices that practices and habits in sport are often adopted in an early age, already when children engage themselves with sport as a hobby. These habits are carried through whole life, shaping future sport leaders’ behavior and values since childhood. Thus, it is crucial to build a gender equal culture inside sport already at a grassroots level, especially in clearly male-dominant sports.

### **3 GENDER EQUALITY IN SPORT**

In this paragraph, gender equality is examined from the perspective of gender inclusion, gender diversity in sport organizations and occupational gender segregation in sport. The paragraph provides a discussion on influence of gender stereotyping on women's employment, career and salary development in sport. Finally, gender equality from the point of view of sport organizations is reviewed. The division of responsibilities in gender equality work of different sport organizations is presented.

#### **3.1 Gender diversity in sport business**

##### **3.1.1 Occupational gender segregation**

Earlier in this study it was discussed how gender roles define socially acceptable behaviour for genders, which guides the activities of individuals. Rossi (2010) notes that socially acceptable behaviours associated with gender roles are also strongly related to the gendered division and gender segregation, especially in civic activities such as labor. This phenomenon is referred to as occupational gender segregation or the differentiation of roles between men and women in labor. According to Korvajärvi (2010) the majority of labor markets represent highly gender-segregated work environments, where certain fields or occupations are predominantly male- or female-dominated, which means that over 50 % of all positions are occupied by representatives of same gender. According to Blackburn and Jarman (1997) there are two types of occupational gender segregation: vertical and horizontal. Horizontal segregation means distribution of genders in different fields, whereas vertical segregation means unequal distribution of genders to different levels of work in organizational hierarchy. Therefore, not only different fields may appear gender-segregated, but also different work positions may be dominated by a certain gender.

Acker (2006) states that gender segregation across various fields and professions fosters professional identities, influencing individuals' choices and the tasks recommended for them to undertake. This way, gender segregation creates schemas of an ideal worker norms and default assumptions on suitability for job positions. Therefore, segregation shapes the trajectories of individuals' lives (Forsyth et al., 2019). Correspondingly, West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender roles create division of labor in society through social routinization. They contend that social routine is questioned when a person who is classified as belonging to one sex category exhibits actions that are typically associated with the other type. Such "role conflict" then can be seen as a dynamic aspect of social division of sexes. Role conflict situations include occasions in which individuals might see clearly that they are out of place and do not belong to the role. Uusikylä (2008) states that Western society often appears to be male-oriented and argues that women would have much more opportunities to succeed professionally, if society would not define a woman's role so strictly. Similarly, Korvajärvi (2010) argues that gendered work and gendering practices in labor hinder women's opportunities for employment. Gender-based distinctions are closely linked with how individuals perceive their professional roles, the symbols connected to work, and the significance of work and life in different cultural and situational contexts.

According to Korvajärvi (2010) Finnish labor market is clearly divided along gender lines, with men and women occupying different fields, positions and professions. Kauhanen and Riukula (2019) note that Finnish labor market can be noticed to be the most segregated in Europe, which causes one of the most significant gender equality issues in labor in Finland. Korvajärvi (2010) observes the outcomes of gender segregation as socially and economically harmful, especially for women. She claims that gender segregation leads to lower regard for professions and industries where women are in the majority, viewing them as less prestigious and lower-paid compared to those dominated by men. Furthermore, Teräsaho (2022) observes that gender segregation in Finnish labor is detrimental to the whole society, given that society forfeits a significant portion of its resources when all talents and competencies are not maximally employed, and individuals are unable to pursue work aligned with their preferences and sense of purpose.

Occupational gender segregation is noted to be connected to various socio-economic inequalities. As a consequence of high gender segregation in Finnish labor market, Attila et al. (2018) indicate that women encounter gender-based belittlement and discrimination which occur mostly in male-dominated fields. They find that most women face challenges in their professional careers due to their gender in terms of lower salary, poorer career advancement, and challenging recruitment situations which contribute to various inequalities (Attila et al., 2018). Moreover, Teräsaho (2022) argues that women's lower salary levels also usually reflect in lower pensions, which reinforces economic inequality throughout individuals' lives.

Korvajärvi (2010) finds that pay gap between genders are influenced by how different professions and skills are valued in society. Pay gaps stem from

established perceptions of the demands of different jobs. Often, job demands are evaluated based on commonly accepted "truths". Simultaneously, Figart et al. (2002) find gender-based assumptions on skills and responsibilities to affect and explain pay gap between genders. As Bairoh and Putila (2021) argue, different perceptions apply to male and female dominated fields and positions. They impart that technological expertise that is associated as a masculine field, is commonly assumed to be more demanding than for instance nursing that is a predominantly feminine field. Therefore, gender segregation in labor force is seen to be evident especially in positions requiring technical expertise. This way, commonly accepted perceptions guide actions that create and strengthen occupational gender segregation.

### **3.1.2 Gender segregation in sport**

Even until these days sport is still highly gender segregated and male-dominated field. Several studies show evidence of vertical and horizontal gender segregation in sport (Spaaij et al., 2020; Mikkonen et al., 2021; Hindman & Paulsen, 2022). According to Hindman and Paulsen (2022) women are not only underrepresented in sport as a field, but also marginalized in higher positions within the sport industry. Spaaij et al. (2020) note gender diversity to be low in sport organizations, which indicates horizontal segregation inside sport. Respectively, Mikkonen et al. (2021) find that leadership positions are predominantly occupied by men in voluntary sport clubs in Finland, which indicates vertical segregation in sport. Additionally, gender segregation is strengthened inside sport as women tend to engage in leading positions in predominantly female-associated sport such as dancing and claims that expertise acquired from masculine associated sport is more valued than the one obtained from feminine sport (Mikkonen, 2023). Therefore, it can be stated that both vertical (Jarman et al., 2012) as well as horizontal (Hindman & Paulsen, 2022) gender segregation can be considered as an indication of gender inequality in sport. As Hindman and Paulsen (2022) note, gender segregation in sport is greater compared to non-sport industries. Such structures and practices highlight gendered hierarchies and reproduce inequality regime in sport organizations. Therefore, sport organizations are noted to reproduce gender inequality by their practices, actions, meanings and processes (Acker, 2006).

Mikkonen (2023) describes sport as a unique field for gender equality research especially concerning gender roles. She notes that sport is one of the rare social activities that is intentionally divided by gender into two different men's and women's series. She argues that the intentional gender segregation in sport may ensure gender equality in physical performances by increasing individuals' possibilities to succeed in sport competition however, gender segregation also unintentionally creates a gender inequality gap by creating a gendered bias and stereotypes. Similarly, according to McDonagh and Pappano (2007) intentional separation of men's and women's sport creates and perpetuates gender stereotypes, rather than contribute to gender equality in sport.

### 3.1.3 Gender diversity in sport organizations

Plaza et al. (2016) found that field of sport is still influenced by gender norms, both directly and indirectly. This influence can lead individuals to unconsciously adjust their participation in sport activities. Likewise, Palašćáková et al. (2020) present that gender roles and stereotypes in sport still nowadays affect both participation of women in decision-making in sport organizations as well as women's participation in sporting activities in Europe and suggest eliminating gendered stereotypes as the most important means of achieving gender diversity and equality in sport organizations.

Development in gender diversity in Finnish sport has however been moderate and there are only few signs of a reduction of gender segregation in the sport industry. Several papers (Turpeinen, 2011; Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018; Lehtonen et al., 2022) have investigated state of gender equality in sport in Finland and noticed only slow improvements towards gender diversity and equality. According to Teräsaho (2022) the development in Finnish sport industry follows a general trend of demolition gender segregation in Finnish society. Moreover, Teräsaho claims that significant improvement in segregation across various fields hasn't been observed over the past 30 years, thus occupational segregation diminishes remarkably slowly.

Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland has published three periodical reviews on state of equality in sport and physical activity in Finland. These publications were published in 2011, 2017 and 2021, offering a valuable viewpoint on development of gender diversity in sport in Finland. As a starting point, Turpeinen et al. (2011) discovered unequal distribution of genders in all areas in sport, as athletes, sport leaders and other positions in sport. As a major finding, they argue that women are clearly underrepresented as sports leaders, members of board of sport organisations or ones' chairpersons. In the next report from 2017, Turpeinen and Hakamäki (2018) discovered only slow improvements in gender diversity in Finnish sport organizations. During 2011-2017 period the number of women in leading positions in sport organizations had risen as well as number of female athletes and coaches. Distribution of female leaders in different sport disciplines was, however, not even. (Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018.) Likewise, Lehtonen (2017) finds that the share of women as members of boards of sport organizations has risen during 2010's. However, she notes that the main power in sport organizations was still possessed by a male oligarchy, often those who own political or other social power.

In the latest publication on equality in sport and physical activity in Finland, Lehtonen et al. (2022) find that conditions for females' sport engagement have improved. They find that the share of female athletes has recently risen along with females' athletic success, which indicates improved gender equality for athletes in sport. Mikkonen et al. (2021) find a correlation between the growth of number of female athletes and female sport leaders in Finnish sport organizations, which means the more female athletes there are involved in a sport organization the more female leaders there are. However, their claim can be questioned with findings by Lehtonen et al. (2022) as they notice only a slight

change in women's share in sport management and leadership positions in Finland even if the share of athletes has risen. Lehtonen et al. (2022) particularly highlight that while the number of women as operative leaders of sport organizations has slightly risen, the number of women in higher managerial positions in sport organizations has remained unchanged since 2000's. For instance, the statistics show that women occupy only 33 % of board members positions of Finnish sport organizations. (Lehtonen et al., 2022.) The similar statistics appear also in other sources indicating the share of women is only 30 % in the highest decision-making bodies of the national sport organizations. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023.)

The similar tendencies in low gender diversity are noticeable in European and international sport organizations. Even though statistically Europe is home to one of the most gender equal countries in the world (World Population Review, 2023), gender diversity and equality statistics in sport do not indicate any superior numbers for European sport organizations. Phelps (2023) notices that in some cases European sport organizations gender diversity statistics fall behind its American and Oceanian counterparts. Statistics prove that European sport organizations do not stand out as pioneers in gender equality especially considering distribution of decision-making positions, which further emphasizes the importance and necessity of gender equality work in sport in Europe. Phelps (2023) presents examples of low diversity in European sport organizations, in which on average, there are 27 % female members in Executive Boards and 19 % female members in National Olympic Committee General Assemblies in Europe. Therefore, despite growth of share of female athletes in Europe, representation of women in other official positions in sport remains low. Statistics show that on average 80 % of all other positions in National Teams (Coaches, Team Management, Team Leaders, Medical Officials and other personnel) are occupied by men. (Phelps, 2023.) Forsyth et al. (2019) agree that males continue to outnumber females in all sport-related positions.

According to the above, it can be concluded that there is generally low gender diversity in both international and Finnish sport organizations. Stainback et al. (2016) observe that organizations lacking gender diversity in leadership positions exhibit more pronounced gender segregation. Conversely, the presence of women in leadership positions is associated with reduced segregation. Furthermore, Stainback et al. (2016) propose that the influence of female leaders correlates with lower levels of gender segregation among employees, suggesting a potential role for women in mitigating workplace gender disparities. Therefore, they claim that women's ability to attain organizational authority contributes to dismantling gender-based organizational structures. However, this claim can be questioned in sport context, as according to Lehtonen et al. (2022) the number of female managers in sport organizations does not increase in the same proportion as in other positions in the sport sector which indicates the gendered structures still present in sport organizations.

## 3.2 Challenges in gender equality in sport

### 3.2.1 Career development

Previous research generally identifies the challenges in gender equality associated with gender roles in sport. Even though Finland is often considered a pioneer in gender equality, gender inequalities still appear especially in sport leadership in Finland (Lehtonen et al., 2022). Spaaij et al., (2015) state that hegemonic masculinity in male-dominated sports justifies and is associated with lack of resources provided to women's engagement in sport by asserting that the patriarchal organisation of sport is natural, normal and therefore justified. The hierarchical structure within sports, predominantly led by men, is coupled with a masculine culture. Ryba and Saarinen (2023) describe how women usually need to adapt to a masculine culture and become "one of men" to be accepted and succeeded professionally in sport. Moreover, they show that women face challenges in their careers in sport field, as athletes, coaches and sport leaders. Therefore, they claim that Finnish sport organizations are still strongly influenced by such heteropatriarchal gender ideology in sport, which hampers women's possibilities to establish a professional career in sport.

According to previous studies, it is not only more difficult for women to establish a professional career in sport industry, but it is also less likely than for men. Meyer and Rameder's (2022) study shows that women are less likely to engage with managerial positions in sport organizations, which again mirrors gender stereotypes and hierarchical and vertical gender segregation of professional sport. Sartore and Cunningham (2007) agree that a significant lack of female presence in top positions within sport organizations indicates how societal gender norms and stereotypes are linked with both social and sports ideologies that might hinder females' potential within the sports domain. They claim that particularly, due to the lesser societal power and recognition granted to women, females in sport organizations may not perceive themselves as capable or suitable leaders or coaches, thus inhibiting their proactive engagement in such roles (i.e., exhibiting self-limiting behavior). This idea is further argued by Cunningham (2008a) that traditional gender roles are associated with occupational positions in sport organizations, which are environments rich in hegemonic masculinity. Acker (2006) presents similar argument claiming that the ideal image of a sport manager is often associated with males while females are seen to fit lower influence positions. The findings by Mikkonen (2023) are in line with the previous literature, claiming that due to gendered perceptions men also tend to fit the frame of an ideal sport leader more often than women. She finds that features that are considered masculine, such as decisiveness and strength, are valued and expected features for a sport leader. At the same time however, Mikkonen (2023) suggests new perspective according to which feminine features like empathy and discussion and listening skills to be likewise crucial for a sport leader. This way, she claims that gender inequality in sport is rather based on



prejudices towards women's physical bodies rather than femininity of women's leadership style, which highlights the inequalities between genders.

Inequalities between genders appear not only in the earlier phases of career establishment, but also later in career development. Aalto-Nevalainen (2018) studied career success of upper sport managers and found differences between male and female sport managers' career success. She claims that to succeed as a sport leader requires more effort from a woman than what it requires from a man. This finding is in line with Cunningham's (2008b) conception that female sport coaches and managers obtain lower returns on their investments in human capital (e.g. level of education, amount of training, size and strength of their network) than their male counterparts. Whereas such human capital is associated with career success for men, this is not a case for women in sport. This idea is further reflected by Mikkonen et al. (2021) who find that even though female sport leaders have a higher education compared to men, males tend to occupy higher leadership positions in sport. The arguments above can be summed up with an idea of Meyer and Rameder (2022) who argue that women in sport are disadvantaged as such and they cannot compensate for this disadvantage with their status or level of education. Such findings again underline Mikkonen's (2023) argument that gender inequalities in sport are based on prejudices towards women. If the previous authors talk about how women face prejudices and challenges in their careers, Ryba and Saarinen (2023) present concrete example how women's abilities in sport are unrecognized due to gender stereotyping. They state that one of the most common acts of gender discrimination in sport is cancelling and questioning of women's professionalism and skills, which makes women to try even harder to gain better results. This does not only concern athletes, as Forsyth et al. (2019) note that also female coaches and sport leaders often experience the pressure to work harder and prove themselves in sports settings. This effort is driven by the need to challenge the stereotype that women lack knowledge about sports. Thus, women are noted to work harder to repeal gender stereotyping and achieve respect in sport.

As already stated earlier, the share of women in decision-making positions in sport is low (Turpeinen, 2011; Lehtonen, 2017; Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018; Forsyth et al., 2019; Mikkonen et al., 2021; Lehtonen et al., 2022; Phelps, 2023). It has also been discussed that it is generally challenging for women to build a career in sport. Behind these two phenomena according to Mikkonen et al. (2021) are gender-biased recruitment processes occurring in the Finnish sport organizations. Mikkonen (2023) presents the tendency to choose people that resemble one another for leadership positions to be one of the main hindlers for gender equality in leadership positions in sport. People tend to favor similar qualities in others, which often causes situations in which the selected group of sport leaders is homologous. Therefore, as Stainback et al. (2016) indicate men in senior positions tend to preferentially hire other men for high-level leadership roles, thereby exacerbating workplace segregation, which according to Mikkonen et al. (2021) limits women's participation in decision making processes of Finnish sport organizations. This phenomenon is called "old boys' network". Pfister and

Radke (2006; 2009) find that excluding women from such male alliances include men's unwillingness to share power with women and the men's fear of losing prestige. Moreover, Mikkonen et al. (2021) find that such networks are characterized by lack of term limits. Thus, members of such networks hold their seats for long periods of time, preventing younger individuals, both women and men, from attaining leading positions. The availability of such positions is contingent upon older members resigning their roles. This dynamic impedes the establishment of gender-balanced boards and organizational cultures. Riivari and Heikkinen (2022) find that such exclusive networks in sport are often associated with closed decision-making processes lacking transparency. They claim that in such sport organizations characterized by exclusive networks, decisions are often made in the cabinets in advance and the practices and the processes are harnessed to serve the desired outcome of the decision-making network. The lack of transparency in sport organizations causes ethical problems, reinforcing lack of diversity and inequality. To avoid such organizational outcomes, Aalto-Nevalainen (2018) suggests that involving men and women in sport carers equally would be beneficial not only for individuals or sport on organizational level but for the whole society. Gender diversity in decision-making processes of sport organizations are associated with positive impact on organizational outcomes (Mikkonen et al., 2021) as gender diversity in leadership positions may provide sport organizations with different perspectives that undoubtedly benefit organizational decision-making (Mikkonen, 2023).

### **3.2.2 Social and economic disparities**

Gender inequality in sports extends to various social and economic disparities. It's argued that gender segregation in sport explains the pay gap between men and women in sport (Hindman & Paulsen, 2022). Several studies have discovered a pay gap between males and females in sport that concerns athletes, coaches, sport leaders and other positions in sport (Cunningham, 2008b; Aalto-Nevalainen, 2018; Burt, 2021; Hindman & Paulsen, 2022). Burt (2021) summarizes pay inequality between men and women in sport as "same work but different pay". Simultaneously, Hindman and Paulsen (2022) find that in sport organizations women are overrepresented in less powerful, lower-earning and more part-time jobs while men dominate in powerful and well-earning positions in sport, which evidences vertical gender segregation in sport. Moreover, Aalto-Nevalainen (2018) found a pay gap between male and female sport managers even though women are on average more educated than men, which confirms the argument of Meyer and Rameder (2022) who argued that women in sport face a disadvantage that cannot be offset by their level of education. Thus, as Zimbalist (1999, as cited by Cunningham, 2008b) argues, differences in men's and women's pay as well as prize money in sport are a function of social factors (i.e., discrimination) as opposed to economic rationale. On the other hand, Burt (2021) finds that female athletes' lower pay is associated with lower media representation of female athletes. She finds that despite women's achievements, they often face neglect due to the disproportionate emphasis that sport media

places on male athletics. This underrepresentation influences the public's awareness of female athletes' accomplishments, which in turn affects their earnings. This finding confirms the statement of European Commission (2014) that female athletes' achievements are way less covered in the media than male athletes' achievements, emphasizing there is no significant change in female athletes' media coverage since the 1970's. Such findings underline the idea that salaries in sport are tied to gender, and not to actual individual performance.

In addition to financial challenges, women also face other challenges of reconciling life and work in sport industry. Aalto-Nevalainen (2018) finds that women in sport are less satisfied with their careers than men. Women experience more challenges in combining family and their work in sport organizations than men (Raudasoja et al., 2022) while female sport managers tend to have more career breaks due to family reasons which appears despite that on average, men are more often married and have more children than female sport managers (Aalto-Nevalainen, 2018). In addition to coordinating family matters, several studies show that there are still certain preconceptions towards motherhood in sport. Ryba and Saarinen (2023) describe that women often face doubting prejudice of combining motherhood and top-level sport career, whereas fatherhood in sport is socially widely accepted. Scott et al. (2022) found that pregnant elite athletes and athletes who are mothers often experience discrimination. Moreover, Ryba and Saarinen (2023) highlight the economic challenges women face when it comes to establishing a family during their sport career. As an example, Ryba and Saarinen provide the fact that during pregnancy female athletes lose economic support from Finnish Olympic Committee while Scott et al. (2022) found that sport sponsoring practices do not support athletes enough during pregnancy either. Therefore, it appears that Finnish sport system lacks guidelines for preserving economic situation during pregnancy and continuing sport career after giving birth.

According to Forsyth et al. (2019) women's challenges related to managing multiple domestical and professional roles can reduce the appeal of sport-related education and employment for females. Additionally, these challenges may contribute to higher dropout rates as a female's career advances. Hence, this confirms Acker's (2006) idea that labor structures are generally organized and adapted to match an average male's life, who are able to spend a working day away from personal responsibilities, e.g. family duties. Therefore, it can be stated that systems inside sport are built for men, ignoring women's needs, which reinforces gender roles and increases gender inequalities.

### **3.3 Operating environment of sport organizations**

Mikkonen (2023) finds that gender inequality in sport is a multifaced phenomenon that appears on multiple levels, from individual to organisational and sociocultural levels, thus is still today a complex challenge to solve. She also argues that addressing gender inequalities in leadership in sport requires

understanding of specific contextual barriers in each organization. Thus, there is no universal solution for all, rather the solutions need to be designed based on factors appearing in each context. Her findings are in line with Heikkinen and Kivijärvi (2021) who suggest that it is important to study the realities of different organizations and different industries claiming that promoting gender equality in Finnish sport organizations requires a stronger connection of equality work to organizational responsibility. Therefore, as Mikkonen (2023) suggests, improving gender equality requires a broad systematic work from multiple actors on multiple levels as well as overall change in sport and society. Even though a single sport organization could change its way of work or thinking towards gender equality, the impact would often remain limited. Thus, the systematic change should involve the whole Finnish national sport system and society. (Mikkonen, 2023.)

In this study, gender equality is investigated from the point of view of sport organizations, particularly ski jumping organizations in Finland. Although the main focus of this study is on national and local ski jumping organizations, the influence of large and international sport organizations on small grassroots organizations must not be forgotten. Hence, this work considers how gender equality work is distributed to different levels of sport organizations. Large, international organizations guide activities and give recommendations to regional and sport-specific sport organizations. These organizations, in turn, further distribute guidance to national organizations that guide sports federations and sports clubs. The diagram below (Figure 1) illustrates the distribution of gender equality work to different organizational levels in sport as it is discussed in this paper below. Influence of European and Finnish national legislation on gender equality work is also noticed.

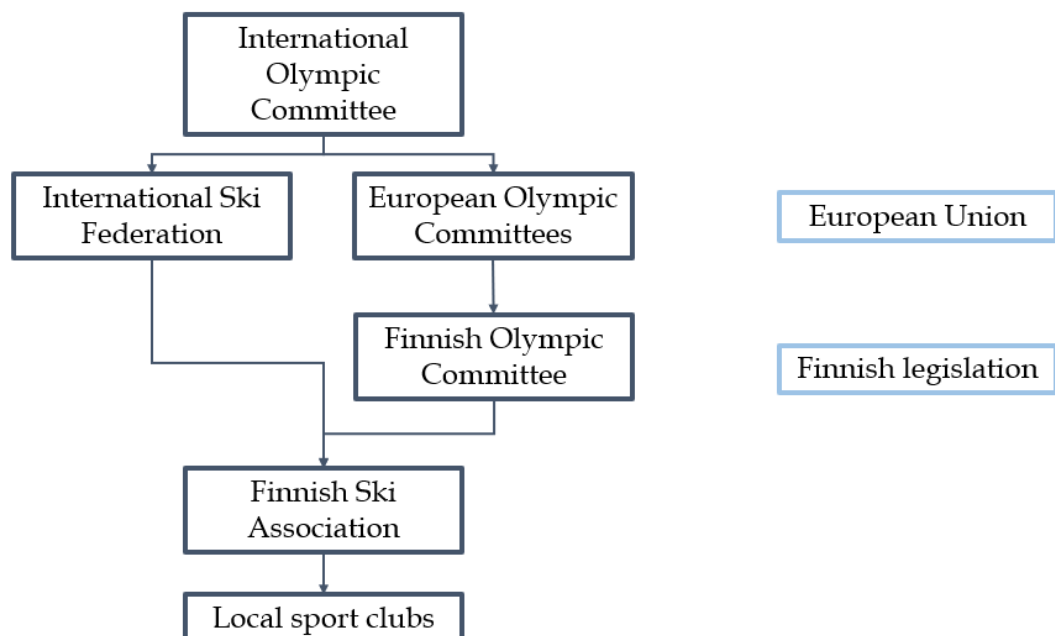


FIGURE 1 Distribution of gender equality work to different organizations in sport

According to European Commission (2023) gender equality in sport would be economically beneficial for all sport organizations and stakeholders as improved gender equality would increase popularity of sport, raising participation and growing workforce. Likewise, Ryba and Saarinen (2023) propose that solving the challenge of gender equality in sport would be beneficial for the whole society, thus they recommend gender equality to be taken more into action in the organizational aspect of sport systems.

### **3.3.1 Major international sport organizations**

While the sport context is still considered as a predominantly male area (Plaza et al., 2016), gender equality in sport has been noticed as a core goal to achieve by several major international organizations. Such worldwide organizations like UNESCO, UN Women and International Olympic Committee, all acknowledge the power of sport to drive the change towards gender equality around the world and improving women's position in society. Sport is seen as a powerful platform for empowering women, teaching girls and women valuable leadership skills and ensuring women's participation in leadership and decision-making, ending discrimination and violence against women, defying gender stereotypes and social norms and presenting men and women as equals. (UNESCO, 2023b; International Olympic Committee, 2023; UN Women, 2020; UN Women, 2023.) To promote and achieve gender equality, several organizations have developed strategic frameworks that support sustainable sport development, some of such are UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (United Nations, 2023), Gender Equality and Inclusion Objectives 2021-2024 or Olympic Agenda 2020+5 by the International Olympic Committee (2024). Such frameworks are distributed to the sport community to be followed and implemented. Even though gender equality is mutually and internationally agreed to be an important goal to reach, according to the International Olympic Committee (2021) there is however no single universal framework for achieving gender equality in sport. Gender equality is viewed and understood differently in different parts of the world depending on a local culture and society. Thus, International Olympic Committee (2021) promotes an "adopt-and-adapt" approach for its gender equality work with different stakeholders that acknowledges cultural and social contexts of each stakeholder. In this paper gender equality in sport is examined from European and especially Finnish perspective, thus the gender equality work is examined adapted to the context of Finnish ski jumping organizations.

### **3.3.2 European sport organizations**

Development of gender equality in European sport is supported by major European organizations, including political ones like European Union. Improving gender equality in sport appears as one of the priority areas in the European Union Work Plan for Sport for the period 2021-2024. According to the plan (European Union Work Plan for Sport, 2020), the European Union is

committed to work for gender equality to improve women's inclusion and equal opportunities in sport. The work includes increasing the share of women in sport, especially in coaching and leadership positions in sport organizations and clubs; increasing media coverage of women's sport competitions, including fighting against stereotypes appears as the second main theme for improving inclusion; and providing both female and male athletes, coaches, officials and other staff with equal conditions, including payment. The responsibility for implementing work towards these goals is distributed downwards to European and national sports organizations. (European Union Work Plan for Sport, 2020.) One such organization is European Olympic Committees (EOC), an umbrella organization for 50 National Olympic Committees of Europe that provides recommendations to its members, National Olympic Committees, on strengthening and promoting gender equality in Europe in its newest Strategic Agenda 2030 (European Olympic Committees, 2022). The main objectives of the agenda are to promote and foster gender equality and inclusion in European sport, providing a safe environment free of discrimination for all genders.

### **3.3.3 National and sport-specific sport organizations**

Although it has been discussed above how much various interdisciplinary organizations work to improve gender equality in sport, according to European Commission (2023) improving gender equality in sport is primarily the responsibility of national stakeholders, such as national policies and legislation as well as the whole sport sector, including national sport organizations and local sport clubs on the grassroot level. Therefore, in this chapter, we go through what gender equality work means from the perspective of Finnish national and local organizations.

On the Finnish national level, Finnish Olympic Committee (2023) appears as one of the highest governing sport organizations whose tasks are to develop Finnish sports and promote active lifestyles in Finland. As a member of the European National Olympic Committee, it works on the national and local level, bringing the international recommendations to Finnish sport context. Therefore Finnish Olympic Committee (2023) has also launched its own Sustainability programme for the sports community for 2020–2024 period to improve gender equality in sport in Finland. The programme was composed in collaboration with national Finnish sport federations and organizations and is supposed to function as a responsibility framework for national sport federations. It tackles five areas of sustainability that address the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. One of the main goals of the programme is to ensure gender equality and equal opportunity as well as safe sport environment that is free of sexual harassment. It also aims to promote equal opportunities in sport, decision-making and operations, e.g. working groups, board and selections.

In addition to the influence of the Finnish Olympic Committee on the equality work of Finnish sport organizations, this study also takes a perspective on the equality work at the sport-specific and grassroots level. Finnish ski jumping organizations include the Finnish Ski Federation and local ski clubs,

whose activities directly affect gender equality in ski jumping. The Finnish Ski Federation collaborates not only with Finnish Olympic Committee, but also with International Ski Federation to prevent harassment in snow sports in Finland. According to the Finnish Ski Federation (2024) different aspects of responsibility guide its decision-making and everyday activities, taking care of the safe future of snow sports. Therefore, Finnish Ski Federation (2024) has created responsibility guidelines based on the code of ethics of the International Ski Federation. The guidelines emphasize that all athletes, staff and administrators working in snow sports have the right to participate in sports activities in a safe environment without harassment, discrimination, belittling or ill-treatment. The guidelines are further distributed to local ski clubs at the grassroots level, providing tools to prevent, identify and act in the situations of gender discrimination or harassment.

### **3.3.4 Influence of national legislation**

Since gender equality is a matter of human rights (Mikkonen 2023, United Nations, 2023), gender equality work in organizations is also guided by national and international legislation. Therefore, the presence of legislation is taken into account below.

On the national level, the Finnish Equality Act (609/1986) and the Finnish national Act on the promotion of sports and physical activity (390/2015) guide the fulfillment of gender equality in sport. Finland's Equality Act (609/1986) aims to promote men's and women's gender equality, prevent gender discrimination, and especially improve women's position in society and working life. The Act tackles inequality issues in education, equal remuneration, representation of women in national and regional decision-making bodies, harassment, and discrimination. The Act obligates all civic activity and organizations operating in Finland, including government agencies, other national organizations and associations and employers. (Equality Act, 609/1986.)

While the Equality Act tackles equality issues broadly in Finnish society, there is a sport-specific legislation that focuses specifically on the regulation of sports. The Finnish national Act on the promotion of sports and physical activity (390/2015) promotes wellbeing and participation in sport as well as ethics and sustainable development in sport, including diversity and equality. The Act obligates all sport bodies to promote gender equality in their operations. According to the act all sport organizations receiving grants from the government must demonstrably contribute to gender equality work and follow ethical principles in sport. Otherwise, the organization is threatened to lose its grants if its actions do not fulfil these obligations in two-year period. (Act on the promotion of sports and physical activity, 390/2015.)

As discussed above, due to high gender segregation in sport industry, diversity in sport organizations remains low. To avoid gender segregation in sport several concrete regulations are done to balance representation of genders in different decisive positions. Both Finnish national and European Union legislations have a similar target for gender-balanced composition of national

organizations. European Commission (2014) emphasizes the importance of representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions. Involving women in decision making improves diversity in leadership styles and improves understanding women's diverse needs and experiences in sport. European Commission (2014) has set a target of 40 % representation of both genders in executive boards and committees as well as management positions of national sport governing bodies. The equivalent target for the international sport organizations located in Europe, is 30 %. Similarly, the Finnish government has agreed to pursue the analogous target for gender balance in decision-making positions. According to the Finnish Equality Act (609/1986) there must be at least 40 % of both female and male members in every public administration institution. The realization of the gender distribution goal is measured with statistics on gender diversity in sport organizations. However, according to European Commission (2014) the numerical targets alone do not guarantee realization of gender equality. Instead, promoting education and training for both genders is rather emphasized as a key tool for achieving gender diversity in decisive positions and gender equality.



## **4 WOMEN IN SKI JUMPING**

This chapter reviews the history and the contemporary situation of ski jumping from the perspective of women's engagement. Based on previous literature, we consider the reasons for excluding women from the ski jumping community. At the end of the chapter, the current situation of gender equality in ski jumping is discussed and the challenges that women currently face in ski jumping activities are presented.

### **4.1 Development of women's ski jumping**

To understand the background of the research field, history of development of ski jumping will be investigated. History of women's ski jumping has gained international interest amongst researchers which makes the field relatively well studied. Most researchers, including Travers (2011), Hofmann (2012), Andresen and Loland (2017) and Laurendeau and Adams (2010) also include historical overview of ski jumping to formulate the background of their research topics on women's ski jumping. They examine the development story of the sport to understand the present male dominance and the reasons behind the challenges women have faced within the sport. History of women's ski jumping is colourful, with many phases and has started alongside men. However, the sport has gone a rocky path from denying existence of female ski jumpers to finally allowing them to participate in the Winter Olympic Games, the most appreciated sport event. (Andresen & Loland, 2017.)

When looking for reasons for men's dominance in ski jumping, one can find the discontinuous development of women's ski jumping. Ski jumping is a traditional winter sport that has its roots in Norway. First, ski jumping was practiced by men as a military exercise in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, since that ski jumping has developed through form of physical activity to a highly competitive elite sport it is nowadays. Today, the sport is practiced and competed in many European, Asian and North American countries. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

during the first development phases of the sport, women got to practice ski jumping alongside men and even had their own competitions. (Andersen & Loland, 2017.) The oldest information about women practicing ski jumping is from 1863 (Kuisma & Jantunen 2020; Hofmann 2012; Andersen & Loland 2017). Men have been competing in ski jumping in Norway since 1866. The first women's competitions took place 30 years later, in 1896. After that, women's ski jumping suffered a setback and became a nearly forbidden sport for women. The next time women got to compete on international level was late 1990's, making a 100-year gap of records in history of women's competitive ski jumping. (Hofmann, 2012.) The gap, however, does not mean there were no women in ski jumping. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were several females who practiced ski jumping. Hofmann (2012), Kuisma and Jantunen (2020) and Laurendeau and Adams (2010) have found examples of active female ski jumpers from Austria, Germany, Norway and North America while Karisto and Laaksonen (2011) introduce several Finnish female athletes who practiced ski jumping alongside men in 1900's-1990's.

Despite being active in ski jumping, throughout history women have faced major challenges in their careers in ski jumping. The challenges are related to stereotyping, judgment, belittling, and in the end exclusion from the sport community (Vertinsky et al, 2009; Karisto & Laaksonen 2011; Hofmann, 2012; Kuisma & Jantunen, 2020). As Karisto and Laaksonen (2011) point out, it was not easy for women to participate in ski jumping. When doing so, women had to join sport clubs that were run for men by men, facing several challenges and negative attitudes towards themselves. Historically, women have faced stereotyping and judgement for participating in ski jumping. Hofmann (2012) argues that female ski jumpers did not usually enjoy public acceptance: sometimes jumping required dressing men's clothes so women would not be recognized. On the other hand, women occasionally got to jump as trial jumpers between men's competitions which was aimed to entertain public. Female ski jumpers were usually seen by the public as clumsy, astonishing and amusing (Karisto & Laaksonen, 2011; Kuisma & Jantunen, 2020). Women's ski jumping was considered unlady-like, unattractive, dangerous and even immoral (Vertinsky et al., 2009). Usually, these kinds of opinions were expressed in media by male reporters and doctors (Andersen & Loland, 2017), reinforcing gender norms and stereotyping and public opinion on the general unsuitability of women for ski jumping.

Since it is evident that the participation of women in ski jumping was not socially accepted, Kuisma and Jantunen (2020) describe how during period around mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century no separate ski jumping competitions were organized for women either. Still, they point out that lack of competition did not fully prevent women from participating in the sport, however it had its own consequences. Girls who dared to challenge traditional gender norms joined local ski clubs and practiced ski jumping together with boys, as part of training groups. Typically, however, women's participation in ski jumping did not last for long. Women did not get to compete against each other, which made those enthusiastic

and competitive ones to change to another sport disciplines that allowed female competitions. These alternative sport disciplines were typically slalom, cross-country skiing or soccer that already officially recognized women's participation. (Kuisma & Jantunen, 2020.) Based on the evidence it can be stated that losing female athletes to other disciplines could have supported and reinforced the stereotype that women were not interested or capable in participating in ski jumping, which together with lack of female role models in ski jumping again contributed to the strong male dominance of the sport.

## **4.2 Gendered practices and culture in ski jumping**

### **4.2.1 Women's exclusion from ski jumping**

When looking at the development of women's ski jumping from the starting phases to the clearly strong exclusion of women, questions arise as to what reasons contributed to the fact that ski jumping was a prohibited sport for women. Based on the prevalence, the answers may be found in the division of the sexes from a social and physical point of view. Hofmann (2012) has found several statements made in 1920's and 1930's where (male) doctors encourage women to practice physical activities to benefit health-as long as it does not involve jumping on skis. She argues that back in history, ski jumping was seen as a dangerous sport for women with a threat to female physiology, which was mostly argued by females' physical factors. Typically, women were perceived as fragile, lacking skills and physical strength (Hofmann, 2012; Andersen & Loland, 2017). Historically, the medical evidences against women's ski jumping were mostly based on protecting women's reproductive organs. Especially landing phase of a ski jump was seen as a threat for female organisms. Landing was believed to cause uterine displacement, which was considered as a reason for sterility. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century some physicians stated that due to women's task of giving birth, ski jumping is not suitable for women. (Hofmann, 2012.) Other medical reasonings argued that women's spinal bones were more fragile and differed from men's, thus could break during landing (Vertinsky et al., 2009). Therefore, there were also several attempts to protect and minimize the risks of jumping specifically for women. Laurendeau and Adams (2010) describe how during the early years of women's ski jumping, women received assistance from men during jumps offering support. Similarly, Karisto and Laaksonen (2011) find that women used to use pillows on their backsides as a safety equipment during jumping. Men are however not reported to have used the same safety measures during jumping events.

Laurendeau and Adams (2010) argue that such "protection" of female bodies is historically a typical reason for exclusion female gender from various physical activities. They underline that an ideal woman was obligated to preserve herself for childbearing and suit a strict role of wife and mother defined by society. This role dedicated to women in society did not include risking health by

participating in a dangerous sport like ski jumping. These examples once again underline the strong stereotypes and perceptions of women as a physically weaker gender (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007). As Vertinsky et al. (2009) present, the above-described reasons for excluding women from ski jumping are evident example of gender stereotyping. To further discuss the argument they apply the three I's theory on gender stereotyping in sport by McDonagh and Pappano (2007) that was also discussed earlier in this study. Vertinsky et al. (2009) propose the theory to be applied to practice in ski jumping as follows:

1. Female Inferiority: In ski jumping, there was a strong belief that women and their physical abilities are inherently inferior compared to men.
2. Protection from Injury: Ski jumping was considered as a dangerous sport especially for women's health and reproduction organs, which why women needed special protection from injury.
3. Immorality of Female Competition: While women did not have their own competitions, they were not allowed to participate in men's competitions either.

Therefore, based on such observations, it can be noticed that ski jumping is built on patriarchal principles and male dominancy. The patriarchal principles as well as gendered structures influenced the development of the sport and women's participation in ski jumping, which according to Laurendeau and Adams (2010) and Travers (2011) meets the criteria of gender discrimination. While gender norms and roles were strongly present in the society (Uusikylä, 2008), the gendered structures of ski jumping perpetuated such norms by preventing women's participation in socially unaccepted sport for women. The predominant gender norms had strong influence on women's own actions and opinions as well. Hofmann (2012) describes how in 1930's Cristel Cranz, the best German female alpine skier who used to practice ski jumping herself, once stated "ski jumping requires strength and endurance more than women can give without harming themselves". The quote represents well the attitude of the time when even women themselves believed they are not capable of doing the same athletic performances as men, underlining perceived females' physical inferiority (McDonagh and Pappano, 2007) which according to Forsyth et al. (2019) expresses being conditioned to the gender norms and stereotypes, while not questioning the prevailing norms.

Vertinsky et al. (2009) present that such gender stereotyping in ski jumping has remained until the very recent times as even in 2006, the head of the International Ski Federation, Gian Franco Kasper stated that from a medical point of view ski jumping is not appropriate for women. Moreover, Laurendeau and Adams (2010) note that this paternalistic protection of women is still noticeable in ski jumping structures, causing different rules in women's and men's ski jumping inside International Ski Federation even now when women got to practice ski jumping officially and professionally alongside men. Hence, gendered structures in ski jumping can be noted to be hindering women's

possibilities of participation in all ski jumping activities as athletes, coaches, leaders and experts. The current challenges women face in the field of ski jumping are discussed in the following chapter.

#### **4.2.2 Discursive silence on women's ski jumping**

In public, there is a common perception that states that women have not been participating in ski jumping until 1990's (Kuisma & Jantunen, 2020). However, this perception can be argued in several ways by taking a look on historical evidences against it. Hofmann (2012) provides an extensive historical insight on women's ski jumping. She argues that the traditional perception of ski jumping as a sport that only men practiced is historically incorrect. Also, Kuisma and Jantunen (2020), Karisto and Laaksonen (2011) and Vertinsky et al. (2009) all notice that there are several evidences that women have always participated in ski jumping, starting from the invention of the sport in 19<sup>th</sup> century. In their papers they bring to light stories of women who practiced ski jumping during early 1900's to 1990's. Based on these findings it can be stated that women have always participated in ski jumping alongside men. Thus, the public perception of absence of women in ski jumping is incorrect. Therefore, questions arise as to what are the reasons that women's participation in ski jumping activities has been disputed throughout history.

When looking on the literature however, women's participation in ski jumping seems to be silenced for decades as indicated by Laurendeau and Adams (2010). In their study they notice a discursive silence around women's ski jumping: despite the long history of the sport, newspaper stories and websites lack information on women's achievements and history in sport. The argument is also recognized by Andersen and Loland (2017) who point out that ski jumping has a long history, but women have officially been involved in the sport for a relatively short time, around 30 years. Discursive silence around women's ski jumping can be easily proved by looking on books addressing history of ski jumping. While searching information for this research, several history books have been reviewed for information on women's ski jumping. Most usually however, women's ski jumping receives only a small paragraph of the whole book's text, while rest of the book concentrates on men's ski jumping (Karisto & Laaksonen, 2011; Taalo, 2022). Hence, it can be stated that women's presence in ski jumping has been left in the dark, which has strengthened the public opinion and stereotype of ski jumping as a men's sport, reinforcing high male dominance. The lack of female role models and images of women in ski jumping has had the effect that new women have not entered or applied to the sport either, perpetuating male dominance (Mikkonen et al., 2021; European Commission, 2023).

### 4.3 Contemporary challenges in gender equality in ski jumping

Even though women's ski jumping has come a long way of development to these days, according to Laurendeau and Adams (2010) and Travers (2011) gender equality and women's position in ski jumping remains challenging. As Travers (2011) has already argued earlier, also according to the latest official international statistics ski jumping remains a male-dominant field of business and therefore a gender segregated sport. According to the latest FIS licensed athletes statistics (2024), there are 428 licensed female ski jumpers and 1041 licensed male ski jumpers, which means that 29 % of all licensed ski jumping athletes worldwide are women. Instead, the share of women in international official positions in ski jumping (judges, competition managers, technical experts) is worldwide 15 % (International Ski Federation, 2024b). Hence, the gender the gender distribution in ski jumping is still uneven for both athletes and officials, which still indicates a strong male dominance in the field until recent days. Figure 2 illustrates the gender distribution in ski jumping athletes and officials for spring 2024. Numbers refer to the licensed individuals registered in the revised databases.

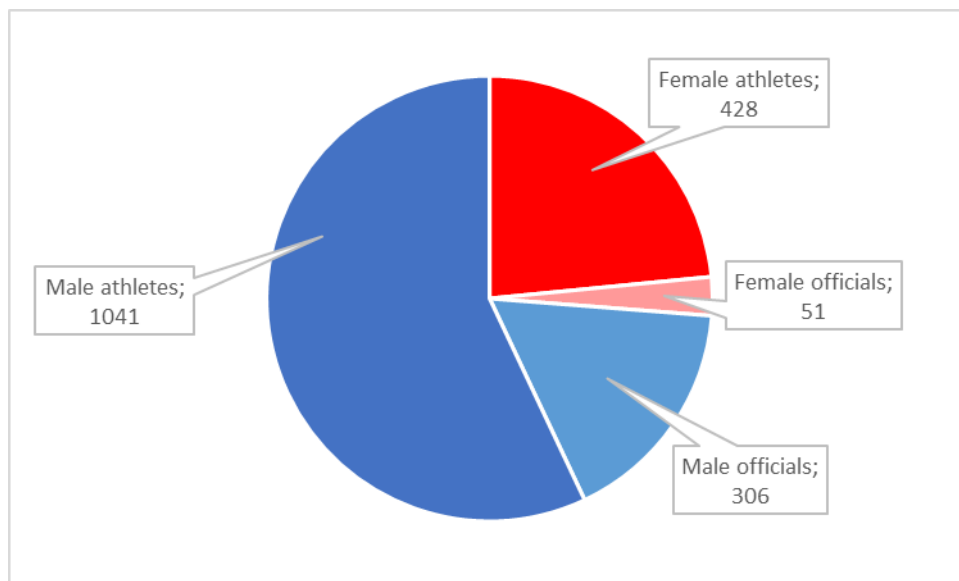


FIGURE 2 Gender distribution in ski jumping, spring 2024

The international statistics provide an overview on gender diversity in the field of ski jumping as an international business. As this study focuses on Finnish ski jumping organizations, the Finnish specific statistics are also revised. For Finland, the FIS Licensed Athletes Statistics (2024) indicate similar distribution of genders for internationally licensed individuals: 33 % of athletes and 28 % of officials are women. Therefore, it can be noted that women are underrepresented in all activities in ski jumping not only as athletes, but also in influential and expert positions which once again indicates strong gender division of tasks within the sport. Moreover, the statistics for Finland are in line with the

international ones, and therefore do not indicate any advanced figures from the perspective of gender equality in Finnish sport organizations, which confirms arguments by Mikkonen (2023) and Phelps (2023) that Finland does not appear as a model example society for gender diversity or equality in sport.

In recent history, there are also concrete examples of gender inequalities in ski jumping organizations in Finland. In 2014, The Commissioner for Equality (2014) has issued a statement according to which girls and women are treated unequally in ski jumping organizations in Finland, facing problems in ski clubs when practicing ski jumping, such as the lack of coaching groups, women's own competition series or different reward practices. According to Spaaij et al., (2015) such lack of resources for women in sport hinders women's development and participation, which perpetuates the gendered structures inside ski jumping in Finland. Internationally however, in 2014 women's ski jumping became an Olympic sport as female ski jumpers participated in the Olympic Games for the first time in history (International Olympic Committee, 2014). Since that, the sport developed even more and nowadays women have their own competitions nationally and internationally (International Ski Jumping Competition rules, 2023). While women nowadays have their own competitions on multiple levels, the main challenges in women's ski jumping have recently been associated with ongoing unrecognition of females' physical abilities and unequal distribution of resources, especially financial reimbursement from being a full-time athlete which is also noticeable in Finland. These topics are discussed further below in the sub-chapters.

#### **4.3.1 Patriarchal structures**

Although it might be assumed otherwise, the patriarchal structures might still remain in ski jumping. Such structures are most visible in ongoing unrecognition of female's physical abilities and women's protection from injuries. Female ski jumpers' protection is still noticeable in the most extreme form of ski jumping, namely ski flying. Ski flying means jumping on the ski flying hills that are sized from 185 meter and larger (International Competition Rules, 2023). Until recent times women were not allowed to compete on ski flying hills in fear of females' injury, which has continued patriarchal protection of women's bodies described by Vertinsky et al. (2009) and Laurendeau and Adams (2010). The first initiative towards including ski flying to women's programme was made only in 2020. According to the decision of the FIS Ski Jumping sub-committee, women were aimed to prepare for jumping on flying hills step by step, introducing to larger hills than what women are normally allowed to jump. This was done before making a final decision to evaluate whether women are ready to proceed to larger, more dangerous ski flying hills. In 2021, Norwegian Ski Association made a proposal of including women's ski flying to the competition calendar in the 2021/2022 season. The proposal was however rejected by the FIS Ski Jumping sub-committee, appealing to the safety of competitors as well as calendar planning. (International Ski and Snowboard Federation, 2021.) Instead, a year later in 2022, the FIS Sub-Committee voted in favor of allowing female ski

jumpers to ski fly in the season 2022/2023. According to the decision however, only a carefully pre-selected individuals based on their level of performance were chosen to participate in the ski flying competition in 2023. In the FIS press release the decision was argued with the following direct citation "We all agreed to open this door for the women. There are still many concerns and fears regarding safety, but the time is right and we want the women to start on a Ski Flying hill". (International Ski and Snowboard Federation, 2022.) In the current 2023/2024 season, the similar terms for women's participation in ski flying are applied where maximum 20 top performance female athletes are permitted to start in the ski flying competitions whereas men's equivalent qualification concerns 50 top male athletes (Raw Air, 2024).

The above discussed debate on safety of women's ski flying continues the previously presented idea of patriarchal protection of female athletes, viewing women as inferior to men in physical qualities and not being able to practice the same sporting activities, which further reinforces gender stereotyping (McDonagh & Pappano, 2007).

#### **4.3.2 Economic disparity**

Not only women face challenges in the structures of ski jumping, but the practice also reveals current socio-economic challenges for women. To investigate the financial reimbursement of female ski jumpers, the comparison to males' equivalent is done. Athletes' earnings in Finland mainly consist of prize money, sponsor agreements and government's grants. Notably, according to the Ministry of Education and Culture decisions from 2016 to 2023, a female ski jumper was granted by Finnish government three times in total during the 7 years period while several male ski jumpers were granted every year during the same time despite lower level of performance of male athletes. (Finnish Olympic Committee, 2024.) The Ministry of Education and Culture annually grants coaching and training scholarships to prospective athletes in Finland. The aim of the scholarship is to create financial conditions for professional and full-time athlete training. The scholarship is not a reward for success, but when awarded, the athlete's international achievements are considered, as well as the athlete's performance and progress relative to the international level and development of the sport. The evaluation considers the specific characteristics of the sports, international recognition and level. (Finnish Olympic Committee, 2024.) This poses a contradictory dilemma, as if looking at the ranking of Finnish female and male athletes in international World Cup overall competitions from 2016-2023, women's results are invariably better than men's (International Ski and Snowboard Federation, 2024a). This suggests that the results achieved by women in ski jumping are not valued as much as men's, which according to Mikkonen (2023) reveals various gender inequalities in sport structures.

The ideas of Mikkonen (2023) on gender unequal appreciation of female and male athletes' results are as Hindman and Paulsen (2022) suggest also perpetuated by unequal reward systems in sport. Therefore, major differences in prize money can also be found when comparing prize money for male and female



athletes in ski jumping (International Ski and Snowboard Federation, 2023a; International Ski and Snowboard Federation, 2023b). The prize money female ski jumping athletes earn on the highest international level is approximately 50 % of what male athletes earn. Notably, however the prize money for Mixed Team competitions (with teams consisting of 2 male and 2 female competitors) is significantly higher and equal to usual men's prize money. Thus, women participating in the Mixed Team competitions with men get more prize money than what they would get from participating in women's own competition.

As Hindman and Paulsen (2022) propose, such pay gap between male and female athletes indicates an evident gender equality gap. As Burt (2021) claims, women earn less for the same work than men. At the moment women earn significantly less than men from being a professional full-time athlete, not only concerning the prize money but also the scholarships that are granted by the Finnish government. This indicates clear economic disparity, that can be argued by the outcome of social discrimination of women and strong gender segregation in ski jumping (Cunningham, 2008b; Travers, 2011).

## **5 RESEARCH METHODS**

This chapter includes description of study implementation. The research questions are set in this chapter, followed by description and justification of the research method, data collection and data analysis methods. In addition, research ethics, reliability and limitations are considered.

### **5.1 Research problem and research questions**

As discussed in the literature review of this study, ski jumping was long seen as a socially inappropriate activity for women to engage with. Thus, women's participation in the sport was not promoted for many decades. As already stated in paragraph 4, the situation for women's participation in ski jumping is still challenging. The field remains male-dominated, and women represent a clear minority both among the athletes of the sport and especially among the officials.

This study aims to find out what are the perceptions of women engaged in ski jumping regarding the progress and challenges in achieving gender equality within the sport, and how do their experiences and perspectives inform strategies for further advancement. This study aims to address the traditional gender roles in ski jumping by investigating to what extent have gender roles and stereotypes influenced the participation, opportunities, and experiences of women in ski jumping, and what measures can be implemented to mitigate their influence and promote greater inclusivity and diversity within the sport.

Therefore, the research questions of this study are:

RQ1: How women perceive the realization of gender equality in ski jumping?

RQ2: How have gender roles and stereotypes been perceived to affect women's participation in ski jumping?

## 5.2 Methodology

This study approaches traditional gender roles and gender inequality in ski jumping through the study of women's personal experiences. As the target of this study are experiences of individuals, that is a unique, changing and depending on a culture and time phenomenon that cannot be measured numerically, qualitative research methods were selected for this study. When considering the methodology for this research, the idea of Huhtinen and Tuominen (2020) was implemented. They recommend approaching the target of the research with qualitative research methods if the research target is subconsciously changing, merging with its environment, renewable and unique that cannot be measured numerically. The purpose of qualitative research is to describe real life and the researched object as comprehensively as possible (Hirsjärvi et al., 2018). The target of this study are individuals' lived experiences that are not fixed, therefore qualitative research methods are used to investigate them. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) and Saunders et al. (2019) find qualitative research methods to be suitable for business related research, especially when the subject of the research is business management while Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) recommend qualitative methods for studying individuals' experiences in business-related studies on management. Hence, the use of qualitative research methods in this research related to sport business management is reasonable and justified.

### 5.2.1 Hermeneutic phenomenology

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) phenomenology and hermeneutics are one of qualitative approaches that can be used in business-related research investigating experiences. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) the central concepts of hermeneutic phenomenological approach are experience, meaning, understanding and interpretation. The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to approach understanding experience through interpretation, focusing on how individuals create meaning for their experiences. This method aims to open and interpret the deepest meanings of experiences and how these meanings are formed in a cultural and historical context. The goal of hermeneutic phenomenological study is to make conscious and visible what habits have made obvious or what has been experienced but not yet consciously thought about. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.) Hence, hermeneutic phenomenological approach was chosen as the aim of this study is to find out how women talk about socially constructed norms and gender roles in ski jumping that appear to be tied to the gendered context of sport.

Hermeneutic phenomenology combines the hermeneutic and phenomenological philosophical approaches. While the object of phenomenological research is the living world, the hermeneutic dimension is associated with interpretation method, the purpose of which is to understand the meanings of phenomena. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018.) Even though, this study aims to investigate individuals' experiences,

phenomenological approach alone was seen to give too heavy emphasis on individuals' experiences as phenomenological "truth" is the way in which a phenomenon appears to a person in a certain time and place (Huhtinen & Tuominen, 2020), thus hermeneutics were chosen as a supplement for this study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In this study, hermeneutics refers to the theory of understanding and interpretation, which aims to find possible rules for data interpretation (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018).

Phenomenology alone is a philosophical approach, as introduced by Edmund Husserl, aims to bring attention back to the ways that things are actually given in experience, keeping it away from traditional academic systems and philosophical analysis of concepts, "Back to the things themselves" (originally, *zu den Sachen selbst*). In a broader meaning, phenomenology focuses on studying the structures of consciousness and aims to understand how we perceive and experience the world. (Husserl, 1995.) In phenomenology, it is thought that human individuals are built in relation to the world they live in, at the same time building the world themselves. Phenomenology is limited in its examination to phenomena as an experienced, lived world. (Laine, 2018.) However, phenomenology acknowledges the uniqueness of a phenomenon and aims to discover how a phenomenon appears to a person in a certain time and place. Phenomenology is based on the idea that reality and people are constantly changing which makes people's experiences to adapt and vary depending on time. (Huhtinen & Tuominen, 2020.) Laine (2018) recognizes the influence of community and culture on human perceptions in phenomenology, however keeping in mind the uniqueness of human's experiences as experiences are built from people's own perspectives as a result of life history. These consist of previous experiences, perceptions, values, and ways of living. (Laine, 2018.) According to Huhtinen and Tuominen (2020) phenomenological research does not aim for finding out universal truth as it rather aims to understand the studied phenomenon as one of experiences of the people involved in the research. They further argue that the main goal of such research, is to interpret the research phenomenon in a particular moment and express the interpretation in an understandable manner for others interested in the research subject. Likewise, Laine (2018) states that phenomenological research does not seek to find universal generalizations, but rather to understand the current meanings of experiences of the person being studied.

Since in this study, the researcher deems appropriate to include theoretical guidance of analysis on effects of gender roles on women's behaviors, the research method of this study includes features of feminist phenomenology. According to Stoller (2017) feminist phenomenology is a feminist-oriented phenomenology, in which these two theories form a constructive relationship. One of the most important characteristics of feminist phenomenology, is applying phenomenological theory to feminist issues like gender inequalities.

## 5.2.2 Data collection

Qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenologist methods are used to collect data for this study. As a data collection method, Huhtinen and Tuominen (2020) propose interviews to be the most suitable to reach and collect people's experiences. An interview is a justified data collection method when like in this study it is aimed to discover individuals' opinions, collect information, perceptions and beliefs, and when it is aimed to understand why individuals act the way we observe (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008). However, Puusa (2020) recommends considering carefully and justifying choice if the researcher intends to use an interview as data collection method, as the use of interviews is demanding. Nevertheless, she points out that interviews are at their best rewarding for both the researcher and the researched and can produce rich and analytically interesting and revealing material. Based on these recommendations, the researcher has considered the focus of this research being the individuals' own experiences and views on gender equality in ski jumping, therefore interview was seen justified and chosen as a data collection method also for this study. In this study, interview means a personal interview in which the interviewer asks questions and writes down the interviewee's answers (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018; Hirsjärvi et al., 2018). Although according to Hirsjärvi et al. (2018), the alternative would have been to conduct the interviews also as pair or group interviews to guarantee a natural and more relaxed discussion, the researcher has seen it best to conduct the interviews as individual interviews, due to the sensitive nature of the subject under investigation. Accordingly, Hirsjärvi et al. (2018) state that the researcher must choose the best interview format, considering the topic of the research.

Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) and Puusa (2020) state that interviews are especially suitable data collection method for qualitative business studies. Puusa (2020) notices that interviews are one of the most common data collection methods in qualitative studies investigating management of organizations while Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) note that interviews are widely used in business-related research studying individuals' experiences, which this study also appears to be. They describe the aim of an interview as a data collection method to be to get as much information as possible about the research subject. The idea of an interview is to find out experiences and other data on person's thoughts on a particular subject or/and find out why he acts in a certain way. According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008) the advantage of interviews as a form of data collection is that the researcher gets the opportunity to approach even difficult research issues, such as how people understand certain phenomena and what meanings they attach to the events they experience. In this way, interviews can reveal matters that can hardly be found out with other data collection methods.

A semi-structured interview was chosen as the interview format for this study. Hereby, the interviewees were wanted to be flexible, but however guided by pre-planned questions, enabling the interviewees the freedom to express their thoughts freely. As Edwards and Holland (2023) suggest, in a semi-structured interview, a researcher has a list of pre-defined questions that are presented to an interviewee, however there is a flexibility in how and when these questions are

presented to preserve the flexibility of the interview situation. In this study, the same interview questions were presented to all interviewees in the same order as researcher did not indicate any need for modification of the questions in the interview situations. As Puusa (2020) proposes, in such interviews, the researcher guides the discussion by asking questions, but refrains from directing the direction of the discussion too much. Therefore, the interviewees were encouraged to answer interview questions in their own words.

According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008) in hermeneutic phenomenological research, interview questions should be fixed in its meaning and not its wording and therefore interview questions can vary in wording between different interviewees. However, the interview questions should be formulated in such a way that they evoke similar meanings for different interviewees as effectively as possible. According to Hirsjärvi et al. (2018) the advantage of such interview questions is that they give the respondent the opportunity to express his or her true experiences, allowing the freedom to express his own thoughts, which serves the purposes of this study particularly. Such questions do not suggest answers, rather they expose the phenomena as it appears to the respondents, which is in the interest of hermeneutic phenomenological research like this one.

The questions for the interviews in this study were developed using the theoretical framework gathered for this study. The questions aim to get close to the interviewee's personal experiences on gender equality in ski jumping and the effect of gender stereotyping on respondents' behavior and career development. The interview questions included multiple themes with numerous illustrative questions within each to guarantee the most thorough and in-depth responses (Hirsjärvi et al., 2018). Interview questions were grouped around the main themes arising in the theoretical background of this study: questions on individuals' experiences, appearance of gender roles and stereotypes and questions concerning ski jumping community. Same interview questions were asked in the same order in each interview to ensure logical moving from one theme to another. Interview questions used for this study are enclosed to this study in appendices. Interviews were held in Finnish, therefore the original interview questions presented in the Appendix 1 are in Finnish. The English translation of the interview questions are provided in the Appendix 2.

The interview questions act as the structure for the interviews, directing the conversation. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to answer the questions based on their own memory, experience, understanding and interpretation. In a semi-structured interview, it is assumed that the interviewees understand the interview theme in the same way, in which case there is no need to clarify the questions for different interviewees (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2008) however note that to obtain accurate information during the interview, the interviewer can clarify or repeat the question and correct misunderstandings if needed. Hence, in this study, both researcher and interviewees had the opportunity to refine the questions when necessary to ensure right understanding of the questions. In the interview situations in this

study, interviewees also had the option to refuse to answer the questions without giving reasons (Saunders et al., 2019). Moreover, the interviewees had the option to suspend their participation in the survey and cancel their research permission in the middle of the interview without giving reasons as Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008) propose.

Interview as a data collection method, has the advantage of flexibility (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, Puusa, 2020). According to Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2018) individuals who are believed to have knowledge or experience on the subject under investigation can be selected for the interview in advance. Saunders et al. (2019) and Puusa (2020) address this method as a purposive and discretionary sampling. The interviewees for this study were selected in advance when they were believed to have own experiences of exercising or working within ski jumping. The interviewees were selected for this study when they fit the following criteria:

- The interviewee must be a woman that is involved in ski jumping in Finland.
- The interviewee must be over 18 years old.
- The interviewee is willing to participate in the interview voluntarily.

When considering how many people to interview for research, Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008) suggest "interviewing as many as necessary to get the information is needed." Moreover, they claim that by interviewing just a few people, it is possible to get significant information on the studied phenomena. For this study, altogether five interviewees were selected for interviewing. The interviewees are randomly selected ski jumping athletes, coaches, and officials, including judges and technical delegates. The interviewees participating in the study are those who have responded to the researcher's interview request. In total, the interview request was sent to 9 women involved in ski jumping, five of whom answered the invitation affirmatively. Although there are only a few participants in the study, the number of interviewees is seen to be sufficient considering that the number of women involved in ski jumping in Finland is prominently small. As Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) propose in such studies, the success of the analysis should be the primary consideration of research quality, not the quantity of the qualitative data.

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) the researcher must carefully consider how to protect respondents' anonymity and present research findings in a way that avoids creating potential challenges for respondents later on. This dilemma requires thorough contemplation to uphold ethical standards in the research process. Kuula (2006) and Saunders et al. (2019) argue that anonymizing the researched data, i.e. removing the identifiers of interviewees may moreover enhance reliability of the data. The purpose of anonymization is the need to protect research subjects from the possible negative consequences that their identification in a research publication would cause. Moreover, anonymization may guarantee that honest answers are obtained in the research, especially on a

sensitive topic, as in this study. (Kuula, 2006; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019.) As the number of women involved in ski jumping is relatively low, the identities and credentials of interviewees are intentionally encrypted to ensure anonymity. In this study it is intended to provide an opportunity for interviewees to talk about experiences without fear of consequences, ensuring the research data is honest experiences of the interviewees. Therefore, as participants are anonymized, when results of this study are presented, interviewees are addressed as: Interviewee A, Interviewee B, Interviewee C, Interviewee D and Interviewee E. The interviewees' identities were not revealed to other interviewees either. The interviews were carried out with each interviewee separately. Only the interviewer and one interviewee were present in the interview situation at a time. Interviewer aimed to create a calm and confidential atmosphere for each interviewing session. The interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams and recorded for further transcription and analysis. Each interview lasted for approximately 50 minutes. Interviews were held in February-March 2024.

To make the interview successful and also for ethical reasons, both Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008) and Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) recommend asking permission for interviewing and informing interviewees in advance about the topic of the interview to ensure that the interview is fruitful for both parts. Therefore, interviewees in this research were asked for permission and informed on the topic of the interview using research bulletin that was sent to the interviewees beforehand via e-mail.

### **5.2.3 Data analysis**

Puusa (2020) reminds that in qualitative research, the interview data is always the subjective experience of the people selected for the sample, therefore the most important researcher's task is to analyze and interpret the collected data. According to Saunders et al. (2019) the objectives of data analysis is to provide a precise description of the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, the aim of this study analysis is to use the interview data to create thorough top-level categories that explain the studied phenomenon and thus answer the research questions.

As this study aims to discover the unique individuals' experiences on a theoretically grounded subject, utilizing theory-guided content analysis methods is justified. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) propose theory-guided content analysis to be suitable analysis method for hermeneutic phenomenological research. In the theory-guided content analysis theoretical background of the research is used to guide analysis of research data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). In this study, established theories on gender equality are used to guide interpretation of the collected data, thus the analysis method of this study is abductive. In this study, the theoretical framework arises in the research questions of this study, its interview questions, as well as interpretations of interview data.

As Saunders et al. (2019) propose, the purpose of such theory-guided analysis in this study is to combine the research data with previous theoretical



background to generate new knowledge on effects of gender stereotyping in context of ski jumping organizations. To examine gender dynamics within organizational contexts this study is guided by Post-Equity feminist theoretical frameworks. Meyerson and Kolb (2000), as cited by Cunningham (2008b), define Post-Equity as a viewpoint that sees gender as a power axis that shapes identities and social structures. It seeks to dismantle gendered hierarchies and practices, dispelling prevalent stereotypes and promoting new interpretations and regulations in sport organizations. McNamara (2009) argues that in such feminist ideology, it is believed that individuals' experiences are socially constructed while individuals' experiences are examined to explore how the social structures have shaped them. According to Edwards and Holland (2023) feminist study approaches are often linked to a social change agenda. In such studies, interviews are aimed to give voice to women's own experiences, beliefs, opinions and interests. Feminist research is often described as qualitative research by women, on women and for women.

In the analysis phase of this study, as the first step to analyze the collected interview data, each interview was transcribed precisely word by word as Hirsjärvi et al. (2018) propose to extract all the data out of the interviews. The original interview data was collected in Finnish that was translated to English for further analysis. The direct quotations of interviews are provided in English in the results of this study. As Hirsjärvi et al. (2018) further suggest, however, only the relevant data for this study had been analyzed. The interview material for this study was extensive and according to Hirsjärvi et al (2018), it is not appropriate to analyze or utilize all the data. Therefore, only the data that referred to the problem of the study was considered in the analysis. The data analysis for this study was executed after the transcriptions were done. For analysis, the transcriptions of the interviews were revised using the following phases presented by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018):

1. Data reduction, in which information irrelevant to the study was removed from the interview data. Summarizing as well as colour coding was done to find the data relevant to the study.
2. Data clustering, in which the coded data was sorted by similarities and differences. The similar data was clustered into a group with a descriptive name.
3. Data abstraction, in which the data essential for research was separated. After that, the interview data was reviewed and linked to the theoretical framework of this study.

As proposed by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2008) the purpose of the interview data analysis in this study, is to find themes, i.e. recurring features in the interviews so that the themes are common to all interviewees. It is unlikely that the interviewees would express the same experience in exactly the same words, therefore the researcher must know how to code these emergent themes into the same category. Therefore, the themes can be based on the themes of the interview

body, and it is to be expected that at least the starting point themes will come up in the interviews. In this study, the themes identified from the theoretical framework are connected to the themes of the interview.

After analyzing the data, the results are explained and interpreted. According to Hirsjärvi et al. (2018), data interpretation means clarifying and reflecting on the meanings that emerged in the analysis of the material. They claim that the interpretation of interview data analysis is challenging as various interpretations can arise, therefore it is recommended to record a variety of interpretations. The researcher, the researched and, moreover, the reader of the research, all observe and interpret in a different way, forming different interpretations of the phenomena. (Hirsjärvi et al., 2018.) Moreover, Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) note that data-driven content analysis is challenging to implement completely objectively, as the researcher's prejudices, the concepts used, the research layout and methods always affect the final results of the research. However, they claim that in phenomenological research, the challenge can be solved in such a way that the researcher describes and becomes aware of his/her own preconceptions about the research topic. Since the trustworthiness of interpretations are part of the reflection on the validity of the research, Hirsjärvi et al. (2018) suggest reflecting on different aspects of the validity of the research, which is carried out in the next paragraph.

### **5.3 Ethics and trustworthiness of the study**

Puusa (2020) proposes that especially qualitative studies with interview data collection have limitations and challenges. According to her however, the object of such research is so unique that it is impossible to reach a reality that appears uniformly to everyone. Therefore, in such studies, it is only possible to find out the perceptions reconstructed by the interviewee and not the phenomenon itself.

As Hirsjärvi et al. (2018) argue, even though the researcher aims to avoid errors, the reliability and validity of the research results may vary. Therefore, they recommend evaluating in all studies the reliability of the research using different means and techniques. To assess trustworthiness of a qualitative research Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose to evaluate it by "the Four-Dimensions Criteria", that are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In this chapter the four criteria are described accordingly to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and considered in the context of this study.

#### **1. Credibility**

Credibility refers to internal validity of the research. It addresses the integrity of the research process, resulting in trustworthy results of the research. Credibility is the level of reliability of conclusions and assessments of the research providing comprehensive and logical analyses of the data. Credibility can be achieved through extended engagement and

observation as well as member checks, that refers to precise understanding and interpretation of participants, especially in in-depth interviews. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985.) In this study, to understand the interviewees correctly, the researcher clarified the answers if necessary. Member checks were also used to ensure that the interpretation of the answers was correct: the interviewees were asked if they saw the issue as the previous interviewees had brought it up. By identifying normative behavioral patterns, this technique made sure that the results accurately captured the breadth and depth of the participants' experiences and viewpoints.

## 2. Dependability

Dependability is essentially the capacity to repeat a study and come up with the same findings, provided that all other factors remain constant. The research process should be transparent and logical, allowing for traceability of the processes and procedures. Therefore, rich description providing enough information on study is essential. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985.) For this study, it is aimed to provide a thorough description of the theoretical framework of the research as well as portrayal of the stages of conducting the research, including sampling, the method of data collection and analysis.

## 3. Confirmability

Confirmability addresses that the research findings, interpretations and recommendations are supported by data. Confirmability aims to show that conclusions and interpretations of conclusions are grounded in the data and do not originate from the researchers' imagination. Therefore, confirmability increases the possibility that other researchers will confirm and validate the findings. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985.) To demonstrate that the results of this study are not figments of the researcher's imagination, direct quotes from interview responses are written down. The references to the theoretical framework in the analysis section also show that the interpretation and reasoning in this study are based on the theoretical data.

## 4. Transferability

Transferability refers to external validity of the research. Transferability demonstrates that the findings of a qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other settings. Transferability is achieved through purposive sampling techniques, rich description of research implementation phases, saturation and reflexivity. Reflexivity particularly attempts to uncover a researcher's personal bias and prejudice on the research context, which can be achieved by writing down the personal bias of the researcher.

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985.) As a researcher, I recognize my own prejudices on the studied topic. I am engaged in expert positions in ski jumping, which is why the industry is familiar to the researcher. When doing the analysis, I left out my own prejudices and personal experiences on the subject and focused on noticing and interpreting only the themes raised by the interviewees, without looking for connections from them to my own experiences. I took the interviewees' statements as they were presented.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) saturation can be linked to transferability and generalizability of the results if the same themes and answers appear in the data at least twice. This study faced saturation in its results, which means that the interview data started to repeat itself, meaning several interviewees had similar experiences on the researched topic. In this study saturation was achieved through the same themes and experiences emerged from the responses of the various interviewees, which was already noticeable after the second interview. Therefore, during the analysis, it had been noticed that there was enough data to describe the themes that emerged in the interviews and how it links to the theoretical framework.

In this study, artificial intelligence has been used to a small extent to help the researcher's writing. Artificial intelligence has been used to check the author's grammar and translate individual words and sentences, which is due to the fact that the researcher is not a native English speaker. Such kind of use of artificial intelligence applications is approved by the University of Jyväskylä in the decision of 25 May 2023 (University of Jyväskylä, 2024), therefore does not perceived to cause ethical problems in this study.

## **5.4 Limitations and further research**

Puusa (2020) proposes that all studies have limitations, hence the limitations of this study are recognized and discussed below. As Saunders et al. (2019) propose, one of the limitations of business studies may concern sampling. The interview data in this study consists of five interviews. In this study it is recognized that wider sample size could lead to a different outcome of this study and bring broader and additional perspectives to the analysis. However, a more extensive study would have required more time than the researcher had available for implementation of this thesis. In addition, a larger sample is challenging to implement in Finnish context, considering that the number of possible interviewees is still low in Finland. In the future, it is possible to carry out a similar study with a larger sample when and if the number of women in ski jumping increases. Moreover, as this study limits to revealing the experiences of representatives of certain generations, it makes the study unique and valid only for the moment of investigation. Future research could focus on investigating the development of gender equality in ski jumping. In that case, it would be generous

to carry out a similar study on future generations engaged in ski jumping, using the same research methods and, for example, interview questions, to get a picture of the development of gender equality and the influence of gender roles.

The topic of a sensitive nature can also be considered as a limitation in this study. This research concentrates on personal experiences and perspectives on gender equality and gender-based discrimination, which can be considered a sensitive interview topic. According to Puusa (2020), in such interview studies dealing with sensitive issues, one limitation may be that the interviewees do not dare to reveal their true perceptions and may also present socially accepted opinions. However, in this study it was aimed to create a confidential atmosphere so that the participants feel safe to share their own genuine opinions and experiences. As Kuula (2006) and Saunders et al. (2019) propose, the eagerness to answer the interview questions truthfully can be improved by guaranteeing respondents anonymity, which was implemented for this study.

In this kind of research, where participation is voluntary, there may also be limitations in diversity of opinions. Even though the voluntary nature of participation in the research is unquestionable, it may also affect the outcome of the study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Saunders et al., 2019). An invitation to participate in this study was sent to nine individuals, five of whom responded to the study. The researcher is aware that only those individuals may have been responded to the research invitation who are conscious of the challenges in gender equality in ski jumping or those who have experienced inequality in their own activities in ski jumping. This may mean that only negative or otherwise strong experiences are recorded in the research results, which may mean that the results are limited to one kind of experiences.

## 6 RESULTS

The interviews conducted for this study were informative. The interviewees brought up plenty of material for analysis. It is worth noting that similar features and similar experiences on the subject could be distinguished from each interview, as the answers started to repeat already in the second interview. All interviews conducted for this study are characterized by one common point: all of the interviewees report to have experienced gender inequalities and discrimination in ski jumping. Therefore, the interview data provides valuable information on how women engaged in different functions in ski jumping have experienced inequality in different ways. In addition, it is noteworthy that several interviewees expressed that this was the first time they ever participated in research on gender equality in ski jumping or discussed the topic with someone. According to some other interviewees the topic is especially on the surface right now, which results in increased media attention towards women in ski jumping. This confirmed the necessity and topicality of the study.

In this chapter, I highlight the experiences of the interviewees divided into different description categories. I treat each descriptive category with concrete quotations from the interview data and compare the findings from some aspects to the theoretical framework of this study. The table below (Table 1) contains description categories along with the themes and keywords that appear based on the findings in the interview data. In summary, this study shows signs of a strong gendered culture and structures and segregation of the sexes according to traditional gender roles in ski jumping. The strong gender roles and traditions that still prevail in ski jumping hinder women's participation in ski jumping activities, both in their free time and professionally. With these also organizational challenges arise, such as exclusive networks, low transparency in decision making, which can be associated with low gender diversity in ski jumping organizations. These topics and the reasons why these conclusions were reached are discussed in more detail in the subsections of this chapter below.

TABLE 1 Description categories and the key findings of the study

Description category	Findings
Gender segregation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Horizontal segregation: male-dominance</li> <li>• Vertical segregation to men's and women's jobs</li> <li>• Segregation to women's and men's ski jumping as different sport</li> <li>• Segregation deepening, underlining gender gap</li> </ul>
Gender roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavioral influence on women</li> <li>• Influence on women's career progression</li> </ul>
Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Old-boys' networks</li> <li>• Exclusive networks</li> <li>• Closed decision-making processes</li> <li>• Lack of women's networks</li> </ul>
Development in gender equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow development in gender equality</li> <li>• Lack of systematic development of gender-equal policies</li> </ul>
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep-rooted traditions</li> <li>• Tensions and bad atmosphere in community</li> <li>• Culture of silence</li> <li>• Unrecognition of discrimination issues</li> <li>• Ineffective distribution of anti-discriminatory information and instructions</li> </ul>

## 6.1 Gender segregation in ski jumping

Interview data indicates strong gender segregation in ski jumping. Gender segregation in ski jumping does not only concern athletes, but also officials and coaches. According to the interviews conducted for this study, there is a noticeable gender division inside ski jumping at all levels. In the first place, interview data indicates that ski jumping still remains a field of male dominance. Interviewees have reported that women are still not considered belonging to or as a "norm" in ski jumping, especially concerning women's participation in professional activities in ski-jumping. This finding confirms a horizontal gender segregation in ski jumping, meaning that the field can still be considered male-dominated.

"Some think women don't belong here and think they belong somewhere else. I don't know if it's the kitchen or somewhere else. The premise is that this is a man's world and it is not meant for women in the first place."- Interviewee A

"Ski jumping is a man's world, whatever happened, it's a man's world. When a woman works in a male-dominated field, the same resistance can be found in ski jumping."- Interviewee D

Noteworthy, interview data also reveals that women experience other individuals questioning women's motives for engaging in ski jumping. According to interviewees, their motives and interest for ski jumping have been questioned and women were asked to justify why they are involved in ski jumping. Moreover, women experience that their own interest in the sport is often considered not enough to "justify" their engagement in the sport. This finding underlines the presumptions of ski jumping as a relatively small, closed field predominantly for men, remaining challenging for women to enter the community and become an accepted member.

"I have to prove that I am indeed interested in ski jumping." -Interviewee A

Even though I got into the sport through my family and have done all kinds of things, they still don't want to believe I am interested." -Interviewee D

In addition to male-dominance in ski jumping, this study indicates vertical gender segregation in ski jumping, meaning that men and women occupy different positions in the field. Several interviewees brought up the division to "Men's and women's work" inside ski jumping. The division is particularly noticeable in expert and coaching positions in ski jumping as well as other influential positions, such as board members and other positions of trust. Such positions are considered unsuitable for women as women are often seen unfit.

"This is such an old-fashioned way of thinking that there are women's and men's jobs in ski jumping." -Interviewee B

"Mostly, women run the café and men do the rest of work." -Interviewee C

"Not that long time ago there was such a discussion as to whether a woman is fit to act as chairperson of the federal council in ski jumping."-Interviewee C

"Women's place is not in such positions of influence." -Interviewee A

However, despite male dominancy, ski jumping has recently also emerged as women's sport. Today, women practice ski jumping alongside men, and women now have their own competition series. While women's own competitions were generally seen as a positive way to increase number of females participating in ski jumping, the interview data shows that the intentional segregation of genders in ski jumping also creates a gap between the genders. Thus, ski jumping appears



to be divided in two different segments: men's ski jumping and women's ski jumping.

"Women's ski jumping is a completely different sport to men's" -Interviewee D

Several interviewees expressed concern about the gender division in ski jumping to different gender segments. Interview data reveals that as a consequence of gender segregation women are put in work positions involved mostly in the women's ski jumping. According to one interviewee such division was visible in a situation where a female coach was considered unfit to work with male athletes. Likewise, according to one other interviewee also expert positions are divided based on gender: women are often assigned to work at women's competitions while men are assigned to men's competitions.

"They never talk about why a man can't be a women's coach. But if a woman becomes a men's coach, then there is a division to women's and men's jobs." -Interviewee B

"I personally wonder the division that women are put in expert positions in women's competitions and men in men's competitions. This increases the gender division." -Interviewee A

Therefore, it can be stated that dividing the sport to men's and women's series creates a gender gap to ski jumping. Moreover, most interviewees have experienced that women are left on their own and out of the men's ski jumping tribe. One interviewee described this as a division of men's and women's territories.

"You (women) can do whatever you want, as long as you don't come to our (men's) playground". - Interviewee B

The finding reflects the idea presented by McDonagh and Pappano (2007) that intentional gender segregation policies in sport to women's and men's series actively creates and maintains stereotypes and deepens the gender gap underlining the difference between the genders. Even though the intentional gender segregation might be intended to enable fair competition for women among members of their own sex, these policies uphold the belief that women are fundamentally inferior to men. This results in less appreciation of women's sport and the different positions women obtain in sport.

## 6.2 Gender stereotyping in ski jumping

This study shows that strong gender segregation in ski jumping creates confrontation between genders and reproduces gender roles and stereotypes. Although the interviewees did not immediately recognize the gender division in ski jumping themselves, their answers showed clear indications of prevailing gender roles in ski jumping. Accordingly, this indicates that women themselves did not necessarily perceive gendered operating models questionable, but rather as the conventional prevailing culture in ski jumping. That according to Forsyth et al. (2019) indicates that women are conditioned to the culture of sport, not questioning the prevailing norms.

The most evident way of gender stereotyping appears in the interview data as disparagement and questioning women's professional expertise and knowledge, especially in influential positions in ski jumping. Such gender stereotyping is related to prejudice and assumptions on socially constructed behavior models for women. The interview data shows that women experience questioning of their abilities and competence to operate in several expert positions in ski jumping. Mostly, questioning is related to the positions that require decision-making ability and technical competence or deeper understanding of ski jumping as a sport, e.g. competition rules or sports venue constructions. In such situations, women feel that they are not treated like equals and not appreciated in what they do. Moreover, the interview data revealed that women receive more acceptance and appreciation if they occupy positions that require less technical competence or decision-making responsibilities (e.g. secretary or a spectator). According to several interviewees it is easier for women to be nominated to such positions in ski jumping that are considered more feminine and therefore socially accepted and suitable for women.

"I have faced stereotyping especially in my technical position or when I should be involved in decision-making." -Interviewee A

"Often, especially in technical matters, my competence is questioned."-Interviewee D

"Questioning is often related to my competence in my decision-making position." - Interviewee C

Such underestimating of women's abilities often appears by not involving women in decision-making process, ignoring and questioning women's opinions as well as arguing and advising women. Interviews revealed that women often feel that their opinions are not accepted.

"Even though my position requires me to be involved in decision-making, I am told that we have already decided on the matter among the boys."-Interviewee A

“The decision-making bodies show a lack of respect for women. The opinions of female members are ignored and belittled. Sometimes women have even been barked at.” -Interviewee C

“Some things you have to constantly fight for. They don't want to believe that even a woman might know some facts... They don't listen and say that we (men) know better... Instead, they give advice to me and say what needs to be done.” - Interviewee D

Even though a woman can be more experienced and educated than her opponent, in her credibility, the woman plays the role of the underdog. Also, women feel that in such technical matters men are believed more easily than women.

“The opposite party often wants to hear opinion from a male person, who in the end says the same thing as me. My word is not enough even though I am an expert in my field with a long experience... Men are believed more anyway. If you put a young woman and a young man of the same age, the man will be believed more, even if the woman could be more qualified.” - Interviewee D

Similar experiences of disparagement of women appeared not only in younger interviewees' answers, but also amongst experienced and most educated ones. Even though, the interview data shows that women enjoy more acceptance as they gain more experience and education, they still face questioning even as experienced sport experts. Women experience that their competence is not fully appreciated even after several years of being involved in the sport. Rather, they feel that experience helps to gain credibility, but a woman's professionalism is still not fully recognized.

“My credibility has been helped by the fact that I have been involved for several years. They see that I haven't disappeared from these jobs, and that I'm really going to continue and that I'm not just a shooting star.” - Interviewee A

“Even after years of working, they don't believe me, but when I work more with people, they get used to me being around.” - Interviewee D

“They don't want to admit that there is a question of authority here. They must think that I must know more than that woman even though the woman has more experience.” - Interviewee D

When comparing the findings of this study to the theoretical framework, it can be stated that questioning women's abilities in ski jumping as one of the most common forms of discrimination is connected to socially constructed gender norms and gendered stereotypes (Ryba & Saarinen, 2023). Therefore, it can be noted that gender stereotyping prevents women from obtaining positions of higher influence in ski jumping, which reinforces inequalities. The results of this study support those of Bairoh and Putila (2021), who note that women's technical skills are undervalued and that this keeps them from using their expertise in the workplace. Consequently, women's exclusion from technical roles may be due to

perception of women being unfit for the traditionally masculine role of a technical professional and lack of recognition of their skills or experience. Thus, it can be contended that gender stereotyping and segregation in ski jumping is obvious, particularly in positions requiring technical expertise. Therefore, this study shows that women in ski jumping are fundamentally disadvantaged regardless of their experience or level of education due to gender stereotypes and assumptions, which is consistent with Meyer and Rameder's (2022) assertion that women in sport face inherent disadvantages and are unable to offset these disadvantages through their social standing or educational attainment.

## 6.3 Influence of gender roles on individuals

### 6.3.1 Behavioral influence

Based on the interviews it can be noted that gender roles and stereotyping in ski jumping has had an influence on women's career progression as well as women's personalities and perceptions on themselves. Forsyth et al. (2019) propose that gender stereotyping in sport leads to women doubting their abilities, causing low self-confidence, and therefore preventing them from occupying influential positions in sport. This study identified such outcome for one interviewee who described her experience as follows:

"It creates uncertainty and doubt on your own skills. You get the feeling that poor career progression depends on your bad professional skills or low expertise in the field." -Interviewee A

Instead, some interviewees describe themselves to become mentally stronger, adapting tough masculine behavior while being involved in a masculine environment. As a consequence, it can be noted that women's personalities have therefore changed because of the external pressure they faced within ski jumping.

"Self-confidence must be built intentionally. It requires mental resilience." -Interviewee A

"I have become a much stronger person." -Interviewee B

"Doubts and comments gave me a tougher shell." -Interviewee E

"In the early years of my career, I have fought so much with many things that it has brought that today I dare to say my own opinions. This is how I realized afterwards that I wanted to show the doubters that it I can." -Interviewee C

However, changes in women's behavior patterns do not give women the desired credibility, leaving them in an inferior position to men. As one interviewee noticed:

“Women's and men's linear actions and leadership style are treated differently.” -Interviewee A

On the basis of these answers, it can be concluded that gender stereotyping has had far-reaching consequences for the development of women as individuals, which may have spilled over into other areas of life as well.

### **6.3.2 Influence on career progression**

According to the interview data, gender stereotyping has had an influence on all interviewees' career progression. With one voice women note that their career progression would be different if they were not females. Gender roles have affected the career development in different ways for each interviewee, for some interviewees less and for others more. However, all the interviewees have in common the fact that they have all experienced challenges due to their gender in ski jumping, which is in line with arguments of Attila et al. (2018) that gender may act as a disadvantage for women in labor. Moreover, one of interviewees reported her career discontinuation because of gender stereotyping.

“Some others take the freeway in their careers, but that's not about me.” -Interviewee A

“Yes, they (gender stereotypes) have affected my career. But I have survived. Maybe because I like challenges... if someone tries to brake and stop me, I get the feeling that I'll complete my tasks, look!” -Interviewee C

Interview data reveals that being successful requires a lot of effort and independent work from women. Women themselves must actively seek support and advice to proceed with their careers. They feel that there is more support available for men and that male's career development is taken forward with priority. Instead, women have to be active themselves and seek for information, education and training. Such outcomes are evident for women involved in leader or expert positions in ski jumping.

“I have gotten to where I wanted to be, but it has required a lot of initiative, to move forward and figure things out.” -Interviewee D

“The development of my career has required pushing through.” -Interviewee A

Questioning women's motives, abilities and opinions have had an influence on women's behavior in their positions. Interviewees have reported that they often need to prepare for decision-making process by thinking carefully of the reasons and facts to reason their opinions. Women experience that they need to earn trust by making right and well-reasoned decisions. At the same time, women experience that they need to prove that they are seriously involved in the matter.

"You must prepare more carefully and think through the reasons for your opinions. You should know how to hit back at the table so that you can do well there." -Interviewee C

"I must be tough and believable so that they understand that I'm serious about this... I want and need to show the doubters that I'm up to it." - Interviewee A

"I put effort and consciously think things through in advance to make a good first impression and show that I can be trusted. I doubt, how many men do the same kind of preparations?" -Interviewee A

"Your decisions must always be prepared well based on facts, but facts are not always enough." - Interviewee D

The results support the claim made by Forsyth et al. (2019) that female sport leaders and coaches often face pressure to perform better, put in more effort, and show off their skills in sport settings. This motivation comes from the need to dispel the stereotype that women possess insufficient knowledge about sport. Moreover, it can be stated that despite women aiming to adapt to the prevailing masculine culture and adopt masculine behavior, they fail to attain credibility, which indicates gender inequality stemming from biases against women's physical bodies rather than women's leadership styles (Mikkonen, 2023).

While it has already been discussed that it requires more effort to succeed from female coaches and leaders in ski jumping, the similar outcomes are indicated for athletes based on the interview data. To the question "Do women have equal opportunities to practice and prosper in ski jumping" all interviewees have answered negatively. They most common answer states that it is possible for a woman to practice and succeed in ski jumping, however, it requires a lot of effort and determination from the individual. The interviewees experience that succeeding in ski jumping requires more effort from a woman than from a man.

"It is possible to practice and be successful, but it is not an easy road." -Interviewee D

"It is possible, but it requires determination and the will to fight as a girl." -Interviewee B

"Let's say that everything is possible, but it is not the easiest way in Finland. The opportunities are not equal." -Interviewee E

"The girls have to be active themselves and seek information and coaching." -Interviewee A

“You have to carry the responsibility for your development yourself and alone.” -Interviewee E

According to the interview data, female ski jumpers face different challenges in terms of access to support, training facilities and resources. Interviewees mention lack of coaching groups and “systematic athlete path” to prevent girls from developing as athletes and achieving results.

“Overall support would be different if I were a man.” -Interviewee E

“I think it is more difficult for girls group to get the access to training facilities.” -Interviewee C

“The development of women is inconsistent. A lot of good work is done in the clubs, but after that the development does not progress on the side of the association.” -Interviewee B

“The boys have a certain path as they go towards coaching groups, e.g. World Championship groups. A girl jumper doesn't have these.” -Interviewee B

“The women's national team has one coach and two athletes, while the men's team has four jumpers and about 7-8 staff members.” - Interviewee B

“There are still no junior groups or national training camps for young girls. However, all this is arranged for the boys.” Interviewee E

Additionally, economic inequality was mentioned several times to play essential role for women's development: often female athletes' economic and sponsor support is lower than males'. Therefore, it can be noted that unequal distribution of resources hinders the developing of ski jumping as women's sport.

“There is a lot to do in Finland on the financial side for women, for example the government grants.” -Interviewee E

“There are shortcomings in the financing and sponsor support of women's activities... Prize money is smaller for women.” -Interviewee B

“The budget for women's ski jumping is zero.” -Interviewee E

“A non-existent amount is cut from the budget for women.” -Interviewee B

Saarinen et al. (2022) claim that Finnish sport coaching system does not take enough female athletes into account. The similar observation came up once in the interviews. According to the interviewee, the biological development of women and its effect on sports performance is not taken into account enough. Although the difference between the sexes is recognized, no measures are taken to better utilize women's natural characteristics. In addition to the fact that men's sports

performances in ski jumping are still considered to be model performances, women are seen as physically inferior to men.

“At younger age girls and boys still have a relatively similar body structure and physique, so it doesn't affect coaching that much. But when a girl turns into a woman and a boy into a man, in my opinion, that change is not taken into account enough. What happens when a girl turns into a woman and what needs to be taken into account in coaching, physics and training programs and their rhythms.” -Interviewee B

Based on the interview material above, it can be stated that in ski jumping, women are mostly disadvantaged by their gender, which is reflected in an overall challenging career development and fewer opportunities to advance in their career (Attila et al., 2018).

## 6.4 Networks in ski jumping

### 6.4.1 “Old boys’ networks”

The interview data shows that all interviewees report to have experienced gender stereotyping especially from older males inside the ski jumping community. Interviewees experience that on average, long-term individuals with years of experience in the sport are more difficult in terms of cooperation. Therefore, this study indicates references to the “old-boys network” culture in ski jumping. Ski jumping community is characterized by male-dominance, long-term involvement, low turnover and division to small exclusive groups. Women experience challenges to enter such networks.

“I feel that I would have gotten into the circles better if I were a man.” - Interviewee A

“It is run by an old-boys club. Nothing changes when the same faces hang around there. There is no turnover at all.” -Interviewee B

“There is a clear division to cliques.” -Interviewee A

“Some groups have a harder time making their voices heard.” -Interviewee D

The interview data indicates that networks in ski jumping community might create pressure to act in accordance with the public opinion of the network community. Several interviewees pointed out that individuals might change their agenda to be accepted by the network community as they enter the network. On the other hand, if the general opinion of the network community is threatened or questioned, conflicts of opinions in the network may arise. Therefore, networks appear homologous not only in gender representation, but also opinion-wise.



"If you can get to work there, you should be such a yes-yes person." -Interviewee B

"Some people are perceived as more harmless than others. Someone can be sympathetic in a certain way, who sympathize with men's decisions, in which case they become a good guy." -Interviewee D

"You might be a strong person and push things forward, but such people are excluded from the community." -Interviewee B

"I started developing a lot and doing things differently. Some of the men who had been in circles longer got angry and left because now that woman is doing something like that." -Interviewee C

Moreover, interview data also reveals that closed networks in ski jumping community can be associated with closed and obscure decision-making. Interviewees note lack of transparency in decision-making processes, making it challenging to understand and predict the outcomes. Notably, three interviewees brought up experiences in which closed decision-making is related to employee selection and career development.

"There is not much transparency in decisions on career progression... It raises questions about different career routes of different people. I think about what I should have done so that I too could get there." -Interviewee A

"I don't know how the tasks are divided to different people." -Interviewee D

"I have experienced very vague decision-making regarding my employment." -Interviewee B

Based on the theoretical background discussed in the chapter 3 of this study, it can be stated that gender bias occur in ski jumping, perpetuating a homogenous and exclusive "old boys' network" where men in senior roles preferentially hire other men (Stainback et al., 2016). This exclusionary practice, driven by men's reluctance to share power, limits women's access to leadership positions in ski jumping. Furthermore, as in many cases these networks lack term limits, preventing both women and younger individuals from ascending to leadership roles and hindering efforts to establish gender-balanced organizational cultures. Moreover, it can be stated as Riivari and Heikkinen (2022) propose, such systems and closed decision-making processes hinder diversity of perspectives in organizational decision-making in ski jumping.

#### **6.4.2 Lack of women's networks**

Interview data shows that although women are not included in the "old boys' networks," they do not have their own networks for ski jumping either. While more women are involved in ski jumping, none of the interviewees could

specifically mention this trend in terms of women's career advancement. The respondents' comments, which highlight the absence of women's networks and the lack of discussion platforms for women involved in ski jumping, demonstrate this lack. In particular, the fact that women are unaware of how other women perceive gender equality in ski jumping serves as concrete evidence of this in the interview data. In addition, there is a direct link between women's lack of mentoring and their inability to network. Numerous interviewees express that they feel unsupported and must handle everything on their own.

“As a woman, you still have to clear the way. I can imagine what kind of work the women who have gone before me have had to do.”-Interviewee A

“I don't know if the younger women get the support they need. At least I have the goal of supporting younger ones that this would not be a constant battle for them.”-Interviewee D

“If there were networks for women, I wish I could get peer support and mentoring from them. Now I am all alone except few trusted persons that I can consult and exchange ideas with.”-Interviewee A

Based on the interview data, women's slower career progress can be associated with lack of supporting networks and mentoring for women. This finding is supported with findings by Mikkonen et al. (2021) that state that because of past role models young women may view leadership positions as more "normal" and reachable for women as well as Forsyth et al. (2019) that state that lack of women's networks in sport is associated with fewer role-models for women in sport and therefore fewer mentors for young women entering the field. Moreover, European Commission (2014) emphasizes the urgency to increase role models for girls and young women in sport to reduce women's drop-out from the field, encouraging women to lifelong engagement with sport.

## **6.5 Culture and practices in ski jumping**

### **6.5.1 Lack of egalitarian practices and culture**

According to the interview data, gendered stereotypes and gender discrimination in ski jumping are still deeply rooted in the culture of the sport. All interviewees point out that the current gender discrimination issues are remnants of the sport's history and traditions, therefore culture is old-fashioned and in need of change. Additionally, a culture of silence is also noticeable as the issues in ski jumping culture are often downplayed and ignored.

“This culture has always been like this, for ages.” -Interviewee B

"The cultural structure is that ski jumping is considered a men's sport, has always been and still is. The culture is in need for change." -Interviewee E

"There have been no changes to this, because this is not really talked about. This is not really talked about out loud anywhere." -Interviewee D

"No one dares to bring this up publicly." -Interviewee A

According to the interviewees, gender inequalities create tensions, bad atmosphere and distrust within the ski jumping community.

"Yes, it kind of increases mistrust of those people. When they don't think that we are all the same group within the same sport." -Interviewee A

"You sense that certain bad atmosphere." -Interviewee E

"You just feel it, tightened atmosphere." -Interviewee D

According to the interviewees' experiences, ski jumping is still not a gender-equal sport. However, all interviewees agree that gender stereotyping in ski jumping is on the decline.

"In my opinion, women and men are still not equal in this sport." -Interviewee C

"I don't feel to be in equal position with men." -Interviewee B

"I don't feel that the status of a female ski jumper in Finland is the same as that of a male ski jumper." -Interviewee E

Although there is some development in equality in ski jumping, based on the interviews, the development has lately slowed down. Several interviewees have stated that the current state of gender equality in ski jumping has remained the same for a while. All interviewees stated that there is still room for development of gender equality in ski jumping.

"The situation has remained the same for a long time, Finland is lagging behind gender equality in ski jumping." -Interviewee B

"In the 80s and 90s, they talked about the pioneers of female ski jumping, but in the 2020s, they are still talking about female pioneers. When will we start talking about the enthusiasts and professionals of the sport and not always the pioneers?" - Interviewee B

The recent international success of female ski jumpers has brought visibility to the sport. However, the interviewees point out that the success of female athletes

has not sufficiently affected the appreciation of women so that the systems of the sport would become more considerate of women and more equal. The interviewees continue to highlight the scarcity of resources allocated to women and the lack of systematic development.

“The attitude of some sports people has changed when girls have started to do well in international competitions, even though throughout history they have been clearly against the development of women's ski jumping.” -Interviewee B

“It's still the same thickness. It hasn't changed terribly, there's still the same rant about saying hey, wake up and take women and girls into consideration.” -Interviewee B

“Although there has been success and media attention, there haven't been a lot of changes within the sport, for example in coaching groups for girls and women.” - Interviewee E

According to interviewees' experience, women's ski jumping in Finland is only developed out of necessity and pressure from society and external stakeholders (for example International Ski Federation). This finding is supported by Cunningham's (2008a) argument that political, functional, and social pressures might initiate a change in the established gender inequality within sport organizations. According to the interview data, In Finland, women's ski jumping has long been considered an unimportant sport that has not been invested in. Interviewees believe that it was because women's ski jumping has lacked public appreciation as it was not an Olympic sport until recent times.

“Women's ski jumping was never thought to become an Olympic sport, as it was supposed to be a marginal sport. Another thing is, for example, in Norway, where the development was already understood earlier. In Norway, the foundation has been laid and the coaches have been named, etc. Finland is lagging behind, while other countries have developed operations.” -Interviewee B

“It must change, we live in 2020's after all. Either this kind of activity does not stand the light of day.” - Interviewee B

Noteworthy, although the Olympic status was expected to bring prestige to the sport, this has not completely happened, and some interviewees point out that the attitudes towards women's ski jumping are still relatively the same as before the Olympic status.

“Attitudes only change by force. Women's ski jumping is an Olympic sport nowadays. It must affect but there are still some beliefs that it's not worth investing so much in women's ski jumping.” - Interviewee E

“There was a spark of hope that when women's ski jumping became an Olympic sport, things would change... But they still haven't changed.” -Interviewee B

It's also important to note that every interviewee acknowledged specific people in their own interviews who helped advance their careers. These individuals have frequently had a special influence on women's development through coaching, mentoring, and other forms of support as they pursue their goals. It is apparent that the women believe that without the individuals in question's support, they would not have advanced in their careers. This observation suggests that the promotion of women's issues in ski jumping rests on the shoulders of a few and certain individuals, rather than being a common development target of the entire ski jumping community. Hence, it can be noted that the sport so far has developed only thanks to the hard work of individuals and not through systematic development.

"I have my own certain supporters." -Interviewee A

"I have received support from certain people, not from others." -Interviewee B

"Thanks goes to my own personal supporters. Their support has been invaluable. I certainly wouldn't be here without them." -Interviewee E

When asking about the initiatives that have been taken to promote gender equality in ski jumping in Finland, only one initiative had risen in the answers. This initiative taken to improve gender equality in ski jumping is introducing own national competitions for girls and women that allowed girls and women to compete against each other. Notably, also this initiative was executed by development-oriented individuals (e.g. parents of young female athletes) rather than appearing as an outcome of systematic development of sport.

"It demands a lot from the parents of girl jumpers." -Interviewee E

Interviewees see introducing girls' and women's competition series as a positive step towards better engagement of girls in the sport, providing them with company of peers and equal and comparative competition. Especially the interviewees who are engaged with sport club activities see girls' own competitions essential for marketing ski jumping for girls and increasing number of girls practicing ski jumping within sport clubs. Interviewees claim that before introducing girls' and women's own competitions in Finland, women had rarely possibility to participate in boys' and men's competitions at all.

"Many leave the sport if there are no other girls giving a company." -Interviewee B

"It is not fun to do it as an only girl in the club when you don't have any other girls as friends." -Interviewee A

Based on the interviews, the indications of slow development of gender diversity and gender equality in ski jumping continue the trend of historical gender unequal development of the sport, which was presented in chapter 4. The development of women in ski jumping is slow and irregular, and therefore does not seem to appear on the priority list of ski jumping organizations.

### **6.5.2 Anti-discrimination practices in the community**

While several interviewees have reported that they have experienced gender discrimination in ski jumping, according to several interviewees they lack information on practices dealing with such situations.

“I have the impression that they want to address and sort out these. But how they deal with it and sort these situations out, I can't answer that.” -Interviewee E

As one of interviewees brought up that the investigation of discriminatory activities often remains the responsibility of the victim alone as the interviewee lacks of contact person if such discrimination cases occur.

“That leaves you alone. That's up to you to figure out for yourself. I don't know who to contact.” -Interviewee A

The interview data reveals that gendered and discriminatory behavior in ski jumping is at times argued by humor and justified. In this case it evidences that the discriminatory activity is not fully recognized.

“I have been told not to take such behaviour too seriously, as this was just a slip of the tongue and the person's own humor... So which act is then serious enough that they really start to address and investigate it?” -Interviewee A

While the two interviews described above have indicated lack of information on anti-discriminatory practices in the community, the other three interviewees have clearly brought up a point of view according to which inappropriate behavior is not addressed in the Ski Association.

“Discrimination is intervened in ski club activities, but not in the Ski Association internal activities.” -Interviewee C

“In the clubs they intervene, but I am not that sure about the Association.” -Interviewee B

“In these matters at the Ski Association level, the community has not really intervened in any way.” -Interviewee D

The culture of silence, the lack of knowledge, the difficulty of identifying cases of discrimination and the lack of intervention came up in the interview data. It is remarkable, because the Finnish Ski Federation (2024) has created guidelines for handling cases of discrimination, which can be viewed freely on their website. In this way, it can be noticed that the distribution of the instructions in question has been unsuccessful, as at least the interviewees of this study were unaware of the practices.

## 7 DISCUSSION

In this chapter the results of this study are discussed. The research questions are discussed and answered in the sub-paragraphs 7.1. and 7.2. Finally, based on the discussion, recommendations for the field are presented in the sub-paragraph 7.3.

In this study, an overview on prevailing gender roles and their formation in ski jumping has been taken. With the interview data, an effort has been made to bring out these points, which still affect the participation and career development of women in ski jumping. The interview data collected for the study reveals strong influence of gender roles on women's participation in ski jumping, affecting development of gender equality in ski jumping. As one of the findings of this study, questioning females' abilities, expertise, motives and qualifications in field of ski jumping has risen as the key barriers for women's career development in ski jumping. This study shows that in ski jumping, women are often stereotyped by their gender, rather than taken as individuals, which hinders women's professional development in the field. Gender roles and stereotyping in ski jumping are also associated with low resources allocated for women, gender segregation in the field, as well as other organizational challenges such as low transparency and exclusive networks.

Although ski jumping has remained a male-dominated sport since a long time to this moment, a greater participation of women in the sport can be observed as athletes, coaches and sport managers. According to the literature ski jumping is growing as a women's sport (Stenseth et al., 2022), however this study has shown that the development of women's ski jumping in Finland is neither linear nor regular. Instead, the development is rather incidental and inconsistent. In general, it can be stated that due to lack of development in the culture and structures of ski jumping, an old-fashioned culture based on traditional gender roles can still be observed. This culture emerges strongly from the historical development of ski jumping. This study however shows that the culture of ski jumping is not actively being developed, even though there are some active administrators in the ski jumping community to move forward women's participation in ski jumping. Consequently, the sport lacks systematic development of structures and practices. The lack of development can be



connected to organizational challenges in management and decision-making. Based on the results of this study, the decision-making processes in ski jumping are concentrated to a small group of people. The decision-making bodies are highly networked, exclusive and lacking diversity. Therefore, the decision-making process is characterized by low transparency, closed circles, low turnover in decision-making positions and lack of diversity in management positions which leads to several negative outcomes both at the individual and community level as well as at the organizational level.

## **7.1 RQ1: Realization of gender equality in ski jumping**

Considering that gender equality in this study is associated with equal opportunities, capabilities, power and knowledge for all genders (UNESCO, 2023a), it can be stated that women interviewed for this study do not perceive gender equality to be realized in ski jumping. The interviews have revealed that unequal structures in ski jumping still prevail, limiting women's power and affecting women's opportunities to participate and succeed in ski jumping. These obstacles come up in the responses of both athletes and officials, which indicates ski jumping to be an unequal sport throughout. Therefore, the answer to the Research Question RQ1: How women perceive the realization of gender equality in ski jumping? is: Women do not indicate gender equality to be realized in ski jumping. The answer is argued and reasoned in the following sub-chapters.

### **7.1.1 Equal opportunities**

Equal opportunities are one of the central perspectives in terms of the realization of gender equality (UNESCO, 2023a). In the interviews conducted for this study, an effort has been made to find out whether both genders have equal opportunities to succeed and practice ski jumping. The interviews revealed significant shortcomings in providing equal opportunities for women. It is worth noting that according to the interviewees, it is possible for women to achieve anything, but it requires a considerable amount of work, referring to the unequal distribution of resources, lack of systematic path for development, lack of opportunities for influence and unequal valuation of skills. These findings are in line with previous literature on unequal distribution of resources in sport (Spaij et al., 2015), women's disadvantage in sport due to their gender (Meyer & Rameder, 2022), which requires excessive inputs from women to achieve the same performance level as men (Aalto-Nevalainen, 2018; Forsyth et al., 2019) and achieve social acceptance in their sport-related activities (Ryba & Saarinen, 2023).

Unequal distribution of resources is noticeable in ski jumping between women and men. The division into men's and women's ski jumping found in the study deepens the gap between the genders (McDonaugh & Pappano, 2007). This can be seen in smaller staff allocations for women, more difficult access to training facilities, lack of coaching groups, and unequal finances, such as a

smaller budget for women's activities and a lower salary level for female athletes. This study shows that a major reason for women's slow athletic development is precisely the reasons described above, which is why women's sports performances may remain unremarkable.

The lack of an "athlete path" in the development system has also been found to be one of the reasons for female athletes' slow and inconsistent development in ski jumping. While male athletes follow a systematic path to develop and succeed, there is no corresponding path for women and women are also left out of the systematic development path of men. The interviewees often talked about how girls and boys start from the same line and their development remains relatively the same as long as they are involved in the activities of the sports club. However, when moving to the next age level, girls' systematic activities stop and the girls are left alone. An example of this is the lack of national camps and coaching groups from middle school age upwards. According to the interviewees, only national team activities are available to women after childhood, which leaves a large part of the athlete's development time without systematic support and coaching. Consequently, teenage female athletes are left without the support they need and have to work for their own success in order to make it to the national team. In addition to that, the interviews also revealed the point of view that girls' characteristics are not taken into account in coaching well enough, meaning that women are physically in a different position in the development of ski jumping sport training programs. This reinforces inequalities as even if exercise programs are available for girls, they may not support girls' development in the best possible way, taking into account the different physical characteristics of the sexes.

Based on the interviews, women's ski jumping is still not appreciated enough and development in the field has been slow in this regard. The recent success of female ski jumpers has increased media and public interest in the sport, but the same tendency is not visible inside the sport's circles. Women may have gained more visibility through their success, but it has not significantly affected the resources women have received, which was discussed above. The continued success of women requires a lot of dedicated work and dedication from the athlete and his supporters (such as parents). Therefore, in ski jumping, women still have to clear the way. As according to one interviewee, women are still considered pioneers in a field where women have always been involved. Therefore, it can be stated that equal success requires a significantly unequal amount of determination, initiative and unyieldingness from female athletes.

Similar experiences on the enormous amount of work done for success have arisen not only for female athletes, but also for sport officials and sport leaders in ski jumping. To succeed in expert positions, the women report that they had to do a lot of preparatory work and independent investigation. Although education is equally available to women, women's access to other know-how in the field is limited. Women feel that field-specific knowledge has not been shared with them as diligently, which is why they have had to find out about best practices themselves. In addition, based on the interviews, it can be concluded that the lack

of women's support network, mentoring and discussion channels means that women may struggle with the same issues on their own, which therefore means more investigation work for an individual. These findings can be associated with unequal distribution of knowledge, which is one of the signs of gender inequality and patriarchal structures inside sport organizations as proposed by Spaaij et al. (2015).

In addition to managing their expert work well, women have to prove their abilities and struggle against gender stereotypes and belittling as well as adapting to masculine environment. This, in turn, can be seen to require more effort put for success. This finding again underlines that it is possible for women to be involved and succeed in ski jumping, but it requires determined work from an individual. Such findings further support the ideas of previous literature that women in sport are disadvantaged due to their gender (Meyer & Rameder, 2022), affirming Cunningham's (2008b) findings that women receive less return on their efforts and educational and other social investments in sport.

### **7.1.2 Equal power**

Gender equality means equal power for all genders (UNESCO, 2023a). This work has also clarified the distribution of power in the field of ski jumping. Based on the report, it can be concluded that the power in ski jumping is unevenly distributed. In ski jumping, the individuals who wield the most power are still mostly men, leaving women in less influential positions. Women are mostly assigned to positions that require less decision-making power. These findings are supported by the previous literature on low gender distribution of power in the sport business (Turpeinen, 2011; Lehtonen, 2017; Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018; Forsyth et al., 2019; Spaaij et al., 2020; Mikkonen et al., 2021; Lehtonen et al., 2022; Phelps, 2023). On the other hand, this study has shown that even if a woman is appointed to an influential position, women's professionalism is often not recognized, leaving women out of the decision-making process. Although women sometimes get to influential positions and participate in decision-making, they feel that their opinions are ignored, or belittled. Such findings support the ideas of Forsyth et al. (2019) who argue that women must prove their competence in sports-related activities to overcome gendered stereotypes.

Furthermore, research has shown the lack of diversity in ski jumping organizations and distribution of power in ski jumping to a small homogenous group, which support the findings by Spaaij et al. (2020) on occurrence of low gender diversity in voluntary sport clubs. The unequal distribution of power can be seen in such closed, exclusive networks inside ski jumping community, which women have challenges to enter. Networks lack turnover, diversity of opinions and transparency in decision-making. Through interview data it is pointed out that the operating models in question create inequality in decision-making, as the decisions often serve only the small group of decision-makers. Further, the practices of closed networks create and reinforce similarity of opinion due to peer pressure. Thus, the decisions of the networks represent only a homogeneous set of decision makers. Therefore, lack of influence and a low opportunity to

participate in decision-making process, indicates low power distribution for women, leading to inequalities. The findings of this study are supported by the previous research on gendered recruitment policies of sport organizations that cause low gender diversity in sport organizations (Stainback et al, 2016; Mikkonen et al., 2021; Mikkonen, 2023), resulting in exclusive networks that hinder the functioning of sport organizations and individuals (Aalto-Nevalainen, 2018; Riivari & Heikkinen, 2022).

## **7.2 RQ2: Implications of gender roles in ski jumping**

Based on this research, it can be concluded that the traditional gender roles prevailing in society have affected women's participation in ski jumping, as athletes, officials, leaders, experts and coaches. The effects can be seen first of all, in the low representation of women in ski jumping tasks, but also in the division of ski jumping tasks into women's and men's jobs that refer to presence of social roles in the modern societies and labour markets as argued by West and Zimmerman (1987), Butler (1990), Uusikylä (2008), Korvajärvi (2010) and Rossi (2010). Regarding this, it therefore can be stated that gender roles have influenced the development of women's careers and their personalities. Hence, in response to the research question RQ2: How have gender roles and stereotypes been perceived to affect women's participation in ski jumping? it can be stated that the prevailing gender roles in ski jumping have affected women's level and amount of participation in ski jumping related activities, women's personal behaviour, their career development, which also has an effect on women's socioeconomic status.

Gender roles are deeply embedded in the culture and practices of ski jumping. This is explained by e.g. the fact that the interviewees themselves often did not know how to recognize gender stereotyping at the beginning, and took discriminatory gender practices as a given feature of the culture of the sport. Only after thinking aloud and critically did the interviewees notice how these practices have shaped their participation in ski jumping. These findings support the argument of Forsyth et al. (2019) of women's submission to the gendered culture of sport and conditioning to the socially prevailing gender norms and roles argued by the theory of "doing gender" by West and Zimmerman (1987). Furthermore, this research has shown that women still feel that they do not fully belong in the world of ski jumping, as the world of ski jumping still appears to be in interviewees' own words "a man's world" and a highly male-dominated industry. In the interviews, the women pointed out that ski jumping is built on gendered practices and traditional gendered culture, where women are at a disadvantage because of their gender. Such disadvantage appears in different obstacles women face in their careers within ski jumping. These findings are in line with Attila et al. (2018) who find that women experience various obstacles and gender discrimination in their professional careers especially in male dominated fields of business.

This study also shows that women are typically thought of as a homogeneous group to which prejudices based on stereotypes are attached. Thus, women are not necessarily thought of as individuals, but as representatives of a certain group, which hinders the recognition of individual abilities, talents and interests. Due to the traditional gender role match and stereotyping that still prevail in ski jumping, women's competence and interest for the sport is not fully recognized. One of the key findings of this study is that questioning women's technical competence hinders the advancement of women's professional careers in expert tasks in ski jumping. Women are typically seen as unsuitable for demanding tasks that require expertise, thus they rarely get appointed to demanding roles within ski jumping. However, in case women manage to get appointed to a responsible position, they often face belittling, advising, having to fight to make their voices heard. Moreover, this study shows that the lack of recognition of women's skills leads to the exclusion of women from decision-making processes, which leaves women's views unheard. The results of this study also propose that the attitudes towards female experts, coaches and leaders do not change according to women's high education or accumulated work experience supported by Cunningham (2008b). Thus, it can be stated that the assumed characteristics associated with women prevent the recognition of women's full potential in ski jumping tasks, slowing and hindering women's participation and career growth. The findings of this study are supported by Bairoh & Putila (2021) who find similar gender-based discrimination structures and policies in other fields of business requiring technical expertise.

The masculine operating environment of ski jumping also places women in an inferior position. While the leadership styles characteristics of women appear to be undervalued in ski jumping, the interviews have revealed that women must adapt to masculine leadership styles by modifying their own behavior. The interviewed women have reported to have learnt to be more tough, and attain qualities and behaviours associated with credibility. Moreover, women must excel preparation so that their opinions and decisions are taken seriously. Therefore, appreciation of women does not come by itself, but women have to earn respect (in the eyes of men) with the right actions and decisions. This way, women are put to the test where they have to prove that they deserve their place in the world of ski jumping. Understandably, such a need to prove one's abilities and the need to earn respect affects women's willingness to continue their duties in the sport. For some, this inspires them to continue fighting, while for others, in the worst case, this means giving up their tasks and ending their careers.

The research findings on women's need to adapt to masculine leadership styles in ski jumping are interesting in relation to Mikkonen's (2023) findings on acceptable leadership styles in football, which appears as a male-dominated field like ski jumping. Mikkonen (2023) finds that in football, male managers must adapt also to softer, more feminine leadership styles. According to Mikkonen however, men's adaptation can only be an indication of adherence to modern softer management theories or the result of social pressure. She points out that male leaders might not want to give up their dominance, which requires them to

adopt current trends in sports management. Looking at Mikkonen's thoughts, it can be suggested that such modern, softer management theories nor social pressure have not yet reached ski jumping. According to the interview data of this study ski jumping is still defined by traditional masculine leadership styles that are onward socially accepted, respected and expected from the leader in the ski jumping community which preserves men's status as respected leaders.

### **7.3 Practical recommendations**

Based on the results of this study, the ski jumping community is encouraged to address the emerging challenges of gender equality. This recommendation is supported by several authors. The European Commission's (2014; 2023) recommendations highlight that achieving gender equality in sport would yield economic benefits for sports organizations and stakeholders. By promoting gender equality, sport can become more popular, leading to increased participation and a larger workforce. Moreover, Ryba and Saarinen (2023) recommend prioritizing gender equality in the organizational aspects of sport systems. It's clear that fostering equal opportunities in sport has far-reaching implications beyond the field, influencing our entire society.

The culture of the sport is valuable to develop into a more open and inclusive one. The ski jumping community is small and currently exclusive, which leads to the exclusion of some individuals from the decision-making processes and networks. Instead, the community must build a culture of social support, where everyone is included in the activity. However, it can be noticed based on the interview data that women's participation in ski jumping at all levels still lacks systematic development and management from the top. This therefore enables different operators, such as ski clubs and individuals to operate according to their own decision and preferences regarding development of women's participation in ski jumping. Since there is no policy or system for the development of women's activities and participation, each actor can decide for himself how to act in the matter of women's development and participation. This is evident in interview data pointing out that certain persons may promote women's conditions in ski jumping based on their personal motives while others do not. Thus, women's participation and success in any kind of ski jumping activity is purely dependent on who they associate with and who they happen to know. Moreover, the challenges in gender equality in ski jumping also do not seem to resolve themselves with the change of generations, rather it requires discussion and concrete actions. At the moment, it seems that the challenges are not fully recognized and have been swept away from the discussions. Discriminatory practices have become the norm, which only few recognize or question. It is also paradoxical that a person who has experienced discrimination does not necessarily know how to recognize discriminatory behavior, as individuals are conditioned to the culture of the sport and do not know how to question the policies. Therefore, discriminatory behavior may not always be

investigated, which confirms the permissibility of the behavior in question. In addition to that, not all cases of discrimination come to light, as the victim does not necessarily dare to raise the issue or know whom to contact in such matters, in which case the discriminatory behavior is impossible to intervene. In this regard, it is therefore necessary to implement gender inclusive policies that enhance anti-discriminatory policies within ski jumping community and create a more open discussion culture.

Gendered practices are however deep in ski jumping culture. In addition to the fact that these practices have been formed over a long period of time, they also do not dissolve quickly. As Heikkinen and Kivijärvi (2021) propose, ski jumping organizations are invariably embedded in a particular cultural environment characterized by robust social norms and institutional frameworks. Therefore, the first step in organizations' efforts to promote equality is identifying these norms. As Palašćáková et al. (2020) propose, implementing a variety of targeted measures such as public discussions, workshops, training programs, and supportive policies for young women in sport could help to enhance gender equality in ski jumping organizations and increase female participation in decision-making roles within the sector.

### **7.3.1 Establishment of a development working group**

Based on the results of this study and the earlier studies on enhancing gender equality in sport organizations (Palašćáková et al., 2020; Spaaij et al., 2020), the researcher proposes to establish a development work group to lead development work for gender equality in ski jumping. The task of the development working group would be to lead and develop the participation of women in ski jumping, comprehensively as athletes, coaches and administrators, experts and managers. The development working group would support ski association and ski clubs in their day-to-day equality work, act as an educator on topic of gender equality by organizing various trainings, seminars and workshops, act as a communicator by sharing information about practices that promote equality, and act as a discussion forum where current challenges are discussed and solutions are considered. The working group's responsibility would be to draw up a clear action program to achieve gender equality at all levels in ski jumping, both in clubs and in the ski association. The action program in question would bind all actors in the field equally, including individuals, which would reduce the different and individual ways of working in the field as it appears today. A common action program for the entire sport would unify and systematize gender equality work. The development working group would monitor the implementation of the action program in ski clubs and ski federation.

To ensure the diversity of members, thoughts and decisions of the development work group, its composition must be as diverse as possible. Different genders, age groups, different regions and job titles must be represented in the working group. The members of the development working group must include representatives from all ski clubs and the Finnish Ski Association, including the Finnish Ski Association Ski Jumping Judges' Club

(Suomen Hiihtoliiton Mäkituomarikerho) whose members are judges and technical experts in the field. To ensure diverse gender representation, each organization must have both male and female representatives as working group members. In addition, the development working group must have expert members from key stakeholder organizations, such as the fiduciary appointed by the Finnish Ski Association, and representatives from the Finnish Center for Integrity in Sports (FINCIS).

### **7.3.2 Networking and mentoring programme**

In addition to the development group, as Forsyth et al. (2019) and Mikkonen et al. (2021) propose, it is also recommended to establish networking and mentoring program especially to support young officials in the field of ski jumping. In the mentoring program, each young person should be assigned with their own mentor, who provides support and advice at the beginning of their career. In addition to mentoring, it is also reasonable to establish wider support networks for young and experienced individuals in the field, where experiences and tips can be shared with peers and more experienced ones. The importance of these networks and the mentoring program for career development is undoubted since the interview data of this study has shown that information and experience sharing in ski jumping community is ineffective, meaning that every individual in ski jumping, especially women, are required to seek for information independently. Mentoring and efficient information sharing could contribute to less drop out and discontinuation of women's careers (Forsyth et al., 2019).

### **7.3.3 Composition of decision-making bodies**

Aalto-Nevalainen (2018), Mikkonen et al. (2021), and Mikkonen (2023) all recommend sport organizations to engage women better in their decision-making processes. Equal involvement of men and women in decision-making would yield benefits not only for individuals and sports organizations but also for society as a whole. Gender diversity in decision-making within sport organizations has a positive influence on organizational outcomes, as it brings different perspectives to the table. This way, diversity in leadership positions can significantly enhance organizational decision-making processes and increase transparency (Riivari and Heikkinen, 2022).

Since the composition of decision-making bodies in ski jumping indicates low diversity, it is therefore recommended to critically examine the composition of current decision-making bodies. To increase diversity, it would be justified to consider applying gender quotas to the groups exercising the decision-making power in ski jumping. Such quotas can follow the regulation of Finnish Equality Act (609/1986) demanding minimum 40 % of both female and male members in every working group. Since the Finnish society has succeeded in distribution of political power almost evenly between the genders (World Population Review, 2023), the researcher sees no reason why the equal power distribution for genders in sport could not be successful. It is argued that it is possible to achieve equal



distribution of power in ski jumping and increase the diversity in decision-making processes if the regulations for equal composition of decision-making bodies are followed.

#### **7.3.4 Equal distribution of resources and support**

As the interview data has revealed unequal access and distribution of resources and support between the genders regarding financing and coaching, it is recommended to consider re-organizing the financial system. At the moment, the division between women's and men's ski jumping has the effect that women's and men's activities are financed differently, regardless of the athletes' success and development prospects. Instead, it is recommended to combine women's and men's activities and coaching so that both women and men participate in the same coaching groups and training camps. This would ensure that women would receive the same number of coaching resources and support for development as men (Spaaij et al., 2015). At the same time, this would provide with joint benefits by save financial resources, benefiting both individuals and organizations.

#### **7.3.5 Gender equal coaching**

Based on the interviews in this study, ski jumping coaching systems are not completely gender equal. Therefore, gender equality issues are recommended to be taken into account in coaching and included in the education of coaches. Coaches must be communicated and emphasized about their responsibility as promoters of equality at the grassroots level. As Saarinen et al. (2022) propose including gender equality aspect to coaches' education could improve and facilitate the cultural change towards gender equality in ski sport in Finland. Moreover, it can be recommended for educators and coaches within ski jumping clubs to acknowledge their responsibility in imparting values, particularly concerning equality in sport, as they stand as one of the most significant agents of children's socialization (Plaza et al., 2016). According to European Commission (2014) gender friendly guidance and coaching might decrease discontinuance of women's sport careers, eliminate gender stereotypes and create safe and positive sport environment for all genders. Therefore, inclusion of gender equality aspect to education of coaches in ski jumping is justified for increasing gender equality in the field.

## 8 CONCLUSION

It has been argued throughout this study that socially constructed traditional gender roles, stereotypes and norms affect women's position in the modern society and sport (West & Zimmerman, 1987), reinforcing power dynamics and creating gender inequalities, including gender discrimination, limited opportunities for women, division of labor and wage gaps between the genders (Korvajärvi, 2010; Spaaij et al., 2015; Attila et al., 2018; Burt, 2021; Hindman & Paulsen, 2022). In turn, the research findings of this study show that gender roles and norms are still deeply ingrained in ski jumping culture that remains strongly a male-dominated field of business. It has been demonstrated that currently prevailing gender roles in ski jumping hinder women's participation in all sport-related activities in the ski jumping context. The effects of prevailing gender roles extend to women's engagement with ski jumping both as a recreational and professional activity. Gender stereotyping in ski jumping contributes to the unequal division of resources and tasks between genders, hindering women's career development as athletes, coaches, experts, officials and leaders, which is in the end affecting their socio-economic status. This research has also demonstrated that low gender diversity and high male dominance in ski jumping organizations is connected to limited and low diversity of opinions as well as closed decision-making, which hinders the organizational performance. Hence, the message conveyed by this study is that still prevailing traditional gender roles adversely influence both individual and organizational functioning in the field of ski jumping. Therefore, enhancing gender equality would be beneficial to all involved in the sport's activities (Aalto-Nevalainen, 2018). The sport of ski jumping, where gender roles have evolved over the long term, however, does not undergo rapid or spontaneous change and rather requires concrete and strategic development (Palašćáková et al., 2020). Hence, based on the results of this study ski jumping organizations are recommended to challenge traditional gender roles by implementing proactive measures, executing inclusive policies, providing equal opportunities and resources for both genders, educating and raising awareness on gender inequality issues in ski jumping (Spaaij et al., 2015; Plaza et al., 2016; Aalto-Nevalainen, 2018; Forsyth et al., 2019; Mikkonen et al.,

2021; Saarinen et al., 2022). Through long-term and systematic efforts, it is possible to create a more inclusive and equitable sport organization culture where everyone can participate and succeed, regardless of gender (Mikkonen, 2023). Such efforts would not only benefit the sport organizations or individuals by allowing them to reach their full potential but also contribute to the overall success and sustainable development of the sport and society (Heikkinen & Kivijärvi, 2021; Ryba & Saarinen, 2023).

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: "Interview questions"

1. Oletko tutustunut tietosuojalomakkeeseen ja suostut haastatteluun?

**Kokemukset:**

2. Kerrotko omasta roolista, taustasta ja polusta mäkihypyssä?
3. Minkälaiseksi koet sukupuolten tasa-arvon mäkihypyssä? Millaisia ongelmia on havaittavissa ja minkälaisia parannusehdotuksia sinulla on?
4. Oletko havainnut, että mäkihypyssä esiintyisi sukupuoleen perustuvaa syrjintää tai vähättelyä? Kuvaile tilanteet.
5. Millaiset mahdollisuudet naisilla on harrastaa ja menestyä mäkihypyssä? Koetko, että kummallakin sukupuolella on yhtäläiset mahdollisuudet ja miksi? Onko tilanne muuttunut ajan mukana?
6. Oletko itse kokenut sukupuoleen perustuvaa syrjintää tai vähättelyä mäkihypyssä? Millaisissa tilanteissa syrjintä/vähättely on tapahtunut? Kuvaile tilanteet käytännön esimerkein.
7. Saatko riittävästi tukea mäkihypyssä lajiyhteisöltä (valmentajilta, seuralta, liitolta ja sponsoreilta)? Koetko, että tuki olisi erilainen, jos olisit ollut mies, miksi?
8. Koetko, että olet tasavertainen urheilijana/toimitsijana? Perustele vastaus.
9. Koetko, että naiset kohtaavat esteitä tai ennakkoluuloja mäkihypyn parissa? Minkälaisia? Onko tilanne aina ollut näin vai onko asiassa tapahtunut muutoksia?

**Sukupuoliroolit ja stereotypiat:**

10. Onko mäkihypyn kulttuurissa, rakenteissa tai säännöissä jotain, mikä saattaa asettaa naiset epäedulliseen asemaan? Kuvaile.

11. Onko mäkihypyssä sukupuoleen perustuvia stereotypioita tai sukupuolirooleja? Minkälaisia? Missä tilanteessa sukupuoliroolit tulevat esille? Onko tilanteita, jolloin ne ovat heikoimmin/vahvemmin näkyvillä?
12. Osaatko kertoa, mistä kyseiset stereotypiat kumpuavat, kuka näitä rakentaa ja mistä lähtökohdista? Miksi?
13. Miltä sukupuoliroolit ja stereotypiat sinusta tuntuvat? Miten reagoit niihin, miten toimit jos kohtaat ennakkoluuloja?
14. Miten sukupuoliroolit ovat vaikuttavat mäkihypyn ilmapiiriin?
15. Ovatko sukupuoliroolit vaikuttaneet urasi kehitykseen mäkihypyn parissa? Miten?
16. Ovatko sukupuoliroolit vaikuttaneet sinuun henkilökohtaisesti? Miten?
17. Ovatko stereotypiat ja sukupuoliroolit muuttuneet urasi aikana? Miten?
18. Onko havaittavissa sukupuoleen liittyvien stereotyyppien purkamista ja tietoisuuden lisäämistä? Minkälaista?

**Yhteisö:**

19. Miten mäkihypyn yhteisö reagoi ja puuttuu sukupuoleen perustuvaan syrjintään tai epätasa-arvoon? Millaisia keinoja yhteisössä on puuttua näihin epäkohtiin?
20. Onko suhtautumisessa asiaan tapahtunut muutoksia urasi aikana?
21. Onko tarjolla koulutusohjelmia edistämään sukupuolten tasa-arvoa mäkihypyssä?
22. Millaisia aloitteita on tehty edistämään sukupuolten tasa-arvoa mäkihypyssä? Kuka ne on tehnyt?
23. Miten mielestäsi media kuvaa/suhtautuu naisten ja miesten mäkihypyyn ja onko siinä eroja sukupuolten välillä?
24. Koetko, että naisten saavuttamat tulokset ja menestys mäkihypyn kilpailuissa saavat tarpeeksi huomiota ja tunnustusta? Onko tilanne muuttunut ajan/menestyksen myötä?

## **APPENDIX 2: “Interview questions translated to English”**

1. Have you familiarized yourself with the privacy form and do you consent to the interview?

### **Personal experiences:**

2. Could you share your role, background, and journey in ski jumping?
3. How do you perceive gender equality in ski jumping? What problems have you observed, and what improvement suggestions do you have?
4. Have you noticed any gender-based discrimination or belittlement in ski jumping? Please describe specific situations.
5. What opportunities do women have to participate in and succeed in ski jumping? Do you believe both genders have equal opportunities, and has the situation changed over time?
6. Have you personally experienced gender-based discrimination or belittlement in ski jumping? Describe practical examples of such situations.
7. Do you receive sufficient support from the ski jumping community (coaches, clubs, associations, and sponsors)? Do you think the support would be different if you were male, and why?
8. Do you consider yourself equal as an athlete or official in ski jumping? Please justify your answer.
9. Do women face obstacles or prejudices in ski jumping? What kind of obstacles? Has the situation always been this way, or have there been changes?

### **Gender roles and stereotypes:**

10. Are there cultural, structural, or rule-related aspects in ski jumping that may disadvantage women? Please elaborate.
11. Are there gender-based stereotypes or roles in ski jumping? What are they, and in what situations do they become apparent? Are there times when they are visible more or less?
12. Can you explain where these stereotypes originate, who perpetuates them, and what underlying factors contribute to their existence?
13. How do gender roles and stereotypes personally affect you? How do you react when encountering prejudices?
14. How do gender roles influence the overall atmosphere in ski jumping?
15. Have gender roles influenced your career development in ski jumping? If so, how?
16. Have gender roles personally affected you? How?
17. Have stereotypes and gender roles changed during your career? How?
18. Is there observable dismantling of gender-related stereotypes and increased awareness? What kind?

**Community:**

19. How does the ski jumping community respond to and address gender-based discrimination or inequality? What methods are used to tackle these issues?
20. Has there been a change in attitudes over the course of your career?
21. Are there training programs available to promote gender equality in ski jumping?
22. What initiatives have been taken to promote gender equality in ski jumping, and who has led these efforts?
23. In your opinion, how does the media portray or treat women's and men's ski jumping, and are there differences between genders?
24. Do you feel that women's achievements and success in ski jumping competitions receive sufficient attention and recognition? Has the situation changed over time or with increased success?