

THESIS: GENDER EQUITY IN SNOWSPORT INSTRUCTION

Increasing Gender Equity in Snowsports Instruction at Big Sky Resort, MT

by

Ann Schorling

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Royal Roads University  
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Supervisor: Jennifer Walinga  
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COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The members of Ann Schorling's Thesis Committee certify that they have read the thesis titled Increasing Gender Equity in Snowsports Instruction at Big Sky Resort, MT and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Leadership:

Jennifer Walinga [signature on file]

Guy Nasmyth [signature on file]

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon submission of the final copy of the thesis to Royal Roads University. The thesis supervisor confirms to have read this thesis and recommends that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements:

Jennifer Walinga [signature on file]

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**Abstract**

This research answered the question, “how might the Big Sky Mountain Sports School and the Professional Ski Instructors of America and the American Association of Snowboard Instructors (PSIA-AASI) increase gender equity within the highest levels of certification and leadership in snowsports instruction?” Using theory from Feminist Action Research and the Action Research Engagement model, I worked with snowsports school instructors and supervisors to identify barriers and solutions to increasing gender equity. This research employed an innovative method called the Bonkers Cocktail Party, which promoted empathy and transformational learning among dominant group members and thereby enabled whole community problem solving on gender equity. Major barriers identified included gender stereotyping and its impact on work distribution, occasionally toxic training environments, and the paucity of advanced, female-identified snowboard instructors.

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## Chapter 1: Focus and Framing

In my thesis I aimed to support the advancement of women in male-dominated industries. I worked with the U.S. national organization for snowsports instructors, the Professional Ski Instructors of America and the American Association of Snowboard Instructors (PSIA-AASI) and Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School. PSIA-AASI consists of 32,000 member instructors, who teach snowsports at schools across the United States. The organization's primary roles include creating and upholding national certification standards and creating educational content for the eight regional divisions. In addition, PSIA-AASI supports the National Team, a group of instructors selected every four years to train instructors across the country and represent the organization nationally and internationally. Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School in Big Sky, Montana (MT) employs many female instructors, examiners, and a female vice president. The school is invested in increasing gender equity in the industry

As a current female member of the PSIA-AASI Alpine Team, I remain committed to improving gender equity within the highest levels of certification and leadership of the organization. This research answers the question, "how might Big Sky Mountain Sports School and PSIA-AASI increase gender equity within the highest levels of certification and leadership in snowsports instruction?" Although this primary research question focused on the highest levels of instructor certification within PSIA, the paucity of women at these high levels, less than 20% of Alpine and 13% of Snowboard level 3 certified instructors identify as women (Women's Initiative Taskforce 2020), likely results from experiences throughout their careers in instruction (Burns, 2015). To support the main research question, it was important to understand the current circumstances affecting female-identified or non-binary individuals in the industry (Stroh, 2015)

and use that knowledge to improve the future. For this reason, the research sub-questions included: 1) How do current practices, cultural norms, or mental models within snowsports schools affect women's longevity as instructors? 2) What barriers exist to women's advancement? 3) Which current practices support women's career development toward certification and leadership? 4) How might snowsports schools create cultures that willingly engage and challenge systemic biases? 5) Which systematic changes will support women's advancement? Asking these questions helped achieve a greater understanding of the pipeline for women's development, in order to better direct that pipeline in support of gender equity. This research identified measurable changes that the Big Sky Snowsports School could make to increase female development opportunities.

### **Significance of the Inquiry**

In this research, I asked the question, "how might Big Sky Mountain Sports School and PSIA-AASI increase gender equity within the highest levels of certification and leadership within snowsports instruction?" Through this thesis I aimed to identify measurable changes relating to the development of women within one snowsports school that could be applied nationally to other schools. Simultaneously, the intent was to support the Big Sky Mountain Sports school in fostering a culture that proactively challenged systemic obstacles faced by female-identified and non-binary individuals, in which both women and men act as mentors and allies to women.

The results of this project may ultimately benefit PSIA-AASI as a whole, because they pointed to systemic solutions for pervasive gender imbalances existing in snowsports instruction. Currently the ratio of women working at the highest levels of snowsports instruction does not

match the ratio of women in the overall population of skiers. Although in 2017 female skiers made up 44% of all skiers and represented the fastest growing segment of all snowsports enthusiasts (Tilton, 2017), in PSIA-AASI's 65 years of existence, the National Team has never included more than 25% women, and women make up less than 20% of the current divisional education staff (based on a review of PSIA-AASI divisional staff websites). Of level 3 certified instructors only 21% of ski instructors and 13% of snowboard instructors identified as women in 2020 (Women's Initiative Task Force, 2020, p. 6). Since some of the most powerful strategies for advancing women include having accessible female role models (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Pande & Topalova, 2013; Saul, 2013), the paucity of women teaching advanced lessons, teaching other women, and training female instructors perpetuates the systemic gender disparity. As the quantity of female guests increases, those guests would be less likely to find high-level coaching from another woman.

Because of the complexity of the snowsports instruction industry, in my research I involved PSIA-AASI at a national level and the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School (hereinafter referred to as "the Snowsports School" or "Big Sky Resort"). I worked with instructors and supervisors within the Snowsports School with varying levels and types of experience. The director of the Snowsports School, Christine Baker, is invested in increasing gender equity. This research helped her uncover areas of systemic bias and develop a culture conducive to dismantling implicit bias. Beyond these specific research partners, stakeholders of this project included the entire membership of PSIA-AASI, especially non-males, who would benefit from more diverse organizational leadership styles (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2020; Stroope & Hagemann, 2011; Walinga & McKendry, 2014).

I am personally and professionally connected to this project, as a female and a PSIA-AASI Alpine Team member, the highest level of the organization. Working on this project supported my leadership and learning by pushing me to consider the organization from a systems perspective and the impacts of longstanding habits on gender equity in leadership within PSIA-AASI. Moreover, this project encouraged me to consider my own biases and accept the multiple realities that exist for women in snowsports—strategies that support gender equity in some cases may not support all female-identified and non-binary instructors. Success in this process necessitated coordination and collaboration with wide-ranging representatives from the national and divisional organizations as well as within the Big Sky Snowsports School.

### **Organizational Context and Systems Analysis**

PSIA-AASI is a particularly complex organization in terms of its distribution of roles and decision-making relative to each member's experience. For this reason, using a systems perspective helped me understand the organization and target my research methods. Arnold and Wade (2015) defined systems thinking as an analytical skillset that helps make sense of systems, anticipate outcomes, and proactively change them to create different outcomes (p. 675). Important components of systems thinking include looking for underlying patterns of behavior and recognizing that sometimes outcomes are caused by seemingly unrelated events (Burns, 2015, p. 6). With these aspects of systems thinking in mind, I explain interrelationships between PSIA-AASI National, its eight divisions, snowsports schools, and members. For the purposes of this thesis, I consider the parts of the system that most directly impact members, such as certification processes and working experiences, and how those processes may perpetuate systemic gender bias.

PSIA-AASI consists of the national organization and 8 divisional organizations that work together based on an affiliation agreement (PSIA-AASI, n.d.). The national organization is responsible for maintaining certification standards, hiring and supporting the national team, running national events, and developing educational content (PSIA-AASI, n.d.). Currently only 22% of the Alpine Team and 33% of the snowboard team identifies as female. Each division employs its own education staff who run training clinics and certification assessments. Though percentages vary between divisions and disciplines, the overall percentage of female education staff is below 20%. Any instructor aiming to become a member of an education staff or the national team must pass three levels of certifications followed by a hiring event. At each of these events, selectors evaluate physical capacity as well as teaching and interpersonal skills.

In the past PSIA-AASI has often focused on the number of women on the National Team as a bellwether for the rest of the snowsports industry (C. Levine, personal communication, May 6, 2021)<sup>1</sup>. I agree with this assessment and coaches of the national teams have made changes in the selection process to address the lack of gender diversity (E. Rolls, personal communication, April 22, 2021), which can benefit gender equity (Pande & Topalova, 2013). However, at the 2021 National Team selection event only eight of fifty alpine candidates were women. This gross disparity of gender representation at the selection demonstrates that increasing female representation also requires attention to the longer-term process of developing instructors throughout the pipeline echoing the work of Burns (2015).

Although divisional and national events are influential to instructor development, instructors spend most of their careers operating within their own snowsports school. At their

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<sup>1</sup> All personal communications cited with permission.

home schools, many aspects affect instructors' day-to-day experiences, including compensation packages, community relationships, mentorship, supervision, quality of work, opportunities for growth, cost of living, summer career opportunities, etc. (Women's Initiative Task Force, 2020). As shown in the literature review, systemic barriers often embedded in hiring practices, social networks, and work expectations can limit women's advancement in male-dominated workplaces. In addition, the paucity of women in high level positions reinforces existing gender bias and further limits the advancement of women.

Because of the complexity of PSIA-AASI and the interrelations between the national organization, divisions, and snowsports schools, I have chosen to do research with instructors in the Big Sky Mountain Sports School. Big Sky's school has a reputation for effectively advancing women. Many female education staff members, two of four female national team members, and a female Vice President of Mountain Sports, Christine Baker, all currently work at Big Sky (C. Baker, personal communication, August 15, 2021). Big Sky is an ideal partner for this research; the organization's successful inclusion of women may provide insights into more general strategies for other schools. At the same time any barriers or institutional biases that exist despite Big Sky's success are likely to exist elsewhere as well.

The goals of this research were twofold: first, to uncover practices that reinforce the current gender ratio at high levels of instruction (Stroh, 2015); second, to support a culture that challenges implicit biases on behalf of marginalized groups (Saul, 2013). In 2015 Stroh argued that "systems are perfectly designed to achieve the results they are achieving" (p. 5), so, we need to increase our awareness of the ways we all perpetuate the status quo (Stroh, 2015, p. 18). An engaged, action-oriented approach to the question of how to advance women in snowsports, with

an emphasis on facilitating transformational learning experiences (Hersted et al., 2019; Schein, 1995) has the potential to create this awareness.

### **Overview of the Thesis**

In the following chapters, I lay out relevant literature, give a thorough description of the research methods employed in this thesis, review the findings of the research and the conclusions drawn from them, and consider the implications for Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School. In chapter two I review relevant literature on gender equity in business/leadership and sport to provide background for likely barriers, limitations, and impacts experienced by female and non-binary instructors in a male-dominated industry. In addition, I review literature on individual and systems change as they relate to challenging implicit bias within organizations. In chapter three, I lay out each of the three research methods—a survey, a focus group, and the “Bonkers Cocktail Party” or BCP. For each method I explain its relationship to existing literature and a detailed description of its implementation. In chapter four, I share the main findings of the research methods. These include a recognition that lesson assignments reflect both supervisor and client gender bias, an understanding that in this context women expressed feelings of self-doubt and discomfort more frequently, the discovery that the experiences and opinions of female-identified snowboarders often countered those of skiers, and the finding that the BCP did successfully create cultural conditions in which members of the Big Sky Mountain Sports School effectively challenged their own implicit biases. Chapter five includes recommendations for the Big Sky Mountain Sports School as well as changes already in place at the school as of the writing of this thesis.

## **Chapter 2: Relevant Literature**

This research on gender equity in snowsports instruction falls at the intersection between leadership and sport for people who identify as female or nonbinary. Female-identified or nonbinary instructors, who rise to the highest levels of snowsports instruction, must navigate both the challenges of assuming leadership in a male-dominated industry and of athletic performance within a co-ed environment. For these reasons, in my literature review I explore the experiences and challenges of women from both angles. In addition, because ideally my thesis research will promote positive organizational change through examining biases and barriers, I am interested in learning about organizational change through engaging mental models and implicit bias. Thus, my current literature topics include women in leadership roles, women in sport, and organizational change through changing mental models.

### **Situating the Research**

Feminist research and research aiming to advance gender equity necessarily falls into conversation with concepts of intersectionality including issues such as race and gender. Intersectionality refers to the ways that an individual's race, gender, class, ability, ethnicity and other characteristics interact and impact their life experiences, perspectives, and privilege (Gopaldas, 2013). None of those categories has greater general significance than the others, though it might within an individual's experience (West & Fenstermaker, 2016). This research adopted a singular, isolated lens to focus on gender. To address intersectionality, feminist research on gender equity should include considerations of the relationship between sex and gender, the idea that gender falls on a continuum, and gender essentialism. In addition, it must acknowledge the historical relationship of feminism and feminist research to racism, racial



justice causes, and class distinctions. Though feminist research also interacts with other categories, I address these two here because of their specific significance to feminist research. I situate my research in these broader topics, before engaging with subsections on advancing gender equity in snowsports instruction.

### **Gender and Feminism**

In considering gender and feminism, three important aspects of research inform the conversation—the relationship between the meanings of “sex” and “gender,” the idea of gender existing on a continuum, and “gender essentialism.” First, relative to “sex” and “gender” in 2015 the Canadian Institutes of Health Research wrote that, “sex refers to a set of biological attributes in humans and animals” which include chromosomes, hormones, genes, and anatomy, whereas “gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours (sic), expressions, and identities” of individuals and gender diverse people (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2015). Thus, “sex” refers to biological attributes and “gender” refers to behaviors, outward expressions, and involves an individual in relation to others (West & Fenstermaker, 2016). With these definitions in mind, the words “female” and “male” often refer to sex categories, while “masculine” and “feminine” often refer to gender and socially constructed categories (Schudson et al., 2019; Walinga & McKendry, 2014).

Although the terminology of male/female, masculine/feminine, and man/woman are all binary terms, scientists agree that no one sex characteristic determines an individual’s sex. Indeed, scientist argue that both sex and gender exist on continua (van Anders et al., 2017), and that sex and gender can overlap within a human in a variety of ways. Examples of sex and gender overlapping include “people who are transgender (whose gender or sex is different from

what they were assigned at birth), cisgender (whose gender or sex is the same as birth-assignment), gender nonbinary (whose identities and experiences are not women or men, males or females), or intersex (whose bodies are perceived, usually at birth, as not matching expectations for a sex)" (van Anders et al., 2017, p. 195). Because of potential variety of sex and gender expressions between individuals, in this research I prioritized individuals' gender identities as their distinguishing gender characteristics. However, when speaking to an individual's elected gender, people seem to most often use the terms: "female-identified" or "male-identified," which runs counter to the above argument. Because of their prevalence, I used them often in this writing.

Relative to the topic of sex and gender, understanding of the concept of "gender essentialism" and its role in feminist research helps distinguish between gender equity arguments. "Essentialism" generally refers to the assumption that there are definitive characteristics of all members in a group that are innate and predictive of behavior (Meyer & Gelman, 2016; Witt, 2010). "Gender essentialism" then means that there are normative, innate characteristics about members of a gender that are both informative and immutable sources of gender difference (Skewes et al., 2018). For example, an essentialist might assume that all women are kind or that they should be nurturing. Often arguments in support of advancing women in professional arenas have relied on essentialist arguments. For example, people commonly argue that women offer complimentary perspectives to men, so organizations and governments should incorporate quotas to maintain a leadership balance (Skewes et al., 2018). However, researchers have demonstrated a darker side to gender essentialism. Specifically, an individuals' gender-essentialist views can predict the frequency of their sexist opinions (Meyer

& Gelman, 2016) and those views tend to correlate with a higher acceptance of workplace discrimination (Skewes et al., 2018). Thus, relying on gender essentialism and normative characteristics, even in support of gender equity, can actually lead to greater sexism and workplace discrimination. Furthermore, gender essentialism places an inherent binary on conversations of sex and gender and thus excludes consideration of individuals not identified as cis-gendered. In some cases, especially in sport, I found it important to consider essentialist arguments, though for the most part I avoided including essentialist arguments and identified them as such when I did.

With this research I hoped to increase gender equity and intended to support the experiences of all people, who identify as non-male. However, during this project I felt continually limited by the available language to describe sex and gender. Throughout the text I refer to “women”, “nonbinary individuals”, “transgender individuals”, “female-identified instructors”, and “non-males.” I often used the terms “women” and “female-identified” to describe the targets of this research, with the intention that that term encompasses anyone who identifies as a woman, regardless of sex characteristics. At all turns I also intended to include and support anyone who identifies as anything other than a cis man. That said, this research is inherently feminist in that measurements of gender in the snowsports industry still divide genders along a binary and most of the data on snowsports and gendered leadership also follows binary patterns. In the literature review section on gender and leadership, many of the authors focused on women’s experiences. For this reason, I used the terms “women” or “female” to accurately represent the findings in the literature.

### **Feminism and Racism**

An historically fraught relationship has existed for centuries between the positions of white women and of people, specifically women, of color. For example, in colonial and slave societies, settlers often justified the oppression and killing of people of color on behalf of protecting white women (Hamad, 2020). Moreover, a common critique of both feminism and feminist research is that they have tended to exclude the ideas and participation of both lower-class women and women of color (Accapadi, 2007; Collins, 2000; West & Fenstermaker, 2016). This segregation of women based on race and class has become normalized throughout global society and has allowed dominant cultures to assume that their perspectives and experiences of the world apply universally to all people (DiAngelo, 2011). White women possess both the identities of oppressor, in being white, and of being oppressed, in being women in patriarchal society. For this reason, their experiences differ from the experiences of women of color, whose dual identities always proffer disadvantage (Accapadi, 2007).

This research project, aimed at advancing gender equity in snowsports, undeniably addresses a question that most benefits the advancement of women and non-binary individuals who are white and middle-class because of the demographics among snowsports instructors. Throughout the research I invited all members of the Big Sky Mountain Sports School to participate. I was unsuccessful in meaningfully incorporating perspectives of non-white participants into the study, with no visible minorities in the in-person methods and only a few people who identified as Asian during the survey.

### **Women and Leadership**

Despite women's growing presence in the workforce and the widely established value of increased female representation in leadership roles, society has failed to meaningfully

incorporate women into the highest levels of organizational and governmental leadership, and in some cases into entire industries. This relative lack of women, combined with post-feminist, neoliberal ideals, enduring gender stereotypes, and “second-generation bias” (Ely et al., 2011, p. 486), has created a self-perpetuating system in which women continue to experience reduced access to certain jobs, diminished reputations in leadership roles, decreased self-perception, and damaged relationships with other women. In this section, I explore the systemic challenges faced by women, the impacts of those challenges on women, and potential tools to promote social change to the gendered system.

Academics have continually argued that women outpace men in a number of leadership and educational arenas. As elaborated in the section on Gender Expectations, academics point out that women govern more collaboratively than men (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2020; Weyer, 2007) and use more effective leadership styles for handling complexity and creating lasting solutions (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Walinga & McKendry, 2014). In recent decades, women have made significant gains in the workforce and in leadership positions held worldwide (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2020; Stroope & Hagemann, 2011; Vecchio, 2002). For example, in the United States in 2010, women made up almost 50% of the workforce and held about 50% of all management and professional positions (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). As the rate of women’s inclusion has increased over time (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2020), some argued that the “feminization” of leadership roles seemed inevitable (Vecchio, 2002, p. 644).

In most western societies, however, men remain dominant in nearly all aspects of daily life (Hearn, 2004, p. 51), and women are still dramatically underrepresented in the highest paying jobs and in elected leadership (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Derks et al., 2016;

Ely et al., 2011; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Pande & Topalova, 2013). In the U.S. women have never held more than 25% of congressional seats (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2020; Stroope & Hagemann, 2011), women held just over 4% of CEO positions worldwide in 2012 (Pande & Topalova, 2013). Moreover, women in leadership face ongoing discrimination (Cheung & Halpern, 2010) and disproportionate threats and acts of violence (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2020). Thus, the large percentages of capable women in the workforce have proven insufficient to significantly increase female representation at the highest levels of business and organizations. Similarly, although many snowsports schools hire an equal number of women and men each year, fewer women advance to the highest levels (Women's Initiative Task Force, 2020). It has become apparent that "being neutral will do little to support the advancement of women" (Burke, 1993, p. 7).

### *Post-feminism*

Unfortunately, paradoxical beliefs and actions about feminism and the advancement of women pervade society and reinforce existing structures of power. In a 2012 study of sport leadership, Claringbould and Knoppers found that respondents universally agreed on the importance of including more women in leadership positions, but few discussed possibilities for change (p. 407). Similarly, Burke (1993) found that 75% of CEOs wanted to advance women but were simultaneously unwilling to change practices to do so. Indeed, this paradoxical behavior is not unique to men. Over the course of the early 2000s, despite the statistics cited above, decreasing numbers of women considered themselves feminists while increasingly women considered gender equality a given (Pfister, 2010, p. 243). Scholars refer to this phenomenon as "post-feminism," in which women acknowledge the importance of

feminism, but deny that it applies to their lives (Ronen, 2018). Women tend to engage in three postfeminist behaviors that perpetuate existing systemic bias: First, they ascribe inequalities to the past or to distinct environments; Second, they claim there is a current female advantage; Third, they accept current gender distribution as normal (Gill et al., 2017). These behaviors contribute to the existing male hegemony, which is characterized by the adoption and normalization by an entire society of an outlook that only benefits those in power (Hearn, 2004; Cranton, 2011). As Ronen (2018) argued, women's inequality persists "not in spite of, but because workers deny experiencing sexism" (p. 199). Before beginning the research, I anticipated that in male-dominated, hierarchical systems like snowsports instruction these post-feminist attitudes would surface and influence women's investment in gender equity work.

### ***Second Generation Bias***

In addition to the paradoxical, post-feminist behaviors, persistent gender stereotypes and subtle forms of "second generation bias" serve to perpetuate existing systems and limit the advancement of women (Ely et al., 2011). Second generation bias or discrimination refers to patterns of behavior within professional settings that overtime exclude non-dominant groups (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). These behavior patterns tend to be more difficult to identify than overt sex discrimination (Ely et al., 2011) because they often appear gender-neutral in isolation yet create discriminatory patterns in the aggregate (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Second generation bias can appear through social networks, hiring practices, questioning women's competence, interrupting them in conversation (Acker, 2006, Hoyt & Murphy, 2016), failing to protect women from threats of violence (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2020), or hierarchically

distributing tasks (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). Second-generation bias is connected to consistent gender expectations of men and women, which inform the evaluation of men and women.

### **Gender Expectations.**

Connected to gender essentialism, academics consistently cite collaboration, empathy, concern, selflessness, and leadership from within as stereotypically feminine traits, while they describe stereotypically masculine traits as agency, decisiveness, and independence (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ely et al., 2011; Fletcher, 2004; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Walinga & McKendry, 2014; Weyer, 2007). The identification of these differences between sexes dates at least as far back as Freud in 1925 (Gilligan, 1977), and researchers and psychoanalysts have continued to examine and support the idea that women are more relational than men for the last century. In the seventies, psychoanalysts and sociologists, working with their own patients, attributed gender behavior differences to relationships between mother and daughter (Chodorow, 2000), the political environment, the evolution of women's moral judgments (Gilligan, 1977), and the housing of less desirable emotional experiences in women as society prevented men from experiencing them (Chodorow, 1997). Later, researchers made a correlation between the identified male-female differences to leadership theories such as transformational and transactional leadership and argued that women's relationality has advantages in transformative leadership. For example, Eagly et al.'s (2003) meta-analysis of gender-comparative studies, found that among participants with a median age of 44, female managers outpaced male managers on five of six different measurements of transformational leadership which correlates to greater collaborative



tendencies. In addition, the search for male-female differences in leadership has continued to address corruption, social goods, and collaboration. In a comparative study of elected leaders in 17 European countries Jha and Sarangi (2018) found that increasing female representation causes a decrease in governmental corruption, while research on female elected officials in India's quota system has shown that women are more likely to support community needs such as improvements to drinking water and roads (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). Similarly, Sotiriadou and De Haan (2019) found that increasing gender diversity on athletic boards promoted complementary skillsets on teams. All of these arguments have contributed a general understanding of women as more relational than men and the tendency to seek out difference in leadership performance based on sex.

As mentioned earlier, "gender essentialism" occurs when we use these gendered assumptions to judge a person's competence (Ronen, 2018, p. 518; see also Weiner, 2004), yet researchers have shown that stereotypes about men and women are automatic and operate as implicit bias (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574). For example, in Banaji and Hardin's (1996) study of reaction times to gender paired versus mismatched words, participants' reaction times slowed when words contradicted their gendered assumptions, showing that their brains worked harder to overcome gender bias. Furthermore, gender is the most commonly used criterion to categorize people (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574). In a study of name recognition connected to statements, participants were more likely to remember that a statement had been said by a woman, than by a person of a certain race (Stangor et al., 1992). These results showed that individuals recall a person's gender quickly, and often have previously attached assumptions to that gender. This in turn supports arguments that even more so than actual

behavior differences between sexes, social perceptions of gender have impacted women's upward mobility, self-perception, behavior, and relationships (Derks et al., 2016; Ely et al., 2011; Fletcher, 2004; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Walinga & McKendry, 2014; Weyer, 2007). As described below, this occurs largely because traditional descriptions of both work and leadership have relied on stereotypically masculine characteristics. Based on the prevalence and consistency of gender stereotypes of female relationality and male agency, in this research I expected gendered assumptions to potentially impact female-identified instructors' work opportunities and upward mobility.

### **Leadership and work as Masculine.**

White men have dominated the highest hierarchical positions for centuries (Acker, 2006). As a result, expectations of workplaces and leadership have become conflated with stereotypically masculine characteristics (Calas & Smircich, 1993; Fletcher, 2004; Pesonen et al., 2009; Walinga & McKendry, 2014). In their "role congruity theory" Eagly & Karau (2002) stated that "the greater the incongruity between the descriptive norms that define the female gender role and a leader role, the more likely that women are perceived as less qualified for leadership" (p. 577). In addition, they argued that ascribed leadership characteristics differ most from stereotypically female attributes at the highest levels of leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thus, there is an assumed lack-of-fit between women and leadership, which means women are less likely to be considered for leadership positions (Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p. 387). For example, Acker (2006) cited a study in which even when performing the same job in a bank, employees received distinct tasks based on sex, and men's tasks were more conducive to future promotion. In addition, when certain positions require more feminine

characteristics, those positions are systematically devalued (Ronen, 2018), such as human resources or family law (Derks et al., 2016). Thus, in order to be perceived as competent in leadership everyone, including women, experiences pressure to adopt masculine characteristics (Derks et al., 2016; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ely et al., 2011; Fletcher, 2004; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). For this research, understanding the pressures on women to adopt masculine characteristics in male-dominated industries, and the consequences described below, creates a picture of women in the ski industry's context and their likely responses.

### **The Double Bind.**

Society often negatively views women who show masculine, agentic characteristics in leadership because they have violated societal gender expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Weyer, 2007). In fact, gender essentialist beliefs magnify people's negative response to a mismatch between gendered expectations and behaviors (Skewes et al., 2018). This phenomenon, referred to as the "double bind," means that women in leadership face a choice between maintaining a more feminine style and sacrificing perceived competence (see above), or a more masculine style and being respected but not liked (Ely et al., 2011; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Stroepe & Hagemann, 2011; Walinga & McKendry, 2014; Weyer, 2007). Equally as insidious, when women use increasingly popular, post-heroic forms of leadership, such as transformational leadership, their leadership is often misunderstood as weak or mothering (Fletcher, 2004). Further examples of the double bind show up in arguments suggesting that women need to find the balance between "assertiveness and aggression" (Stroepe & Hagemann, 2011, p. 52) or embrace femininity and decisiveness (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). Anecdotally, many female snowsports

examiners I know personally have on occasion received one of two labels, “harsh and abrasive” or “weak and uninspiring”.

### **The Added Challenge of Motherhood.**

All of the above systemic challenges affect women regardless of whether they have children; however, mothers or potential mothers face an additional source of discrimination. Expectations including eight-hour workdays, timeliness, and “total attention to work” all favor the “unencumbered worker” (Acker, 2006, p. 448). They rely on caregivers, who can take over family responsibilities (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012), but women often bear that burden (Weiner, 2004). Beyond that, mothers receive lower compensation, are viewed as less capable (Cheung & Halpern, 2010) and less committed to their jobs, and are held to higher standards than fathers (Saul, 2013). Even policies designed to support families such as part-time work and flexible hours may exacerbate these stereotypes (Acker, 2006). Of the women who earn more than \$100,000 or become CEOs almost half have no children (Cheung & Halpern, 2010, p. 183). Clearly, in current professional systems women face a choice between career success and having children.

In snowsports instruction, which often requires eight-hour days, work on most weekends and holidays, and using days off for skill development, many women at high levels do not have children. Whereas in the United States 80% of women over 35 have children (Statista, 2018), no female National Team member has had children since before 2000, and only seven of 17 female examiners in the Intermountain Division have children. On the current National Alpine Team none of the four female members has children, yet six of 14 men are fathers. Thus, a woman’s choice to have children must relate to her choice to

advance in the snowsports industry. Removing barriers to motherhood in leadership positions could increase the population of women available to advance.

### ***The Impact of Minority Status***

All of the above systemic challenges contribute to the way women are viewed and impacted by others. However, gender stereotypes and working in male-dominated cultures also negatively impact women's self-perception, performance, and relationships to each other.

#### **Stereotype threat.**

A "stereotype threat" exists when one has the real "threat of being judged poorly in settings where a negative stereotype about one's group applies" and it can be conscious or unconscious (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p. 388; see also Saul, 2013). Researchers have shown that regardless of background, the presence of a stereotype threat negatively impacts performance, and that even highlighting the paucity of women in an organization can bring on that threat (Saul, 2013). In addition, when women internalize these negative perceptions (Weyer, 2007), the impacts include disengagement and decreased ambition (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). In cases where threats became overt, as in threats or violence against female leaders, they impacted women's ability to govern effectively and desire to continue (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2020). Thus, working in a male-dominated industry is sufficient to create a stereotype threat and decrease the performance of women. When looking for systemic barriers to women's advancement, it will be important to consider circumstances of increased stereotype threat, especially when people evaluate women in the face of a stereotype threat.

#### **Women's Relationships to Each Other.**

Repeated studies have shown that minority groups experiencing a stereotype threat, will favor the dominant group, adopt behaviors of the dominant group, and distance themselves from their own group (Derks et al., 2011; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Not surprisingly, these behaviors occur more prominently for women in organizations with fewer women in leadership roles (Derks et al., 2011; Ely et al., 2011). Kanter's 1977 work on gender ratios and tokenism argued that heavily skewed groups lead to exaggerated assumptions about individuals in the minority and limit their effectiveness. Joecks et al. (2013) found an important tipping point for the experience and performance of obvious minorities at 30% or at 3 out of 10 people. For example, Claringbould & Knoppers (2012) found that on heavily male-dominated boards, women tried to "act like 'one of the boys'" (p. 412). As a result, women who rise to success in strongly masculine cultures are less likely to support other women or acknowledge existing gender bias (Derks et al., 2011; Ely et al., 2011). This in turn leaves women feeling less connected to each other (Derks et al., 2011) and less likely to view successful women as role models (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). These decreased connections between women are particularly insidious because two identified solutions to stereotype threat include intragroup community-building and the presence of positive, female role-models (Derks et al., 2011; Ely et al., 2011; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Based on this, in a male-dominated industry, such as snowsports, we can assume that women may distance themselves from each other and that deliberate community building will help combat the stereotype threat they experience.

### ***Reinforcing loops***

The paucity of women in political and organizational leadership creates a reinforcing feedback loop, which reproduces and strengthens itself over time. People who spend a lot of time together often share the same skewed understanding of and judgments about reality (Anderson, 2012), and in heavily male-dominated contexts people often accept the gender imbalance as normal, unimportant, or assume they cannot change it (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). Moreover, women filter their contributions to be more masculine and often support existing power structures, since in these male-dominated contexts “naming sexism could be challenging—if not dangerous” (Ronen, 2018. p. 516). All of these behaviors perpetuate the paucity of women in leadership, which then reinforces negative perceptions about women’s leadership (Pande & Topalova, 2013). In snowsports instruction, this reinforcing cycle highlights opportunities to promote change, whether through challenging assumptions about the current gender imbalance, increasing female visibility, or building female community as mentioned above.

### *Approaches Supporting Women in Male-Dominated Industries*

Approaches to solving the challenges faced by women in male-dominated industries range from organizational to individual. The first and most obvious way to combat the challenges experienced by women in male-dominated industries is to increase the number of women in leadership (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Saul, 2013; Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019). In order to do so, organizational changes could include creating an “identity-safe” environment through gender-neutral promotion and hiring practices (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016, p. 393) and supporting affinity groups (Glassman & Glassman, 2017). Sotiriadou and de Haan (2019), however, suggested that the most effective impacts on women’s experiences might come

from individual behaviors, which then impact the whole organization. These could include mentorship from any gender, which research has shown to be effective in advancing women (Farkas et al., 2019). Therefore, in this research I will consider both systemic and individual approaches to support gender equity.

Consistent themes emerge from the literature around individual behaviors that support women's advancement, including the presence of positive role-models and mentors, fostering women's belief in themselves, and surfacing unconscious bias in both men and women. Women who advance in leadership roles commonly cite the impact of role models, mentors, and allies, both male and female, as critical to their success (Farkas et al., 2019; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Pande & Topalova, 2013; Stroope & Hagemann, 2011). Female role models demonstrate to others that progress is possible (Pande & Topalova, 2013; Saul, 2013), while male allies can effectively challenge existing organizational bias (Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019) and may leverage more organizational influence to support mentees (Dreher & Cox, 1996; Farkas et al., 2019). Daynes (2007) defined an ally as someone "who has empathy with but not direct experience of the oppression and systems they are allying against," who uses their positional power to support others (p. 6). In addition, regular encouragement, a growth mindset, and high self-efficacy all help insulate non-dominant groups from stereotype threats (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Saul, 2013). However, before becoming advocates for themselves and women, both men and women need to be convinced of the impacts of second-generation bias (Derks et al., 2016; Ely et al., 2011). Thus, we must expose existing biases within the system to support mentorship and advocacy. In my work, I focus on three individual strategies—increasing female community and role models, surfacing unconscious bias, and identifying systemic bias.



The literature on women and leadership relates directly to my research question and to my lived experience. The relative paucity of women in leadership roles in the snowsports industry (Women's Initiative Task Force, 2020) likely amplifies gender stereotypes, the double bind, and circumstances that cause women to either disengage or distance themselves from other women. Upon reflecting on my own experience, these patterns have emerged for me in the form of competition with or criticism of other women, as if I needed to rise above others to achieve success. The combination of this gender and leadership puzzle with sport, an undeniably masculine environment, likely exacerbates challenges for women in leadership. The most potent means to overcome obstacles to female leadership appear to be improved connections between women and with male advocates at all levels of snowsports instruction, a theme that resonates in recent surveys of female instructors as well (Women's Initiative Task Force, 2020). To engage a broader swath of advocates, challenging existing implicit bias and mental models will prove essential.

### **Women and Sport**

Since snowsports instruction takes place in the context of sport, I next consider literature on the experience of women in sport. This includes the initial conception of sport as masculine, the reproduction of masculinity through sport media and leadership, and studies on performance differences between male and female athletes.

#### ***Sport as Masculine***

Men and women interact in many different arenas, where both organizational cultures and definitions of leadership have adopted masculine characteristics. The culture of sports, however, is perhaps the most intertwined with traditional forms of masculinity. Men

originally created modern sport for themselves, the values of sport reflect those of wealthy, heterosexual, white men, (Anderson, 2009; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 410) and sport remains an inherently gendered institution (Burton & Leberman, 2017). Even in an age when workplaces increase gender integration, sports have maintained extensive segregation as almost all teams are single gender (Anderson, 2009). Women currently only participate in arenas deemed acceptable by men (Pfister, 2010). For example, of the four major professional sports in the U.S. only basketball has a women's league, and the U.S. women's soccer team, despite prolific success and determined advocacy, earned a fraction of what the men's team earned until recently (Fine & Fine, 2021).

For many boys, participation in sports is a defining childhood experience (Hearn, 2004) that through segregation “reinforces a conservative and stabilizing form of masculinity” (Anderson, 2009, p. 4). Single-gender sports prevent boys from seeing women in roles of athletes or leaders and the time commitments of sport decrease the likelihood that boys will form friendships with women (Anderson, 2009). Thus, beyond simply embracing masculinity, sport tends to instill in boys particularly insidious types of masculinity.

### ***Masculinity Reproduced through Sport Media and Leadership***

Both sport leadership and sports media reinforce masculinity in sport. As with national and international trends, few women work at higher levels of sports organizations, and almost none are board-chairs or senior editors (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 404; Pfister, 2010, p. 242). Of 30 countries, only four have women representing more than 30% of their sport governing boards (Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019). The overrepresentation of men in sports leadership and media seems a natural result of the masculine culture. Interestingly, the

greater the athletic success had by a man, the higher the likelihood that he will enter other roles in sports organizations (Anderson, 2009). This means that the men who enter sport leadership and media roles have spent more time in the hyper-masculinized culture of sport, thereby rendering sport leadership hyper-masculinized as well.

Sports media coverage is also biased toward men. Only about five to fifteen percent of sports media covers women's sports (Pfister, 2010, p. 240). In addition, because almost all sportscasters and senior editors are men, the little media coverage of women's sports also tends to be biased (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012, p. 410). For example, female athletes must meet higher standards of physical appearance, and their media success depends on balancing athleticism with femininity (Person et al., 2001). Further, advertising often represents female athletes as sex objects (Pfister, 2010). Indeed, at the highest levels of sport, especially in masculine domains, displays of femininity and "eroticism" have proven to increase a female athlete's marketability (Pfister, 2010, p. 239). Related to this, when women fill media roles, male peers assumed they were hired based on their looks (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012). Thus, as women enter the hyper-masculine world of sports, they must balance their masculine athleticism with feminine sexuality in order to gain media attention. However, as is the case in co-ed sports, such as snowsports, women sometimes must compete directly with men. Here the distinction between sport success and feminine characteristics mentioned earlier diverges greatly, so the experience of the double-bind for women in co-ed sport must be significant.

### *Performance Differences*

An interesting aspect of this dialogue involves the actual performance of sport by women. Weyer (2007) argued that there are two approaches to comparing men and women—either minimize differences between men and women, which may also minimize the strengths of women in a masculine society, or highlight the lasting differences between men and women, which may lead to discrimination against women (p. 489). Clearly both of these approaches have pitfalls. The second approach, referred to as “essentialism” and mentioned earlier in this text, means that we assume there are durable, permanent differences between men and women (Weiner, 2004). As we saw earlier, this discourse is problematic for feminists because averages do not predict performance or behavior in particular cases (Weiner, 2004), because gender exists on a continuum (van Anders et al., 2017), and because essentialist arguments can breed sexism (Meyer & Gelman, 2016). However, an examination of essentialist differences between women and men is relevant in co-ed sport, because some have described sport as the “one institution where men very visibly dominate women” (Anderson, 2009, p. 4).

Current studies of differential strength between women and men report consistent and predictable differences between the two sexes. In the data, women are consistently weaker than men in strength tasks (Jones et al., 2016) and at least 24% of male performances in explosive tasks (Philpott et al., 2020). When comparing untrained, as opposed to elite, athletes, strength and explosive differences increase (Philpott et al., 2020). Furthermore, women have a well-established four to six times higher risk of knee injuries in explosive sports than men (Hewett et al., 2005; Person et al., 2001). Hence, on average men dominate women in the realms of strength, explosion, and knee injury avoidance.

Some scientists, however, dispute these studies as demonstrations of durable differences and instead argue that the culture in which we raise women impacts their performance on strength tests. Nimphius (2019) argued that the training status of an athlete predicts their strength or explosion much better than knowing their gender. Further, the differences between men and women all but disappear when skill increases (Nimphius, 2019), and power discrepancies disappear when scientists either control for muscle mass (Jones et al., 2016) or equal strength (Nimphius et al., 2019). Nimphius et al., (2019) argued that what we attribute to gender differences are actually related to strength, which is a product of gender stereotypes, upbringing, and the masculine nature of sport. Thus, while there are average differences between men and women, one cannot assume those differences apply to specific men and women. These arguments about women in sport have particular relevance to snowsports instruction, where certification rests on physical performance of certain tasks. Given current trends, we can assume that on average male instructors will be stronger and more powerful than female instructors. However, we cannot assume that any female instructor will be unable to out-perform her male colleagues.

The arena of co-ed sport informs the context of this inquiry into advancing women in snowsports instruction. The inherently masculinized nature of sport only exacerbates earlier-cited challenges for women, such as stereotype threat, second-generation bias, and the double bind. Further, for certifications all instructors must pass the same skiing assessments and meet the same standard for success. Based on the studies of strength in men and women, we can assume that on average women will need to prepare more for any strength or explosion-based performance tasks, such as moguls, freestyle handstands, or hop-turns. Thus, the

context of sport in snowsports instruction likely adds additional barriers to the success of women.

### **Challenging Implicit Bias in Individuals and Organizations**

The kind of systems change required to increase female representation in male-dominated arenas requires engaging with implicit individual and systemic biases. Therefore, organizational change attempts on behalf of gender equity must also serve to shift behaviors in addition to individually and organizationally held mental models and implicit biases. In the research methods and particularly in the Bonkers Cocktail Party (BCP), I aimed to promote this type of shift. For these reasons in the literature review of organizational change I consider models of organizational change, adult learning theory, and implicit bias—all of which informed the BCP and argue for a balance between change at a systems level and an individual level.

#### ***Organizational Change Models***

Many theorists of organizational change based their models on Lewin's three stage model of change, which entailed unfreezing the current state, changing existing organizational structures, and refreezing them back into place (Greenwood & Levin, 2006; Schein & Schein, 2016). More recently change theories have instead argued that effective organizations constantly change (Bushe & Marshak, 2015). These theories include two stages—identifying the need for change and helping people as they change (Walinga, 2008). Relative to identifying the need for change, Schein & Schein (2016) argued that discomfort or dissatisfaction must precede movement towards change. Senge (2006) called that discomfort “creative tension” and described it as the difference between our current state and our desired state (p. 139). In the case of advancing women in snowsports, first recognizing the ways the current system reinforces

inequalities will support future movement toward change (Walinga & McKendry, 2014). The first two research methods I used helped identify challenges in the system, whereas the BCP continued to identify challenges and moved the organization toward change.

### ***Org Culture Change through Individual Change***

If, as a result of creative tension, an organization embraces change, it will need to consider organizational systems, cultural patterns, and individual behaviors and values as targets of change. Many theorists argue that all change, whether at the individual, cultural, or organizational level, depends on individual behavioral change for success (Karp, 2005, Lawson & Price, 2003; Schein & Schein, 2016; Stroh, 2015; Walinga, 2008). Even structural change depends on individuals to enact it (Walinga, 2008) and culture results from the aggregation of individual perspectives (Lawson & Price, 2003). Further, according to Schein & Schein (2016) culture stabilizes organizations and resists change, so organizations must frame all change in terms of specific, individual behavioral change (Schein & Schein, 2016, p. 343). For this reason, this research with the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School will include a focus on how individuals can create change on gender equity, while organizationally the school can frame changes on gender equity in terms of specific individual actions.

Any change initiative also involves some level of anxiety for individuals (Schein & Schein, 2016), which in turn limits people's ability to make changes and work together (Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012; Mohammed et al., 2010; Walinga, 2008). Schein & Schein (2016) differentiated the anxiety of change into learning anxiety, or stress about making the change, and survival anxiety, or stress about not making the change. They argued that change

facilitators must decrease learning anxiety so that the change becomes less daunting and include incentives to change that overcome fears. Walinga (2008) addressed this anxiety from a different angle. She argued that when people perceive a lack of control related to change, they shift toward managing their emotions and stress instead of productively solving problems. She argued that helping people acknowledge their lack of control during change helps them find problem-focused strategies to adapt. In response to this anxiety, Schein & Schein (2016) and Lawson & Price (2003) discussed essential organizational elements to reduce anxiety and support individual change. Both argued for the importance of providing positive role models, coaching individuals as part of their working groups, and aligning organizational structures with the change. All of these arguments point to the importance of providing psychological safety—safety to be, contribute, learn, and challenge themselves—to individuals as they participate in change, which in this research proved important when engaging participants to increase gender equity.

A similar line of thought around change emphasizes the importance of surfacing individual and organizational mental models. Senge (2006) defined mental models as our strongly held understanding of how the world works. Organizational changes are unlikely to succeed when they conflict with individual or organizational mental models (Mezirow, 1997; Karp, 2005; Senge, 2006). For this reason, I will next consider adult learning theory and challenging implicit bias as tools to promote change.

### ***Adult Learning Theory and Transformative Learning***

When considering individual learning to support organizational change, theories of transformative learning in adults help to understand the process of individual change.



Transformational learning entails surfacing and examining frames of reference and strongly held beliefs so that our opinions become more justified (Cranton, 2011; Mezirow, 1997; Mezirow, 2003). Further, transformational learning aims to uncover roots of power and injustice, enables people to advocate for themselves, and entails learning through communication (Cranton, 2011; Dirkx, 1998; Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012; Mezirow, 2000). Although some theorists advocate for learning through reasoned discussion (Cranton, 2011; Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012; Mezirow, 1997), while others emphasize the import of emotional and spiritual methods (Dirkx, 1998), all seem to agree that the purpose of transformational learning is to empower individuals. Therefore, in designing this research, I aimed to involve participants in and ultimately give them some ownership over the changes made by Big Sky Resort.

In order to facilitate transformational learning, authors have identified strategies, but not necessarily a clear method. Mezirow (2000) pointed out that true transformational learning occurs rarely and often requires confronting a “disorienting dilemma,” which challenges strongly held beliefs (p. 22). Further, unlearning old mental models typically requires a period of discomfort (Karp, 2005; Schein & Schein, 2016). That said, transformational learning theorists generally support learning through dialectical methods (Karp, 2005; Mezirow, 1997; Mezirow, 2003), which surface mental models so that we can consider them (Karp, 2005). In addition, many argue for facilitating learning communities that are “both supportive and challenging” (Dirks, 1998, p. 9), and create psychological safety (Schein & Schein, 2016). More specifically, Walinga et al. (2011) found evidence that it is possible to unearth our assumptions by critically examining perceived barriers, and by

this method create new solutions. In addition, Schein & Schein (2016) argued that receiving feedback is critical to making individual changes, however, that feedback must be solicited by the learner. Overall, these arguments all suggest that creating a safe environment in which people converse and encounter perspectives that conflict with their own strongly held beliefs can facilitate transformational change.

For this research, I designed the methods to support individuals in challenging their own mental models through discourse in safe environments to promote behavioral changes. That said, as shown below, organizational change around implicit bias also requires structural change to support it. Because I aimed to consider mental models around implicit gender bias, I next also consider organizational and structural methods for facilitating change.

### ***Implicit Bias***

As we have seen, many change models emphasize individual change as the foundation for organizational change. In addition, adult learning models emphasize individual learning from disorienting dilemmas as the basis for transformational change. In the case of increasing female representation at the highest level of snowsports instruction, however, success depends on transforming individuals' mental models including implicit biases and systemic imbalances that disadvantage female-identified and non-binary individuals. Mezirow (2003) pointed out that in adult learning power dynamics can undermine dialogic learning, and an inherent power dynamic exists when mixing dominant and marginalized groups. Further, unlike previous organizational change theories, when dealing with implicit biases, the research suggests relying on individual change to support organizational change may be insufficient without simultaneous structural changes.

**Defining Implicit Bias.**

Implicit biases are unconscious, strongly held, discriminatory beliefs about a target group, and researchers suspect that all humans hold them (Anderson, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2017; Saul, 2013). Implicit biases affect perceptions of and interactions with targeted groups. Even organizations hold implicit bias in their daily practices that serve to maintain inequalities (Acker, 2006, p. 443). Implicit biases are so potent that they often conflict with an individual's expressed beliefs and targeted groups frequently hold implicit biases about themselves (Holroyd et al., 2017; Saul, 2013). When implicit biases reflect existing hierarchical systems, they contribute to patterns of discriminatory behavior, in which systems can create injustice, even without the presence of specific unjust acts (Anderson, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2017).

**Challenging Implicit Bias.**

Implicit biases may prove more difficult to unearth and dismantle than other subjects of adult learning. First, humans both chronically underestimate the extent of their bias against others (Acker, 2006; Anderson, 2012) and overestimate their ability to counteract their bias (Saul, 2013). In other words, humans misunderstand their own biases. Second, even if humans had accurate understandings of their implicit biases, resisting them would require significant effort (Anderson, 2012). For example, evidence shows that resisting biases may produce a reactionary effect and actually increase bias (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Holroyd et al., 2017) and high stress interactions (Saul 2013), especially when external pressures create a "a prescribed manner of thinking or behaving" (Legault et al., 2011, p. 1473). However, changing the motivation for reducing bias from external to internal and making participation voluntary has consistently reduced both implicit and explicit bias (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Legault et al., 2011).

Finally, implicit biases typically benefit dominant groups, who resist attempts to remove that advantage (Acker, 2006). These aspects of challenging implicit bias highlight the limitations of relying on changes in individuals' behavior to increase gender equity in organizations. For these reasons, the majority of authors surveyed supported challenging implicit bias through or in conjunction with organizational systems change, such as improved hiring practices, improved family leave, increased mentorship opportunities for marginalized groups, and better transparency of wage and promotion criteria (Acker, 2006; Anderson, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2017; Pritlove et al., 2019). In this thesis, conversations from the BCP began a process of identifying structural change, and a follow up meeting with the VP of Snowsports and research participants specifically focused on those changes.

One commonly used organizational strategy to combat bias is running diversity trainings, though researchers hold differing opinions about the impacts of diversity programs as a tool to combat implicit and systemic bias. Although Acker (2006), Anderson (2012), and Holroyd et al. (2017) argued for the importance of systemic change to combat bias, Rodgers et al. (2019) pointed out that despite spending billions of dollars annually on diversity initiatives little evidence shows that those programs improve company function. In fact, diversity initiatives can have negative consequences, especially when employees perceive them as compulsory or preventing them from developing their own perspectives (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Glassman & Glassman, 2017; Legault et al., 2013). Rodgers et al. (2019) documented a growing awareness that in fact managers are key to incorporating diversity initiatives. Indeed, it turns out that managers' "diversity mindsets," or opinions about increasing diversity, impact the effective implementation diversity programs (Homan, 2019, p. 2). For example, when employees want

diversity initiatives to succeed or feel responsible for their success, they are more likely to participate (Cunningham, 2008). In addition, diversity initiatives succeed more often when they create conditions for diverse groups to work together on complex tasks (Homan, 2019). For these reasons, when developing organization-wide diversity initiatives, companies need to ensure that any diversity programs support positive diversity mindsets through voluntary training (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016) and create circumstances for collaboration. Thus, even when initiating systemic diversity programs, organizations need to manage individual perspectives around diversity and bias.

Challenging individually held implicit biases also supports dominant groups in becoming allies, an important aspect previously mentioned in advancing gender equity. Daynes (2007) pointed out that becoming an ally requires “uncovering power, privilege, and values” (p. 12), all of which entail challenging bias. Additionally, there is evidence that under certain circumstances individuals’ experiences can have lasting effects on implicit biases. First, the authors reviewed above did find success when challenging individuals’ implicit biases, specifically when those individuals consciously espoused opposing values (Acker, 2006; Anderson, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2017; Saul, 2013). Furthermore, some suggested that finding educational, non-judgmental, and low-risk ways to challenge biases can lead people into a safer space for accepting feedback on their biases (Zheng, 2016), especially when learning exposed individual privilege (Knowles et al., 2014). Specifically, researchers have found success in two promising methods for challenging implicit biases, which include perspective taking and counter-storytelling. Perspective taking entails having individuals think about the experience of being in another person’s situation (Madera, 2018; Todd et al., 2011). Research has shown that perspective-taking

reduces overt bias against and increases empathy towards stigmatized groups (Madera, 2018). Furthermore, perspective taking also improves “automatic interracial evaluations,” or implicit biases, and interpersonal behaviors between different groups (Todd et al., 2011, p. 12). Thus, perspective taking promotes meaningful changes in individuals’ behaviors and attitudes. Similarly, in counter-storytelling, researchers have used stories from the margins of society to challenge dominant narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Counter-storytelling can help participants discuss issues of racism and bias and serves as an important tool to counter false notions of “objectivity, color blindness, white supremacy, and meritocracy” (Cho, 2017, p. 669). Both perspective-taking and counter-storytelling rely on story or imagination to promote change and increased empathy in the dominant culture. These tools challenge biases and help bridge intergroup divides. Both of them supported the design of creating structured, productive conversations around gender bias in the BCP.

Overall, for this research project, it appeared that challenging systemic bias would most effectively result from a combination of shifting individuals’ strongly held mental models in conjunction with changing organizational systems to promote gender equity. To do this, in my research methods, I first unearthed instances of systemic bias. Next, I incorporated concepts of adult learning by promoting community dialogue around gender equity in the Focus Group. In the BCP, I created disorienting dilemmas through storytelling and perspective taking, designed opportunities for groups of any gender to problem solve together, and maintained circumstances of minimal risk. Finally, in a meeting with Christine, the VP of Mountain Sports and research participants, I facilitated a discussion to identify specific systemic changes in the Mountain Sports School to decrease gender bias. See Chapter 3 for specific details.

The three topics of this literature review—Women in Leadership, Women and Sport, and Challenging Implicit Bias in Organizations—supported the research questions, method design, and data analysis of this research. Chapter 3 explains each of the data collection methods in detail, the participants in each, data collection strategies, and data analysis.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

#### Methodology

For this research I used the Action Research Engagement (ARE) model in conjunction with Feminist Action Research (FAR) while gathering data with an appreciative lens (Stavros et al., 2018). Foundationally, I took a constructivist approach to knowledge, assuming that knowledge production is inherently subjective and socially generated (Hesse-Biber et al., 2015). In general, engaged, action-oriented approaches aim to do research “with” people (Hersted et al., 2019, p. 10). This research centered around the client’s needs (Schein, 1995, p. 15) and produced learning for both the researchers and subjects (Fazey et al., 2018, p. 64). In ARE projects, the researcher and client work together through all phases of the research, including identifying changes, but stop short of implementing them (Rowe et al., 2013). Thus, when working with the Big Sky Mountain Sports School, we analyzed cultural and organizational practices that impede and support women in order to identify strategies for increasing gender equity therein. However, most implementation of the recommended changes will not occur until the start of the next winter season.

The FAR methodological lens is uniquely suited to research on gender equity in the snowsports industry. FAR is an extension of Participatory Action Research (PAR), which evolved as an emancipatory research methodology to challenge power dynamics in communities, in organizations, and between researcher and subjects (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019; Greenwood & Levin 2006; Reid, 2004). “Emancipatory knowledge is self-knowledge, leading to growth, development and freedom from oppression” (Cranton, 2011, p. 81). Researchers who follow FAR methodology push the democratic ideals of PAR further to



challenge consistent gender discrimination and work toward inclusion and social change for women (Frisby et al., 2009; Reid, 2004; Weiner, 2004). Because true emancipatory knowledge serves all people, Reid (2004) called inclusion the highest principle of FAR and, in this research, I aimed to include people who do not fall into binary gendered categories as well. In addition, organizational change theorists agree that including workers in change efforts support their success (Dickson et al., 2012; Schein & Schein, 2016). Indeed, examples of PAR and FAR include many different voices and bring research subjects into the research conduction process (Swantz, 2008). For these reasons, during my research I engaged women at many levels of the organization in the research, planning, and meaning-making phases.

In support of FAR methodology, I also used principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to investigate positive aspects of the snowsports industry. Researchers use AI as a methodology to positively impact social systems by inquiring into the best of what currently exists and amplifying those aspects (Bushe, 1999). One of the potential drawbacks of PAR (and FAR by extension) methodologies is that they can overemphasize fixing problems, and in so doing alienate participants (Boyd & Bright, 2007, p. 1024). Using AI enables researchers to build trust with the community and avoid defensiveness. I used AI in particular when inviting participants to engage in the research and in starting dialogue about gender in snowsports instruction. Already aspects of PSIA-AASI's and Big Sky Resort's operations effectively recruit women and encourage them through opportunities for growth, mentorship, and job benefits (Women's Initiative Task Force, 2020, p. 10). In addition, before this research the Big Sky Mountain Sports School in many ways led the industry in female leadership, so I wanted to identify the best aspects of the school that could benefit other parts

of PSIA-AASI. In other words, by pairing FAR and AI methodologies, I believe I challenged the status quo within the Big Sky Mountain Sports School, while amplifying current strengths.

My project included three research methods, a survey, a focus group, and a “Bonkers Cocktail Party” (BCP) (designed based on the literature review in conjunction with Brown & Isaacs, 2005; Kolb, 1984; Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014). It concluded with a debrief among participants and school leadership to share findings and decide on next steps (Rowe et al., 2013). See below for further information.

### **Data Collection Methods**

In this research project I used three methods of data collection in a “qualitatively driven,” sequential, mixed method design (Hesse-Biber et al., 2015, p. 6). The research question, “how might Big Sky Mountain Sports School and PSIA-AASI increase gender equity within the highest levels of certification and leadership in snowsports instruction?” was exploratory and lent itself to qualitative research (Wilson, 2008). However, in order to better design subsequent methods, the initial survey included quantitative questions to understand the demographic context and distribution of opinions among the instructor population. Following the survey, each method sought only qualitative information. In addition to sources and data collected from the survey, I used my experience and advice from my inquiry team to guide specific questions for the Focus Group and BCP. As an informed researcher with extensive experience throughout PSIA-AASI, who understands internal language, systems, and experience, I believe my background in snowsports gave me an increased level of comfort with participants. See Appendices, for the specific method designs and invitation letters.

### *Survey*

I first employed a survey to learn instructors' demographics and certification levels as well as common cultural and systemic aspects in Big Sky Resort that help or hinder instructor development. I gathered quantitative data in predominantly closed questions on demographic components, such as age, ethnicity, experience teaching, and certification level to provide background information for later questions (Andres, 2012; Hesse-Biber et al., 2015). Next, I gathered data about hindrances and supports in snowsports instruction using open-ended, qualitative questions. I chose this strategy because gender-bias affects individuals differently (Ely et al., 2011) and I wanted to avoid influencing participants' responses (W. Lepore, personal communication, July 15, 2021). I aimed to understand the prevalence of barriers and supports in the context of instructors' career goals. Using open-ended questions, I left space for unpredicted results and the stories within the Big Sky Mountain Sports School to emerge. For a complete list of survey questions, see Appendix F (Andres, 2012).

### *Focus Group*

For the second research method, I designed a focus group for women and non-binary identified instructors (WFG). In general, a focus group is a style of group interview, performed with the intention to learn about the group's collective experience on a topic (Ryan et al., 2014). This method brought together a group of female instructors with the shared goal of advancing women in snowsports. Using purposive sampling to maximize variation (Etikan et al., 2016) from those who expressed interest, I chose the 8 participants with the most diverse backgrounds based on years of experience, certifications, and age. The group included a mix of skiers and snowboarders with ages ranging from 20 to 60, certified at either level one or two, and with

years of teaching experience ranging from two to eight years. During the focus group, I facilitated in a semi-structured manner, with the intention to draw out individual stories and create opportunities for dialogue among the group (Morgan, 1997; Ryan et al., 2014). In addition to gathering data from participants, I hoped to generate meaningful conversations and connections between the participants, since close relationships between women in male-dominated professions have been shown to support female advancement (Ely et al., 2011; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Furthermore, in FAR methodology, research participants often do research as well (Reid, 2004). For this reason, in addition to providing insights into a cultural analysis of gender dynamics in the Big Sky snowsports school, I invited this group to participate in subsequent research methods, which included problem-solving in addition to gathering data. By working together, this group with divergent experiences had an opportunity to share commonalities among and differences between their experiences as women in snowsports. For a complete list of questions, see Appendix I.

### ***Bonkers Cocktail Party***

The third research method I refer to as the “Bonkers Cocktail Party” (BCP). The BCP consisted of two parts, an experiential storytelling and sharing component, and a debrief in the form of a World Café (Brown & Isaacs, 2005; Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014) (For complete instructions see Appendix L). With this method I aimed to create an environment in which the entire community could participate in problem-solving conversations about gender equity in snowsports instruction. Before this could happen, I wanted the entire group, and specifically male-identified instructors, to experience transformational learning (Mezirow,

1997) around gender equity so that all participants had an opportunity to examine their unconscious biases and become more effective allies (Daynes, 2007; Pritlove et al., 2019).

Specifically, the storytelling phase of the BCP consisted of structured social interaction, in which male participants asked scripted questions of female participants and were not permitted to add their own interpretations. The storytelling section evolved from research on the value of perspective taking to reduce social barriers in equity conversations (Madera, 2018; Todd et al., 2011) and from counter-storytelling strategies, which center the stories of marginalized individuals to challenge narratives of the dominant culture (Cho, 2017; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). In this case, I chose to use storytelling to create transformational learning around gender bias. For this reason, I centered non-male stories (Stroope & Hagemann, 2011), reversing cultural norms in which women take on peripheral roles (Fletcher, 2004), used questions to highlight differences between male and non-male experiences, and challenged societal gender norms of male agency and female community (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fletcher, 2004).

To facilitate the storytelling experience, I relied on four concepts of transformational change and challenging bias from the literature review. First, transformational learning entails uncovering roots of power and injustice, enabling people to advocate for themselves, and learning through communication (Cranton, 2011; Dirkx, 1998; Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012; Mezirow, 2000). Second, facilitating individual or organizational change requires generating “creative tension” (Senge, 2006, p. 139) and in this case first identifying the ways individuals and the current system uphold gender bias (Walinga & McKendry, 2014). Third, to successfully promote this transformational change, it was important to support

psychological safety throughout the process (Lawson & Price, 2003; Schein & Schein, 2016; Walinga, 2008). Lastly, many argue challenging implicit biases is most effective when those individuals challenged consciously hold opposing values (Acker, 2006; Anderson, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2017; Saul, 2013). These four criteria underpinned the design of the storytelling component of the BCP. To address the first component, in the storytelling, all questions related directly to aspects of power dynamics in Big Sky that previous methods had unearthed, and only non-males told stories. To address the second, having participants hear stories addressing the same theme from a variety of people helped expose trends in non-male experiences and increased their perceived significance. Relative to psychological safety, studies have shown that engaged listeners promote vulnerability and psychological safety (Castro et al., 2016; Castro et al., 2018), whereas distracted listeners undermine storytellers' sense of self and engagement in their stories (Pasupathi & Rich, 2005). For these reasons, I carefully scripted the questions men could ask and their responses so that without specific training, listeners' explicit role might support them in appearing attentive and engaged (Rost & Wilson, 2013). Moreover, scripted responses might prevent listeners from focusing on their own stories or defensive responses and enable them to listen more actively (Rost & Wilson, 2013). In addition to this, to promote psychological safety I had participants first ask permission to interview each other. Lastly, because participation was voluntary and I shared all of the details of the BCP in advance, I felt confident that the majority of the participants supported increased gender equity in snowsports instruction. Thus, they were well positioned to unearth and challenge their own implicit biases.

The debrief of this experience took the form of a World Café (Brown & Isaacs, 2005; Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014) (World Café questions Appendix L), and provided all data for the method. During the World Café, each group took notes on flip chart paper and I recorded each person as they shared their next steps for change. The BCP intentionally followed the WFG, so that members who participated in both had already begun to think critically about their experiences as women in snowsports and were potentially more likely to participate thoughtfully in the structured social interaction of the BCP. I identified the specific topics and questions presented at the BCP from a review of the survey and WFG data as well as through conversations with my inquiry team (See Appendix L).

### ***Make it Happen Meeting***

In the final phase of research, I facilitated a “make-it-happen” debrief with focus group and BCP participants and Christie Baker, the Vice President of Mountain Sports at Big Sky Resort. During this meeting the group discussed the biggest challenges revealed by the research process and identified recommendations for the Big Sky Mountain Sports School to better support women. These meetings used FAR methodologies by engaging female participants in decisions about future changes (Frisby et al., 2009; Reid, 2004). Relative to following the ARE process, the meetings represented the end of the official research process and transferred decision making responsibility to the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School (Rowe et al., 2014).

### **Project Participants**

For each method I drew upon the instructors and supervisors at Big Sky Resort, MT as participants. To minimize ethical risk, I excluded all participants under 18 years old. To manage power-over dynamics, I excluded supervisors from the focus group and restricted

their participation in the BCP (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). For the survey (see Appendices D, E, and F), I recruited as many participants as possible from the 375-member snowsports school staff, of any gender. In the end, 62 people fully completed the survey.

During the focus group (see Appendices G, H, and I), I wanted to gain and share a nuanced understanding of the challenges experienced by non-male individuals throughout snowsports instruction and to foster their connection to each other. For this reason, I recruited and chose participants, all female or non-binary, with the most diverse instruction and life backgrounds, relative to age, teaching experience, certification level, and snowsports discipline. In the end, certification levels ranged from 0 to 2, ages ranged from 20 to 60, and the group included 2 snowboarders, 6 skiers, and 1 instructor of both. Although including senior women in the focus group might have diversified the conversation, for this method I excluded examiners or supervisors, who may have had power over other participants.

In the “Bonkers Cocktail Party” (See Appendices J, K, & L) I invited all members of the snowsports school to participate. I restricted supervisors’ participation during the storytelling phase to manage power-over dynamics and allowed them to participate with everyone else during the World Café portion. Overall, 15 people participated in the BCP, 6 identified as male, and 9 as female, 10 of the participants worked as supervisors of instructors.

Lastly, for the “make-it-happen” meeting I invited representatives from the WFG and BCP to collaborate with Christine Baker on the changes that might more effectively support women moving forward. This group included 5 participants, 3 who participated in the BCP



and 2 who participated in both the WFG and the BCP. Three worked as supervisors and 2 worked as instructors.

## **Inquiry Conduct**

### *Survey*

I began this research with a survey to engage participants throughout the Big Sky Mountain Sports School (see Appendices D, E) in late-December (for a complete timeline of the thesis, see Appendix A). I invited all members of the Big Sky Mountain Sports School to participate via their internal communication system and shared an Invitation (Appendix D) and the Research Information Letter (Appendix B). I conducted this survey through Royal Road's access to Survey Monkey to protect participants' privacy. The survey included quantitative and qualitative components (Hesse-Biber, 2017). For all methods, I pilot tested questions with my inquiry team and advisor prior to beginning (Andres, 2012). Quantitatively, I wanted to know instructors' gender identification, age (by decade), ethnic and racial background (though these were optional), number of years teaching, and current certification level. Next, I asked all instructors the following questions: What are your ultimate goals in working as a snowsports instructor? If you could have any type of support in reaching your goals, what would be most useful to you in achieving them? What obstacles do you anticipate in reaching your goals? What, if anything, would cause you to leave snowsports for another industry?

These questions were intentionally open-ended to generate new ideas. After coding and theming this data based on demographic information, trends informed questions for the WFG and the BCP (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). Answers to these questions indicated what

instructors needed most in terms of support, what they viewed as systemic obstacles, and what would cause them to leave the pipeline. I wanted to find discrepancies between answers based on gender identity as well as answers at different ages and certifications. I also highlighted qualitative outliers as sources of future conversation. I used thematic analysis to process this data (Nowell et al., 2017).

### ***Women's Focus Group***

After completing the survey in January, I convened a sample of female-identified staff from the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School in a focus group in early February (Morgan, 1997). Because of the Covid-19 outbreak in early 2022, the WFG participants met on Zoom, again using Royal Roads University's access to protect participants. Through this method I aimed to learn about their common experiences, to expose patterns, and to build connection between women at varying levels of instruction. In addition to collecting data, both of the last two outcomes support women's performance in male-dominated environments (Derks et al., 2011; Ely et al., 2011; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). I began the WFG with the results of the survey and asked for stories of relevant experiences (See Appendices G, H, & I for detailed descriptions). In this conversation I included storytelling questions, positive experiences, and discussion of challenges to reflect both FAR methodologies and an appreciative stance. In order to support these women in a participatory model (Swantz, 2018), the women shared their most salient takeaways to bring forward to the BCP. I used both their takeaways and the recorded session as my data. As mentioned previously, both the dialogue and the data were helpful to understanding how current systems affect female instructors.

***Bonkers Cocktail Party***

Next, I facilitated the “Bonkers Cocktail Party” (BCP) in late March. The BCP included two parts, a storytelling section and a debrief in the form of a World Café, each lasting an hour. During the storytelling activity, male-identified instructors received a set of questions to ask, which focused on non-males’ experiences in the snowsports school (for a complete set of instructions, see Appendix K). Male-identified instructors were not allowed to deviate from the script or make any statements in response to the stories. Female-identified or non-binary instructors were invited to speak freely and share stories with whomever they chose. Because fewer male-identified instructors participated than non-males, female participants could also ask the scripted questions to other women. Any person from the snowsports school was invited to attend. To manage power over dynamics, supervisors could only ask questions of peers, unless an instructor approached them to be asked.

In the invitation to the BCP I clearly stated the structure for the event and asked that only people committed to its success attend (See Appendices J, K, & L for details). Conversations from the focus group informed the list of questions for the BCP and three members of the focus group participated in the BCP. I specifically invited WFG participants because their previous conversation could promote depth in thinking about the challenges of female-identified instructors in the snowsports industry. Throughout the session participants had access to paper and writing tools to share their thoughts and reactions. Data collection and analysis included written thoughts from the participant debrief, which took the form of a World Café (Brown & Isaacs, 2005) and a recording of the last round of shared thoughts (For a complete list of World Café questions, see Appendix L).

After the survey, WFG, and BCP, Christine and I organized a group conversation with the goal of recommending implementable, systemic changes to benefit female instructors during the season. We used data and experiences from the research methods to inform the conversation. This group included interested participants from both the WFG and the BCP. The intent of these recommendations was to identify systemic strategies to challenge the barriers identified through other research methods. Initially, I used Nominal Group Technique, in which all members shared one idea at a time until all members had shared all ideas (Dunham, 2006) because, although not technically a research method, this group did include power-over dynamics. See Chapter 5 for recommendations from this conversation. Next season, I will meet with the same group to gauge the success of these changes and potentially implement new solutions.

Throughout the research I met regularly with my inquiry team to check the relevance of my questions and share new insights. They provided ongoing relevance and clarity checks as I moved forward with each method. Christine proved invaluable in recruiting participants and suggesting timelines that worked best for her staff. Kirstie, the Executive Director of the PSIA-AASI Intermountain Division, gave feedback on my questions for each method. I believe Christine and Kirstie's investment in the project and presence in PSIA-AASI will help support lasting change from the research.

### **Data Analysis and Validity**

Successful outcomes of this research include offering credible information that in turn helps other parts of PSIA-AASI support female advancement (Scotland, 2012). Data analysis relied on content analysis through coding and theming (Nowell et al., 2017) and member

checking (Stringer, 2007) for qualitative data. Content analysis involved categorizing the open-ended questions from the survey, the focus group and the BCP into theoretical codes as they emerged from the literature review and the research (e.g., stereotype threat, mentorship for career improvement, balancing personal goals with feminist actions, implicit bias, etc.). From there I identified salient themes which included lesson assignments, minority experience, self-doubt, mentorship, and solutions. Member checking included confirming quoted information with focus group participants, having the BCP participants write findings as groups, and having the BCP participants share one salient takeaway.

Throughout the process I addressed aspects of Stringer's (2007) definition of rigor in qualitative research, which included "credibility [and] transferability" (Stringer, 2007, p. 57) by working with participants for extended time periods. For this reason, both the WFG and the BCP lasted over two hours and left time for thorough discussion (Stringer, 2007). To further support credibility, for in-person research methods I used member checking as a tool to confirm my analysis by asking for salient takeaways in the WFG and using participant generated notes and allowing them to choose their recorded suggestions in the BCP. When I cited individual participants in the findings, I confirmed with the individual the quoted text or sentiment matched their intention. Lastly, I tried to include a diversity of stakeholders in the process, mixing disciplines, experience levels, and roles in the snowsports school. Regarding transferability, I documented the specific context and events surrounding my data collection so that others may apply these to similar situations.

As a researcher I was concerned with the authenticity of the process. PSIA-AASI has an inherently hierarchical system. I could assume that all research participants fall into that

hierarchy and that my elevated location within it might limit conversation. To address this, I aimed to hear opinions from everyone, avoid marginalizing any group, and created research methods that could deliberately increase the capacity of participants in the future (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 140).

### **Ethical Implications**

The Canadian government's panel on research ethics identified three core principles of research ethics: respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (TCPS2, 2018). The United States' Belmont Report identifies the same principles of ethical research but replaces "concern for welfare" with "beneficence" (Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). Below I discuss my approach to each of these core principles of research ethics.

According to the TCPS2 (2018), respect for persons entails respecting their autonomy by acquiring their unpressured, informed, and ongoing consent. To address this, I shared as much information as possible with participants in advance of their participation, including the purpose of the method, the questions, and the facilitated design (See Appendices B, E, H, & K for an information letter and invitations). I offered and frequently reiterated the opportunity to withdraw at any point. Further, I relied on Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School's hiring standards to screen individuals with cognitive impairment, who might not be able to make informed consent. I excluded anyone under 18 from participation.

Managing power-over dynamics in my research presented an interesting dilemma. PSIA-AASI operates in a hierarchical system. As individuals gain certification, they may then occupy a position of seniority over others with lesser certification status. Specific to this project and my own involvement, as a member of the PSIA-AASI Alpine Team and a certification examiner for

the Intermountain Division, it would be possible for me to have power over any participants in my research with plans to pursue certification. To solve this, I chose to work with Big Sky Resort, which is neither my home resort nor part of the division where I give exams. Thus, I did not have actual power over any participants. Still participants could have perceived power-over in that I occupy a high status within PSIA-AASI. To address this, I continually reminded participants that they were free to withdraw at any time and that I had no expectation for their participation.

Relative to other power-over dynamics, potential existed within my group methods for the hierarchies of the Big Sky staff or of PSIA-AASI certification to create a power-over relationship. To manage this, for each of my group methods I created opportunities for people to share their opinions afterward and managed participation so that every person had an opportunity to speak. In addition, I excluded direct supervisors and examiners from the WFG. For the BCP, I limited supervisors' engagement with instructors during the first phase of conversation and storytelling by only allowing them to interview instructors who approached them. Later, everyone interacted together during the World Café debrief. I also created anonymous opportunities for information sharing with available flipchart paper and opportunities to email me afterward. While facilitating the "make-it-happen" conversation, although it was not a research method, I ensured that everyone had similar opportunities to speak through the Nominal Group technique (Dunham, 2006).

For all of my methods I excluded participants under 18 years of age to minimize risk. Participants in this age category represent a very small percentage of the instructor population, so I was not concerned about excluding this data.

The TCPS2 (2018) defined concern for welfare as adequately weighing the risks and benefits for participants associated with participating in the methods and providing enough information so that participants can make informed decisions. As this research largely included female-identified participants and aimed to advance the cause of gender equity in snowsports instruction, I believed the value to participation outweighed the risks. For male-identified participants, much research has demonstrated the benefits of improved gender-equity in leadership (see Literature Review section on Women and Leadership) and snowsports schools' need for highly trained women, so I believe the benefits to male-identified participants also outweighed the risk of participation.

Relative to the BCP, I anticipated that some male-identified participants might be uncomfortable with the structured conversation dynamic. I was transparent about the purpose and plan so that all participants could make informed consent (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017) (See Appendix J). I also ensured that participants could leave at any time. Lastly, by excluding or separating supervisors and trainers during group methods, I believe I minimized the risks of participation for less senior instructors.

Finally, the TCPS2 defined justice as the need to treat all people fairly and equitably. The report specifically mentions that marginalized populations may need additional focus to be treated equitably in research. I specifically addressed this aspect of ethics through the design of my research methods. Both the WFG and the BCP were designed with common strategies to support non-males in organizations and to challenge traditional gender roles. I believe my research treated female-identified and non-binary instructors equitably and that the benefits outweighed the risks of participation.



### **Proposed Outputs**

I defined success in this thesis as identifying and generating changes that support gender equity at Big Sky Resort and potentially throughout the snowsports industry. Ideally these changes will either remove barriers or advance structures that better support non-males in the industry. Successful change entails creating structural systems change on issues that the participants in the study identified as important. Successful change also increases awareness throughout the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School of the impacts of gender bias in heavily male-dominated organizations. In addition, I hoped to identify transferable changes that other schools or PSIA-AASI divisions could implement as well. After my thesis defense, I planned to publish my thesis and to present my research to both Big Sky Resort and to PSIA-AASI's national and divisional organizations, with the hope of drawing attention to systemic bias throughout the organization and supporting change therein. In addition, I aimed to publish an article on the results in an academic journal as well as *32 Degrees*, the journal of professional snowsports instruction.

### **Contribution and Application**

In the words of Cheryl Heykoop (C. Heykoop, personal communication, July 20, 2021), what I “expected” to contribute from this project included insight into the experiences of female-identified and non-binary instructors and more effective knowledge sharing about those experiences within the Big Sky Resort community. I “wanted” to promote investment on the part of all genders in the Big Sky Resort community in the project, and to generate changes that meaningfully impact non-males’ experiences. I “hoped” to have third-person impact (Torbert &

Taylor, 2008) by promoting this dialogue at more levels of PSIA-AASI and by identifying patterns that translate to other schools with different contexts.

### **Chapter 4: Inquiry Project Findings and Conclusions**

In chapter four, I lay out the findings from data analysis of the survey, focus group, and Bonkers Cocktail Party. Next, I report the study conclusions in response to the original research question: “How might Big Sky Mountain Sports School and PSIA-AASI increase gender equity within the highest levels of certification and leadership in snowsports instruction?” I also address each of the five sub-questions of the research: 1) How do current practices, cultural norms, or mental models within snowsports schools affect women’s longevity as instructors? 2) What barriers exist to their advancement? 3) Which current practices support women’s career development toward certification and leadership? 4) How might we create cultures in snowsports schools that willingly engage systemic biases? 5) Which systematic changes will support women’s advancement?

Below I reference participants from each of the three research methods. In the findings, I identify survey responses by the question (e.g., Survey Q1) or by question and respondent order (e.g., Survey Q11, R23). Lastly, I identify BCP contributions either by the question number and group number (e.g., BCP Q3, G1) if the response was written during the World Café portion, or by participant number (e.g., BCP P7) if the response was recorded during the individual share out portion.

#### **Study Findings**

Five significant themes emerged from this research, including Lesson Assignments, Mentorship, Self-Doubt, Minority Experience, and Solutions. The themes emerged from coding qualitative responses, and codes reflected information found in the literature review or prevalent

topics of discussion. For a table of themes, codes, findings, and conclusions see Appendix N.

The study's findings are as follows:

1. Participants agreed that current habits in assigning lessons and recognizing achievements rely on biased decisions from both supervisors and clients. They further agreed that bias is exacerbated by differences in self-advocacy between males and non-males.
2. Female-identified instructors expressed feelings of intimidation, unfair judgment, and self-doubt much more frequently than male-identified participants. They also reported that their minority experiences contributed to significant gender bias, stereotype threat, tokenism, and microaggressions. Those feelings intensified in more male-dominated populations and at higher levels of skiing and snowboard performance.
3. The participating female-identified snowboard instructors articulated less interest in or even aversion to affinity groups and female mentorship, which contradicted the statements of the female-identified skiers.
4. Both younger staff and female staff placed a high value on mentorship programs that highlight and prioritize mentor choice and professional growth.
5. During the empathy building activities in the BCP, both male and female instructors and supervisors expressed a heightened awareness of gender bias in lesson assignments, which causes women to receive emotionally challenging lessons, while men receive physically challenging lessons.

6. Suggested changes to support non-male advancement within the snowsports school included addressing gender bias in lesson assignments and creating more gender balance in training groups or increasing available affinity training.

### ***Bias in Lesson Assignments and Recognition***

This finding relates to the first research sub-question: How do current practices, cultural norms, or mental models within snowsports schools affect women's longevity as instructors? Participants agreed that current habits in assigning lessons and recognizing achievements rely on biased decisions from both supervisors and clients, which tend to underestimate the skills of non-male-identified instructors (Survey Q11, R37). Specifically, a number of comments from each of the research methods referenced the tendency for supervisors to assign emotionally challenging lessons to non-male instructors and physically challenging lessons to male instructors (FG 5). According to FG 7, "we always get pigeonholed into being nurturers." One survey respondent elaborated that her "biggest obstacle has been not being able to teach lessons that are at the ability/difficulty level that my certifications are held at... I've noticed that myself and many of my female co-workers (almost particularly with a higher-level cert) are put on 'difficult' lessons in terms of behavior and people management, whereas men are often put on lessons that are considered 'difficult' because of terrain" (Survey Q11, R18). Similarly, a BCP participant, who is a supervisor, certified at the highest level, and a guide at Big Sky, was given a lesson with a 3-year-old instead of a private lesson as a guide, because she was "a better fit" than a male coworker (BCP P7). One Focus Group participant put it clearly when she said, "I think my biggest issue is, I worked really hard to get my [level] two to prove that I was a good teacher and I was a good skier and then it seems like nothing really came of it. And... there are still level one

boys getting higher level lessons even though they're literally not as good and so that just really bothers me" (FG 4). Indeed, during the BCP many supervisors acknowledged the impact of their own gender biases in their decisions about lesson assignments (BCP P2, 5, 9, 11, 12, 14).

Furthermore, participants agreed that clients also demonstrate gender bias when requesting or evaluating snowsports instructors. Indeed, a major learning reported during the BCP was that "bias extends to the clients we work with" (BCP G1, Q1). Female-identified instructors told stories of needing to prove themselves to clients in guide program (BCP G2, Q1), of guests who skied off after being assigned a non-male instructor (FG 3), of being tested by guests (FG 1), and of continually receiving lessons that request female for little kids or scared clients (FG 3). One instructor said, "if I get one more lesson note that says that a patient female was requested, I'm going to lose my shit... pardon my language, but like I get so many... private lessons [with a] patient female requested" (FG 3). A particular problem with this client bias, as one supervisor in the BCP pointed out, is that if six clients request female instructors to work with little kids on the same day, the snowsports school only has male instructors left to send to high-level lessons (BCP P15). Thus, according to participants, the bias of clients has had a significant impact on the gendered nature of lesson distribution.

Many participants further agreed that differences in self-advocacy between males and non-males exacerbate gender bias in lesson assignments in that non-male instructors frequently hesitate to request changes, while supervisors tend to take the path of least resistance. One focus group participant summed it up excellently in an interaction with her supervisor, "he said, 'the reason I send you to level one is because you never complain'" (FG 5). Focus group participants further pointed out that women are often taught to "go along and smooth things over" (FG 5) and

that society brands certain behaviors in men as self-advocacy, but in women as complaining (FG 7). Beyond these social tendencies, participants in all methods discussed the prevalence of self-doubt and intimidation that prevents non-male employees from asking for change. Another Focus Group member, regarding a requested position change said, “it was intimidating, I thought about it for probably a year longer than I should” (FG 1). Lastly, it is possible that individual supervisory behaviors that discourage complaining may also exacerbate gendered behaviors toward self-advocacy. For example, one instructor stated that “management and supervisors have lauded... not complaining and it pisses me off, because it doesn't let people stand up for themselves” (FG 4). Related to this during the BCP supervisors suggested they would deliberately change their perspectives on self-advocacy to better support instructors (BCP P7, 15).

Thus, according to participants in all aspects of this research, gender bias plays a significant role in how supervisors assign lessons. Participants’ comments highlighted that gender bias comes from both supervisor and clients’ biases. In addition, masculine and feminine communication styles around self-advocacy enable the continued distribution of physically challenging lessons to male-identified instructors and emotionally challenging lessons to female-identified instructors.

### ***Intimidation, Unfair Judgment, and Self-Doubt among Female-Identified Staff***

This finding, along with the next, begin to answer the second research sub-question: What barriers exist to their advancement? In the survey, female-identified instructors expressed feelings of intimidation, unfair judgment, and self-doubt more frequently than male-identified participants. Participants in later methods expressed that those feelings either intensified or

paired with frustration and disengagement in groups with higher ratios of men to women. For example, among survey respondents, who identified as female, some described intimidation as their greatest limitation in reaching goals. Responses included: “the outdoor industry [feels] scary or intimidating to enter,” “often our... trainings are male dominated and can be seen as intimidating,” or “[I feel] like I can’t ask the questions I have” (Survey, Q11). Furthermore, female respondents said that their limitations included external judgment: “being seen as old,” and “people not thinking I’m capable of what I know I’m capable of” (Survey, Q11). Among male-identified survey respondents, there were no mentions of intimidation or judgment as limitations. Furthermore, in the survey female-identified instructors expressed self-doubt more often than male instructors (19% vs. 9%), and when they did their comments were more likely to reflect stress associated with self-doubt. As an example, one female-identified respondent described as her limitation an inability to handle stress or being challenged by “being in the right headspace” (Survey, Q11). Overall, survey respondents who expressed feelings of intimidation, judgment, and stress-related self-doubt almost exclusively identified as female.

Through the in-person research methods, it became clear that those feelings of self-doubt, intimidation, and/or stress intensified or became paired with frustration and disengagement in groups with higher ratios of men to women. One focus group participant said, “a lot of times with guys... it feels like you are the one like being picked on and ... I'm going to guess that, like everybody in this group has gone through it, but it's mansplaning” (FG 2). Another said, “the younger dudes with hot feet that are all really great friends, that gets intimidating” (FG 1). Indeed, during the BCP groups pointed out that challenges increase when more men are present and that trainings can be “more of a boys club at higher levels” (BCP Q1, G2, 3). For example,



during the BCP a participant told a story of a woman who had wanted to enter the guides program at Big Sky. She went to a training, where she was the only woman, and afterward described her experience as so toxic that she did not want to go back (BCP, P1). In the most extreme example of this, one person told a story of a peer, who make a public lewd gesture in training, and a trainer who laughed it off, calling the perpetrator a “jokester” (FG 6). This combination of intimidation and unpleasant experiences lead to disengagement and impact non-males’ by challenging their senses of self and limiting them from achieving their goals. One focus group participant described her frustration saying, “I think what I feel threatened with in this whole like thing is I either can be a part of this cool girl squad... or, I can try to fit in with the guys and... I can't really just be who I am outside of gender roles” (FG 8). Thus, the social experience of being in male dominated contexts appeared to exacerbate feelings of self-doubt, intimidation, or stress for female-identified staff members.

Much of the conversation around self-doubt during the research also highlighted a tendency for women to hesitate to take on new challenges, which may exacerbate trends in lesson assignments. Indeed, one of the observed themes from the storytelling portion of the BCP was the question “Are you good enough?” (BCP, Q1, G3). This theme as a predominantly feminine thought process showed up throughout the research methods. For example, one FG participant pointed out that “Men ... are taught to push themselves... and girls and women to the same extent are taught to be careful” (FG 4), while another exemplified this as she hesitated to join because, “I didn’t know if I have good things to say” (FG 1). During the BCP, when asked what assumptions we need to challenge to advance gender equity in snowsports, every single group identified the relationship between confidence and competence in their problem list. The

groups said that they needed to challenge “individual perceptions of ability and confidence” (BCP Q2, G2), the idea that a “lack of confidence does not equal a lack of skill.” (BCP Q2, G3), and challenge that “women need permission vs. men expect” to advance (BCP Q2, G1). Indeed, many individuals in the BCP cited a deliberate intention to challenge assumptions of competence and competence among instructors (BCP P5, 7, 8, 10, 14). Thus, it is clear that these instructors and supervisors considered the balance of confidence and competence among female-identified staff as a limiting factor in their development. In sum, this research showed that feelings of intimidation, self-doubt, and unfair judgment are more common among female-identified participants. Further, these feelings can be exacerbated by environments with increased male presence and with high levels of skill required. Lastly, these feelings likely increase the gendered nature of lesson assignments.

### ***Differing Experiences of Instructors Depending on Discipline***

Along with the last finding, this finding points to the second research sub-question: What barriers exist to their advancement? The participating female-identified snowboard instructors articulated experiences and preferences that contradicted those of female-identified skiers. The snowboarders expressed frustration with and feeling limited by affinity groups and assigned female mentorship, whereas alpine instructors expressed enthusiasm about both (FG). In addition, the snowboarders seemed less concerned with the fairness of lesson assignments or needing to engage in masculine environments (FG). During the focus group one snowboarder said, “I would love to be with the boys... I think it's more insulting that they separate us” (FG 6). Another said, “I’d rather not focus on the fact that I'm a woman at all because it's clearly not helping me get uplifted” (FG 8). Conversely, alpine instructors expressed nearly the opposite

sentiment, “I do way better when it's an all women training group, I feel so much more comfortable” (FG 2) and “I really strongly feel that mentorship is the only reason I've pushed myself at all... and seeing all these really high-level women really doing incredible things at Big Sky inspired me to do better” (FG 4). Although there were few female snowboarders who participated in this study, these statements showed that the participating female snowboarders and skiers placed starkly different priority on associations with other female-identified instructors. These experiences point strongly toward the impacts of tokenism on women in heavily male-dominated groups (Joecks et al., 2013; Kanter, 1977), which the conclusions will address specifically.

### **The Value of Chosen Mentorship for Professional Growth**

This finding contributes to the third research sub-question: Which current practices support women’s career development toward certification and leadership? Participants, especially younger and female participants, in this study placed high value on mentorship and community support as tools to achieve their goals. In the survey, when asked what they most needed to achieve their goals, younger (< 25 years-old), female staff placed a high value on mentorship (53%) or community and emotional support (23%), whereas only a total of 40% of older female staff and 20% of older male staff mentioned similar things (Survey Q10).

More in-depth conversations in the Focus Group revealed important nuances in mentorship, specifically that participants wanted mentorship to serve their professional growth and they wanted to choose their mentors. As a case-in-point, when asked what she wanted from a mentor, one participant responded with “professional development... if it's a part of the ski school, it should be about getting us to our next level of quality of teaching and certification”

(FG 7). Another participant argued that mentorship for her was not about making friends, “I don't mean this in a negative way but that's not what I want, like I want someone to help my [skills on snow], because that's what I need to pass my level two” (FG 6).

In addition to the importance of mentors who can support professional growth, participants wanted to have some choice in who became their mentors. During the focus group, participants spent 26 minutes discussing their frustration with being assigned mentors. One said, “I didn't sign up for the mentor program was because there was one person that could be my mentor” (FG 8). While another suggested that, “all of my mentors have been organic, and I've just chosen people that I've gotten along with” (FG 4). Outside of the Focus Group, one survey respondent described the fact that he does not “connect well with all of the trainers” as a significant obstacle to reaching his goals (Survey Q11, R 35). Thus, while participants broadly agreed on the importance of mentorship throughout the research, it became clear during the Focus Group that participants most value mentorship that serves professional development and from mentors of their choosing.

### **Building Empathy through Story**

This finding contributes to the fourth research sub-question: How might we create cultures in snowsports schools that willingly engage systemic biases? During the debrief of story-sharing activities in the BCP, both male and female instructors and supervisors expressed heightened awareness of the impact of gender bias in the snowsports school, among guests, and in their own daily decision-making. These impacts included assigning lessons with emotional challenge to women and with physical challenges to men, guests whose requests and behaviors exacerbate those assignment differentials, and instructor behaviors that amplify stereotypes. All

of these lead to work distribution based on gender stereotypes, in which women receive emotionally challenging lessons, while men receive physically challenging ones. For example, one written comment in response to the question, “What have been your major learnings or insights so far?” was that “everyone [asked] had experiences to share [related to] the survey challenges” (BCP Q1, G3). In other words, hearing a multitude of stories painted a picture of the scope of gender bias. Other comments were more self-reflective, such as asking “Have I been a positive force?” (BCP Q1 G3) or “As a supervisor I’m going to start trying to challenge my assumptions... I don’t like it, but I do tend to have like a bias I think toward males and higher levels” (BCP P11). Similarly, one male instructor said, “in lessons where I’m sharing a lesson with a female instructor, [I want to be] particularly mindful of... assumptions that guests are making about the role of the female that maybe faulty and actively [be] sensitive to that and [take] action about it.” Indeed, six of fifteen participants in the BCP stated that gender bias had played a role in their work decisions and expressed intention to make a conscious shift (BCP 2, 5, 9, 11, 12, 14). Thus, the opportunity to hear a number of uninterrupted, personal stories of gender bias during the BCP facilitated transformative learning that changed participants’ expressed intentions in their day-to-day behaviors.

### **Suggested Changes to Reduce Impacts of Gender Bias**

This finding contributes to the understanding of the fifth research sub-question: Which systematic changes will support women’s advancement? Suggested changes to support non-male advancement within the snowsports school included addressing gender bias in lesson assignments and creating more gender balance in training groups or increasing available affinity training. In the research methods, questions did not begin to address solutions until the BCP. For

these reasons there are fewer coded and themed statements supporting these views. Participants suggested more solutions during the Make-It-Happen meeting, however, as this meeting was not an official research method, I will those results in Inquiry Implications and Study Recommendations found in Chapter 5.

In terms of addressing gender bias in lessons, 10 of 15 participants in the BCP mentioned that they were aware of the role gender bias played in their own decision making or in how they interacted with coworkers. All 10 stated specific intentions to reduce the impact of their personal biases, both in terms of providing physical challenges to female-identified instructors and in terms of trusting men with emotionally challenging lessons. For example, one supervisor said, “My action item as a supervisor is going to be to be more aware of lesson assignments and specifically not defaulting to putting non-male instructors on younger kid lessons or lower-level lessons and being aware of having an even distribution of levels and ages across genders” (BCP P2). In addition, increasing parity of genders in training groups and the availability of affinity group trainings consistently emerged from the focus group and BCP. Two of the three groups in the BCP suggested all-female trainings as an important tool to address the negative impact of tokenism in high-level trainings (BCP G1, G3: Q3) and two of the participants discussed creating affinity training as their action-items moving forward (BCP P1, P7). Similarly, other participants brought up the idea of creating parity in training groups, and one group pointed specifically at this as a solution. (BCP G3: Q3; BCP P3, P4). Thus, the data showed clear support among BCP participants of managing gender balance in trainings.

### **Study Conclusions**

The study conclusions, based in order of the research questions, are as follows:

1. How do current practices, cultural norms, or mental models within snowsports schools affect women's longevity as instructors? The mental models of gendered behavior expectations held in the snowsports instruction industry impact the careers of female-identified instructors through work assignments and training.
2. What barriers exist to their advancement? The most significant barriers to achieving increased gender equity in snowsports include the relative paucity of female snowboarders, the relative paucity of female-identified instructors in high-level trainings, and the inability of trainers to combat negative group behaviors.
3. Which current practices support women's career development toward certification and leadership? The behaviors that support increased gender equity in Big Sky Mountain Sports School include the presence of female mentorship, the adaptability of school leadership in response to new information, and the commitment among leadership to tackling issues of equity.
4. How might we create cultures in snowsports schools that willingly engage systemic biases? It is possible to promote cultures that engage systemic bias by using principles of transformational learning, identifying "creative tension" (Senge, 2006), supporting psychological safety, and engaging people who consciously espouse values that contradict the bias in question.
5. Which systematic changes will support women's advancement? This question will be answered in Chapter 5.

***Mental Models Related to Stereotypically Masculine and Feminine Characteristics***

Recall from the literature review of women and leadership that stereotypically feminine attributes include collaboration, empathy, concern, and selflessness, whereas masculine traits include agency, decisiveness, and independence (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ely et al., 2011; Fletcher, 2004; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Walinga & McKendry, 2014; Weyer, 2007). Based on the findings and frequent observations that female-identified instructors are more likely to receive emotionally challenging, younger, and lower-level lessons, it is clear that these gendered stereotypes, held by all genders, have impacted work distribution among ski and snowboard instructors within the Big Sky Snowsports School.

As a snowsports instructor working at almost any resort, gaining certifications is the most effective way to increase pay and professional opportunities. Passing certifications requires instructors to teach and ski or snowboard at advanced levels, so limited access to high-level lessons decreases instructors' opportunities to practice and the likelihood of passing an exam. In Jackson Hole, for example, the age groups instructors teach correlated to the likelihood of achieving level three certification (data provided by J. Morse, personal communication, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021). Thus, this finding reflects Acker's (2006) suggestion that even when hired for the same position, men and women often receive different job responsibilities, and women's responsibilities are less conducive to professional growth. As unearthed in the BCP, implicit biases held by almost all supervisors present around female and male strengths, even among a group that strongly expressed support for gender equity, have impacted the career trajectory of many non-male instructors.

Although almost all of the supervisors expressed intentions to change their behaviors around assigning lessons, in the literature on challenging implicit bias many authors argued that



effectively combatting implicit bias also requires changing organizational systems (Acker, 2006; Anderson, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2017). Furthermore, as the research findings discuss, these implicit biases extend to paying clients, who express preferences for male or female instructors based on gender stereotypes. The findings of this research reflect observations from many ski and snowboard schools across the country, in which sales offices prioritize reasonable client requests for instructor preference (J. Ballou, personal communication 4/20/22; R. Barnes, personal communication, 4/20/22). In other words, the mental models of the service industry, in which the industry prioritizes client requests, could further perpetuate gender bias in the industry and limit the potential of female-identified instructors to advance in their careers. Thus, in order to truly impact gendered lesson distribution and its underpinning mental models, Big Sky Snowsports School would need to create systems that support changing lesson assignment practices despite client wishes in addition to promoting individual transformational learning around gender bias.

### ***Barriers in Heavily Male-Dominated Arenas***

The literature review highlighted significant impacts on the behavior and experiences of women in heavily male-dominated arenas, including the negative impacts of “stereotype threat” (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Saul 2013) and the likelihood that female-identified individuals differentiate from each other and assimilate to the dominant group (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Derks et al., 2011; Ely et al., 2011; Joecks et al., 2013; Kanter, 1977). The findings from this research on the preferences of female-identified snowboard instructors and of the experiences of alpine instructors in heavily male-dominated groups reflect these tendencies. The comments of the female snowboard instructors reflected pressure to differentiate themselves

from each other in their male dominated environment, with one instructor preferring to ride with the boys (FG 6), while another explicitly described the choice between professional growth and female community (FG 8). On the other hand, the descriptions of female-identified alpine instructors tended to reflect more the experiences of internalized stereotype threat. They expressed disengagement, lack of community, and the experience of feeling judged unfairly in high level trainings. In both cases, heavily male-dominated groups impacted female behavior and performance.

In different ways, the paucity of female-identified snowboarders overall, and the relative paucity of female-identified alpine instructors in high-level trainings create barriers for advancement. In snowboarding at Big Sky Resort, there are no female-identified examiners, only two female-identified instructors with a level-three, and two who recently attained level-twos (C. Baker, personal communication, June 23, 2022). These statistics of female participation in snowboard instruction are reflected in national statistics in which the proportion of female snowboard participation is significantly lower than female alpine participation at every level of certification (Women's Initiative Task Force, 2020) except for the National Snowboard team of which 33% (three of nine members) identifies as female. The general lack of female examiners and trainers in snowboarding means that mentorship, which the literature review found supports female advancement (Dreher & Cox, 1996; Farkas et al., 2019; Homan, 2019) and this study found is most effective when it includes choice and serves professional growth, is significantly less likely to come from women. Furthermore, for those women who are advancing in their careers ahead of others, it would be impossible to create an affinity group that would serve their professional and athletic goals. Thus, within this environment in Big Sky, identifying and

encouraging male-advocates and similarly leveled peer groups for female instructors may be the most effective way to support instructors as they advance.

Even for female-identified alpine instructors, the experience of heavily male-dominated trainings at high levels, especially in level-three certification trainings and in guides training, create a barrier to participation through stereotype threat and ensuing disengagement. Instructors who hesitate to ask questions, feel excluded in training, or avoid attending future trainings because of their experiences are less likely to advance. It is true that among alpine instructors in Big Sky there are many strong female role models, and this access serves to buoy female instructors (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Pande & Topalova, 2013; Stroope & Hagemann, 2011). However, in these male-dominated trainings stories about lewd gestures (FG 6) and toxic cultures (BCP P1) reflect trainers' lack of preparation to tackle bias in their groups. In addition, a near total lack of participation in this study of men under the age of 25—two in the survey, none in other methods—indicates that the staff most likely to interact with newer female-identified instructors might have the least awareness of gender bias. Thus, even in a snowsports school that boasts strong female representation among alpine trainers, the lack of preparedness of supervisors and trainers to respond adequately to micro- (and macro-) aggressions leaves participants vulnerable to the impact of bias and stereotype threat. For these reasons, addressing stereotype threat in alpine and snowboard trainings may include creating affinity trainings (Glassman & Glassman, 2007), attempting to create a quorum of female instructors in groups (Joecks et al., 2013; Kanter, 1997), and training on interrupting microaggressions.

### ***Current Practices supporting Gender Equity***

The current practices that support increasing gender equity in the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School include the deliberate engagement by leadership on issues of equity, their adaptability to new information, and the presence of many female trainers, thoughtful mentors, and advocates. The reviewed literature argued that improving diversity in organizations requires commitment among managers (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Rogers et al., 2019). Throughout this study, many supervisors and managers in addition to Christine Baker, the VP of Mountain Sports, supported the research, recruited participants, offered to participate, and engaged me in thoughtful conversation about the role of gender bias in their work. Their commitment to this research project ultimately made its completion possible, and their investment in change led to quick transformation in day-to-day behaviors. For example, one examiner changed her exam tasks in response to the research on explosive power differentials between male and female athletes (Jones et al., 2016; Philpott et al., 2020). Multiple supervisors began creating training groups either exclusively for non-male participants or with a greater proportion of female participants to support more balanced groups (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2016; Joecks et al, 2013; Kanter, 1996). Lastly, the mountain sports school created a deliberate mentorship program throughout the school in response to survey results after I compiled them in late January and before the focus group in early February (FG). Thus, the administrative staff in Big Sky's investment in this work and willingness to respond quickly supports their ability to challenge gender equity.

In addition, the presence of female trainers as role models and engaged mentors throughout the Big Sky Mountain Sports School positively impacts their non-male staff. Clearly the research findings showed that instructors want mentorship aimed toward their professional

development from people they relate to. Simultaneously, throughout this study, participants referenced the positive influence of advocates and female mentors during their careers (FG 1, 2, 3, 4, 8; BCP Q1, G2-3). The literature review clearly demonstrated the importance of role models and mentors to the professional success of women (Dreher & Cox, 1996; Farkas et al., 2019; Homan, 2019; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Pande & Topalova, 2013; Pritlove et al., 2019; Stroope & Hagemann, 2011). This well of supportive female and male mentors within Big Sky supports development of current staff and could be leveraged further to impact instructor development.

### *Creating Cultures That Willingly Engage Systemic Bias*

In the BCP I aimed to facilitate transformational learning among participants on the topic of gender bias, so that all genders could identify gender bias within the school and participate in problem-solving to combat it. I designed the BCP with four main points from the literature in mind. First, the fundamental tenets of transformational learning are that it aims to uncover roots of power and injustice, enables people to advocate for themselves, and entails learning through communication (Cranton, 2011; Dirkx, 1998; Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012; Mezirow, 2000). Second, a critical aspect of facilitating individual or organizational change entails generating “creative tension” (Senge, 2006, p. 139) and in this case first identifying the ways individuals and the current system upholds gender bias (Walinga & McKendry, 2014). Third, many authors argued for the importance of supporting psychological safety throughout transformational learning and organizational change (Lawson & Price, 2003; Schein & Schein, 2016; Walinga, 2008). Lastly, many of those writing on implicit bias advocated for challenging implicit bias, specifically when those

individuals consciously hold opposing values (Acker, 2006; Anderson, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2017; Saul, 2013). These four criteria underpinned the effort to create a culture willing to challenge systemic bias.

The storytelling phase of the BCP was designed to meet these criteria of supporting change. The uninterrupted stories enabled participants to advocate for themselves, to learn through communication, and to later challenge the roots of those stories. The storytelling phase of the BCP was modeled on research surrounding perspective taking (Madera, 2019; Todd et al., 2011) and research using counter storytelling (Cho, 2017; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). By listening to uninterrupted stories of non-males, all participants had the opportunity to identify ways that the current system upholds gender bias. Through this method I also aimed to create “disorienting dilemmas” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22), in which participants might question whether their past actions aligned with their conscious values. Although I could not guarantee psychological safety, I supported it by sharing all of the details of and scripts for the event in advance, by discussing the prevalence of gender bias in both men and women globally, and by carefully scripting male participants’ communication to limit their available reactions to storytelling. Lastly, I assumed that people who chose to participate in the BCP would already consciously support gender equity, making them prime targets to challenge implicit gender bias. In these ways the structure of the BCP evolved from the literature review.

In the end, through the BCP the participants created a culture among themselves in which they willingly engaged systemic bias. The participants showed this in their individual comments about changes they intended to make in their jobs (BCP 2, 5, 9, 11, 12, 14), in comments about

increased awareness of the prevalence of gender bias and of their own participation in it (BCP 11; BCP Q1, G1-3), and in their suggested future changes at the school (BCP Q3, G1-3). The BCP also led to increased conversation in the rest of the Big Sky Mountain Sports School (M. Larson, personal communication, April 7, 2022). For future action-oriented research to successfully promote a community engaged in challenging any form of bias, it will be important to follow the four tenets of creating cultures that engage systemic bias, which include 1) following principles of transformational learning, 2) identifying “creative tension” between the current state and the desired state, 3) protecting psychological safety, and 4) working with people who consciously espouse values opposed to the suspected bias.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry**

This study evaluated the impacts of gender bias on snowsports instructors at Big Sky Resort, MT. The findings and conclusions from this study may or may not represent challenges experienced by other resorts but do represent likely causes and impacts of gender bias in similarly sized mountain sports schools.

Limitations of this study include the limited participation of female snowboarders, the limited participation of mothers, and the lack of participation of individuals self-identified as transgender and/or non-binary. First, in the snowsports community, female-identified snowboarders operate in a much more heavily male-dominated arena than do female-identified skiers. Though this study showed that their experiences and preferences differed significantly from the experiences of skiers, the data include few of their stories and only a limited view into how gender bias affects snowboarders. Furthermore, although the literature review clearly points to disproportionate impacts of parenthood on women and the disadvantages mothers face in

professional life (Acker, 2006; Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Saul, 2013; Weiner, 2004), few mothers participated in the in-person research methods, zero stories of motherhood emerged from the FG or BCP, and only one person mentioned kids as a limitation in the survey. It is possible that the timing of the research methods in the evening or the structure of activities limited the participation of mothers. In addition, to my knowledge, only one person who identifies as transgender and none who identified as non-binary participated in the survey, and no one openly from either group participated in the in-person methods. Lastly, no one among the participants in the in-person research methods appeared to be a visible minority. This probably reflects the overall population of snowsports instructors in Big Sky, which includes few minorities, though it might also reflect the timing and time commitments of the in-person methods. Thus, there are four marginalized groups, whose perspectives this study does not adequately represent and whose perspectives would be important to understand the challenges of gender equity in snowsports more fully.

There were no significant irregularities in the conduct of the study.



### **Chapter 5: Inquiry Implications**

Chapter 5 synthesizes the research and changes made until now and expands the conclusions from Chapter 4 into a set of recommendations. This chapter also includes a description of changes already underway at Big Sky Resort and the Mountain Sports School's plan and considerations for moving recommendations forward based on a Make-it-Happen meeting held in late April 2022.

#### **Study Recommendations**

In order to increase gender equity within the highest levels of certification and leadership within Big Sky Mountain Sports School and PSIA-AASI, we must address issues that prevent non-males from moving through the certification pipeline and advancing within the organization. As shown in the findings and the conclusions, current practices and cultural norms around work distribution and gendered mental models and behaviors significantly limit the types of work and growth opportunities available to female-identified instructors. With this in mind, the recommendations from this study include:

1. Address current work distribution practices, systems to track work distribution, and systems for meeting client requests affecting work distribution.
2. Support trainers and supervisors in mitigating toxic behaviors, which alienate non-male staff and decrease engagement.
3. Strengthen the existing mentorship program to prioritize choice and professional development. Ensure that female-identified snowboarders have access to effective mentorship, regardless of their mentor's gender identification.

4. Increase existing efforts to create gender-balanced or all non-male training opportunities, especially for higher-level trainings.
5. Create opportunities for more staff to participate in transformational, empathy-building, community events such as the BCP

### ***Address current work distribution practices***

In order to address the impacts of mental models and specifically implicit bias on current work distribution, Big Sky Mountain Sports School should consider creating policies that insulate the organization from implicit gender bias (Holroyd et al., 2017; Zheng, 2016). These could include revisiting systems of assigning lessons to instructors, creating tracking systems for lesson distribution, and designing systems for managing and channeling client expectations. Currently, supervisors largely assign work based on the short-term needs of the client and which instructor will fit best with which lesson product on a given day (BCP). Potential systems that would change this include generating a checklist for supervisors to reference while assigning lessons, better tracking of instructor skills and lessons taught, targeting lesson assignments toward the instructors' goals and the organization's goals for that instructor, and a clear value system that changes the emphasis on or impact of client requests.

The costs to Big Sky Mountain Sports School if it does not address these changes include slowed development of their non-male staff, lowered engagement, and continued decreased likelihood of non-males advancing in snowsports instruction (Anderson, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2017; Pritlove et al., 2019; Saul, 2013).

### ***Support trainers and supervisors in mitigating toxic behaviors***

Throughout the study, a couple of examples of toxic social experiences during training sessions emerged. Although there were few specific examples, in each case the toxic experience served to significantly alienate at least one female instructor from the training group and from the trainer and to decrease the likelihood of the instructor attending future trainings (FG 7; BCP P1). Although it is not clear how prevalent these experiences are in Big Sky, the impact on individuals was significant. Rodgers et al. (2019) pointed out that the challenges managing a more diverse workforce come from managers' inability to understand group dynamics, manage creatively, or shed their own biases (p. 14). For this reason, in addition to managing implicit bias from a systemic perspective, I recommend that Big Sky look into strategies to support trainers in identifying and mitigating implicit biases and appropriately dealing with toxic behaviors within their training groups.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, mandatory diversity trainings can breed resistance and resentment if people feel that the organization is taking away their own decision making or autonomous opinions around diversity (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Glassman & Glassman, 2017). Similarly, focusing on de-biasing individuals is insufficient without the earlier mentioned larger systemic changes (Anderson, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2017; Pritlove et al., 2019). However, systems change within Big Sky will not necessarily change the individual actions of influential trainers. Thus, Big Sky's Mountain Sports School can promote voluntary diversity initiatives and implicit bias training in educational and low-threat conditions (Zheng, 2016), which can help people develop awareness of their participation in systems of bias (Pritlove et al., 2019). Ideally this would also attract people who already consciously espouse values of equity and would be more inclined to respond positively to a challenge (Holroyd et al., 2017). This implicit bias

training can take the form of trainings that highlight male privilege and encourage those in power to take steps to dismantle their own advantages (Knowles et al., 2014), trainings that encourage perspective taking or counter-storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Todd et al., 2011), or more group-specific, targeted empathy building exercises such as the BCP. In conjunction with other systemic interventions that address pay discrepancies, equitable hiring and promotion practices, mentorship opportunities, etc. implicit bias training can make individuals aware of their involvement in perpetuating bias (Pritlove et al., 2019) and will hopefully decrease the prevalence of toxic behaviors during trainings.

Though few examples of toxic social experiences during trainings emerged from the research, each example had a salient impact on at least one female instructor. The impacts led to disengagement by the women involved, undermined their relationships with the trainer, and impacted their intention to continue to pursue goals. Each time a training group permits a toxic culture to exist can damage the experience and career of non-dominant participants. Although potentially a daunting task, supporting trainers in mitigating these behaviors is important to advancing women in snowsports instruction.

### ***Strengthen existing mentorship programs***

The data clearly show that study participants believe effective mentorship has and will continue to help them develop their skills in the future. Similarly, the literature review clearly demonstrated the import of positive female role models and mentors of any sex on women's employment satisfaction and success (Dreher & Cox, 1996; Farkas et al., 2019; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Pande & Topalova, 2013; Stroope & Hagemann, 2011). Big Sky Mountain Sports School already has a significant population of alpine female role models and it has created the

beginnings of an organizational mentorship program. The current mentorship program already supports many female instructors, however, based on conversations in the focus group it appears that it does not quite meet the needs of all younger staff and especially snowboard instructors.

Moving forward, Big Sky can further expand its mentorship program by including less-senior instructors as mentors (FG 8; Farkas et al., 2019), considering crossover mentors from a different snowsports discipline but with similar experience, and encouraging male mentors, who may not otherwise feel comfortable choosing female mentees, to mentor women (Dreher & Cox, 1996; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Farkas et al., 2019). Within this mentorship program, it will be important to create opportunities for choice among mentors and mentees (FG 3, 6, 7, & 8), since poor pairings decrease participant satisfaction (Farkas et al., 2019). In addition, the adaptations to this mentorship program could include systems of social accountability for the development and success of female mentees, which improves manager investment in equity outcomes (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). These changes to the mentorship program will strengthen it, enable more people to participate, and remove some of the burden of mentorship from senior, female-identified instructors. It will also support female snowboarders, who have few female, snowboard-specific role models.

### ***Increase efforts to create gender-balanced training***

Throughout the research, female-identified alpine instructors strongly advocated for increasing ratios of women in training groups, and for creating affinity training groups (FG 2, 3, 4; BCP Q1, G2; BCP Q2, G1). Similarly, as we saw in the literature review, creating affinity training groups could reduce staff turnover, increase engagement, and for the benefit of Big Sky, increase company competitiveness (Glassman & Glassman, 2017). Even when creating groups of

all women would be impossible, increasing the ratios of women to above 30% and ideally above 40% in each training group should improve women's participation in the group, their authenticity and group effectiveness, and decrease the likelihood of the aforementioned toxic cultures in trainings (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2012; Joecks et al., 2013; Kanter, 1977; Saul, 2013). Thus, I recommend that Big Sky consider both creating more extensive opportunities for affinity training groups, and when possible structure training groups so that groups with a mix of genders have at least 3 women and ideally 50% female participation (Joecks et al., 2013; Kanter 1977).

***Increase Opportunities for Staff Participation in BCP-style events***

The Bonkers Cocktail Party experience created meaningful individual and group movement to counter implicit and systemic biases. We know from the literature review that experiences that challenge implicit biases can make people aware of their unintentional participation in inequity and their own privilege (Pritlove et al., 2019), as well as contribute to members of dominant groups becoming effective allies (Daynes, 2007). Counter storytelling and perspective taking have been shown to effectively change people's implicit and explicit biases (Cho, 2017; Madera, 2018; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Todd et al., 2011), and the storytelling experience in the BCP replicated this finding. Furthermore, we know that creating opportunities for diverse groups to solve complex problems together increases intergroup collaboration and empathy (Homan, 2019). All of these aspects collectively in the BCP allowed participants to uncover their own biased decision-making and allowed the mixed-gender group to collaboratively challenge barriers (Walinga, 2010) and strategize for structural change. As a tool to continue to develop individual and organizational learning around gender bias, I recommend

that Big Sky Mountain Sports School find ways to incorporate more facilitated experiences like the BCP for a wider group of staff.

### **Organizational Implications**

The research findings from this study clearly point to the impacts of gender bias in lesson assignments, the priorities of instructors in mentorship, the impacts of toxic behaviors in group training experiences, and the value of transformational learning to the community that engaged in the BCP. Addressing the challenges facing the development of non-males in the Mountain Sports School will be critical to advance more female-identified instructors into the highest level of certification and leadership. Further, to sustain and grow the developing community investment in improved gender equity, the school will benefit from engaging more instructors and supervisors in empathy-building and transformational experiences similar to the BCP.

In late April, Christine Baker hosted a “Make It Happen” meeting with five volunteers from the school, who had participated in the BCP or both the BCP and the FG. The group devised a list of short and long-term systemic changes to support the recommendations from this research. Expanding on the individual transformational experiences from the BCP, the group discussed the importance of systemic changes to manage organizational gender bias and create lasting change in the school (Acker, 2006; Anderson, 2012; Holroyd et al., 2017, Pritlove et al., 2019). What follows are the planned systemic changes from that list.

#### ***Address Current Work Distribution Practices***

In response to currently problematic work distribution practices, the administration at the Big Sky Mountain Sports School plans to implement three changes next season. First, they want to institute systems and expectations for supervisors to distribute work relative to instructors’

goals and the school's goals for the instructor. Second, they plan to create a scripted response for the sales office to use when clients specifically request a gender identity for their instructor.

Third, they intend to train supervisors on the likely tendencies of gender bias in assigning lessons and have regular conversations to support individual supervisors in managing their biases.

In the first instance, the school will create a systemic practice for supervisors to discuss goals with each returning instructor during the preseason and to revisit those goals mid-season. They will manage the male/female competence versus competence dynamic expressed in the research findings by having supervisors create goals for the instructors, to ensure that female-identified instructors have lofty enough goals and support in reaching them. This will also keep supervisors accountable to the goals and success of instructors (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). The scripted response for the sales office will explain to the client that the school does not guarantee gendered instructor requests. In an effort to shift the dialogue away from gender identity and assumed gendered characteristics (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ely et al., 2011; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016), the script will instead ask the client to explain what behaviors or personality aspects they prefer in an instructor. Lastly, ongoing conversations about the likelihood of gender bias in lesson assignments can create awareness among supervisors of that problem and encourage them to create systems for self-checking bias (Pritlove et al., 2019; Zheng, 2016). These short-term structural changes will support the Mountain Sports School in removing some bias from their system of assigning lessons.

In the longer term, the Big Sky Mountain Sports School hopes to develop more robust systems to track work distribution for both private and group lessons, create an automated system to report on actual work distribution by students' levels and ages, a consistent tracking



system of instructors' skiing and teaching abilities, and a system for people assigning lessons to access more accurate and consistent information on instructor skills. All of these long-term systemic changes will improve the accuracy and availability of data, which will combat implicit bias in the system.

### ***Support trainers and supervisors in mitigating toxic behaviors***

After the “Make It Happen” meeting, Christine and I continued to discuss strategies to manage the few, but significant, examples of micro and macro aggressions against female-identified and nonbinary instructors during training. Christine is currently researching “bystander intervention” trainings to increase skill development among her senior staff. She has already supported senior staff in attending an ally skills training organized through the Chamber of Commerce and run by the Montana Racial Equity Project. Christine plans to put on another similar training through the same organization for more of her staff in the fall. She is invested in supporting this type of learning and already on the path to addressing these issues.

In addition, Christine and I had a conversation about potentially running more extensive training similar to the BCP with a larger group of Big Sky trainers and instructors. Though not explicitly bystander training, the storytelling and problem-solving activities of the BCP may support male-identified instructors in the Big Sky community in increasing their empathy for and understanding of gender issues in the school (Cho, 2017; Madera, 2018; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Todd et al., 2011) and create opportunities for them to identify and dismantle some of their privilege (Knowles et al., 2014).

### ***Strengthen existing mentorship programs***

Relative to strengthening the existing mentorship program, Christine's and her administration's plan to create supervisor accountability for instructor goals will go a long way to generating mentorship that supports professionalism, which was highlighted in the findings. In addition to this change, they plan to create a formal mentorship program for all instructors in their first three years teaching. This reflects the fact that most people requesting mentorship in the survey were under 25 years old. The senior team has not yet identified how to prioritize mentor choice in the program but are aware of its importance.

Specific to the demographic of snowboard instructors in the school, the Big Sky Mountain Sports School intend to ensure that female snowboarder instructors have access to mentors, who can support the instructors' goals, regardless of the mentor's gender identity. Christine will also look for ways to fill the void of female role models in snowboarding by bringing in outside snowboard trainers and clinicians to work with the staff.

### ***Increase Efforts to Create Gender-Balanced Training***

The group involved in the "Make-It-Happen" meeting agreed to focus on increasing the availability of gender-balanced training by adding more non-male affinity group training, especially at the higher levels. In addition, for all new-hire and returning staff training they will create groups with 30 to 40% female-identified participants and leave some groups as all male. They will only do this if there is an appropriately skilled peer-group of female-identified instructors for each participant to ensure that participants feel adequately challenged.

### **Implications for Future Inquiry**

In this research, I identified 4 important areas for future studies on gender equity and diversity initiatives to explore within snowsports instruction. They include the application of

these results and recommendations in other snowsports schools of varying sizes throughout the country, the reexamining the empathy building activities of the BCP to consider the extent of their effectiveness, specific consideration of motherhood as it relates to careers in snowsports instruction, and the specific experiences of LGBTQIA+ and racial minority instructors as they relate to gendered experiences within the industry. First, Big Sky's demographics, location, staff make up, administration, terrain, and business model, all make it unique and thus the results of this research not directly applicable to other ski areas. Further research should look into the same question in other ski areas and at the divisional and national levels of PSIA-AASI. Second, the results of the BCP indicated significant personal transformation and successful group deliberation around gender equity. This exercise of storytelling and empathy-building followed by group problem solving showed potential as a tool to improve employee engagement in diversity initiatives. Future research replicating the method of the BCP would indicate whether its success here was related to its specific context within Big Sky's Mountain Sports School or whether that success might be more generalizable. Third, although the literature review showed extensive evidence of the impacts of motherhood on professional development, few mothers participated in this research project, and almost none of them addressed motherhood directly and its impacts on their careers. Based on the literature review, the paucity of mothers in high-level instruction, and anecdotal stories about women leaving the industry when they had children, I advocate for PSIA-AASI, its divisions, or individual snowsports schools to research the impact of motherhood on the careers of female-identified instructors. Fourth, this research only explored a narrow subset of the gender and sexuality continuum within snowsports instruction and does not capture the experiences of transgender or non-binary instructors in snowsports. Further

inquiry is needed to understand the experiences of LGBTQIA+ members of the community and strategies to promote gender equity outside of the gender-binary male/female divide. Lastly, there was little participation in this research from visible minorities. Applying these results to increase gender equity may impact BIPOC community members differently. Research in these areas will enable the results of this study to be more generalizable across the country.

### **Thesis Summary and Conclusion**

In this research I collaborated with the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School and the PSIA-AASI National office to advance gender equity in snowsports instruction. Specifically, I asked the question, “how might the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School and PSIA-AASI increase gender equity within the highest levels of certification and leadership in snowsports instruction?” To conduct this research, I used a survey, a focus group, and an interactive group empathy-building and problem-solving method called the BCP. In the first two methods I gathered background information on female-identified and nonbinary instructors’ experiences and limitations working in the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School. I also used the focus group to promote community building and dialogue among female-identified instructors. In the last method, the BCP, I promoted empathy-building and understanding of gender equity so that a mixed-gender group could effectively problem-solve together. The research concluded with a Make-It-Happen meeting to devise systemic changes for the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School.

The findings of this research reflect many themes from the literature review. For example, the finding that mental models of essentialist gender-stereotyping significantly impact work distribution along gendered lines and are pervasive across the Big Sky Resort Mountain

Sports School supports the existing literature on essentialism and role congruity theory. Similarly, the emphasis participants put on mentorship throughout the study also reflects the literature, though the explicit suggestion that mentorship be geared toward professional growth was new. Lastly, considerations of stereotype threat and the behaviors of female-identified people in heavily skewed groups introduced in the literature clearly emerged from the data. Most notably, the differential impacts of gender bias and stereotype threat on snowboarders versus skiers highlighted that behaviors and needs can vary in response to similar challenges. All of these findings are noteworthy because few have studied issues of gender equity in snowsports instruction.

Specific to the snowsports instruction industry, the impacts of gender bias on work distribution are significant. Many large resorts within the United States rely on supervisors to assign lessons and do so based on client preferences. The research showed that supervisors, clients, and instructors all rely on internalized gender bias in lesson distribution. Because certifications require advanced teaching and skiing/snowboarding performance, the biased distribution of work slows the development of female and nonbinary-identified instructors. Furthermore, the demonstrated trends of increased self-doubt and acquiescence among female-identified instructors enables the distribution trends to continue. The Big Sky Mountain Resort Snowsports School's plan to train supervisors, set goals with instructors, and manage client requests has the potential to reverse much of the systemic bias in lesson assignments. These changes may be applicable to schools across the country and address one of the most significant barriers to gender equity in snowsports instruction.

Similarly, the emergence of stories about negative training cultures has implications for the broader snowsports instruction community. Negative training experiences have lasting effects of non-male participation and engagement. These stories demonstrated that even if uncommon the experience of toxic training cultures affected individuals in lasting ways. As an industry we need to embrace opportunities to expose trainers to implicit bias training and experiences that build empathy for non-dominant groups.

Perhaps the most significant contribution this research makes to the literature is the Bonkers Cocktail Party (BCP). Specifically, the BCP combined theories of adult learning, systemic bias, and effective diversity training to promote engaged problem-solving on gender equity among a mixed-gender group. Although none of the components of the BCP design was new to the literature, its specific combination of factors is noteworthy. The literature showed that storytelling and perspective taking effectively challenge individuals' biases (Cho, 2017; Madera, 2018; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Todd et al., 2011), that disorienting dilemmas and dialogue promote transformational learning (Dirkx, 1998; Karp, 2005; Mezirow, 1997; Mezirow, 2000), that transformational learning requires emotional safety (Lawson & Price, 2003; Schein & Schein, 2016; Walinga, 2003), that identifying creative tension (Senge, 2006) or barriers (Walinga, 2010) promotes change and discovery, and that collaborative problem solving promotes intragroup function across diverse groups (Homan, 2019). The combination of these factors in the BCP allowed the group to experience transformational learning, increased collaboration, and identify personal and systemic changes that will advance gender equity in snowsports instruction. The combination specifically enabled the dominant group, male-identified participants, to act as allies (Daynes, 2007), and contribute in meaningful and informed

ways to the dialogue. In future action-oriented projects, similar facilitated events using these criteria could help different populations collaborate and problem-solve between dominant and marginalized groups.

In planning for this project, I asked many academics whether they had read a study in which action-oriented researchers made meaningful change on gender equity. No one I spoke with gave an example. To make progress on issues of diversity, the dominant group must be engaged and committed to the success of equity (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Knowles et al., 2019; Homan, 2019), and even women need to be convinced of the existence of systemic bias (Ely et al., 2011) before engaging. Although literature on systemic bias supports systemic changes as the primary means to combat bias, we also need to expose implicit bias. Systemic changes would not improve the toxic culture in all training groups, and implicit bias training would not mitigate impacts of systemic lesson assignments in Big Sky Resort. To truly improve gender equity in snowsports instruction, we need both. This research showed that exposing bias and empathy building enabled instructors to collaborate and identify systemic changes that will significantly impact gender bias in the Big Sky Resort Mountain Sports School.

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**Appendix A: Thesis Research Schedule**

Project Milestone	Expected Completion Date
Form Thesis Committee	August 2021
Complete Thesis Proposal	October 10, 2021
Submit for Ethics Review	November 15, 2021
Begin Survey	Mid-December, 2021
Run Women's Focus group	Early February, 2021
Host the "Bonkers Cocktail Party"	March, 2021
Make-it-happen conversation	Mid-April, 2022
Nominate External Examiner	June 2022
Thesis Completion & Approval	July, 2022
External Examiner Review	August, 2022
Oral Defense	Late August, 2022
Completion	August 28, 2022

Adapted to Thesis Deadline Dates 2020-03, from Royal Roads Capstone Site.

**Appendix B: Research Information Letter****Advancing Gender Equity in Snowsports Instruction**

My name is Ann Schorling, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. You can confirm my registration at Royal Roads University by contacting the Program Head, Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta at [Niels.Agger-Gupta@royalroads.ca](mailto:Niels.Agger-Gupta@royalroads.ca)

**Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization**

The purpose of my research project is to answer the question, “how might PSIA-AASI increase gender equity at the highest levels of certification and leadership in snowsports instruction?” To answer this question, I am working with PSIA-AASI National and Big Sky Mountain Sports School to consider the entire development pipeline in snowsports instruction through the lens of gender. Other questions I plan to address include: 1) How do current practices, cultural norms, or mental models within snowsports schools affect women’s longevity as instructors? 2) What barriers exist to their advancement? 3) Which current practices support women’s career development toward certification and leadership? 4) How might we create cultures in snowsports schools that willingly engage systemic biases? 5) Which systematic changes will support women’s advancement?

The purpose of my research is to identify tools to increase gender equity at the highest levels of certification and leadership within PSIA-AASI. Whereas 40% of PSIA-AASI’s membership



identifies as female or non-binary, only 20% of alpine level threes identify as female, and only 13% of snowboard level threes. Collectively, only about 20% of all education staff are women, and the national team has never included more than 25% women. As such, my research will look at the pipeline for female instructors, beginning early in their careers and continue on to include examiners and national team members.

I am excited to partner with Big Sky and PSIA-AASI for this project. Big Sky and the Northern Rocky Mountain division have a strong reputation for advancing women in the industry, with the highest percentage of female examiners in the country. It is my hope that by working with Big Sky I can identify positive strategies that have worked and may apply to other resorts. In addition, because of its success the challenges in achieving gender equity in Big Sky likely occur elsewhere in the country. By identifying strengths and challenges, we can support the industry in advancing.

### **Your Participation and How Information will be Collected**

The research will consist of three methods, beginning with a survey which will gather both quantitative and qualitative data from Big Ski Instructors. The survey should not take more than 15 minutes to complete. That data will then inform a Focus Group, or a structured conversation among a representative sample of female or non-binary instructors at Big Sky. The Focus Group should take 90 minutes. Next, we will run an event called a “Bonkers Cocktail Party” (BCP). This event will aim to reverse existing social gender norms by centering the stories of female and non-binary identified instructors. It will take 2 hours, beginning with 60 minutes of mixed

conversation and followed by a structured debrief. Lastly, I will facilitate a conversation with diverse members of the Big Sky Mountain Sports School, including instructors, supervisors, and decision-makers. In that conversation, we will use gathered data analysis to determine which changes to implement for the rest of the 2021/2022 season and beyond. See the following appendices for a complete list of questions.

If interested, a small group of female and non-binary instructors (4-6 people) can take on a larger role in determining the outcome of this research. This small group may participate in the focus group will be invited to help design questions for the BCP, participate in the BCP, and participate in the meetings to determine next steps for Big Sky mountain sports school. If you are interested in this role, please email me at:

### **Benefits and Risks to Participation**

With this study, I hope to build community around developing gender equity in snowsports instruction and to generate meaningful changes within the Big Sky Mountain Sports School that other schools and PSIA-AASI can replicate around the country.

By participating in the in-person components of this study, which include the Focus Group and the “Bonkers Cocktail Party,” it will not be possible to maintain true anonymity as you will interact with other people. Though we ask all participants to maintain confidentiality of others, we cannot guarantee that this will hold true. In addition, some topics of conversation may bring about uncomfortable topics or unearth uncomfortable memories.

**Inquiry team**

The inquiry team for my research includes Christine Baker and Kirstie Rosenfield.

Christine Baker, the Director of the Big Sky Mountain Sports School. Christine will not have access to any raw data, and because of her professional relationship with all participants will only participate in the debrief of the “Bonkers Cocktail Party” and the final decision-making meeting. Christine will help evaluate questions and consult on the delivery for each method. She will be instrumental in implementing any recommended changes for the Big Sky Mountain Sports School.

Kirstie Rosenfield, the Executive Director of Intermountain and member of the PSIA-AASI Women’s Initiative Task Force. Kirstie will not have access to raw data because of potential power over participants in an assessment setting. Kirstie will help evaluate questions and consult on the delivery for each method. Kirstie may also help evaluate data once it has been anonymized.

**Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest**

My aim is that this research will positively impact gender equity at all levels of snowsports instruction and especially in attaining higher levels of certification and leadership. I recognize that any changes made by PSIA-AASI for National Team Selection in 2024 as a result of this research might positively impact my efforts to rejoin the team. For these reasons, I am focusing my research primarily on earlier stages of women’s careers in snowsports. I disclose this

information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study.

### **Confidentiality, Security of Data, and Retention Period**

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password protected computer on my home computer. Information will be recorded in hand-written format, typed, photographed, or audio recorded and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. I will be the only person reviewing raw data (data that includes any identifiers), and that data will be destroyed one year after I have completed my thesis defense in August 2023.

I will be unable to remove any data collected from individuals, who withdraw from the study during or after participating in group methods. I will protect confidentiality yet cannot extract data from one individual without undermining the entire method.

Due to the nature of group methods, including the Focus Group and the “Bonkers Cocktail Party,” it will not be possible to keep identities of the participants anonymous from the researcher, facilitator, or other participants. Again, I will ask participants to respect the

confidential nature of the research by not sharing names or identifying comments outside of the group.

### **Online Surveys**

The online survey tool is SurveyMonkey, used through a Royal Roads University account.

Survey Monkey has its servers in the USA. Your anonymous survey data may be subject to seizure by the US government under the USA Patriot Act. While the likelihood of this happening is very small, I am required to advise you of this potential risk.

### **Sharing Results**

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with PSIA-AASI National, the Women's Initiative Task Force, PSIA-AASI Divisions, and Big Sky Resort. In addition, I may use the research in conference presentations, scholarly articles, articles in 32 Degrees, or books. Should you wish to receive a copy of this research, you may email me at.

### **Procedure for Withdrawing from the Study**

You may withdraw at any point from the study. If you have already expressed interest or participated in any of the group methods, please contact Ann Schorling with your decision. You may not withdraw any data previously collected, but you will not be expected to participate in further elements of the study.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation or signing the in-person consent form, you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

If you have any questions about this inquiry, please contact: Ann Schorling,.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

### **Appendix C: Inquiry Team Member Letter of Agreement**

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership Degree at Royal Roads University, Ann Schorling (the Student) will be conducting an inquiry study at Big Sky Mountain Sports School to Identify how might we increase female representation as the highest levels of leadership and PSIA-AASI? You can confirm the student's registration at Royal Roads University by contacting the Program Head, Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta at Niels.Agger-Gupta@royalroads.ca

#### **Inquiry Team Member Role Description**

As a volunteer Inquiry Team Member assisting the Student with this project, your role may include one or more of the following: providing advice on the relevance and wording of questions and letters of invitation, supporting the logistics of the data-gathering methods, including observing, assisting, or facilitating an interview or focus group, taking notes, transcribing, reviewing analysis of data, and/or reviewing associated knowledge products to assist the Student and Big Sky Mountain Sports School's change process. In the course of this activity, you may be privy to confidential inquiry data.

#### **Confidentiality of Inquiry Data**

In compliance with the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy, under which this inquiry project is being conducted, all personal identifiers and any other confidential information

generated or accessed by the inquiry team advisor will only be used in the performance of the functions of this project and must not be disclosed to anyone other than persons authorized to receive it, both during the inquiry period and beyond it. Recorded information in all formats is covered by this agreement. Personal identifiers include participant names, contact information, personally identifying turns of phrase or comments, and any other personally identifying information.

Personal information will be collected, recorded, corrected, accessed, altered, used, disclosed, retained, secured and destroyed as directed by the Student, under direction of the Royal Roads Academic Supervisor.

Inquiry Team Members who are uncertain whether any information they may wish to share about the project they are working on is personal or confidential will verify this with Ann Schorling, the Student.

Statement of Informed Consent:

I have read and understand this agreement.

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Name (Please Print)

Signature

Date

**Appendix D: Online Survey Consent Form**

By signing this form, you agree that you are 19 or older and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and have data you contribute used in the final report and any other knowledge outputs (articles, conference presentations, newsletters, etc.).

I consent to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the Survey be included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed

I understand that once I have submitted this survey, I will not be able to remove or change my responses.

Name: (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix E: Online Survey Email Invitation**

Dear [Prospective Participant],

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for my Masters' Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by PSIA-AASI and Big Sky Resort, and I have been given permission to contact potential participants for this purpose.

The purpose of my research is to identify tools to increase gender equity at the highest levels of certification and leadership within PSIA-AASI. Whereas 40% of PSIA-AASI's membership identifies as female or non-binary, only 20% of Alpine level threes identify as female, and only 13% of snowboard level threes. Collectively, only about 20% of all education staff are women, and the national team has never included more than 25% women. As such, my research will look at the pipeline for female instructors, beginning early in their careers and continue on to include examiners and national team members. Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are an instructor at Big Sky Resort.

I am excited to partner with Big Sky and PSIA-AASI for this project. Big Sky and the Northern Rocky Mountain division have a strong reputation for advancing women in the industry, with the highest percentage of female examiners in the country. It is my hope that by working with Big Sky I can identify positive strategies that have worked and may apply to other resorts. In

addition, because of its success the challenges in achieving gender equity in Big Sky likely occur elsewhere in the country. By identifying strengths and challenges, we can support the industry in advancing.

This phase of my research project will consist of an online survey, which entails a series of questions and should not take more than 10 minutes to complete. The survey will be open from December 19th until January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

The attached document, the Information Letter, contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time before or during the survey without prejudice. If you choose to withdraw after completing the survey, because the data is anonymous, it will not be possible to remove any data collected from your participation up until that point.

I realize that due to our collegial relationship, you may feel compelled to participate in this research project. Please be aware that you are not required to participate and, should you choose to participate, your participation would be entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. If you do not wish to participate, simply

do not reply to this request. Your decision to not participate will also be maintained in confidence. Your choice will not affect our relationship or your employment status in any way.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

If you would like to participate in the survey, please follow this link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.ca/r/KMN6KPM>

If you would like to participate in other aspects of my research project, please contact me at:

Name: Ann Schorling

Sincerely,

Ann Schorling

**Appendix F: Survey Questions**

## Section 1: Demographic information

1. What is your age: 18-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, 51-55, 56-60, 61 and over
2. What is your gender identification? M, F, Other
3. Optional: What is your race?
4. Optional: What is your ethnicity?
5. What is your primary snowsports discipline? Alpine, Snowboard, Telemark, Cross Country, Adaptive
6. How many years have you taught snowsports? 0-2, 3-5, 6-10, 11-20, 21+
7. What is your highest current level of certification? No certification, 1, 2, 3, Education staff

## Section 2: Open-Ended

1. What are your ultimate goals in working as a snowsports instructor?
  
2. If you could have any type of support in reaching your goals, what would be most useful to you in achieving them?
  
3. What obstacles do you anticipate in reaching your goals?
  
4. What, if anything, would cause you to leave snowsports for another industry?

**Appendix G: Women's Focus Group Consent Form**

By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 18 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and have data you contribute used in the final report and any other knowledge outputs (articles, conference presentations, newsletters, etc.).

- I consent to the audio and/or video recording of the Focus Group
  
- I consent to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the Focus group be included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed
  
- I consent to the material I have contributed to and/or generated, including flipchart notes or other visuals, thorough my participation in the Focus Group be used in this study
  
- I commit to respect the confidential nature of the Focus Group by not sharing identifying information about the other participants
  
- I understand that some topics of conversation may cause discomfort and that I am free to leave this focus group at any moment.
  
- I acknowledge that I may leave this conversation at any moment, and accept that

any data collected from my participation up to that point cannot be removed.

- I recognize that although this research aims to increase gender equity in snowsports, change may be slow, incremental, or nonexistent.

Name: (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix H: Women's Focus Group Email Invitation**

Dear [Prospective Participant],

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for my Masters' Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by PSIA-AASI and Big Sky Resort, and I have been given permission to contact potential participants for this purpose.

The purpose of my research is to identify tools to increase gender equity at the highest levels of certification and leadership within PSIA-AASI. Whereas 40% of PSIA-AASI's membership identifies as female or non-binary, only 20% of Alpine level threes identify as female, and only 13% of snowboard level threes. Collectively, only about 20% of all education staff are women, and the national team has never included more than 25% women. As such, my research will look at the pipeline for female instructors, beginning early in their careers and continue on to include examiners and national team members. Your name was chosen as a prospective participant in this particular method. because you are a female or non-binary self-identified instructor at Big Sky Resort.

I am excited to partner with Big Sky and PSIA-AASI for this project. Big Sky and the Northern Rocky Mountain division have a strong reputation for advancing women in the industry, with the highest percentage of female examiners in the country. It is my hope that by working with Big

Sky, we can identify positive strategies that have worked and may apply to other resorts. In addition, because of its success the challenges in achieving gender equity in Big Sky likely occur elsewhere in the country. By identifying strengths and challenges, we can support the industry in advancing.

This second phase of my research project will consist of a Focus Group, which entails a small group conversation with other female instructors about your experiences at Big Sky Resort and is estimated to last 120 minutes. The goal of this conversation is to add depth and stories to the data collected earlier in the survey and to identify salient topics to discuss moving forward. The Focus Group will take place on the evening of February 8<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm Mountain Time. Due to current COVID-19 circumstances, we will run the Focus Group online and meet via Zoom. Please note that because Zoom's servers are in the United States any data may be accessed but the U.S. government through the patriot act.

The Focus Group will consist of four to eight participants. For the purposes of this research, I will choose focus group participants from among those who express interest to maximize the diversity of experiences in teaching in the snowsports industry based on snowsports discipline, certification level, age, and years of teaching.

If you are interested in participating in the Focus Group, please send an email by February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022. In that email, please state your name, interest, age, snowsports discipline, certification level, and how many years you have taught.

In addition, members of the Focus Group may choose to have greater involvement in the overall research project. Anyone interested may participate in upcoming methods and contribute to discussions about any changes at Big Sky moving forward. If you are interested in this greater role, please mention this in your email to me.

As the researcher, I will maintain your confidentiality, but because this is a group method, I cannot promise this on behalf of other participants. I will, however, request that all participants respect the confidential nature of this study and not share identifying information with others.

The attached document, the Information Letter, contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time before or during the Focus Group without prejudice. If you choose to withdraw during the Focus Group, because this is a group method, it will not be possible to remove any data collected from your participation up until that point.

I realize that due to my role in the industry, you may feel compelled to participate in this research project. Please be aware that you are not required to participate and, should you choose to participate, your participation would be entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you

are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. If you do not wish to participate, simply do not reply to this request. Your decision to not participate will be maintained in confidence. Your choice will not affect our relationship or your employment status in any way.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please contact me at:

Name: Ann Schorling

Sincerely,

Ann Schorling

### **Appendix I: Focus Group Outline**

The WFG will be a semi-structured focus group. I will work with my Inquiry team after the results of the survey have come out to more specifically design the focus group questions for this method. As the facilitator, I will ask questions and probe the group to hear from everyone. I will also encourage dialogue, pay attention to interaction and commonalities and fill an empathetic, as opposed to objective, role in order to gather collective as well as individual information (Ryan et al., 2014).

#### **Intro:**

“Thank you for attending this research method. I want to remind you that your attendance is not mandatory and that you are welcome to leave at any moment. If you choose to leave, please send a direct message to me, letting me know you will leave and that it is not a result of technical difficulties. I recognize that as this is a group method, none of you is anonymous to each other. I ask that you respect the confidential nature of this method, and do not disclose any identifying information or who was at this event to others not in attendance. What happens in the room stays in the room.

“During this conversation, please feel free to share when you are ready. Not everyone needs to answer every question, you may respond to each other in dialogue. Relative to my facilitation, I may interrupt the flow of the conversation to keep on track for the timeframe”

#### **Questions:**

1. Introduce yourself, your role at Big Sky Resort, and what brought you into this conversation.
2. Mentorship was commonly cited in both this and the WIT survey. In what ways has mentorship played a role in your successes?
3. In your experience at Big Sky, what has been most helpful to your development? Can you think of a time when you felt most supported as a non-male instructor?
4. Based on the results of the survey, do any of these cited challenges ring true for you: feeling judged inaccurately or stressed by judgment, feeling like work is inequitably distributed, feeling impacted by a “boys club” or a “too cool for school vibe,” or feeling limited by available mentorship? If so, share a story of how? (put in the chat)
  - a. What bothers you most about that?
  - b. What does that get in the way of/threaten?
  - c. What are we actually trying to achieve? Why are those things important to us?

5. As we transition into the next method, which will entail women sharing stories with men, which conversation topics are most important to carry forward?

**Appendix J: “Bonkers Cocktail Party” (BCP) Consent Form**

By signing this form, you agree that you are 19 or older and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and have data you contribute used in the final report and any other knowledge outputs (articles, conference presentations, newsletters, etc.).

- I consent to the audio and/or recording of the “Bonkers Cocktail Party”
  
- I consent to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the BCP be included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed
  
- I consent to the material I have contributed to and/or generated, including flipchart notes or other visuals, through my participation in the BCP be used in this study
  
- I commit to respect the confidential nature of the BCP by not sharing identifying information about the other participants
  
- I understand that some topics of conversation may cause discomfort and that I am free to leave this group research method at any moment.



- I acknowledge that I may leave this conversation at any moment, and accept that any data collected from my participation up to that point cannot be removed.
- I recognize that although this research aims to increase gender equity in snowsports, change may be slow, incremental, or nonexistent.
- I understand the risks of participating in in-person research during a pandemic and choose to participate free of coercion
- I acknowledge that the safety protocols have fully been explained to me in the information letter, and I agree to follow those protocols
- I absolve Royal Roads University of any liability in the event that I contract Covid-19 from participating in the research.
- I am aware of the Covid-19 symptoms and attest that I do not currently have any symptoms
- I have neither been exposed to someone with Covid-19 nor tested positive at any time in the last 10 days, nor am I awaiting the results of a recent Covid-19 test.
- I agree to inform the research team immediately if I begin to have Covid-19 symptoms or

test positive within 10 days of participation in this method.

Name: (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix K: “Bonkers Cocktail Party” (BCP) Email Invitation**

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for my Masters’ Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. This project has been approved by PSIA-AASI and Big Sky Resort, and I have been given permission to contact potential participants for this purpose.

The purpose of my research is to identify tools to increase gender equity at the highest levels of certification and leadership within PSIA-AASI. Whereas 40% of PSIA-AASI’s membership identifies as female or non-binary, only 20% of Alpine level threes identify as female, and only 13% of snowboard level threes. Collectively, only about 20% of all education staff are women, and the national team has never included more than 25% women. As such, my research will look at the pipeline for female instructors, beginning early in their careers and continue on to include examiners and national team members. Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because you are an instructor at Big Sky Resort.

I am excited to partner with Big Sky and PSIA-AASI for this project. Big Sky Resort and the Northern Rocky Mountain division have a strong reputation for advancing women in the industry, with the highest percentage of female examiners in the country. It is my hope that by working with Big Sky I can identify positive strategies that have worked and may apply to other resorts. In addition, because of its success the challenges in achieving gender equity in Big Sky

likely occur elsewhere in the country. By identifying strengths and challenges, we can support the industry in advancing.

This phase of my research project will consist of a large group research method, the “Bonkers Cocktail Party,” so named because it is designed to challenge the traditional gender roles of men and women by centering women’s and nonbinary individuals’ voices. The goal of this event is to engage men in conversations and problem solving with women and nonbinary individuals about gender equity in snowsports instruction. Male allyship in developing gender equity has proven highly effective in promoting meaningful progress on increasing equity in the workplace.

The “Bonkers Cocktail Party” will include one hour of structured conversation between participants, and one hour of a debriefing conversation. Normative gender roles are widespread phenomena, consistent across the country and across age demographics. At the event, each participant will receive instructions based on their gender identity, male or female and nonbinary. Men will be given a series of questions to ask throughout the event, and for the 60 minutes of casual conversation will be asked not to deviate from those questions. Female and non-binary identified individuals will receive instructions to speak freely. For a list of specific questions, please see attached. Afterward, all participants will engage in a structured, large group debrief lasting 45-60 minutes.

Keep in mind, this research method aims to center the stories gender groups less likely to be heard, with the hope of developing an understanding of emergent patterns in their less-visible

experiences with snowsports instruction. Although this method divides roles based on gender, it does not aim to place blame on any group or individual. Gender bias, stereotypes, and norms extend far beyond this group, this school, or this country. The impacts of gender bias can range from the extreme, such as threats of violence, to the more subtle, such as the impact of social groups on career advancement, of assumed gender-aligned skills on job expectations, or even the damaging impact of gender bias on relationships between women. Stories of non-males in male-dominated groups can vary widely and may even contradict each other. The goal is not to judge these stories, but to take the opportunity to listen openly. The hope is that by giving men an opportunity to hear the stories of women and non-binary individuals, we will create an opportunity to collectively learn the impacts of gender bias in Big Sky.

As the researcher, I will maintain your confidentiality, but I cannot promise this on behalf of other participants. However, I will request that all participants respect the confidential nature of this study and not share identifying information with others.

This event will take place at the Big Sky Conference center and is estimated to last 120 minutes. The event will take place in the Jefferson Room at 4:45 pm on 3/29/2022.

Because of the current Covid-19 pandemic, all participants will be expected to wear masks at all times when indoors, to maintain 6ft between themselves and others while indoors, and to stay home if they show any symptoms. Participants will further be expected to show proof of vaccination or a negative Covid-19 test within a week in order to participate in this method. Any

participant who shows symptoms of Covid-19 within 10 days of this session must immediately alert the primary researcher or their school director.

The attached document, the Information Letter, contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time before or during the “Bonkers Cocktail Party” without prejudice. If you choose to withdraw during the “Bonkers Cocktail Party”, because this is a group method, it will not be possible to remove any data collected from your participation up until that point.

I realize that due to our professional relationship, you may feel compelled to participate in this research project. Please be aware that you are not required to participate and, should you choose to participate, your participation would be entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. If you do not wish to participate, simply do not reply to this request. Your decision to not participate will also be maintained in confidence. Your choice will not affect our relationship or your employment status in any way.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please email me at:

Please include in your email your Name, Gender Identity, Role in the Big Sky Mountain Sports School.

Sincerely,

Ann Schorling

**Appendix L: “Bonkers Cocktail Party” Facilitator Draft Instructions**

The “Bonkers Cocktail Party” (BCP) consists of two parts. First, participants will engage in 60 minutes of semi-structured conversation, with instructions based on challenging gendered norms. The second half of the BCP will run a debrief in the structure of a World Café (Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014).

Intro:

“Thank you for attending this research method. I want to remind you that your attendance is not mandatory and that you are welcome to leave at any moment. I recognize that as this is a group method, none of you is anonymous to each other. I ask that you respect the confidential nature of this method, and do not disclose any identifying information or who was at this event to others not in attendance. What happens in the room stays in the room. Masking with your nose and mouth covered is mandatory for the duration of the activity.

“We all come to this experience with good intent. On some level, we all are here because we agree that we would like to influence the gender balance of snowsports instructors, especially when in the advancement of women and nonbinary instructors to higher levels of certification. Whereas 40% of PSIA-AASI’s membership identifies as female or non-binary, only 20% of Alpine level threes identify as female, and only 13% of snowboard level threes. Collectively, only about 20% of all education staff are women, and the national team has never included more than 25% women. We are not here to debate these statistics; we are here to try to change them. If you disagree strongly with this premise, it’s okay to choose to leave.”



## Part One

“For the first part of this evening, based on their gender identity, participants will receive one of two sets of instructions. The intent of this part of the BCP is to intentionally reverse normative gender behaviors in an effort to center the voices of women and non-binary individuals as an opportunity to uncover areas of systemic gender bias within snowsports instruction. Patterns of gender bias exist throughout the country and world. They can be obvious like a woman being asked if she believes, as a woman, she is capable of doing X job, or more subtle like the impact social groups have on professional development. Even men, who strongly support the promotion and development of women and women, who identify strongly as feminist, can subconsciously adhere to these patterns. So during this activity, for those identifying as female or non-binary, I want to stress the importance of sharing the impact your stories have had on you and avoiding assigning responsibility. We are all responsible. For those identifying as male, or those in the role of asking questions, I want to stress the importance of avoiding defending perspectives and individuals and instead listening to understand the impact. Even if you would like to respond empathetically to a story, please adhere tightly to the script.

Those participants identifying as male will receive instructions that say:

The intent of this part of the research method is to intentionally reverse normative gender behavior in an effort to hear unfamiliar stories and potentially uncover areas of systemic gender bias. Thank you so much for your open-minded willingness to participate in this experience.

Please avoid attempting to judge or solve any of the stories you hear, they are all the real experiences of another human, no story is right or wrong, instead just spend the hour listening to understand the impact of the stories. To achieve the goals of the BCP, I ask that for the next hour you adhere closely to these directions. This is a learning exercise. Use the script.

1. Please converse with people of a different gender from your own.
2. Please do not deviate from the statements or questions on this script
3. Please ask the following questions in order as many times as you want:
  - a. May I ask you some questions about your experiences in snowsports instruction? (If the answer is “no,” move to speak with another person)
  - b. In your experience at Big Sky, what has been most helpful to your development? Can you think of a time when you felt most supported as a non-male instructor?
  - c. Based on the results of the survey, do any of these cited challenges feel relevant for you: feeling judged inaccurately or stressed by judgment, feeling like work is inequitably distributed, feeling impacted by a “boys club” or a “too cool for school vibe,” or feeling limited by available mentorship? If so, would you be willing to share a story of how?
    - i. What bothers you most about that? And/or...
    - ii. What does that get in the way of/threaten?
4. While someone is telling you their story, you may ask probing questions like:
  - a. What was that like?

- b. Can you say more about that?
  - c. How did that experience affect you?
5. After someone shares their story with you please respond only with:
  - a. Thank you for sharing your story with me

“As you participate in the next hour, listen for subtleties, things you did not expect. Enjoy filling the role.”

Those participants identifying as female and non-binary will receive instructions that say:

“The intent of this research method is to intentionally reverse normative gender behavior in an effort to hear unfamiliar stories and potentially uncover areas of systemic gender bias. Thank you so much for your open-minded willingness to participate in this experience. To achieve these goals, I ask that you spend the next hour following closely to these directions:

1. Please converse mainly with people of a different gender from your own.
2. Share your stories as you feel comfortable, and especially share the way those stories have impacted you.
3. Avoid attempting to assign responsibility in your stories, assume good intent (though there may be stories in which it will be impossible to avoid placing blame and negative intent may be obvious).
4. Enjoy your conversation

Note:

For this event, the demographic breakdown included nine female and six male attendees. It also included ten people in supervisory roles and five instructors. Because of these demographics and a desire to enable as much conversation as possible while managing power dynamics, I added the following stipulations:

1. Women could use the script to ask questions of other women.
2. Male supervisors could approach female supervisors to ask questions, but not approach anyone else.
3. Female supervisors could approach any male or female participants to be asked questions. They could not approach female instructors to ask questions.
4. Male and female instructors could approach any female to ask questions
5. Female instructors could approach supervisors to be asked questions if they wanted to engage with supervisors.

## Part 2: The Debrief

The debrief ran as a World Café (Lipmanowicz & McCandless, 2014), because there were more than 8 participants. If there were fewer than 8 Participants, it could run as a Focus Group (Ryan et al., 2014). The World Café or Focus Group will consist of three rounds of

questions, each lasting 20 minutes for a total of 1 hour. The questions will be based on learning from prior methods, here is a draft of the questions.

Round 1:

What have been major learnings or insights so far?

Round 2:

What are we not seeing? Where do we need more clarity?

What assumptions do we need to test or challenge in thinking about this situation?

Round 3:

What would it take to create change on this issue?

What needs our immediate attention going forward?

Round 4: Share out from each person

What are the most important action items moving forward?

Data Collection

Data will come from an audio recording of the group share during the World Café Portion, as well as any written notes from participants on flip charts.

#### Materials

Flip Charts, one per group of 5 participants.

Flip Chart Markers

Pre-written instructions, one per participant

Enough tables and chairs for all participants to sit in groups of 4-6

Extra masks

Sticky notes

**Appendix M: Introduction and Recruitment Email**

Hello, Big Sky Instructors. My name is Ann Schorling and I am a current member of the PSIA-AASI Alpine Team. Most importantly in the is moment, however, I am currently a masters student pursuing an MA in Leadership from Royal Roads University in Victoria, BC. To graduate from my program, I need to complete a research project in an area of my choice. Christine Baker and Big Sky Resort have given me permission to do this project with volunteers from the Big Sky instructional staff separate from your work requirements.

The goal of my research is to identify opportunities to increase gender equity in the highest levels of snowsports instruction. As you may know from the Women's Initiative Task Force Survey released last year, female representation decreases markedly in PSIA-AASI at Level 3. Nationally, the average Education staff is 20% female, based on a review of divisional websites. Furthermore, the national team has never held more than 25% women. Through this research, I hope to identify systemic challenges that prevent us from advancing more women in snowsports instruction and work with you all to devise strategies to change them.

Big Sky is an ideal place for this research because it outperforms many of these trends in female representation and has clearly supported female advancement more effectively than other areas. Big Sky employs two of the four current female Alpine Team members as well as many of the NRM's female education staff. The Northern Rocky Mountain Division boasts upwards of 30% female education staff. Working in this environment with the Big Sky staff will be useful to

identify positive solutions that can be applied to other schools. Beyond that, it is likely that any remaining structural or systemic bias we identified would apply elsewhere as well.

My thesis project takes the form of participatory action research, which means that instead of gathering information as an outsider, I will work with any of you who are interested to make effective change as we learn. As an individual you have the choice to opt out of all participation, participate in one method, or potentially participate in all of my three research methods and influence my data interpretation. I will send out more information in the coming days and weeks regarding the specific research methods. If you are already interested or have questions, please email me at:.

I'm looking forward to working with all of you!

Best,

Ann Schorling



**Appendix N: Themes, Codes, Findings, and Conclusions**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
<p><b>Lesson</b></p> <p><b>Assignments</b></p>	<p>Client bias 16</p> <p>Limited self-advocacy 12</p> <p>Male vs. Female reputations 6</p> <p>Priority System 7</p> <p>Role congruity in assignments 30</p>	<p><b>How do current practices, cultural norms, or mental models within snowsports schools affect women’s longevity as instructors?</b></p> <p>Participants agreed that current habits in assigning lessons and recognizing achievements rely on biased decisions from both supervisors and clients. They further agreed that bias is exacerbated by differences in self-advocacy between males and non-males</p>	<p><b>How do current practices, cultural norms, or mental models within snowsports schools affect women’s longevity as instructors?</b> The mental models of gendered behavior expectations held in the snowsports instruction industry impact the careers of female-identified instructors through work assignments and training.</p>
<p><b>Minority</b></p> <p><b>Experience</b></p>	<p>Affinity cons 2</p> <p>Boys club 14</p> <p>Can’t be myself 1</p> <p>Gender bias 25</p> <p>Industry bias 4</p> <p>Lack of Role Models 1</p> <p>Male preference 11</p> <p>Microaggressions 2</p> <p>Overly competitive 1</p> <p>Prevalence of minority</p>	<p><b>What barriers exist to their advancement?</b> The participating female-identified snowboard instructors articulated less interest in or aversion to affinity groups and female mentorship, which contradicted the statements of the female-identified skiers.</p>	<p><b>What barriers exist to their advancement?</b> The most significant barriers to achieving increased gender equity in snowsports include the relative paucity of female snowboarders, the relative paucity of female-identified instructors in high-level trainings, and the inability of</p>

	<p>experience 15</p> <p>Promoted quickly 3</p> <p>Queen Bee 8</p> <p>Stereotype threat 6</p> <p>Tokenism 7</p> <p>Ubiquity of neg impact 2</p> <p>Unfair Judgment 5</p>	<p>Female-identified instructors expressed feelings of intimidation, unfair judgment, and self-doubt much more frequently than male-identified participants. They also reported that their minority experiences contributed</p>	<p>trainers to combat negative group behaviors.</p>
<b>Self-Doubt</b>	<p>Ability vs. Confidence 13</p> <p>Certification as Credibility 9</p> <p>Emotional Support 6</p> <p>Encouragement 8</p> <p>Female Community 3</p> <p>Masc. vs. Fem. attitude 40</p> <p>Self-Doubt 15</p> <p>Self-Worth 3</p> <p>Stereotype Threat 6</p> <p>Stress 4</p>	<p>to significant gender bias, stereotype threat, tokenism, and microaggressions. Those feelings intensified in more male-dominated populations and at higher levels of skiing and snowboard performance</p>	
<b>Mentorship</b>	<p>Accessible mentors 11</p> <p>Checking In 2</p> <p>Learning from 10</p> <p>Male advocates 11</p> <p>Mentor Choice 15</p> <p>Mentor communication 2</p> <p>Mentor Trust 6</p> <p>Mentor for career 21</p>	<p><b>Which current practices support women’s career development toward certification and leadership?</b></p> <p>Both younger staff and female staff placed a high value on mentorship programs that</p>	<p><b>Which current practices support women’s career development toward certification and leadership?</b></p> <p>The presence of female mentorship, the adaptability of school leadership, and the</p>

	Positive mentorship 6 Role models 8	highlight and prioritize mentor choice and professional growth.	commitment among leadership to tackling issues of equity
<b>Solutions</b>	Affinity Learning Spaces 14 Challenging own bias 10 Feeling seen and valued 2 Parity 6	<p><b>How might we create cultures in snowsports schools that willingly engage systemic biases?</b> During the empathy building activities in the BCP, both male and female instructors and supervisors expressed a heightened awareness of gender bias in lesson assignments, which causes women to receive emotionally challenging lessons, while men receive physically challenging lessons.</p> <p><b>Which systematic changes will support women’s advancement?</b> Suggested changes included addressing gender bias in lesson assignments and creating more gender balance in training groups or increasing available affinity training.</p>	<p><b>How might we create cultures in snowsports schools that willingly engage systemic biases?</b> It is possible to promote cultures that engage systemic bias by using principles of transformational learning, identifying “creative tension” (Senge, 2006), supporting psychological safety, and engaging people who consciously espouse values that contradict the bias in question.</p> <p><b>Which systematic changes will support women’s advancement?</b> See Organizational Implications Ch. 5</p>