

'Skierinas' in the Olympics

Gender Justice and Gender Politics at the Local, National and International Level over the Challenge of Women's Ski Jumping

Patricia Vertinsky, Shannon Jette & Annette Hofmann*

On November 28, 2006, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) voted to exclude women's ski jumping at the 2010 Olympic and Paralympics Games in Vancouver/Whistler. Using McDonagh and Pappano's (2008) four-stage framework for achieving gender equity, in this paper we examine the history of women's ski jumping and the modes of regulation that have developed around female participation in ski jumping competitions, including their historical exclusion from the Olympic Games. We then analyze media coverage of the current controversy surrounding the exclusion of women's ski jumping from the 2010 Olympics and discuss how the organizers of the Games have fallen into line with the IOC mandate. We conclude with a discussion of the lawsuit launched by a group of female ski jumpers in the British Columbia Supreme Court in the hope of gaining access to the 2010 Winter Olympic Games and assess its implications for gender equity.



Ski jumping is one of the last Olympic events to exclude women. The IOC says its 2006 decision not to include a women's ski jump event at the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympics Games in Vancouver/Whistler had nothing to do with gender discrimination. The ruling was based, it claims, on a lack of 'technical merit.' However, if one looks at the issue from an historical perspective, it becomes evident that gender discrimination is precisely the reason why women are not jumping at the Games. Barred from serious competition for decades because jumping was not deemed appropriate for females, women ski jumpers have not been able to establish the required paraphernalia around international level training and competition and gain the 'technical merit' required by a Eurocentric organization largely controlled by men.¹ The IOC's ruling, noted a *Vancouver Sun* editorial in 2008, was particularly galling given that it was the very organization that welcomed to competition Eddie (The Eagle) Edwards, the "affable short sighted overweight plasterer from Cheltenham who earned a last place finish for Great Britain at the 1988 Calgary Olympic Games in the men's ski jumping competition."² A comment posted on the *Now Public* blog recalls The Eagle's infamous Olympic experience:

* Patricia Vertinsky and post-doctoral fellow Shannon Jette are with the School of Human Kinetics, University of British Columbia. Annette Hofmann is with Ludwigsburg University of Education (Germany).

*He was absolutely terrified each time he had to go down the chute. It was both heart breaking and hysterical to see the look on his face, coke-bottle glasses steamed up, teeth clenched, and body as rigid as a popsicle as he jumped, fervently hoping, he told us afterwards, he would survive the fall.*³

Although sport historians have mostly neglected women's experience in skiing,⁴ ski historian John Allen points out that the sport is instructive for studying changing cultural values and the relationship between modernity and tradition, given that traditional values around gender have lingered on, sometimes tenaciously clutched to, but rarely disregarded.⁵ Ski jumping, in particular, offers an illuminating discourse in gender stereotypes and expectations since on the one hand, women have been prevented from taking part in ski jumping competitions until relatively recently while at the same time they have long demonstrated that they can participate at equal or better levels with men.⁶ Furthermore, as Matti Goksøyr observes, the more recent inclusion of women into high level competition has led to a transformation of ski jumping from a male-dominated sport to one focused on weight, body shape, skill and technique. Given the decline in the number of male competitive ski jumpers, he points out that the inclusion of women may well be needed to revitalize the sport. On the other hand, the continued androcentrism of the cultural order in ski jumping seems to work against this, contradicting the position of the IOC Medical Commission that "sport is for everyone. Girls and women should not be excluded from participation in athletic activity because of their gender."⁷

In their recent book, *Playing with the Boys*, McDonagh and Pappano remind us that 'sport'—a system which still privileges the male body as superior—does not *reflect* social and gender realities but rather plays a key role in *constructing* them.⁸ In their view, a central problem with organized sport has been the way that sport-related policies - particularly those enforcing sex segregation - have codified historical myths about female physical inferiority, fostering a system which, while offering women more opportunities than ever before, has kept them from being perceived as equal athletes to men. This practice of 'coercive sex segregation' does not reflect actual sex differences in athletic ability, but instead constructs and enforces the false premise that males are inherently athletically superior to females. It has been built on three false assumptions (the three I's), all of which have their origins in nineteenth century beliefs about the female sporting body and women's proper role in society: i) female *inferiority* compared to males; ii) the need to protect females from *injury* in competition; and iii) the *immorality* of females who compete directly with males. To challenge these assumptions, they suggest, requires actively moving through a four-stage process: 1) challenging the *prohibition* of women from participating in sports activities in the first place; 2) allowing women to participate in sports activities, but only on a *coercive sex-segregated* basis; 3) accom-

modating women in sports programs on a *sex-integrated* basis; and 4) permitting women to choose whether they prefer a sex-integrated or sex-segregated context for their sports activities, that is, *voluntary sex segregation*.

We will use this framework in examining the history of women's ski jumping to document the modes of regulation which have developed around female participation in ski jumping competitions and their historical exclusion from the Olympic Games. We will make the point that despite instances of resistance, women's ski-jumping has barely progressed to McDonagh and Pappano's second stage of coercive sex-segregation (it was only in the late 1990s that women were allowed to compete in organized ski jump competitions) and that at the international/Olympic level, the sport seems to be stuck at the first stage. In light of our historical findings, we will then analyze the current controversy over the entrance of women's ski jumping into the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver with a focus upon the media and organizational politics being played out at local, national and international levels. We will examine why the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) and members of the Canadian Olympic Committee have fallen quickly into line with the IOC's mandate and the role of the International Ski Federation (FIS) in the decision to continue their exclusion. Finally, we will explore the potential of using legal measures to restore human rights and secure gender justice for women ski jumpers in their bid to compete in the 2010 Olympic Winter and Paralympic Games.

Theory and Method: Deconstructing the Exclusion of Female Ski-Jumpers

Before turning to our examination of women's ski jumping, however, we provide a brief overview of our theoretical approach and methodology. The theoretical lens and methodological tools of social constructionism facilitate an examination of the ways in which taken-for-granted assumptions of the present have developed and been sustained over time. Although different strands exist, those taking a social constructionist approach view knowledge as produced through the daily interactions between people in the course of social life. What is asserted to be 'truth' or 'common sense' is seen as a product of power relations, sustaining some patterns of social action and excluding others.⁹ Feminist scholars have used this approach to critique the 'biology as destiny' ideology popularized by the (largely male) medical profession in the late nineteenth century and used to deny women participation in the public sphere and competitive sport.¹⁰ By questioning the truth claims of biomedicine and science, they have challenged male categories and claims about the body, producing alternative forms of knowledge.¹¹

With regard to women's ski jumping, a social constructionist perspective allows us to illustrate how women's current position of subordination within

the sporting realm does not reflect a natural gender order, but is the legacy of long-standing patriarchal and patronizing views about female bodies and women's participation in sport. By destabilizing and questioning the current exclusion of women from the 2010 Olympic Winter and Paralympic Games, we aim to reveal how the reasoning of the IOC and its related organizations is the product of power relations dating back to the late nineteenth century. In articulating the contingent formation of the present, we are reminded that the future is open rather than set on a course by some logic of development.¹² Such an analysis is crucial because given the centrality of sport in contemporary Western society, continued gender inequalities within the sporting realm reinforce gender inequality in the larger social context by 'confirming' women's subordinate status to men.

Constructionism is often associated with the notion that social reality is a narrative or text.¹³ Because language is viewed as *shaping* reality rather than merely reflecting it, a key methodological tool is the deconstruction or critical analysis of texts. In our study we draw upon the technique of Foucauldian discourse analysis in order to examine the material conditions and social structures that produce certain forms of knowledge and how these knowledges (or discourses) shape social practices. The aim of such an analysis, notes Burr, is to "identify the discourses operating in a particular area of life and to examine the implications for subjectivity, practice and power relations that these have."¹⁴ In our investigation, we utilize media texts, medical documents and personal memoirs (collected from both primary and secondary sources) to deconstruct the history of women's ski jumping, illustrating the ways in which the female ski jumper has encountered power relations that have explicitly and consciously made her the object of techniques and strategies that have attempted to render her docile. Our investigation of the contemporary situation has entailed a close examination of organization web sites and media discourses, particularly newspaper coverage (both print and online) of women's exclusion from the 2010 Games.¹⁵ We also attended the week long Supreme Court trial in April 2009 where lawyers for a select group of ski jumpers asked VANOC to respect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and allow the women equal access with men to the 2010 Winter Games.

Masculinity, '*Idraet*' and the Early Years of Ski Jumping

European beginnings

Ski jumping has its origins in Norway, with the first measured jump occurring in 1809 when a Norwegian lieutenant, Olaf Rye, jumped almost 9.5 meters through the air to prove his courage to his soldiers.¹⁶ This early example illustrates how in Norway, skiing was not merely considered a sport but rather grew from a necessary means of transport to be viewed as *Idraet*, an outdoor and

healthy physical exercise in which “strength, manliness and toughness” were the goals.¹⁷ John Allen explains that “[b]y 1834 *Idraet* included the effort to perfect not just the body but the soul, ideally even to develop ‘the physical and moral strength of nations.’” It was a view best epitomized by famed Norwegian skier Fridtjof Nansen who, in 1890, claimed that “nothing else steels the muscles and strengthens the frame in such a way, nothing else provides the body with greater elasticity and versatility, nothing promotes the will power more, nothing makes the wits as fresh as skiing does.”¹⁸ The early forms of *Ski-Idraet* did not focus merely on the ski jump; the sport of ‘ski running,’ as it was called, consisted of an obstacle course (including jumps) which would test the all-round abilities of the participants. Ski jumping as a stand alone sport began to increase in popularity in the 1860s, drawing thousands of spectators by the final decades of the nineteenth century – in both Norway and other parts of Europe.¹⁹ But in keeping with its ideological underpinnings as an event which turns boys into men (*Idraet*), jumping was regarded as inappropriate for women who were barred from organized competition.²⁰ Writing in his skiing handbook of 1893, Norwegian Laurentius Urdahl warned, “[h]opefully ladies are not going to attempt ski jumping. It is so tempting to try but the best for all those involved would-be accomplished skiers is that they abstain completely from this sport.”²¹

This is not to say that women did not jump. According to Gerd von der Lippe, in 1862 Ingrid Olsdatter Vestby took part in a ski-jumping competition in Trysil, Norway and other Norwegian women followed her lead:

*She pushed off and raced down to jump, took off, and flew until she landed firmly, planted on her skis, past the point where many a brave lad had lost his balance earlier in the competition... Their relief was great for they had never seen a girl jump on skis and they had been more than a little anxious as she flew over their heads.*²²

Female participation, however, was more common prior to 1900 when large scale organizational rules and official referees began to dominate the sport and highlight the perceived unladylike and even immoral aspects of female jumping. On February 18, 1910 the first international skiers' conference met in Oslo, providing the impulse for the foundation of the International Federation of Skiing in 1911, from which the FIS emerged in 1924 at the first Winter Olympics in Chamonix, France.²³ This was followed in 1928 at the Winter Olympics of St. Moritz with an invitation for interested physicians to participate in evaluating the medical aspects of skiing and become part of the FIMS – the International Federation of Ski Medicine. With increasing frequency, national and international sports organizations referred to medical opinion when they needed to justify the push for regular training, and medical opinion often discouraged women's participation using a variety of medical arguments to legitimize and preserve the differences between the sexes.²⁴

The discourse on protecting sporting girls from injury, reminds von der Lippe, is as old as organized sport in the Western world, as is the discourse on ridiculing sporting females.²⁵ Popular medical opinion in the late nineteenth century held that women were born with a limited amount of vital energy, and that the reproductive functions of puberty, menstruation and especially childbirth required a significant amount of this energy reserve.²⁶ Because a woman's primary function in life was motherhood, she needed to conserve her energy to fulfill her reproductive destiny, which meant forgoing 'unnecessary' strains such as rigorous physical activity and higher education. Referring specifically to ski jumping, one male physician wrote:

*The very training called for—standing upright during a jump—is far more strenuous than realized. Not only are many muscles under continuous strain but the heart, as well as the rest of the nervous system is under great strain. One must concentrate one's full attention on the run down to the take off and maintain this concentration during the flight. All of one's muscles, one's very will are put to the test. This state of mind is very strenuous for more or less weak, nervous and untrained women.*²⁷

Women who had given birth were thought to be at particular risk given that they "had been through a process [childbirth] which all too often reduces them to a morbid state." The worry was that ski jumping might sap them of their limited energy reserves and further weaken the muscles supporting the uterus. Nor were concerns about female jumping confined to medical concerns. Hofmann and Preuß point out that although several female ski jumping competitions took place in Norway at the turn of the century these events were rarely mentioned in the local papers. Many reporters (typically male) preferred to ignore such events, regarding female jumping as "unlady-like" and women performing such activities as "unattractive" and "immoral."²⁸

Despite anxieties about their physical and moral well-being (two of the I's identified by McDonagh and Pappano), some European women continued to jump during the first decades of the twentieth century. Perhaps one of the best known female jumpers in these early years was the Austrian Baroness Paula Lamberg. The 'floating baroness' as she was often called, achieved jumps of 23 or 24 metres which were comparable to those being made by her male counterparts. In the 1930s, two outstanding ski jumpers in Norway were women—Johanne Kolstad and Hilda Braskerud. They had begun ski jumping as children and although able to reach the same distances as male youth, at the important competitive events they were only permitted to jump during the breaks as 'trail jumpers'—entertainment for spectators.²⁹ Thus, while these female athletes might have resisted culturally-informed concerns about the physical dangers and perceived immorality of women's ski jumping, false assumptions about their athletic inferiority

to their male counterparts limited their competitive sporting opportunities. Fed up with the conservatism of the Norwegian Ski Federation which claimed in 1933 that "women's cross country skiing and ski jumping are not desirable," Johanne Kolstad left Norway to demonstrate ski jumping in the United States and became acclaimed there by her promoters as "Queen of the Skis."³⁰ Here she established a world record in 1938. At 72 meters it remained unbroken for over 30 years until Anita Wold from Trondheim set a new one in 1972.³¹

Ski jumping in North America

Skiing first began to appear in North America with the arrival of Norwegian immigrants in the 1880s and by the turn of the century ski jumping was one of the most popular winter sports in the United States and Canada.³² Like any good American sport, notes Allen, ski jumping, once a test of manliness and moral and physical strength (*Idraet*), soon gave way to "leaps of length, points, prize money and records."³³ An appealing spectator sport, ski jumping drew large crowds and provided the impetus to further bureaucratize and organize the sport in North America. The National Ski Association (NSA) was created in 1905 to set rules and schedule competitions, its formation promoted by the 'Ishpeming ski fathers' in Michigan who wished to ensure their town as the headquarters of the organization (and assume control of jumping in the US).³⁴ The NSA originally consisted of several member clubs, growing to 23 clubs in 1921 before splitting in 1922 when New England formed its own association. Other zones or regions were created as ski jumping continued to grow in popularity: the Rockies in 1923, northern Minnesota in 1925, the Midwest in 1927 and California and the Northwest in 1930.³⁵

Organized skiing in Canada followed a somewhat different trajectory. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the growth of skiing in Eastern and Western Canada occurred more or less independently thereby delaying the creation of a national organization representative of all clubs. At the turn of the century, Montreal (in Eastern Canada) and Rossland (in Western Canada) were the central hubs of organized ski jumping and it was common for each region to sponsor and claim the national championships.³⁶ As additional clubs were created in the ensuing years, interclub competitions in Western Canada often had a north-south orientation, with Canadian clubs competing against clubs in the north-western United States. In Eastern Canada, Ottawa and Montreal clubs competed regularly by the 1920s. In 1920 the Eastern ski clubs (in Quebec, Ottawa and Toronto) formed the Canadian Amateur Ski Association (CASA) and in the 1927/1928 season the Western ski clubs created their own governing body, the Western Canadian Amateur Ski Association (WCASA).³⁷ In 1935, the WCASA voted to disband and all Western clubs became directly affiliated with the CASA.³⁸

Women can't jump!: Keeping women out of ski jumping

Male empowered ski clubs and organizations in North America typically created set rules and competition schedules which did not include jumping events for women. In *I Skied the Thirties*, W.L. Ball writes that girls growing up in Canada were actively discouraged from the sport. He recalls when the Wurtele twins, who later became Canada's top women downhill skiers, "did a tandem jump on the Côte des Neiges hill in Montreal. They were only eleven years old at the time and when their mother heard about it they were forbidden to jump again."³⁹ Winlo argues that the first all-women alpine ski club in Canada, the Penguin Ski Club, was formed in 1932 in reaction to women's exclusion from competitions held by male-run ski clubs in the first decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ She explains that the majority of urban ski clubs in Eastern Canada focused on the Nordic style and held competitions in cross country and ski jumping. But "because ski-jumping was considered too daring and long-distance cross-country too strenuous, women were not encouraged to participate in ski competitions."⁴¹ Thus the role of female members in many of the male-run ski clubs in Eastern Canada was not one of competitor. Rather it was hoped that women would "add spectator support at the competitive events and prepare and serve food for the social gatherings afterwards."⁴²

It was not until alpine (or downhill) skiing grew in popularity during the 1930s that women were able to take a greater role in skiing and in competitions in Eastern Canada. Alpine skiing was deemed to be acceptable for females provided they did not do anything too aggressive, and with the understanding their ski exploits were merely a brief interlude before marriage and motherhood.⁴³ Indeed, a Canadian women's team participated in the 1936 Winter Olympics at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, the first year that downhill skiing was included as an event - although Canadian participation most likely occurred because there happened to be four Canadian women living in Europe at the time who had some experience racing in the Alps.⁴⁴ (The American Women's Ski Team was selected in the same way). Widespread fears about the masculinizing effects of competitive sport were alleviated by stressing the good looks and femininity of prominent Canadian downhill skiers, such that by the 1950s they were nicknamed 'skierinas.' Ann Hall points out that while this term was meant by some as a compliment, "it also signaled that women skied differently than men, like ballerinas on snow with speed and grace" but not with a male's strength and power.⁴⁵

Ski clubs in Western Canada appear to have been slightly more progressive than their Eastern counterparts in these early years. Both the Rossland Winter Carnival (popular from 1899-1915) and the Revelstoke Winter Carnival (the main Western Canadian tournament from 1915 to the 1930s) held women's events in ski running and cross country racing.⁴⁶ However, the lengths of the

'ladies' events were always shorter than the men's and the prizes also reinforced gender stereotypes. At the Revelstoke Winter Carnival, for instance, female competitors were awarded hairbrushes and handbags whereas male participants commonly received a medal and boys a pocketknife or new fishing rod. Absent from the programme were women's jumping events, and while young boys were encouraged to jump (there was often both an Under-17 and Under-14 boys' division in the Carnival), jumping competitions were not held for girls.

Some girls and women were not deterred, however. Wendy Bryden describes Isabel Coursier's early beginnings in the sport; each winter she would watch the boys practice their ski jumping in her hometown of Revelstoke, but she was never asked to participate:

One winter carnival, she was the only girl who entered the 'ski-joring' competition, a race in which a skier is pulled behind a pony going full throttle. She beat all the boys. That year she was invited to practice ski jumping on the "Boys' Hill" which was a smaller version of the Great Ski Hill on Mount Revelstoke.⁴⁷

In 1922, at the age of 16, Coursier jumped with the boys at the Revelstoke Winter Carnival and set the amateur women's world ski jumping record with a jump of 84 feet.⁴⁸ In July 1923 she participated in a ski tournament at Rainier National Park in Washington and received an ovation from the crowd and a special trophy. Upon graduation from high school in 1925, Coursier went to McGill University to study physical education, and while in Quebec she gave exhibitions throughout the Laurentians and the United States. Scott records that Coursier "continued to thrill spectators at ski tournaments at the Quebec Winter Carnival and in Montreal. She was the first women allowed to go over the famous Côte des Neiges ski jump in Montreal."⁴⁹

Coursier, while exceptional, was not the only Canadian female jumping in these early years. In 1923, ten year old Grace Freeman from Nakusp (a neighboring town of Revelstoke) jumped at the Revelstoke Winter Carnival—although she dropped out of competitions in later years.⁵⁰ According to Ball's recollections of skiing in Eastern Canada in the 1930s, the all-women Penguin's Ski Club included ski-jumping in their competitions and Winlo refers to Elsie Richardson of Timmins, Ontario who performed an exhibition jump at the 1937 Ontario Zone Championship as "one of the few exceptional women to ski-jump at competition."⁵¹

Women were also jumping in the United States. Allen notes that at the end of the nineteenth century (during the first wave of the women's rights movement), a few American females jumped—less to compete against each other than to show men they were capable of doing so.⁵² One of these could have been "the happy hooligan" Sadie Gibson who, in 1904, leaped 46 feet 4 inches—the greatest leap by a woman on skis ever made according to the *Ashland Daily Press* of Wisconsin.

A 1921 article in the *Revelstoke Review* with the headline “Famous Lady Ski Jumpers to Compete in Big Tournament” reported that a twin jump would be performed by two women from Wisconsin (Miss Matilda Johansson Steinwalson and Miss Julia Burghild Rasmussen), suggesting that the Graves sisters (who jumped in the 1930s) had some American predecessors.⁵³ Furthermore, women were sometimes included in the jumping programmes at various winter carnivals in the United States. Between 1928 and 1935, for instance, ‘girls’ and ‘ladies’ had their own jumping events at the Steamboat Springs Winter Carnival in Colorado. Ski jumper Beatrice Kirby is still remembered today for her outstanding performance by virtue of the Bea Kirby Trophy, awarded annually since 1993 to the best female Nordic jumper at the Steamboat Springs Winter Sports Club.⁵⁴ Dorothy Graves of Berlin, New Hampshire also became a renowned ski jumper, competing with men (in both the Class A and Class B division of tournaments) during her competitive career which spanned the 1940s.⁵⁵ She performed with Kolstad at Madison Square Garden, where an indoor International ski meet took place in 1938. In a 1974 interview Graves recalled that this event was the first time she was allowed to compete against another woman.⁵⁶

This historical overview of women’s participation in ski-jumping in North America provides evidence to suggest that in these early years women were transgressing gender boundaries in sport, some perhaps even ‘leaping’ into McDonagh and Pappano’s third stage: participation on a sex-integrated basis. But although some female jumpers did ‘play with the boys’ at local competitions (with their stellar performances evidence that women’s athletic inferiority is indeed socially constructed), they were the exception. Most likely, says Allen, these sterling female jumpers were viewed as something akin to circus performers providing entertainment - a ‘side show’ to the ‘serious’ jumping of the men.⁵⁷ Although women such as the Graves sisters (from Berlin, New Hampshire), Isabel Coursier (from Revelstoke, British Columbia), Elsie Richardson (from Timmins, Ontario) and visiting Norwegian jumper Johanne Kolstad were jumping notable, even record-breaking distances, these outstanding female performances “were hardly noted outside the women’s sphere and were only of interest to skiers as something slightly voyeuristic.” In other cases, women jumpers were likely not seen as ‘really jumping’ or ‘riding’ as it was termed at the time. For instance, ‘glider girls’ would jump at the competitions held by the Revelstoke Ski Club – while holding the hand of a male partner.⁵⁸

Moreover, when it came to international competitions, women jumpers remained grounded in the first stage identified by McDonagh and Pappano: exclusion. Despite evidence that women were capable of making outstanding jumps during the 1920s, women’s jumping was not made an Olympic sport in 1924 - the first year that ski jumping for men was included at the Winter Olympic Games in Chamonix, France. (The IOC did not introduce the rule that every new male event must have a female equivalent until 1991, and even then,

by emphasizing the word 'new', they were able to neutralize the "grandfathering" of equity for any sport already on the IOC roster).

During the 1920s and 1930s, often referred to as the golden age of women's sport, doctors and female physical educators, keen to promote the therapeutic benefits of physical activity for female health, encouraged a number of sports, but ski jumping was definitely not among them.⁵⁹ Prominent Canadian physical educator Ethel Cartwright, for instance, supported this maternalist stance in encouraging young women to skate, snow shoe and ski in the winter months – as long as no jumping was involved.⁶⁰ By this time vital energy theory (VET) had largely given way to fears that physical activity was responsible for uterine displacement which was believed to cause sterility.⁶¹ This made jumping - particularly landing – seem very dangerous for women already perceived as fragile. The threat of uterine displacement was thought to be especially pronounced during menstruation due to the congestion and increased weight of the uterus stretching the ligaments. Nor, in the excitement of a competitive environment, could females be trusted to voluntarily sit out during menstruation, so it was thought best if they avoided these situations altogether. Hofmann and Preuß cite a German physician who (in 1926) wrote that:

*At this time there is no need or reason to organize jumping competitions for ladies. Because of the unanswered medical question as to whether ski jumping agrees with the female organism, this would be a very daring experiment and should be strongly advised against.*⁶²

The notion that jumping would cause uterine displacement remained a point of debate well into the 1960s, even though leading female physical educators such as Anna Espenschade insisted that the most striking thing about research on women athletes was the lack of it.⁶³ A text summarizing the proceedings of the 1967 *Symposium on Sports Medicine* (by the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons), included a chapter entitled "Effects of vigorous athletic activity on women" by Dr. Clayton Thomas.⁶⁴ One of the questions listed under the rubric of "what is not known" in sports medicine, was "can simple running and jumping events cause irreparable harm to the growth and development of the organs of reproduction?"⁶⁵ Thomas concluded that the question had no definitive answer yet still ventured to comment on the issue. After reviewing existing literature on the topic he conceded that:

*quite obviously, one may be injured in any athletic activity, but the basic point is that the organs are quite well protected, and when the body receives a severe blow, the force transmitted to the internal organs is much less than that experienced by the surface of the body.*⁶⁶

He then referred to a scientific study of landing shock in jumping for women by eminent physical educator Charles McCloy who quoted a Dr. Paramore at length:

Dr. R. H. Paramore, who has experimented extensively in this field, has called attention to the additional fact that the uterus is sur-

rounded with structures of practically the same specific gravity as itself, and that it normally has no air spaces around it. Thus it floats free in a miniature pool of pelvic viscera, just as it might if detached, float in a jar filled to the brim with water. Such a body suffers only such shock as occurs within itself and does not fly violently through the fluid when shaken. This can easily be proven by placing a raw egg in a liter jar filled to the brim with water and then screwing the top on in such a way as to exclude all air. No degree of violent handling that does not smash the jar will injure the egg.

Apparently, others were not quite as convinced and concerns lingered (even though Erdelyi's 1960 survey of 729 Hungarian women athletes had found no adverse effects from vigorous athletic activity, and detected no problems in their obstetric history).⁶⁷ Decades later, Canadian skier Anna Fraser Sproule, winner of the 1986 World Cup in women's freestyle, recalls how in 1975 (at the age of 12) she was informed by an Ottawa race official that she could not participate in a weekend event involving ski jumping because, he argued, it might hurt her reproductive organs.⁶⁸ She later reflected on the irony of the decision, observing that

I went into freestyle, and jumped a different way. It wasn't until I was older and competing in freestyle skiing and doing twisting double flips and triple flips into water [in training] that I sort of started to see how funny that logic was.

Challenging the Gender Order in International Competitions

Along with many other sports, ski jumping for women began to take on a new vitality during the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and 70s. Yet women athletes continued to be barred from official ski jumping competitions until the very last years of the twentieth century and the debate and controversy over female participation in ski jumping championships served to exemplify gendered hindrances that remained obvious in a number of sports.⁶⁹ It was not until the late 1990s that the first female national ski jumping teams were finally formed and a number of national and international competitions organized.⁷⁰ In 1998, seventeen female ski jumpers from seven countries competed in the women's competition at the Junior World Championships – the first women's event officially accepted by the FIS. Gerd von der Lippe suggests that a likely factor in the FIS decision to officially recognize the 1998 event was the falling popularity of ski jumping (due in part to the explosive popularity of new ski sports like snowboarding). She explains that

in Scandinavian countries the number of boys and men who participated in ski jumping declined drastically in the early 1990s to the extent that by 1996 there were more ski jumps in Norway than there were ski jumpers in the Norwegian ski federation.⁷¹

Regardless of the motives behind the FIS vote to sanction the 1998 Junior World Championships, the event inspired the fathers of two women jumpers, Eva Gangster of Austria and Michaela Schmidt of Germany, to organize a series of competitions for women called the *Ladies' Grand Prix*.⁷² Momentum grew from their success and other women's events were created to help establish and grow the sport. In 2004, the FIS voted to elevate the *FIS Ladies Grand Tournee* to the status of the Continental Cup. This was a notable achievement for women ski jumpers, but as 'B' category jumpers they remained one level short of the World Cup 'A' category status needed for official entry into the Olympic Games. And although the FIS finally decided to hold a World Cup Championship in Liberec in the Czech Republic and introduce a World Cup 'A' for women in 2009, they missed the deadline for inclusion into the 2010 Olympic Games, this despite the fact that Eva Gangster was allowed to start as a pre-jumper at the Olympic Winter Games in 1994 at Lillehammer. Women ski jumpers can perform, it seems, but not compete as ski jumpers as far as the IOC is concerned, an issue to which we will return later.

Bumps on the international course

Hofmann and Preuß complain that while the development of women's ski-jumping over the past few years may seem to have progressed more smoothly, the road remains a rocky one. A significant barrier relates to continued patriarchal concerns about the strength—or weakness—of the female body. For instance, in the 1990s the head of the FIS, Gian Franco Kasper (today supposedly a 'supporter' of women's ski jumping), commented that the female uterus could burst during landing. Other representatives argued that one of women's spinal bones had a different and more fragile structure than men's and thus could break during landing. In 1995, Matti Pulli, national director of the Finnish ski jumping team, expressed the view that ski jumping was too demanding for women and was quoted as being shocked and alarmed to see a Swedish girl fall upon landing and lose consciousness at the World Skiing Championships.⁷³ As recently as 2005, Kasper informed the media that he's still not sure jumping is the right sport for women's bodies. "Don't forget, it's like jumping down from, let's say, about two meters on the ground about a thousand times a year, which seems not to be appropriate for ladies from a medical point of view."⁷⁴ His view (which has now been retracted) contradicted a special report of the IOC Medical Commission which stated in 2002 that the benefits of sports participation for women and girls exceeded the risk - that gender specific injuries were rare and concerns about female participation in sports outdated and erroneous: "The female reproductive organs are better protected from serious athletic injury than the male organs. Serious sports injuries to the uterus or ovaries are extremely rare."⁷⁵

Opposition to the participation of women ski jumpers at the international level has also included more subtle measures. Women ski jumpers complain that invitations to the *Ladies Grand Prix* did not always reach them, minimizing the number of women participating in the competitions. These ‘oversights’ are not insignificant given that one of the arguments used to justify their exclusion from the Olympic Games is that there are too few female jumpers performing in international competition.⁷⁶ Moreover, the abilities of female jumpers are not fully recognized. Some race organizers (and spectators) remain skeptical that women possess the courage, strength and bodily control required to face the risk of jumping. Finland’s Matti Pulli had no problem demeaning the national record jump of Tiina Lehtola, saying “I remember when Tiina Lehtola did 110 meters on the big hill at Ruka. As far as I understand it was such an unnerving experience for her that she gave up the sport there and then.”⁷⁷

Yet recent developments in ski jumping technique, one could argue, have made it more ‘suitable’ for women rather than less. Increasingly, characteristics believed most suited to jumping include a “slight build, a flexible body, good balance, a low centre of gravity, and the ability to focus—all qualities that seem to characterize female bodies and minds.”⁷⁸ As a leading newspaper in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*, pointed out in 1995, women certainly do not lack the courage and moreover, confidence and technique in ski jumping are developed through training opportunities and practice:

*... if you start when you are young, that makes it easier to move to the big hill... when you move on step by step to bigger hills your courage will increase as you go along and you will hardly even notice it ... Practice will help to give girls more thrust to their jump. And in any case it's the timing of the jump and the ability to fly that matter most.*⁷⁹

The same article went on to suggest that the female body constituted no obstacle in the sport given females’ lighter bone structure and ability to gather more speed than men on the approach: “In ski jumping girls might even be better than boys. Some say the reason why they are bypassed is precisely that they might be even alarmingly good.”

Hofmann and Preuß make a similar argument, suggesting that male anxiety that women may soon be jumping farther than men - jostling their male counterparts for sponsorship, contracts, prize money and influence over the sport may well contribute to continued consternation over female jumping.⁸⁰ Disparaging remarks by a high ranking FIS official about the skill and toughness of female jumpers—despite their obvious competence—lends credence to this theory. In 2004, Torbjorn Yggeseth, a Norwegian member of the FIS commented on the first official Norwegian female championship in ski jumping by saying, “half of them jump whereas the other half is doing something similar to sledding.”⁸¹ Yggeseth then used this as a reason for denying women (he called

them 'little girls') a chance to be test flyers at an upcoming ski-flying competition (an event which takes place on big jumps with a critical point of 185 meters for men and 90 meters for women, allowing athletes to fly as far as 185 meters). Yggeseth was further quoted in another Norwegian paper as saying that the FIS fear the women might fall and hurt themselves and that the women jumpers were in a special situation and must content themselves with smaller hills.

While specific to the sport of ski-flying, the above example is illustrative of the old-fashioned and patriarchal views still held by some FIS officials, views which may have been a factor in the women's exclusion from the 2010 Olympic Games. The argument that women lacked the required skill was used to justify the FIS's delay in holding a World Cup Championship for women which is needed to allow them entry into the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. Writing for *CBS News*, Christine Lagorio pointed out that "the FIS would have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to put on a world championship for women jumpers and FIS president Gian Franco Kasper isn't sure the women warrant that kind of substantial investment."⁸² According to Lagorio, Kasper suggested that the women's numbers might still be too small and expressed concern about their skill level: "Actually," he said "they are all jumping, but not all are *really* jumping. Six or seven of them are *really* jumping. There are a few *really* jumping, but a few, in very few nations." National politics may also have played a role in the lack of FIS support for the women's inclusion in the Olympics.⁸³ When the US Ski and Snowboard Association agreed to back the women's bid for the Olympics the FIS based in Oberhofen, Switzerland was more reticent, albeit voting in favor. Supporters of the women's sport in the US suggest that the Europeans are leery of adding another event that would likely reward the Americas with more medals. (The USA is one of several leading nations in women's ski jumping where they have been competing for more than a decade and where all five US team members rank among the top 15 women's ski jumpers in the world).

Since the technical merit argument has been at the heart of IOC refusals to accommodate female ski jumpers, a word about technique seems appropriate. Examining recent changes in the technical rules around ski jumping, it is interesting to note the level of alarm over 'underweight,' potentially anorexic male ski jumpers who were increasingly jumping longer at the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics and related major competitions. In 2004, the FIS – supported by studies underwritten by their own organization and the IOC – introduced new regulations "in the interests of fairness" designed to remove the advantage of low body weight by reducing ski length.⁸⁴ The aerodynamic disadvantage of shorter skis compensates for the advantage of low weight. Leg length of tall persons was also taken into consideration in ski length allowances. The perceived need for new rules arose from the introduction of the V-technique in 1991 (first demonstrated in 1984 by Boklov, a

Swede), which had a major influence on performance enhancement and likely provided a distinct advantage to lighter (female) ski jumpers. Thus, the rule changes aimed to discourage men from becoming too light (and perhaps ‘feminizing’ the sport) at the same time that they aimed to remove any advantage that female jumpers might have (the assumption that females would ‘naturally’ have a lighter physique than the men of course reinforces essentialized notions of what a female body looks like). Indeed, Müller and colleagues (in a study also funded by the FIS) noted in 1996 that the advantage of low body weight and also the minor importance of the jumping force indicate(d) that women jumpers could become a “real competitive threat.”⁸⁵ This example illustrates how organizational rules work to reinforce gender boundaries and the gender order. The Indy Racing League had a similar change of heart about weight since Danica Patrick became such a popular driver in open-wheel racing. Weighing only one hundred pounds many felt that she had an unfair advantage on the track and a new rule has been established making the minimum weight for IRL cars include the driver - thus lessening the disparity between the lightest and heaviest drivers.⁸⁶ Despite the new rules Patrick became the first woman in a century of open wheel racing to win an Indy on April 30, 2008 in the Japan 300.

Researchers also confirm that, in fact, very few biomechanics studies have been devoted to ski jump landings, casting doubt upon long standing anxieties about the special hazards to female jumpers’ reproductive organs when they land.⁸⁷ Such fears, well articulated in the professional discourse on female health, exercise and sport throughout the twentieth century, continue to be contaminated by deterministic views which focus on the biological mission of the female – poisoning young athletes’ concept of physical self by causing them to perceive their natural processes as a continuing burden.⁸⁸

*Ski jumpers kept out longer because
Olympic organizers will not relent sooner*

Women ski jumpers held their first official Junior World Championships in 2006, and their first World Championship in 2009. Despite the lack of elite training facilities, female ski jumpers began to taste the possibility of becoming Olympic competitors at the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympics in Vancouver. While there have been no jumping competitions for women in the Olympics to date, Bryden suggests that there is nothing in the rule book that states they would not be allowed to take part if one was on a jumping team.⁸⁹ As well, the IOC has declared that any sport added after 1991 must also include a women’s competition, announcing a specific ruling in 1996 that:

[t]he IOC strongly encourages by appropriate means, the promotion of women in sport at all levels and in all structures, particularly in the executive bodies of national and international sports organiza-

*tions with a view to the strict application of the principle of equality of men and women.*⁹⁰

These announcements of the IOC's new commitment to the principles of gender equity, however, did not open the door for women's ski jumping. Men's ski jumping, with its venerable past, was already an established Olympic sport, hence the IOC's 1991 rule about only 'new' sports requiring gender equity was decreed to be not binding. There appears to be no rule for retroactivity – at least in the case of ski jumping for women.

The IOC executive committee voted on November 28, 2006 to exclude women's ski jumping from the 2010 Winter Olympics given that their development is still in the early stage, thus lacking the international spread of participation and technical standard required. Supporters of the inclusion of women's jumping argue this point saying the girls are merely being kept out of the sandbox longer because the IOC will not relent sooner. Ski jumping is a community-based sport that can typically absorb a huge number of participants, as can other Nordic sports. Hundreds of training hills equipped with four season jumping surfaces are now to be found world wide notes Andreas Andresen of Pemberton, British Columbia, and women are increasingly arguing for the right to use them and for better access to coaches and training opportunities. They have gained a growing level of competency in the sport evidenced, for example, by the fact that "the distance record on the normal hill at Whistler Olympic Park is presently held by a girl."⁹¹ Ron Read, High Performance Director for the Canadian Ski Jumping Association, has said he believes women's ski jumping is just as competitive as other women's sports at the Olympics. He further argues that "[i]f you took all 13 of the Winter Olympic sports, I believe women's ski jumping would be in the top half for numbers, for a competitive field."⁹²

IOC spokesman Emmanuelle Moreau, however, insisted there are not enough competing athletes to justify adding the sport of women's ski jumping. In an e-mail to the Canadian press he said that the IOC would like to stress again that the decision not to include women's ski jumping has been taken purely on technical merit—any reference to the fact that this is a matter about gender inequality is totally inappropriate and misleading.⁹³ This argument is somewhat problematic given that there are 135 elite female ski jumpers registered in 16 countries while the IOC has recently welcomed events such as snowboard cross with 34 female competitors in 10 countries, bobsled with 26 women in 13 countries and the newly added ski cross with 30 women in 11 countries.⁹⁴ Thus female ski jumping numbers are greater than either skeleton or bobsled before women were included in those events. Furthermore, ski cross was added as a new event (perhaps because it is

deemed more profitable given its appeal to the lucrative youth market) even though it has fewer competitive events and far fewer female athletes. Regardless of the numbers of women jumping, citing this as a reason for exclusion is a circular argument, Anita DeFrantz, US member of the IOC is reported to have said in disagreeing with the IOC ski jumping rulings:

*There are too few women jumping so we won't support any women's jumping, which leads to too few women jumping... You don't even have to build anything new. The hills are there already. It boils down to the will to do the right thing.*⁹⁵

IOC eligibility rules also require that to be considered for inclusion in the Olympics a sport must have held at least two world championships, although in 2007 the IOC changed the Olympic Charter to allow for exceptions in the requirement for world championship competition as a prerequisite for inclusion in the Olympic Games.⁹⁶ The first women's ski jumping world championship was not held until 2009 in the Czech Republic. But this rule too seems to have been malleable in the case of other sports. When the women's marathon was finally added to the Olympic list in 1984 there had only been one world championship in 1983. When women's cross country skiing became an Olympic sport in 1952 it was another two years before that sport held its first world championship. The same exception has not been made for women's ski jumping, however, and IOC officials appear to blame the female jumpers for not pushing to organize a World Cup sooner, with little recognition that the largely male-run FIS delayed the event.

Cam Cole of the *Vancouver Sun* complained that the IOC sees itself as bigger than governments (and therefore not bound by Canadian law that says public money must not go into a facility that discriminates among its users), yet also perceives itself as something of an international ambassador - when it suits it.⁹⁷ It tried, noted Cole, to "save Yugoslavia in 1984, unite Korea in 1988, modernize Greece in 2004 and will try to humanize China this coming summer." That said, the IOC stepped away from the latter issue as violence escalated in Tibet and human rights activists called for a boycott of the 2008 Beijing Olympics—a move which would have proved enormously costly to the Olympic movement. In short, said Cole, it often appears that the IOC believes that in all matters it knows best. IOC Presidents have at times demonstrated this through their personal styles and egos. Juan Antonio Samaranch was a rule bender, and included several women's events without making them fulfill technical requirements. Current President Jacques Rogge, however, prides himself as a stickler for rules and, irritated by accusations of gender discrimination, has dug in his heels, using the IOC's power on the international sporting stage. Dick Pound, Canadian member of the IOC, provided insight into the mindset of the international organization (and Rogge):

If I were sitting in Lausanne after years and years of attempting to get to this better equity position for women, and I'm being painted as a human-rights violator, I think I would be pretty ticked off. I think it was the wrong card to play and it was played badly and you've got to be careful it doesn't come back to bite you four years from now.

The IOC, he continued, "has long stood for social equality and progress and female ski jumpers would be better served working to improve their sport so they could meet IOC requirements."⁹⁸ Pound was merely reiterating the position he had taken immediately following the IOC's November 2006 decision not to include women's jumping when he warned:

*I hope the girls don't waste their time and make this a human rights issue. That's silly and all that will do is piss people off. That's not the issue at all. What happens is if you file one of these actions, it gives everyone who doesn't want to act an excuse not to.*⁹⁹

Why did the Vancouver Olympic Committee and the Canadian Olympic Committee fall into line?

Pressed to comment upon struggles by women ski jumpers to participate in the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, VANOC board chairman, Jack Poole, said it was not for VANOC to take up the cause when the IOC has said the sport doesn't meet its minimum technical requirements. He went on to explain that:

*[t]he IOC have pointed out to us in a very friendly and polite way that this is not our file...The responsibility for which athlete participates is theirs and theirs alone and so we have no role, no influence, no jurisdiction whatsoever.*¹⁰⁰

VANOC further supported its 'hands off' approach by explaining that they had already done their part by lobbying the IOC to include women's jumping prior to the November 2006 decision. Cathy Priestner Allinger, VANOC's Executive Vice-President of Sport, explained that:

*In advance of the IOC's decision not to include women's ski jumping for 2010, we supported the inclusion of women's ski jumping and communicated to the IOC that if they elected to add the event, we would and could support it from a logistical and operational standpoint... We provided input but the final decision lies with the IOC, and we have accepted the IOC's decision regarding women's ski jumping.*¹⁰¹

It appears, then, that VANOC supports gender equity but is not willing to fight for it. Chris Rudge, Chairman of the Canadian Olympic Committee, agreed that the decision lay with the IOC, saying he would tell the federal government's Sport Canada that nothing could be done to change the situation.¹⁰² "I do not think you will see women's ski jumping in 2010," he said. Both organizations were responding to the Canadian Human Rights Commission which mediated

a settlement between the mother of Canadian ski jumper, Katie Wells, and the federal government in 2007, calling the two sides to work together to convince the IOC to reconsider its decision.¹⁰³ Dick Pound and Chris Rudge, both of whom are on the board of VANOC insisted that the IOC decision had nothing to do with gender discrimination.

Deedee Corradini, President of Women's Ski Jumping USA and mayor of Salt Lake City during the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, used the backdrop of the North American Junior and Canadian ski jumping championships at Whistler Olympic Park to further lobby the COC and VANOC.¹⁰⁴ She noted that \$580 million of Canadian taxpayers' money has helped VANOC build Olympic facilities and argued that it is against federal and provincial law in Canada to spend government money on facilities that discriminate. Therefore, to have a 'men's only' sign on the ski jumps would be discriminatory and contrary to Canada's own human rights act. She went on to suggest that Canada, as the host of the 2010 Games, was in a special position to have the women's jumping event included as an Olympic event.

At a protest rally held by female ski jumpers in Vancouver on February 24, 2008, Corradini again cast doubt upon the IOC's claim that the sport needs more development and suggested that since host governments provide much of the funding for the games they should have the right for more leverage over the IOC.¹⁰⁵ Support for this view came from the fact that the organizers of Salt Lake City Games had succeeded in pressing the IOC to include bobsled and skeleton events in 2002.¹⁰⁶ She stopped short at that time of suggesting that Ottawa (Ontario) and Victoria (British Columbia) actually withhold funding to pressure the IOC into changing its mind on women's ski jumping. Some Canadian government officials, however, took up the female jumpers' cause, recognizing that Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms has clear provisions governing gender equity. According to *The Globe and Mail*, New Democrat MLA Harry Bains (who was the Olympic's critic in the BC legislature) and his federal counterparts in the House of Commons planned to table a motion to include women's ski jumping in the 2010 Olympic Games.¹⁰⁷

On his visit to Vancouver to review the city's preparation for the Games in late February 2008, IOC president Jacques Rogge was not swayed by the public protests of the women jumpers (or the giant billboard erected across from the VANOC headquarters which highlighted the Olympic charter's commitment to gender equality). He maintained the IOC stance, stating that allowing women ski jumpers into the 2010 Olympic Games would "dilute the medals given to others."¹⁰⁸ He went on to explain that he had no doubt the sport would eventually gain Olympic status and that:

this is not discrimination... This is just the respect of essential technical rules that say to become an Olympic sport, a sport must be widely

practiced around the world...and have a big appeal. This is not the case for women's ski jumping so there is no discrimination whatsoever.

Indeed, visibly irritated by the continued allegations of gender discrimination, Rogge later reiterated his message to Helena Guergis (federal secretary of state for sport in Canada who had offered her backing to the ski jumpers) in a telephone conversation.¹⁰⁹

Female Ski Jumpers Versus VANOC and the IOC: Moving to the Law Courts

In referring to the Olympic Games as “symbolic wars dressed in short pants,” David Von Drehle and Simon Elegant draw our attention to the influence of muscular Christianity and nineteenth century fears of degeneracy upon the modern Olympics with its call for manly men, their control over sporting organizations and their hostility to feminizing influences in many spheres.¹¹⁰ What is remarkable, is the staying power, over more than a century, of the kinds of patriarchal and patronizing views about female bodies and their participation in sport vocalized by the modern Olympics' founder Pierre de Coubertin and sustained by the largely male organizations which constitute the organizational apparatus of much of national and international sport. Such institutions are compromised by legacies of practices, patterns of behavior and entrenched interests that were formed during periods of exclusion and discrimination but are now invisible in a haze of lost history.

Canada, while vigilantly protecting human rights in its own Charter, has not yet been prepared to stand up to an international organization such as the IOC in demanding gender equity in sporting festivals on its own soil thereby continuing the cascade of disadvantages to sporting girls and women. Canadian women's difficulties in establishing their sport of ski jumping are then further compounded because *Sport Canada* and *Own the Podium 2010* only provide funding for sports organizations and athletes that are contenders in Olympic and Paralympics disciplines. As long as Canada does not demand equal access of women to the Olympics, and the IOC does not accept women's ski jumping, the athletes will be on the hook for most of their own training and competition costs.¹¹¹ The result is that too few women jumpers are supported in their jumping endeavors such that opportunities for growth in the sport continue to be constrained. So long as the IOC controls the rules it can also keep changing them to ensure that newcomers never win. Women will indeed be kept out of the sandbox longer because the IOC won't relent sooner.

In a bid to open the Olympic doors, a rostrum of 15 elite women ski jumpers from 6 countries including Canada, Norway, Austria, Germany, Slovenia and the United States hired a Vancouver lawyer to ask the British Columbia Supreme Court to issue an injunction to ban men's ski jumping events at the

2010 Winter Olympics if women jumpers were not allowed to participate. They alleged that the decision to exclude them discriminates against them on the basis of their gender and is in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Excluding them, claimed the female jumpers, was based on old-fashioned stereotypes about the types of activities that are suitable for women and demeaned the dignity of all women, specifically of women who ski jump.¹¹² VANOC's response was one of frustration. John Furlong, head of the VANOC, insisted that the list of Olympic sports was up to the IOC - the sport knew the process, it participated, and it wasn't successful. The public response was voluminous, and distinctly unsympathetic, as one can see from the type of comments posted on the *Globe and Mail's* blog:¹¹³

Its one thing to fight hard for your cause... but to jeopardize or even target in the first place, the cause of others is just selfish...

To attempt to ruin the event for the men is just downright nasty, especially since the male ski jumpers are innocent bystanders, working hard to be able to do their best.

And with this move, the women's ski jumping movement has removed any hope it may have had of becoming legitimate in the eyes of spectators, the sporting community and likely even fellow athletes. It's no longer a sport, but a misguided 'feminist'... cause that brings a black eye to anyone actually fighting for women's rights...

The chair of Ski Jumping Canada also questioned the lawsuit, explaining that the women jumpers were missing the target. "It's not the right path," said Brent Morrice, adding that "this is an IOC issue not a local one."¹¹⁴ It is a path, however, that has been taken before, and has led to a successful conclusion. In 1932, Gustavus Kirby, president of the Amateur Athletic Union in the United States and the American representative to the International Amateur Athletic Federation threatened a boycott of men's track and field at the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles if the IOC refused to reverse its earlier decision to deny women's participation in the track and field events. His success showed that rules can indeed be changed through such means—by men—even though the IOC's promises about women's track and field events were only partially kept in future Olympics.¹¹⁵

On November 18, 2008 the legal team representing the female ski jumpers suing VANOC for excluding them announced that their case would be heard in British Columbia Supreme Court on April 20, 2009. Daphne Bramham, a Vancouver journalist covering the story, noted: "it seems a pretty good case of discrimination—contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms—that in the entire panoply of winter Olympic events only ski jumping remains closed to women."¹¹⁶ At the same time, the Canadian Government and the COC also announced their support to step up pressure to fight for equal opportunities for female ski jumpers. "It's about equality," said Canada's Secretary of State for Sport, Helen Guergis.¹¹⁷

It is also about the law. Most assuredly, in the United States, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 helped free girls and women from discrimination in sport in educational arenas and change societal attitudes toward women and sport. Yet the intimate relationship between law and social change continues to be worked out on the playing field and, as Hogshead-Makar and Zimbalist point out, gains on behalf of women might easily be relinquished to the forces of resistance that continue to circulate on these issues.¹¹⁸ McDonagh and Pappano are even less optimistic; Title IX has helped women onto the playing fields but the power structure that defines sport remains a male power structure that relegates women to inferior roles within it. As such, it has created new opportunities for women but has not yielded equality.¹¹⁹

In their efforts to use the law, female ski jumpers, their supporters and a host of reporters filled the B.C. Supreme Court in Vancouver for a week between April 20 and 24, 2009 to hear lengthy and complex arguments for and against their discrimination claim which were made to Judge Lauri Ann Fenlon. Columnists at the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Washington Post*, and leading Canadian newspapers and television networks all provided extensive coverage. The battery of lawyers working for VANOC insisted that the discrimination claim was misguided in that the power to dictate events at the Olympics is controlled not by VANOC but by the IOC which is not bound by Canadian law. The lawyers for the plaintiffs, acting pro bono, presented a solid moral argument about female discrimination though it was clear that the legal challenge was more complex. The ski jumpers needed to prove that VANOC was controlled by the government and thus subject to the Charter, and/or that putting on the Olympics was carrying out a government function and thus should be subject to the Charter. The *New York Times* conjectured that it was a long shot constitutional case.¹²⁰

In their statement of defense, VANOC argued that a victory for the women might mean the IOC would never again award an Olympics to Canada. Reacting to such a claim, Bruce Kidd, a former Olympian and professor at the University of Toronto, said "If the price of hosting the Olympic Games, or the Winter Olympic Games is that we deny opportunities to women, well, maybe we don't want the Games."¹²¹

The Games will go on, however, regardless of the effectiveness of legal maneuvers. Applying McDonagh and Pappano's notion of coercive sex segregation to this discussion of female ski jumping, we have shown how the three I's—inferiority, injury and immorality—have been constructed around the female body to promote biological deterministic perspectives that continue to limit opportunities for participation and relegate girls and women to inferior roles within the sport. Despite the historical resistance of generations of feisty female ski jumpers, the sport is neither gender neutral nor gender blind. And accord-

ing to McDonagh and Pappano's four stages of desegregation on the basis of sex, women's ski jumping in the twenty-first century remains stalled between stages one and two. Whether Canadian law could move the sport along finally became a matter for the court, but a break from a sex-segregated past and the ushering in of fair play in a just society is a much taller order.

In fact, the law could not move the sport along. On July 10, 2009 B.C. Supreme Court judge Lauri Ann Fenlon ruled against the women ski jumpers in their bid to enter the 2010 Winter Olympics. She agreed that their exclusion from the games was discriminatory, noting that many of them were training against and competing against men who would be Olympians in the coming year and that the women were being excluded for no other reason than their sex. But she concluded that VANOC was not in breach of the Canadian Charter because the IOC has sole control over which events can be held and is not subject to the Charter. "This is the outcome I must reach because the discrimination the plaintiffs are experiencing is the result of the actions of a non-party (the IOC) which is neither subjected to the jurisdiction of this court nor governed by the Charter."¹²² "So much for Canadian values and promises that the 2010 Winter Olympics will showcase the best of Canada," commented journalist Daphne Bramham. "We get law not justice in the exclusion of women's ski jumping."¹²³

The law further prevailed over gender justice when the ski jumpers' expert to the B.C. Court of Appeals was dismissed on November 13, 2009. Time had run out for women's ski jumping at the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Endnotes

- 1 The decision-makers in the IOC and the national Olympic committees have almost always been exclusively male. Not until 1981 were 2 women appointed to the IOC. By 1995, 7 out of 107 members were women, and of the 64 member Medical Commission and sub-commissions of the IOC, only 4 were female. Gertrud Pfister, "Women and the Olympic Games, 1900-1997," in *Women in Sport*. Encyclopedia of Sports Medicine and the International Federation of Medicine, vol. VIII, ed. Barbara Drinkwater (Malden, MA: Blackwell Science, 2000), 3-22.
- 2 "IOC's Flimsy Reasons for Banning Female Ski Jumpers Boil Down to Discrimination," *The Vancouver Sun*, January 11, 2008, A8. The IOC worried that this might sully the integrity of future games and put in a new rule stiffening qualification requirements but Eddie gained celebrity status bringing, he said, the sport of ski jumping from the 47th page to the front page.
- 3 Peggy, comment on "Eddie the Eagle to Land in Calgary Again," *Now Public Blog*, posted January 30, 2008, <http://www.nowpublic.com/people/eddie-eagle-land-calgary-again>.

- 4 The work of Gerd von der Lippe and Annette Hofmann is the exception. Their previous research has been invaluable in the writing of this paper.
- 5 E. John B. Allen, "Values and Sport: The Development of New England Skiing, 1870-1940," *Oral History Review* 13 (1985), 55-76.
- 6 Matti Goksøyr, "Ski Jumping," in *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Extreme Sports*, eds. Douglas Booth and Holly Thorpe (Massachusetts: Berkshire Publishing Group, 2007), 278, <http://www.exacteditions.com/exact/browse/442/550/3513/2/302?dps>.
- 7 IOC, "Position Statement on Girls and Women in Sport," *IOC Medical Commission, Working Group Women in Sport* (2002), 1; http://multimedia.olympic.org/pdf/en_report_517.pdf.
- 8 Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano, *Playing With the Boys: Why Separate is Not Equal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 9 V. Burr, *Social Constructionism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
- 10 See Deborah Lupton, *Medicine as Culture: Illness, Disease and the Body in Western Societies* (London: Sage Publications, 2003); Patricia Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors and Medicine in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
- 11 Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, "Introduction to Section Three: Bodies and Science in Biomedicine," in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999).
- 12 Pat O'Malley, "Governmentality and Risk," in *Social Theories of Risk and Uncertainty: An Introduction*, ed. Jens Zinn (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).
- 13 Bryan Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008).
- 14 Burr, *Social Constructionism*, 170.
- 15 Between January 2008 and November 2008, we conducted numerous online searches using the 'google' search engine and the keywords "women and ski jumping." We located just over a hundred articles on the issue (dating from November 2006 to November 2008) and included all of the data in our analysis.
- 16 "A Short History of Ski Jumping," *Olympic Review* Jan/Feb (1994), 41-2.
- 17 E. John B. Allen, "A Short History of U.S. Ski Jumping," *Skiing Heritage* 18 no. 1, (March 2006), 34. See also Karel Daněk, "Skiing In and Through the History of Medicine," in *Nordisk Medicinhistorisk Årsbok* (Stockholm: Yearbook of the Museum of Medical History, 1982), 86-100.
- 18 Cited in Daněk, "Skiing In and Through the History of Medicine," 96.
- 19 "A Short History of Ski Jumping," *Olympic Review*, 41-2.
- 20 Annette Hofmann and Alexandra Preuß, "Female Eagles of the Air: Developments in Women's Ski-Jumping," in *New Aspects of Sport History: Pro-*

- ceedings of the 9th ISHPES Congress, Cologne, Germany, ed. Manfred Lämmer, Evelyn Mertin and Thierry Terret (Cologne: Academia Verlag, 2005), 202-9; Gerd von der Lippe, "Ski Jumping," in *International Encyclopedia of Women and Sport, Vol 2*, ed. Karen Christensen, Allen Guttmann and Gertrud Pfister (New York: MacMillan References, 2001), 1046-7.
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 - 28 Hofmann and Preuß, "Female Eagles of the Air," 304.
 - 29 Hofmann and Preuß, "Female Eagles of the Air," 305; Karin Berg, *Jump, Girls Jump. Ski Jumping is for All!* (Oslo: Holmenkollen Ski Museum, 1998), 64-69. Kolstad and Braskerud became the first female media stars of ski jumping (known for their habit of dressing identically—as well as for their precociousness and athletic ability).
 - 30 von der Lippe, "Female Ski-Jumpers in Norway: Against Nature," 333.
 - 31 Karin Berg, *Hopp, Jenter-Hopp. Historien om Johanne Kolstad og Hilda Braskerud - et Annerledes Sskieventyr* (Oslo: Chr. Schibsted Forlag, 1998).
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- 39 William L. Ball, *I Skied the Thirties* (Ottawa, Ontario: Deneau Publishers & Company Ltd, 1981), 80.
- 40 Andrea Winlo, "Avid Skiers or Sports Feminists?: The Women Skiers of the Penguin Ski Club and Their Relationship to Canadian Ski Clubs and Ski Organizations, 1932-1972," (Master's thesis, Concordia University, Montreal, 1999). Winlo outlines how the PCS helped to foster the development of women's alpine skiing from the 1930s onwards, providing members with ski lessons and hosting women's meets and tournaments. Several members of the PCS were part of the national team and the PCS became a member of the CASA in the 1934/35 season, thereby giving women a voice in this national organization (p. 27). See also *The Penguin Ski Club, 1932-1992: The 60th Anniversary: A Story of Women's Skiing in the Laurentians* (Self published, Print Three, 1992).
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