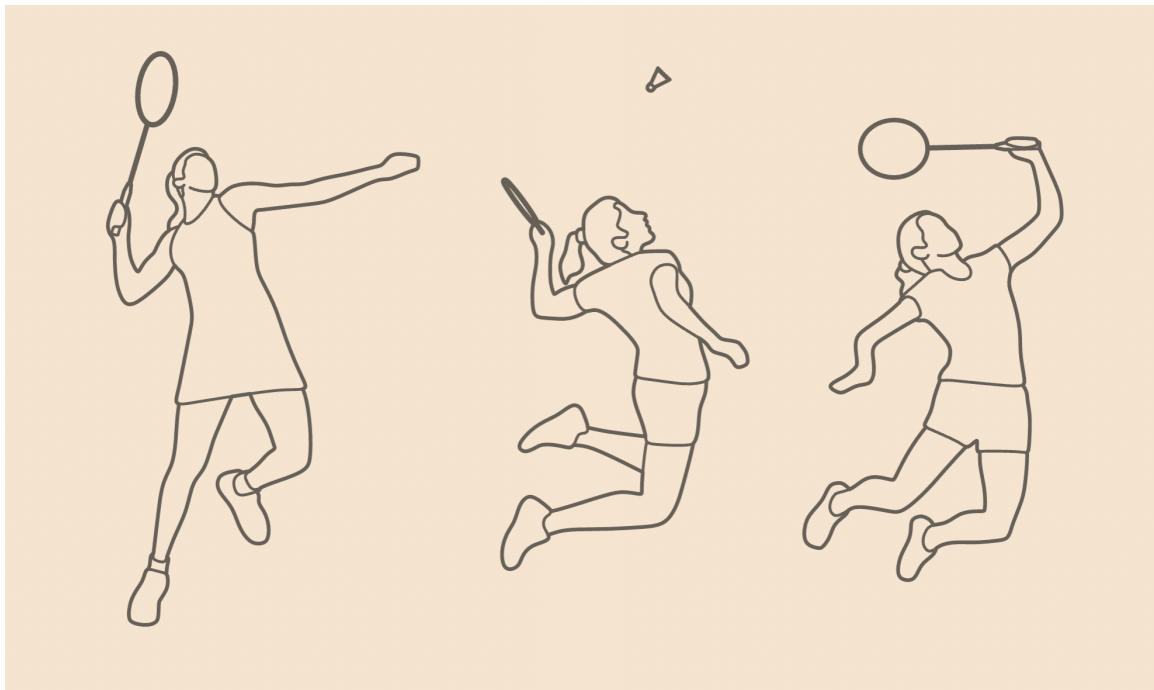


Smashing Like a Girl

*A Qualitative Study on Female Athletes' Perception
of Factors Affecting their Performance*



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Abstract

This thesis aims to investigate cultural factors of gender that may affect female performance from the female athletes' perspective through the problem statement:

“How do cultural factors of gender affect women’s performance in elite sports from the perspective of elite female athletes?”

The thesis introduces a previous study focused on cultural factors through participant observation (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022). The previous study is important since this thesis is a follow-up study, and thus, the significant findings are presented.

The theoretical framework of the thesis consists of the French social psychologist Serge Moscovici’s theory of social representations and the American social feminist Iris Marion Young’s account concerning bodily comportment. Moreover, a critical perspective on Young’s early work is emphasized. Lastly, Moscovici and Young’s accounts are contextualized regarding female athletes’ challenges in a sports psychological and philosophical framework.

The study's methodological framework focuses on phenomenology regarding the epistemological and ontological approaches to the study. Moreover, the study applies the qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews. Thus, three female athletes from the Danish national badminton team are interviewed.

The interviews are analyzed through thematic analysis, and thus, six main themes and nine sub-themes are identified. These themes are the main theme Childhood Development. The main theme Media Discourse, including the sub-themes of Female Attractiveness, Personal Life Versus Performance, and the Interpretation of the Word “Athlete.” The main theme Gendered Playing Style, including the sub-themes of Doubles and Mixed as well as Space. The main theme Social Roles, consisting of the sub-themes of Communication and

Hierarchy. The main theme Patriarchy, including the sub-themes of Sexism and Authorities. And lastly, the main theme Education.

The findings from the previous study, the theoretical framework, and the conclusions of the analysis merge into a discussion to enlighten the problem statement. The discussion consists of eight topics regarding the cultural influences on children's upbringing, gendered differences in badminton, pursuing a dual-career, media discourse, gender inequality in sports, a comparison between the previous study and the thesis, and the study's trustworthiness.

Overall, several factors seem to affect female performance in elite sports from the participants' perspective. Gendered childhood competition might unconsciously affect their social roles growing up, affecting their performance. The playing styles affect their performance, as the aggressive playing style, including the jump smash, seems to enhance their performance. The communication appears to affect their performance. The social roles seem to affect the female athletes, and they experience the men as superior. The pursuit of dual-careers might impact their focus, hampering their performance. The media discourse also seems to affect their performance as the media portray other factors as necessary for female athletes. The majority of male leaders may influence social roles. And lastly, gender equality may also affect female performance, as women are perceived as secondary. The discussion also focuses on a comparison between the two studies. Overall, several factors are consistent in the two studies, which regard the men receiving more attention, the male-dominated coaching staff, the differences in bodily movement, the differences in the communicative levels, and the media's focus on female appearance. However, some findings do not correlate, which concerns the focus on gender roles and responsibility, the emphasis on childhood competition and dual-careers, and the mention of gender labeling. The discussion also emphasizes the trustworthiness of the study.

The thesis emphasizes future research and research implications. These items include a focus on the coaches' gender and the coaching career, dual-careers and gender, a correlation between the gender pay gap, roles models, and the pursuit of a dual-career, male athletes'

perspective on cultural factors of performance, the implementation of the jump smash in girls' practices, awareness and the bystander effect, and replicating the study to other sports. The research implications regard workshops about awareness of the factors for both players and coaches and the implementation of badminton's aggressive playing style. Thus, from the participants' perspective, this thesis emphasizes the importance of gendered cultural factors according to female performance in sports at the elite level.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction and Problem Statement

If you explore sports news sites in 2022, you are more likely to discover male performance than female performance articles. One of the Danish sports news sites, TV2SPORT, has 44 articles about male athletes and three articles about female athletes on the front page on May 26, 2022 (TV2, 2022). Moreover, the Danish sports news site, DR Sport, has 36 articles concerning male athletes compared to six articles about female athletes on the front page on May 26, 2022 (DR, 2022). Of those six articles, two are about performance and four are about their personal lives and regard headlines such as “Træneren blev ved med at røre ved tidligere dansk landsholdsspiller: ‘Det er langt over grænsen’” [“The coach kept touching former Danish national team player: “It is way over the line”] (Nørgaard, 2022). This exemplifies a tendency for men to be portrayed more often than women, which aligns with studies that show that the media covers male athletes more often than female athletes (Alkammash, 2021). Moreover, if female athletes receive media coverage, the media seems more concerned about their personal lives than their performance, aligning with the above example (CUP, 2016; Plaza et al., 2017). Thus, there appears to be a tendency for the media to focus more on male athletes’ performance than females. Therefore, female athletes might encounter some difficulties regarding the focus on their performance as they must navigate their position in sports where the media seems to be concerned with their personal lives more than their performance. Therefore, it could be interesting to investigate what cultural factors affect female athletes’ performance in elite sports.

Most sports have constituted a male-dominated preference throughout history, creating a preference domain for men (Plaza et al., 2017). Pringle (2018) defines modern sports as masculine in its orientation, male-dominated, and fundamentally a sexist institution. Moreover, sports have been divided into gender for decades, where women’s sports have been perceived as secondary to men’s (CUP, 2016). Men are perceived to perform better than women, with studies showing men performing an average of 11.7% better in 82 quantifiable Olympic disciplines (Thibault, 2010). These differences are partly explained through biological factors; however, studies show that gender only predicts five percent of

the difference in physical abilities (Chalabaev, 2013). Therefore, investigating differences in sports participation and performance might be explained by other factors. Thus, cultural, social, and psychological factors should be considered regarding the differences in performance between genders.

These factors can be explored through several methodological approaches. Thus, this thesis is a follow-up study to a previous study that focused on cultural factors that affect female athletes' performance based on participant observations. Thus, the problem statement of that study was: "How do cultural conceptions of gender affect women's performance in sports at the elite level?" (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022). To further investigate the cultural factors that may affect women's performance in elite sports, it could be interesting to research the female athletes' perspectives. This may further help map the cultural factors that influence their performance. Thus, to further investigate this field of research, this thesis is the second part of a study that focuses on cultural factors of female athletes' performance. Therefore, the problem statement of this thesis is:

"How do cultural factors of gender affect women's performance in elite sports from the perspective of elite female athletes?"

By researching Danish female badminton players, the field will narrow down to badminton as a sport. However, through the theoretical perspective on general gendered issues in sports, the field will broaden to a discussion on female athletes in general.

1.2. Clarification of Concepts

This thesis applies several concepts that may need clarification for the reader to comprehend their purpose. Thus, three concepts will be clarified and some of the different aspects of the game of badminton. The concepts of cisgender, gender norms, and patriarchy will be clarified. Moreover, the badminton terms singles, doubles, and mixed will be clarified since this thesis focuses on the game of badminton.

Gender norms are related to a subset of social norms regarding gender. They are deeply entrenched, informal, and widely held beliefs about social roles, expectations, and power relations that control human behavior in a particular social context. Moreover, they are

rules or ideas about how women or men are expected to act (Jones et al., 2018). This concept is relevant, as gender norms will be referred to throughout the thesis.

Cisgendered people regard individuals who identify their gender as either woman or man in correlation to the sex they were ascribed at birth (Aultman, 2014). Accordingly, this thesis uses the term “gender” in correlation with cisgenderism. Thus, the terms “woman” and “man” will be applied in the thesis, which implies the meaning “ciswoman” and “cisman.”

Patriarchy refers to an institutionalized system, government, or society ruled by men. It is manifested in social, political, economic, and legal organizations through different cultures (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017). Accordingly, patriarchy is applied in this thesis as the term is used by some of the theorists in correlation to the organization of sports (Plaza et al., 2017).

A singles match refers to a match with one player on each side of the opposing sides of the same gender. A doubles match refers to a match with two players on each side of the opposing sides of the same gender. A mixed match refers to a match with two players on each side of the opposing side where one player is male, and one is female (BWF, 2010). These terms are relevant as the thesis will refer to these types of playing styles.

1.3. Disposition

The disposition of this thesis starts with **section 2**, which is an introduction to the previous study about “Gendered influences on female performance in elite sports” (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022), which is considered the first part of a two-part study with this thesis as the second part. Thus, the findings from the previous study and their relevance to this thesis will be introduced in section 2. **Section 3** regards the theoretical approach, which focuses on the French social psychologist Serge Moscovici’s theory of social representations and the American social feminist Iris Marion Young’s theory of female embodiment, with a critical perspective on Young’s early work. Moreover, some of the gendered challenges in sports psychology and philosophy will be presented. **Section 4** presents the methodological framework of the thesis, which is the qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews. **Section 5** introduces the analysis based on the thematic analysis method and the appliance to the thesis. **Section 6** covers the discussion, which connects the theoretical

framework with the analysis and the findings from the previous study (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022). **Section 7** presents possible future research points and the research implications of the study. **Section 8** completes the thesis with the conclusion, and **Section 9** covers the reference list.

2. Previous Study

The research on cultural and gendered factors regarding women's performance in elite sports has taken two parts. The first part took place during my ninth semester. I approached the topic with a focus on the cultural factors of gender that affect women's performance in elite sports by applying participant observations (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022). The second part is this thesis, which approaches the topic through semi-structured interviews to gain insights into the female athletes' perceptions of the cultural and gendered factors that might influence their performance. Thus, this thesis is a follow-up study to the previously conducted research. This section covers some of the main findings of the previous research that informed the current research.

2.1. Findings From the Previous Study

The first study focused on the problem statement: "How do cultural conceptions of gender affect women's performance in sports at the elite level?" (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022). By observing the Danish women's badminton national team's practices, the method applied was participant observation to investigate the problem statement. The data collection consisted of a comprehensive list of 968 observations based on nine practices, which was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis.

Seven discussion topics were comprehended, including Space, Secondary Women, Female Attractiveness, Gender Roles and Responsibility, Language Use, Bodily Performance, and Research Criteria. Although these seven topics were divided into subheadings, they all interacted and intervened with one another (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022).

The study's findings indicated that the female badminton players were limited in their space usage obtaining different and less comprehensive positions compared to men. The findings further implied that the women reinforced certain gender-stereotypical social representations as they occasionally acted gigglish and clenched their bodies. It also appeared that the women would reinforce Young's stereotypical account that girls are taught to play nicely and restricted, as they seemed to lack a free playing style. It is arguable that the gender-stereotypical roles were reinforced as the women were observed to pay more attention to their coaches and take up more responsibility than their male counterparts.

The findings indicated that the women seemed withdrawn in their verbal- and nonverbal communication compared to men, which might contribute to their level of performance. The findings suggested that the women were perceived as secondary since the coaches seemed to pay more attention to the male players as the setup in the gym was in the men's favor and thus, emphasized male priority. Lastly, theoretically, there was an understanding that women should perform attractively, and therefore, the female clothing indicated a reinforcement of those social representations. Overall, the findings indicated that the women seemed more restrained in their bodily performance than men, who took up more space and seemed to be more in charge, and thus, the men appeared to have a higher range for performance (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022).

The conclusions made in the study indicated that the female athletes seemed more restrained in their body language, verbal and nonverbal communication, positioning, and use of space. It is arguable that the bodily impacts may influence the level of performance of female athletes in Danish badminton. Moreover, there seem to be tendencies that could be applied in other sporting arenas (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022).

Applying other sources or methods could strengthen the findings and create a sense of triangulation (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). Triangulation is a method to strengthen the findings by applying several theoretical perspectives, diverse independent sources, and different methods or concepts (Andersen & Boolsen, 2016). Therefore, the study implied future research regarding the participants' perspectives concerning the factors that may influence their performance. This might reinforce or contradict the findings or explain other factors contributing to gendered performance. Thus, the previous study led up to the problem statement of this thesis and, thus, a continuation of the topic and the relevance of female athletes' perspectives on gendered cultural factors that might influence their performance.

The overall approach and findings of the first study precede the approach in this thesis and the focus on the female athlete's perspective on the cultural factors that may affect their performance in elite sports through semi-structured interviews as a method, which will be elaborated on in section 4.

2.2. Relevance to This Thesis

The findings of the preceding study are relevant to this thesis as it precedes some of the possible cultural factors that may affect female athletes' performance in elite sports. The study's outcome proposed future research regarding the female athletes' perspectives on the cultural, gendered factors that might influence their performance, leading to the methodological framework of this thesis: semi-structured interviews. This methodological framework is applied to comprehend the female athletes' experiences, strengthening the study's credibility through triangulation. The preceding study has further shaped the problem statement of this thesis, as it is a continuation of that study but with a focus on the athletes' perspective.

Moreover, the previous study shaped the interview guide, focusing on the female embodiment, agency, and social representations of female athletes' perception of being women in elite sports and how this may affect their performance. Further, some of the questions emphasize the discussion points of the previous study, as seen in Appendix 1. Generally, the previous study has sharpened the questions and focus of this thesis. The participant observations made me aware of some tendencies that seemed to affect the female athletes' performance, which I was not aware of before. These tendencies include the social roles of the gender of the coaches, the usage of the courts and how the genders position themselves, the differing usage of space between the genders, how the two genders communicate differently, and the importance of female appearance. Thus, the previous study shaped the purpose of this thesis in several different ways. Therefore, it seems relevant to include the findings and the purpose of the prior study before asserting this thesis. Thus, this thesis applies semi-structured interviewing, which will be elaborated on in section 4.2., to focus on the female athletes' perspectives on the possible cultural and gendered factors that may affect their performance and further reassess the findings from the previous study.

3. Theoretical Approach

This section covers the theoretical approach. First, social representation theory will be presented to understand the societal, cultural, and historical perspectives on women in sports. This section covers objectification and anchoring, and transformation through intervention. Next, Young's theory on female embodiment will be presented to understand the cultural influences embedded in female athletes. This section covers bodily comportment, the gendered bodily differences, phenomenological space, the Other, and a critical perspective on Young's early work. Lastly, the gendered challenges in sports psychology and philosophy will be introduced, integrating the social representation theory and Young's account to comprehend how this affects female athletes in sports.

3.1. Social Representation Theory

This section introduces the social representation theory and the relevance to understanding the challenges that female athletes face today and how these are accepted by cultural, societal, and historical events and changes.

Moscovici introduced the social representation theory, a theory of social knowledge that establishes social networks of figurative schemes and concepts created in and through common sense, daily knowledge, tradition, and communication. Thus, social representations are concerned with communicating what is already known, as it is embedded in historical and sociocultural contexts (Markova, 2012; Markova, 2019). It aims to understand the transformation and formation of knowledge, beliefs, actions, and meanings of complex social phenomena in and through culture, language, and communication (Markova, 2012). Social representations are systems of values, practices, and ideas constructed by social groups that enable orientation to the world and a code of communication (Wagoner, 2017). It emphasizes communication and group affinities when shaping ideas. The representations are unified by a shared motivation to protect the self-identity of the in-group. Thus, the dominant groups control the process of representations, making some representations gain more value than others (Joffe, 1999). The purpose is to understand how people feel, think, and act and make unfamiliarity familiar (Markova, 2012; Wagoner, 2017). Thus, people apply prior knowledge to comprehend new phenomena as they stress everyday knowledge and make meaning of recent events (Wagner

et al., 2002; Joffe, 1999). The social representation of phenomena differs from one culture to another, from one point in time to another, and at the same point in time within the same culture (Farr, 1993). Linell (2009) argued that the social representation theory generally focuses on thinking in society. Social representations are both held by someone and by something, and they are in people's minds and the media, making them a part of cognition and culture (Farr, 1993). Thus, social representations are communicated through the mediation of symbols and meanings to someone through group-based processes (Valsiner, 2007; Joffe, 1999). Moreover, if people understand their social representations, they can understand why they behave as they do (Farr, 1993).

Moscovici draws on Piaget and Vygotsky as he focuses on Piaget's emphasis on the role of the child and Vygotsky's emphasis on the internalization of collective sign systems. Hence, Moscovici sees psychological development as a social process, incorporating both views to create social representations (Duveen, 1997). Duveen (1997) argued that children are objects of other people's representations of gender. Therefore, they position themselves in a world structured by these representations. This perspective aligns with Young's account, which will be introduced in section 3.3. It concerns children being shaped by their culturally constructed gender labels from an early age, creating the gender groups that people fit into as they grow up. Children are taught to behave according to their gender, based on semiotic media such as toys, books, and clothes, which shape a child's gender identity to fit into society. Duveen (1997) argued that boys are more frequently active and constructive in play than girls, who are more regularly creative and do role play. Thus, the semiotic media are internalized by shared values or social representations (Zittoun, 2012).

3.1.1. Transformation Through Intervention

Social representations are phenomena that are always in the making and take part in intervention and action, as they are transformed and formed in and through conflict, asymmetries, tension, and discontinuities (Markova, 2012). As communicative genres of certain groups are always a part of the culture, social representations are never a neutral exchange of information. Social representations are discontinuous, as they arise in traditions, communication, and social experience. Beliefs, images, and emotions are sensitive to sociocultural changes and tensions (Markova, 2012). Thus, the past imprints certain marks on new representations, but they can change over time (Joffe, 1999).

Social representations can change the thinking of groups or individuals about an issue, as they can transform certain practices. Thus, the representations and the intervention of social representations are consciously directed at making changes in the activities of groups or individuals (Markova, 2012). As social representations of certain phenomena are transferred, certain routines are disrupted, turning the social representations upside down and calling for action (Markova, 2012). Women must begin the transformation themselves concerning the female embodiment in sports. Otherwise, women simply discover themselves as the inessential and never turn into the essential (de Beauvoir, 2011/1949). Therefore, there must be a call for action for women to change their social representations and gender roles in society.

Moscovici also focused on the theory of minorities' innovation, which concerns the creation of conflicts, group dynamics, and the role of communication in social change. Moscovici argued that anomic minorities passively accept their status of persecution and discrimination without opposing their inferior status. Nomic minorities create and maintain conflict by actively changing the system, expressed through their opposition to the social system. They further provoke external conflicts with the majority as they refuse to accept the beliefs and norms (Markova, 2019). Women in sports appear to be a minority since sports are male-dominated. Thus, female athletes must actively create and maintain conflict to change the system and the social representations of women in sports.

3.1.2. Objectification and Anchoring

According to Wagoner (2017), Moscovici described two principal processes involved in social representation: objectification and anchoring.

Objectification is a process of projecting what people are thinking into the world to make the abstract more concrete. Hence, normalizing scientific concepts by making them more familiar. The idea of unfamiliarity becomes saturated with reality and turns into the essence of reality (Wagoner, 2017). Overt gender labeling is more common in women's sports than in men's, both in terms of the athletes participating, such as a "woman golfer," and in terms of the sport itself, such as "ladies' singles" (CUP, 2016). Women's sports seem to be marked more often than men's, implicitly normalizing the concept of "sports" to be

understood as men's sports, creating an objectification of the term "sports" in common-day speech (CUP, 2016).

Anchoring defines how something unfamiliar is brought into a group's familiar symbolic universe, expressing and modeling everyday social relations. New objects are classified and named according to prior existing social knowledge. It is a defensive mechanism that circles an unfamiliar object to devise what aspects to familiarize ourselves with and which to reject. It is never neutral, as it is a tool to advance our interests (Wagoner, 2017). Historically, women in sports have been perceived as something unfamiliar. For instance, the Tour de France was inaugurated in 1903, but a women's version was not inaugurated until 1955. It was named the Tour Feminine Cycliste, and it assumed that women were not capable of enduring races over equivalent distances to men (Williams, 2014). Since 1955 the race's format has changed numerous times, and lastly, it has been announced that in 2022 the race will occur under the name Tour de France Femmes Avec Zwift, having eight stages compared to the male version named Tour de France that has 21 stages (Cycling News, 2022; Tour de France, n.d.). This exemplifies how women in cycling are anchored as something unfamiliar. "Feminine" had to be added for people to make sense that women could participate at the elite level. Thus, female cyclists have been anchored to comprehend their position.

3.1.3. Summary

This section has introduced the theory of social representations. The transformational process has been introduced to portray how female gender roles in sports can be changed towards a higher standard of equality. Lastly, objectifying and anchoring have been introduced to provide an insight into how people understand and comprehend female sports.

3.3. *Bodily Comportment*

This section introduces Young's early work on female embodiment regarding female bodily use and performance in sports. Young's earlier work centers around a theory of the feminine style of bodily movement (Prange, 2018). It is a starting point for reflection on the bodily and social resistance female athletes encounter in sports. It has groundbreaking thinking on the gendered perspective and nature of the athletic movement (Bergés & Siani, 2018; Prange, 2018). This section focuses on Young's essay "Throwing Like a Girl"

(Young, 1980), which describes how women are much less effective and confident than men in using their body movements and that they use less space and feel more constricted (La Caze, 2014). Thus, Young focused on basic modalities of feminine bodily comportment (Barbour, 2018).

Young (1980) described the basic modalities of feminine manners of moving, bodily comportment, and relation in space to comprehend how women comport themselves in society and how they move differently than men. She directed her account towards the modalities of feminine bodily existence regarding women in contemporary commercial, urban, and industrial society. Young (1980) did not claim for her account to be universal. Still, she provided a significant generalization of what might be experienced rather than describing the essence of all experiences (La Caze, 2014). However, her approach to female bodily comportment applies to other fields, societies, and epochs, such as the female bodily comportment in elite sports to this present day (Young, 1980).

Young (1980) drew on the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of "femininity," which is not something all women have due to their biological sex. Instead, it is described as a set of social conditions and structures bound by the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society. De Beauvoir argued that this situation defines any human existence concerning cultural, social, historical, and economic relations, and the existence of any female person cannot be reduced to the appeal of the natural and ahistorical feminine essence (Prange, 2018). Therefore, not all women can be considered "feminine" due to their biological sex, so no distinctive structures or behaviors are typical of being a woman. Women share a sense of unity based on the experiences bound through a certain sociohistorical set of circumstances, which emphasize a set of structures of feminine existence (Prange, 2018). This thesis focuses on Young's understanding of female embodiment and how this translates into athletics. Young's account combines de Beauvoir's theory of the woman's situation with the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the lived body, which is described as the primary source of human experiences in relations with and to the world (Prange, 2018). Young described the lived body as a unified idea of a physical body experiencing and acting in a specific sociocultural context, described as a body-in-situation. Young argued that "gender" describes how these lived bodies are positioned through certain structural relations of processes and institutions (La Caze, 2014). The combination of the two theoretical aspects describes a particular style

of bodily comportment that is typical of feminine existence, which consists of specific modalities of the conditions and structures of the body's being in the world (Young, 1980). Thus, Young addressed how each gender projects their state of being in the world through bodily movement (Prange, 2018). Young further argued that the lived body is a practical way of thinking about identity and subjectivity (La Caze, 2014).

3.3.1. Gendered Bodily Differences

According to Young (1980), women move differently than men, based on the typically “female” and “male” forms of bodily posture in the 1980s (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012). Women do not use their body's full lateral and spatial potentials. Women are more enclosed in their body language as they shield their bodies with their arms, sit with their legs closed together, and walk with smaller strides. Women “perform femininity” as they throw with less power, accuracy, and distance than men (Tredway, 2018). Science shows that males perform better in motor tasks that require speed or strength from puberty on (Chalabaev, 2013). However, despite the physical differences between the genders, Young (1980) argued that many of the observed differences in performing requiring physical tasks are due to how each gender uses their body in approaching those tasks and not the differences in physical strength. Women tend not to put their whole-body weight into performing physical tasks that require strength, force, and muscular coordination. They also often do not perceive themselves as capable of carrying and lifting heavy things, and thus, they do not shove, pull, or squeeze with significant force. As a result, women often fail to summon the full possibilities of their muscular position. They do not put their whole bodies into engaging in physical tasks with the same naturalness and ease as men. Instead of using the entire body, women typically concentrate on one part of the body. The remaining body parts stay relatively immobile, and hence, they do not throw their whole bodies into motion as men do. Thus, the entire body is not put into a directed and fluid motion, and therefore, women engage in sports with less free motion and less open reach than men. Hence, men are often seen displaying better sporting efforts than women (Young, 1980).

Young argued (1980) that the bodily differences are seen at young ages, as girls do not use their bodies in the same manner as the boys do. Girls are encouraged to act in “lady-like” ways throughout their childhood, such as not using “masculine gestures” and keeping their legs closed together, and as a result, the girls learn and acquire these bodily traits (Inglis &

Thorpe, 2012,). Young (1980) argued that lack of bodily movement creates a gap where girls are often more enclosing and sedentary in their playing style than the boys. Girls are not encouraged in the same manner as boys are to develop specific bodily skills or use their full bodily capacities in open and free engagement with the world. Girls are also not encouraged to engage in sports or asked to perform demanding physical tasks that require strength and effort. They get little practice at fiddling with things, giving them less time to develop spatial skills. As girls understand their gender, they learn to acquire a particular positive style of feminine body movement and comportment through subtle habits, such as walking, standing, sitting, and gesturing like a girl, according to Young (1980). Thus, girls' physicality and body movements are restricted, as they literally learn to "throw like a girl" (Scraton, 2018). Young (1980) argued that girls actively learn to hamper their movements, as they are told that they must be careful not to get dirty or hurt and that things they may desire are dangerous to encounter. Thus, girls develop a bodily timidity, increasing as they get older. The more girls understand themselves as feminine, the more they take up themselves as immobile or fragile, and thus, they actively enact body inhibition. Young (1980) argued that the process of socializing women into "moving like a girl" starts in childhood socialization, which continues and is constantly reinforced for women in adulthood by the unconscious practices of the social order.

Young (1980) argued that feminine bodily comportment derives from women's contradicting experience of their bodies as both a capacity and a thing; it is a tool and an object. Women often mediate their actions by imagining themselves as objects to others and their actions as intentional subjects (Barbour, 2018). Thus, female movement is intentionally inhibited, ambiguous transcending, and a discontinuous unity (Young, 1980). Even though feminine bodily existence is an openness to the world, and thus, a transcendence, it is an ambiguous transcendence since it is laden with immanence simultaneously (Prange, 2018). This notion stems from the gendered norms in a patriarchal society, in which women are inhibited and excluded from the full expression of universal bodily humanity (Young, 1998). Instead of being merely a subject, the feminine bodily existence is both an object and a subject. Thus, the feminine body is lived as a thing that inhibits bodily movement and creates a distance from one's body and from engaging the world's possibilities (Young, 1980).

3.3.2. Phenomenological Space

According to Young (Prange, 2018), women are surrounded by an imaginary space as they move in sports, which they are not free to move beyond, making their movement in space confined. She argued that women are discouraged from confidently reaching out to the space surrounding them through socialization and enculturation (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012). She argued that women tend to wait for things and objects to approach their space rather than meet them, as they tend to respond to the object's motion as if it is coming at rather than coming toward them. Thus, their bodily impulse is to duck, flee, or protect themselves. Men move towards the objects and confront them with a countermove. Therefore, men act while women react. Women typically approach physical engagement with things with hesitancy, timidity, and uncertainty. They further lack a sense of confidence in the capability of their bodies (Young 1980). As such, women tend to underestimate their bodily capacity and their level of achievement (Prange, 2018). Young (1980) argued that women live their bodies as a burden, which must be prodded and dragged along but also protected at the same time. Young asserted that these habits are learned and acquired and not something women are born with and act upon through their nature. Instead, these ways of behaving are socialized through a patriarchal society, which creates a certain female sense of self (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012).

Young drew on Merleau-Ponty's (Young, 1980) notion of phenomenal space, which arises from people's lived relations and motility. Through this notion, Young argued that the female body is not the subject of motion but instead held in place by the female's surroundings (Prange, 2018). Therefore, feminine existence lives in space as confining or enclosed, making the feminine existence positioned in space. The space available to women is frequently physically of greater radius than the space they inhabit or use. Thus, the space available for female manipulation and grasp is constricted, and the space beyond the radius is not available for her movement. Young (1980) argued that the women's movement accounts for situations conditioned by patriarchal oppression in contemporary society and not in anatomy. Thus, Young (1980) argued that women's spacing becomes filled with timidity, uncertainty, and immobility, creating a limited feminine space.

3.3.3. The Other

The modalities mentioned above are based on de Beauvoir's account of women's being in a patriarchal society. She argued that "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011). Thus, no psychic, economic, or biological elements define women's position in society, but civilization creates the feminine. It is the mediation of another that constitutes an individual as an Other. Therefore, one is not born a "female" athlete and acts accordingly; one has rather learned to behave a certain way through societal rules concerning the role of being a woman participating in sports (Laustsen et al., 2017). Through this enculturation, women have learned that their gender label is vital regarding their status as an athlete, as they are the Other compared to the Absolute man. De Beauvoir (2011/1949) argued that as a woman, it is important to define one's gender before all other assertions since they will arise based on the basic truth that women's gender matters. However, a man does not have to posit himself as an individual of a certain gender before other assertions as he is the Absolute (de Beauvoir, 2011/1949; Pringle, 2018). De Beauvoir (2011/1949) stated that humanity is historically, culturally, and socially made up by man. Thus, the man defines a woman; in relation to himself and not in herself. Therefore, women are not considered autonomous beings. Historically speaking, several male thinkers have made male-superior claims, such as the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, who claimed: "that a woman feels like a mutilated man" (Pringle, 2018), or the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who stated that "The female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities" (de Beauvoir, 2011/1949), or Saint Thomas who argued that women are "an incidental being" and "an incomplete man" (de Beauvoir, 2011/1949). Thus, throughout history, women have been described as inferior to men, which influences the cultural, historical, and societal understanding of women's position in society as secondary to men.

De Beauvoir's account of women living in a patriarchal society is defined by a tension between transcendence, or freedom, and immanence, or lack of freedom. This tension creates life in contradiction for female athletes, between the freedom in bodily movement and lack of freedom (Prange, 2018). De Beauvoir (2011/1949) stated that in a patriarchal society and culture, the man is the Absolute, and thus, the woman is defined as the Other, the inessential correlation to man. De Beauvoir (2011/1949) argued that women are both socially and culturally denied the creativity, autonomy, and subjectivity, which are considered definitive of the notion of being a human, who is accorded the man in a

patriarchal society. Young (1980) argued that women are physically confined, inhibited, objectified, and positioned in a patriarchal society. However, as the woman is human existence, she is also a subjectivity and transcendence. Thus, a contradiction occurs between being a free human subject who participates in transcendence, yet the woman's situation is denied this subjectivity. It transcends due to her being a woman and not a man. This contradiction can be transferred into feminine motility, spatiality, and bodily comportment modalities. The same tension between subjectivity and being an object or transcendence and immanence is carried on into these fields (Young, 1980). Young (1980) argued that since women are defined as mere objects in the patriarchal society, they are seen as mere bodies. Thus, women live the possibility of being gazed upon as a mere body that presents themselves as potential objects of another subject's manipulations and intentions rather than as a living manifestation of intention and action. If women were to open their bodies in an outwards direction with free, active, bold, and open extension, they would invite objectification. To avoid such objectification, women tend to move closed, keeping their limbs enclosed around themselves (Young, 1980). Thus, Young (1980) argued that women instantiate transcendence. However, male-dominated institutions deny them transcendence and instead aim to confine women to the immanence of natural objects.

By adding de Beauvoir's conception of the woman as the Other and Young's modified theory of the body in living action, Young opened phenomenological reflection on women's sports (Prange, 2018). Numerous studies show that the sporting arena is presented as male and that most sports are considered masculine activities compared to only a few sports conceived as feminine activities (Plaza et al., 2017).

3.3.4. Criticism

Despite Young's work being praised worldwide, some critics argue that her work is outdated and too generalizing. Young (1998) herself criticized her own Beauvoirian framework that focuses on transcendence and immanence, which creates a dichotomy between a positive and negative perspective on the female embodiment. Young argued that one does not necessarily contradict the other, but it is a dialectical process of immanence and transcendence. By proposing a dialectical approach, there can be a focus on how a male-dominated society excludes women from male activities that are highly valued and how this type of society devalues female activities at the same time.

Young (1998) criticized her early work by saying that it was too focused on the account that the male-dominated society oppresses women's body comportment and that women appear as the victims of a patriarchal cultural society, which refuses to admit full humanity to women. She argued that this is one-sided and needs to be more-sided by focusing on both social harms to women and values of gendered feminine experiences. It is not to say that women do not suffer disadvantages and damage in the male-dominated society, as women are still inhibited, constrained, positioned, and gazed at by men. However, women should not be disempowered by this notion, and the male-dominated society should neither be given full blame. Young (1998) argued that women's involvement in sports has dramatically increased and that some have more bodily freedom of movement, which is a great starting point for changes. However, she argued that the changes toward gender equality have not been of a fundamental qualitative sort (La Caze, 2014). Although Young criticized her early work, others defended it, such as the American philosopher Sandra Bartky. Bartky (2009) argued that it is still essential to show the subtle ways women are victimized. She argued that Young's early work did not assume that the masculine styles of bodily comportment were more valuable than feminine ones.

The American philosopher Beth Preston argued that Young described non-habitual activity rather than feminine activities. Preston (1996) argued that many of the examples in Young's early work could be dealt with through practice and training, and thus, female athletes move freer as they have practiced and trained specific behavior. However, the Australian philosopher Marguerite La Caze (2014) counterargued Preston, stating that she missed the point regarding fear and doubt that women's existence is pervaded, and that this notion affects their habitual movements. There is a difference in bodily movement between women, female athletes, and men, which means that women have encountered more training and practice with specific bodily movements than women who are not elite athletes. Nevertheless, they are still hampered by some societal and cultural influences regarding bodily comportment, and they are still perceived as the Other.

Canadian professor Dianne Chisholm suggested that women's situation has altered and changed dramatically since Young's early statements (La Caze, 2014). Chisholm argued that women could embody free movement despite male domination, drawing on the evolving social- and cultural contexts in which women reform themselves (Barbour, 2018).

Chisholm (2008) argued that Young overstressed gender as she explains femininity and women's negative experiences of embodiment as general and typical of all women. She further disagreed with Young's perspective on the lived female body and how women's experience of embodiment is within a restrictive history of gender normativity. Instead, Chisholm (2008) argued that this normativity no longer typifies women's contemporary situation. Chisholm (2008) argued that the perspective was outdated, as it drew on the gender norms of the 1980s. Instead, Chisholm (2008) argued that women could overcome the gender limits of their situation by cultivating, embodying, and empowering the body's full and free movement. Chisholm (2008) argued that women must overcome any tendency to look to a man for leadership. Instead, women must put in extra effort to act freely and overcome normative femininity and masculine domination.

La Caze (2014) agreed with Chisholm's notion about the societal differences between the 1980s and the twenty-first century. However, she argued that Young's early work still seems relevant regarding female bodily movement as patriarchy is still an issue today. Young is critical of her previous work, yet she argued that sexual divisions of labor, gendered hierarchies of power, and normative heterosexuality must be considered, as they still affect gender structures and the lived bodily differences (La Caze, 2014).

Regardless of the critical perspective that Young herself (1998), Prange (2018), Chisholm (2008), Preston (1996), and others have displayed, other critics, such as Bartky (2009), La Caze (2014), Prange (2018), and Young herself (1998), still praise Young's early work for being relevant to the concept of women in sports and female embodiment. La Caze (2014) argued that Young's account is still relevant and that her aspects and theories of her feminist legacy are still something that is challenging people's everyday experiences in the twenty-first century.

3.3.4.1. Young and Sports Psychology

Prange (2018) critically applied Young's early work to sports. She argued that female athletes' experience of transcendence is compromised and that they live a life in contradiction. However, she criticized Young's early work and focus on transcendence and immanence; Young's claim that the female person is a subject and transcendence because she is a human existence does not explain the foundation for transcendence as a lived

experience. Further, Young's account that identifies transcendence with the male movement reproduces sexist essentialism, which Young tried to overcome. Instead, it suggests that women must move like men to experience transcendence. According to Prange (2018), these explanations do not cover how women should experience transcendence nor how to overcome immanence. Instead, Prange (2018) argued that sports must be a site of active resistance and contestation against the hegemonic power to overturn and "degender" athletic movements and spaces. Prange (2018) questioned whether female athletes' only chance of experiencing freedom is to move "like a boy." She argued that Young implied that women must adopt the male movement modalities to emancipate since the male full and free use and occupation of space in athletic movement open the sphere of autonomy, transcendence, and universal humanity. Instead, Prange (2018) argued that Young's (1990) work on oppression would provide a better solution to the problem. She argued that at least two of Young's five faces of oppression, cultural imperialism and marginalization, are permeated in women's sports due to the domination of the masculine power hegemony and the male gaze herein. Cultural imperialism is seen in sports as it is a process of intrusion in which the dominant group, men, protect their norms and experiences as representative of all. Thus, the dominant group neglect, overhaul, annul, and stereotypes other groups', women's, standards and experiences. Thus, cultural imperialism reinforces the consequences and experiences of marginalization. Marginalization is seen in sports, and it is a process of exclusion in which women are relegated to lower standing and the edges of society. Women are marginalized in sports as it judges female athletic achievements and movements according to a heteronormative perspective and male norms of feminine behavior, appearance, and athletic movement (Prange, 2018). Women's situatedness coincides with these two forms of oppression as the lived experience of the male norm is the outcome of the cultural imperialism seen in sports. Moreover, the marginalization of women is the outcome of the cultural imperialism consistency in reinforcing and spreading norms and male dominance within sports. Thus, Prange (2018) argued that women could only live a life of transcendence after the liberation of the political fight for female rights in sports, and until then, women live a life of immanence in sports.

From Young's perspective, sports constitute a space of gender fault lines defined by the patriarchal culture. An athletic female is a social construct and a product of heteronormative prejudice. Women's sports are marginalized in the sports media, and women's sports studies generally have a philosophical and societal relevance beyond sports. Therefore, it

is essential to encounter Young's account and contribution to a relationship between space and body and its historical, social, and gendered dimensions that point out life in contradiction, displayed between immanence and transcendence (Prange, 2018).

Despite Young's early work being exaggerated at times, it still seems relevant, as it continues to reveal aspects of human possibilities and women's situations that are important to this day (Young, 1998). According to Prange (2018), Young opened the field for body-phenomenological reflection regarding the experience of being a woman by pointing to the interaction between space and body and the historical, gendered, and social dimensions of space. Young further opened the reflection on the relation between socially and physiologically structured spatial, hindered, and bodily experiences. Her early work further shows that movement plays a crucial role in the lived experience of being an autonomous, free subject, displayed in everyday life and sports (Prange, 2018). It is arguable that her work is still relevant and could be defended as it is still a sharp break in a nuanced evolution (La Caze, 2014).

3.3.5. Summary

This section has presented Young's (1980) work on bodily comportment. Phenomenological space has been introduced to comprehend how women move and behave differently from men due to societal, cultural, and historical influences. Further, de Beauvoir's account of the Other has been integrated to understand the position that women are given in a patriarchal society and, thus, how women in sports are perceived as secondary to men. Nevertheless, the critical section on Young's early work emphasizes female embodiment and that women must take action into their own hands. Thus, female athletes are still affected by the bodily comportment issues that Young presented, but it is essential to consider the changes today.

3.4. Gendered Challenges in Sports Psychology and Philosophy

The previous sections covered social representation theory and Young's account of bodily comportment in a societal context of female athletes' positions. This section links the theory to some of the challenges that female athletes encounter in sports while focusing on psychological and philosophical challenges. The purpose is to understand how societal and

cultural matters influence women in sports and thus, understand some of the challenges female athletes meet, as it seems to be a domain dominated by men (Plaza et al., 2017).

The field of sports psychology concerns several issues, but this thesis focuses on gendered issues in sports. Despite few sports being perceived as feminine, sports are generally characterized as a domain of preference for men generating male preferences and masculine identity (Plaza et al., 2017). Moreover, the heteronormative assumptions are conveyed and normalized in elite sports (Ryan & Dickson, 2018). Studies show that sports involving strength, physical contact, and endurance are more likely to be perceived as masculine. In contrast, aesthetic sports that involve expressions, gratefulness, application, flexibility, and concentration are more likely to be experienced as feminine (Plaza et al., 2017). This correlates with general gender stereotypes of men being more assertive, aggressive, and independent compared to the stereotypical gender traits of women being sensitive, emotional, and agreeable (Kassin et al., 2017). These factors reproduce social representations of Young's account of gendered differences in bodily comportment. Since this thesis focuses on those domains of preference for men, these domains consist of a primarily male-dominated environment and a social representation concerning sports being masculine. Studies show that being a woman in male-dominated sports can be challenging, as women in these domains are considered a minority (Plaza et al., 2017; Alkammash, 2021).

In masculine sports, overt gender marking is portrayed in the media, where it is more common for women's sports to be gender marked than men's, as mentioned in section 3.1.2. Thus, gender marking women's sports objectify the social representations of women being secondary. Moreover, the covering of athletes in sports has a much higher prevalence of the word "sportsman" than "sportswoman.". Thus, more mentioning's of "female athletes" than "male athletes" may reflect the tendency to mark women's sports more than men's sports (CUP, 2016). Although this tendency for women to be gender marked more than men, there is also a development of gender marking in sports (CUP, 2016). Examples include the Danish national soccer teams, where the men's team changed their name from "Landsholdet" [The National Team] to "Herrelandsholdet" [The Men's National Team] in 2017 to support gender equality (Nielsen, 2017). Changes can push towards more gender-neutral markings, transforming the social representations about gender labels in sports and creating gender equality in sports.

The media further reinforces gender inequality through other means. There is a tendency for the media to focus on female appearance and their personal lives over their performances, which is not considered a male issue (CUP, 2016). By focusing on female appearance, the social representations of Young's account of women having to "perform femininity" gets reinforced. Further, there seems to be a more significant focus on women's marital status and age than on men in elite sports (CUP, 2016; Plaza et al., 2017). Further, the media seems to favor male athletes in their coverage and accomplishments compared to their female counterparts, and they receive more airtime than women (Alkammash, 2021; CUP, 2016). Thus, the media seems to focus mostly on male performance and women's personal lives or appearance.

Several tendencies point toward gender inequality in sports: men receive more airtime than women, the gender marking of women's sports is perceiving women as the Other, and there is a bigger focus on women's appearances and personal lives rather than performance. There are improving tendencies to gender equality in sports, with a narrowing gap in airtime (CUP, 2016). There is also a higher prevalence of gender-neutral terms such as the word "sportsperson" (CUP, 2016). Thus, there are some tendencies toward gender equality in sports as some of the social representations about which gender is allowed to participate are changing, yet more actions need to be taken.

Sport, performance, and exercise psychology are somewhat new in addressing cultural diversity and gender. Despite the increasing participation of women and girls in recent years, media representations and stereotypes still convey the message and social representation that sport is a masculine activity (Gill, 2017). Further, sports remain a stereotyped domain based on gender (Plaza et al., 2017). There is still a gender gap in elite sports, which is seen in the United States at the collegiate and elite levels, where the participation between men and women is still not equal. Further, less than half of the women's teams are coached by women. The administration remains primarily white men, with a 2015 Racial Report Card indicating that less than ten percent of the athletic director positions were women (Gill, 2017). Moreover, men mostly held coaching positions and Olympic officials at the 2012 London Olympics. Thus, despite increasing gendered diversity in sports, women are still limited compared to men in this field (Gill, 2017). The percentage of male participants is still higher in most sports, which may partly explain the

persistent masculine characteristics of the sporting context and the reproducing character of the social representations regarding de Beauvoir's notion of the Other (Plaza et al., 2017). Despite the growing focus on performance, exercise, and sports psychology, the field of sports psychology has still made very little progress regarding the promotion of social justice and cultural competence (Gill, 2017). Further, sports activities are still gendered, both at the implicit and explicit levels, leading people to adjust their participation unconsciously (Plaza et al., 2017). LaVoi and Baeth (2018) argue that it is essential to have women in coaching positions as they are potent reminders that can help expose people to the idea that women are and can be successful leaders. Role models of the same gender, such as coaches and staff, can inspire women to value themselves and their abilities, raising self-perceptions (LaVoi & Beath, 2018).

The philosophy of sports has a brief history, and it is concerned with questions regarding the value of play, the ethics of competition, aesthetics, and gender inequality (Prange, 2018). The last aspect regarding sports and gender inequality is relevant in this thesis due to the focus on how gendered and cultural factors affect female performance in elite sports. Prange (2018) argued that Young's early work is a great starting point for reflecting on the variety of social and bodily resistances which female athletes experience in sports. Young (1980) argued that women move differently than men, resulting from women's lived experiences of the norms of the patriarchal society. Women experience sports as both a field of emancipation and liberation as well as discriminatory and oppressing due to the continued comparison with the male hegemony and men's game, which can turn women into the Other (Prange, 2018). The relationship between sports and womanhood deserves specific attention since athletic movements that women carry out are indeed generally valued according to a male perspective and male norms, despite the differing feminine and masculine history of sports and movement (Prange, 2018). By turning more attention toward the relationship between womanhood and sports, the social representations of female participation in sports being secondary might be transformed.

3.5. Summary

This section introduced Moscovici's theory of social representations, which applies to female athletes' cultural, societal, and historical influences. Moreover, Young's account of bodily comportment has been incorporated to captivate the challenges that female athletes

encounter in sports. Additionally, a critical perspective on Young's account has been included to captivate the essence of her work in the twenty-first century. Lastly, Moscovici and Young's accounts have been incorporated into the sports psychological and philosophical challenges that female athletes encounter to enlighten the cultural factors of gender that may affect women's performance in elite sports.

4. Methodological Approach

This section covers the methodological approach of this thesis. First, the section will introduce the epistemological and ontological approaches to phenomenology. Then, the choice of the method will be presented, which includes the seven steps of the interview study, the interview guide, the transcriptional process, and ethics regarding interviewing.

4.1. Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology is often applied to a methodological framework that focuses on interviewing, and it is concerned with understanding peoples' thoughts, intentions, feelings, and experiences from their perspective (Andersen & Koch, 2016). The ontological aspect regards subjectivity and the subjective meaning, which is ascribed to an independent sense of reality. Thus, phenomenology focuses on a first-person perspective. Moreover, the epistemological aspects of exploring the individuals' personal lives and consciousness require other methods than the scientific and positivistic approach (Andersen & Koch, 2016). Phenomenology can be defined as a philosophical flow that focuses on the conscious experience of the world. It is important to work as unconditionally as possible by applying a transcending philosophical method, which disregards or transcends what has been taken for granted in the ordinary sense of the world (Andersen & Koch, 2016).

The phenomenological approach to interviewing seeks to approach as precise descriptions of what people have experienced as possible. It focuses on consciousness and the lived world, an openness toward the subjects' experiences, prioritizing accurate descriptions, an attempt to put prior knowledge in the background, and seeking after invariant essential meanings in the descriptions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). However, phenomenology has received some critique for favoring an individualistic and essentialist approach to research. Nonetheless, phenomenology can explore experiences from a first-person perspective, which is why this approach is applied in this thesis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Another aspect regarding the science of knowledge and appliance in this thesis concerns the normative, ideographic approach, which this thesis applies to frame the methodological framework. The normative approach refers to a value judgment and what someone ought to do (Jacobsen, Lippert-Rasmussen, & Nedergaard, 2016). This thesis focuses on the

participants' perspectives and their understanding of the world, which are based on historical, cultural, and societal influences in which they are socialized to behave. Moreover, the idiographic approach is applied since it focuses on the individual and thus, focuses on the subjective, cultural phenomena (Brinkmann, 2016).

4.2. The Semi-structured Interview

This thesis applies the semi-structured interview as the method, which focuses on the subject's experience, gaining knowledge about the subject's life situations, meanings, attitudes, and experiences. It further focuses on gathering descriptions of the interviewee's lived world to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020). Thus, this method has been applied in this thesis to enlighten the participants' perspectives and understand the cultural factors that may influence their performance in elite sports. Moreover, Farr (1993) argued that applying social representations to research goes well with qualitative methods, such as interviewing, since the researcher does not wish to superimpose their representations on the participants. Therefore, the participants are three female elite badminton players who participated in the Danish badminton national team and were also present during the observations in the previous study (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022).

The semi-structured interview is neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed survey. It is a semi-structured technique based on an interview guide that emphasizes specific themes. The qualitative scientific interview aims to understand themes in a lived everyday setting based on the subjects' perspectives and to understand an individual in-depth. Thus, it is a means to convey and construct a life story and social practice situated in a specific historical and cultural setting (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020). The created knowledge is based on an interpersonal situation since it is constructed through an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. It is an interaction between the interviewer and the participants searching for the socially negotiated, contextual-based answer. It is not a neutral technique for creating unaffected answers from the informant (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

During the interview, the interviewee focuses on how specific individuals understand certain events, situations, and phenomena within their lives during the interviews. Thus,

one can provide a detailed analysis of the relatively limited amount of people's experiences of specific situations. Ideally, one would interview until sufficient material has been conducted. Thus, this thesis applied three interviews to gain enough information. Interviewing focuses on human experiences in relational, conversational, linguistic, and narrative areas. Thus, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is structured by the conversation in a practical social setting. Therefore, the context created within this practice is decisive concerning what is being said in the situation (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020).

Combining interview research with other methods is advisable since this may create more profound insights into what people do and why (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020). This thesis follows up on a prior study (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022), as mentioned in section 2. Thus, the triangulation strengthens the credibility since different methodological approaches are applied to enlighten the topic of concern.

Interviewing involves an asymmetric power structure since the interviewer decides the direction of the conversation. It is a one-way dialogue as the interviewer questions the interviewee. It is also an instrumental dialogue based on a guide and not an open everyday conversation, which can be manipulative since it can have a hidden agenda. Thus, the interviewer has a monopoly on the interpretation of the interview. It is essential for the interviewer to be aware of these power relations and to reflect upon the role that power may have regarding the production of the interview knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

4.2.1. The Seven Interview Steps

Research interviews have no standard procedures, yet some standard choices must be made. These choices create a linear progressiveness from the original ideas to the final report, and they are described through seven interview steps: thematizing, design, interview, transcription, analysis, verification, and reporting (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

The thematizing of this thesis includes finding the *why* and *what*. The study's *why* concerns the purpose of the study, which is to find the cultural factors regarding gender that may affect women's performance in elite sports from the participants' perspective. The design of the thesis includes the study of *what* concerns a conceptual and theoretical understanding

of the phenomenon, which was introduced in section 3. The purpose is to create a foundation for the supplementation and integration of new knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The design of the thesis includes the study's *how* and regards the planning of the interview with the three female badminton players. The interview step focuses on the actual interviews based on an interview guide presented in section 4.2.2., which took place at Det Nationale Elite Træningscenter (DNET). The transcriptional phase transforms the spoken language in the interviews into written text, as described in section 4.2.4. The analysis method is determined by the purpose of the study, the topic, and the character of the material, which will be elaborated on in section 5. The verification of the thesis will be presented in section 6.7. Lastly, the reporting of the results and the methods applied will be offered throughout sections 5 and 6 (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

4.2.2. Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview is based on an interview guide divided into research- and interview questions. The research questions seek explanations regarding specific phenomena, processes, and connections, whereas the interview questions seek concrete descriptions. The research- and interview questions are divided into two categories since the research questions rarely work as great interview questions. The interview questions are more idiomatic, blunt, and close to the lived world than research questions that are more abstract or organized into a model (Brinkmann & Tanggaard, 2020). Interview questions need to be both thematic and dynamic in their dimension; thematic concerns knowledge production, whereas dynamic regards the interpersonal relationships within the interview. Therefore, the interview questions contribute to both production of knowledge and the dynamics of good interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. The thematic dimension regards the study's *what*, whereas the dynamic dimension focuses on the *how* of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

The interview guide in this study focuses on the overall problem statement, which is compromised based on the theory introduced in section 3 and the observed patterns presented in the previous study (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022), as portrayed in Appendix 1. The interview guide shows three primary research questions focusing on the female embodiment, agency, and social representations.

4.2.3. Transcription

Transcribing means transforming the spoken language into written language; thus, transcriptions are constructions of a spoken conversation into written text. The transcribed version of the interview becomes impoverished, decontextualized representations of the lived interview conversations, and thus, it is essential to be aware of the lost context in the transformation. Transcribing the interviews makes the material analyzable. It is part of the first steps of the analysis itself, as the punctuation and other wordings are already a part of the interpretational process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interviews are audio recorded in this thesis, and the transcriptions focus on meaning-making. There is no correct and valid transcriptional form, and thus, no accurate and objective transformation from the spoken to the written form. However, literal descriptions are necessary for linguistic analysis, which means that it is essential to incorporate breaks, repetition, and intonation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Thus, Tanggaard and Brinkmann's (2020, p. 52) approach to transcription is applied in this thesis, as shown in Appendixes 3-5.

4.2.4. Interview Ethics

When conducting qualitative research, several aspects of ethics need to be considered. This study focuses on four ethics concerning interviewing, which include informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the role of the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

The ethical concerns are not based on any specific set of guidelines or rules but should be understood as contextual. Informed consent concerns that the participants are informed about the overall purpose of the study and the most substantial design features, possible risks and benefits contributed to participation, and their rights to withdraw from the study at any given point in time (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The participants were given prior informed consent, as portrayed in Appendix 2. The confidentiality aspect of the thesis concerns that any identifying data will be anonymized. Thus, the participants' names have been anonymized, and the people they talk about in the study. However, as some participants mention famous people, these have not been anonymized since they are not considered measures that can identify the participants. The consequences of the study regard the vulnerable position that the participants are in, as they may experience revealing uncomfortable information. It is essential to be aware of the consequences and possible damage the qualitative research may inflict on the participants and the possible distributions

that the research can be expected to add to the participants. During one of the interviews, a participant was asked if she would prefer for me not to talk about the given topic she was talking about in the study, which she did not mind. Another participant asked to remove a few lines from her interview after conducting it, which aligns with her right to withdraw any information at any given time, as she was concerned about the consequences of sharing personal stories. As such, those parts were deleted to minimize the consequences for the participant. However, the removed parts were minimal and thus, cannot be considered to change the validity of that specific interview. The researcher's role concerns the researcher's integrity, which is essential concerning the scientific knowledge and the ethical decisions that need to be taken (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). These four ethical aspects are important to consider when conducting qualitative research. Moreover, it is important to be aware of any ethical issues throughout the study.

4.5. Summary

This section has focused on the scientific approach to knowledge in this thesis, which focuses on phenomenology. Moreover, a focus on the methodological approach applied in the thesis has been introduced, which concerns the semi-structured interview. Thus, the seven interview steps, the interview guide, the transcriptional process, and ethics regarding interviewing have been covered. This approach has been applied to research three elite female badminton players and their perception of how cultural factors of gender can affect their performance in elite sports. Thus, by using the semi-structured interview as a method, this thesis focuses on the participants' perspectives regarding the cultural factors of performance in elite sports. The analysis of the findings of the interviews will be presented in the next section, which applies thematic analysis.

5. Analysis

This section covers the analysis of the study. The research is based on three semi-structured interviews with elite female badminton players affiliated with the Danish badminton national team. First, a general introduction of thematic analysis as an analytical tool will be presented, following the application in this thesis.

5.1. Thematic Analysis

This study applies a thematic analytical approach to enlighten the observed data in the semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis identifies, analyzes, and reports patterned meanings or themes within data. The strength of a theme depends on whether it captures something important to the overall research topic and not on how quantifiable the measures are. Thematic analysis is often applied in psychology, and it is used to describe and organize the dataset in detail and interpret various aspects of the research topic. Thematic analysis can be perceived as a foundational method for qualitative analysis, and it is not confined to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and thus, it is a method used to unravel, unpick, and reflect the surface of reality. Therefore, the phenomenological approach can be applied within the thematic analysis, as it focuses on the lived experience of human beings and their perspective on reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This thesis applies Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis guide to analyzing the gathered data from the semi-structured interviews.

5.1.1. The Six Steps of Thematic Analysis

There are no straightforward ways to conduct thematic analysis, but as mentioned above, this thesis applies Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step guide to using thematic analysis as a method, which includes: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Despite the guide following six steps, thematic analysis is not a linear process but a recursive process of moving back and forth throughout the entire data set, the coded data extracts, and the different guide phases. The six steps will be elaborated on below while applying the process to the thesis.

5.1.1.1. Familiarizing Oneself with the Data

The first phase concerns immersing oneself with the data. The researcher must transcribe the data and repeatedly read the data to search for meanings as the identification of probable patterns will be shaped while rereading the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, the interviews were transcribed into written text. A transcriptional process is an interpretative act where meanings are created. I reread the interviews and wrote initial thoughts and notes in the comment section throughout the data, as seen in Appendixes 3-5.

5.1.1.2. Generating Initial Codes

The second phase contains the production of initial codes and comments from the data, and it is essential to coding for as many probable themes as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial codes are portrayed in Figure 5.1., with the initial codes for the first interview (App. 3) listed in the first column. The coding from the second interview (App. 4) includes some codes in the first column and all codes in the second column. Lastly, the third interview (App. 5) consists of some codes from the first two columns and the listed codes in the third column.

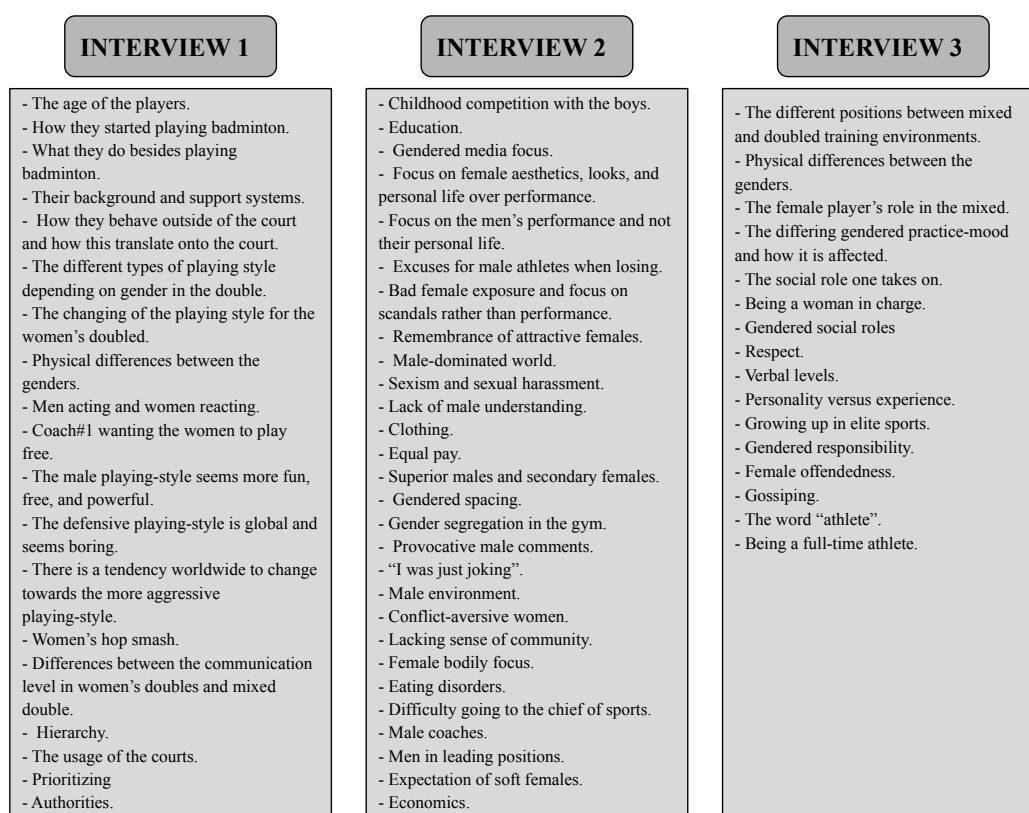


Figure 5.1. The Initial Codes Based on the Interviews in Appendixes 3-5.

5.1.1.3. Searching for Themes

The third phase involves categorizing the codes into potential themes and comparing the relevant coded data extracts. By the end of this phase, there will be a collection of candidate themes, including all data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These potential themes are shown in Figure 5.2., which offers a thematic map of the 18 candidate themes and most of the initial codes.

THEME	INITIAL CODES
CHILDHOOD AND DEVELOPMENT	How they got into the sport, support systems, competition, gendered issues.
PERSONAL LIFE VS. PERFORMANCE	Female aesthetics, focus on personal life, excuses, sexism, clothing, biology.
MEDIA INFLUENCE	Media, exposure, focus on personal life, excuses.
GENDERED PLAYING STYLE	Playing style, acting/reacting, communication, positions, mood, respect, space.
COMMUNICATION	Playing style, communication, mood, social roles, gossip.
FEMALE ATTRACTIVENESS	Aesthetics, sexism, sexual harassment, clothing, bodily focus/shame.
HIERARCHY	Hierarchy, usage of courts, authorities, gendered prioritizing, space, social roles.
AUTHORITIES	Coach's influence, authorities, patriarchy, male leaders, social roles, harassment.
SOCIAL ROLES	Personality, hierarchy, gender segregation, male leaders, positions, respect.
PATRIARCHY	Hierarchy, gendered prioritizing, sexism, equal pay, harassment, social roles.
USAGE OF THE GYM	Hierarchy, usage of the courts, gendered prioritizing, space, positions.
SPACE	Personality, communication, usage of courts, gender segregation, positions.
SEXISM	Hierarchy, sexual harassment, patriarchy, female aesthetics, male leaders.
MOVEMENT	Usage of courts, focus on performance, acting/reacting, space, positions, biology.
EDUCATION	Education, economics, expectations, equal pay, focus on performance.
GENDERED BIOLOGY	Positions, physical differences, social roles, respect.
GENDER SEGREGATION	Gendered prioritizing, positions, biology, social roles, respect.
EQUAL RIGHTS	Gendered prioritizing, patriarchy, gendered understanding, equal pay.

Figure 5.2. Initial Thematic Map, Showing 18 Candidate Themes.

5.1.1.4. Reviewing Themes

The fourth phase concerns the refinement of the candidate themes, meaning that some themes will merge, some themes stay indifferent, and others might be broken down into separate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The 18 potential themes were merged into six reviewed themes, as seen in Figure 5.3.

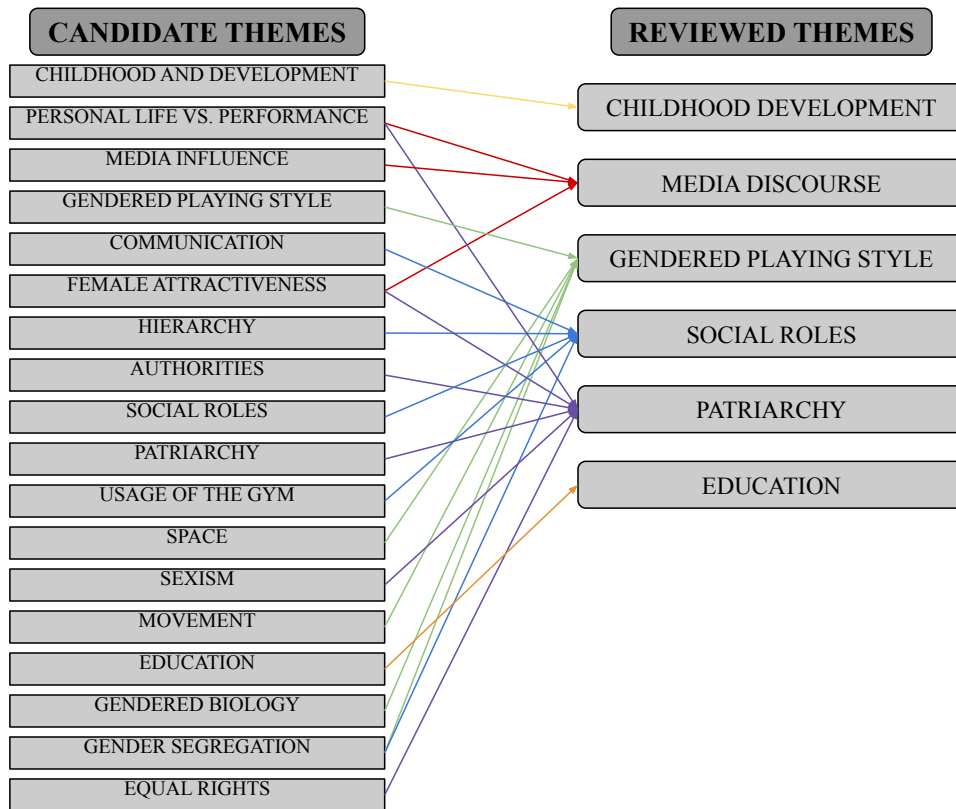


Figure 5.3. Developed Thematic Map, Showing the 18 Candidate Themes Merged into Six reviewed Themes.

5.1.1.5. Defining and Naming the Themes

The fifth phase includes defining the themes and identifying their essence. It is essential to consider the themes concerning one another. The refinement aspect includes identifying sub-themes which are themes-within-a-theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, the final thematic map consists of six main themes and nine sub-themes, as shown in Figure 5.4.

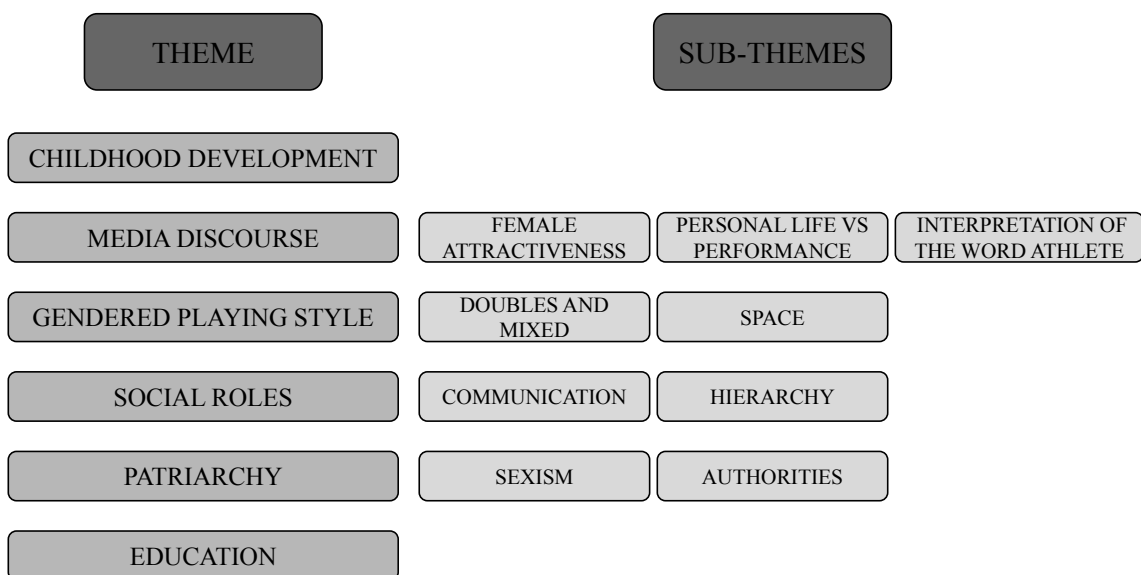


Figure 5.4. Final Thematic Map, Showing the Six Main Themes and the Nine Sub-Themes.

5.1.1.6. Producing the Report

The last phase concerns the final analysis and write-up of the report. The analysis must provide logical and coherent accounts of the story that the data displays across and within the themes. The analysis must be demonstrated through vivid examples and data extracts, which capture the essence. The write-up must go beyond mere description and argue the study's research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The conducted, written analysis will be elaborated in section 5.2, based on the themes described in Figure 5.4.

5.2. Analysis of the Data

This section covers the analysis of the semi-structured interviews. First, the main theme Gendered Childhood Competition will be introduced. Second, the main theme, Media Discourse, will be introduced, consisting of the sub-themes Female Attractiveness, Personal Life versus Performance, and Interpretation of the word Athlete. Then, the third main theme, Gendered Playing Style, will be elaborated on, consisting of the sub-themes Doubles and Mixed and Space. Then, the main theme, Social Roles, will be introduced, which consists of the sub-themes Communication and Hierarchy. Afterward, the main theme, Patriarchy, will be elaborated on, which consists of the sub-themes of Sexism and Authorities. Lastly, the main theme, Education, will be presented.

5.2.1. Gendered Childhood Competition

This section covers the analysis of the theme of Gendered Childhood Competition, which focuses on the competitive environment the participants encountered while growing up and the impact this may have had on them.

Luna describes how she would play competitively with the boys in the schoolyard as a child and how some girls would participate as well, but not as competitively as her (App. 4, ll. 25-42). Her description seems as if it was irregular of her to be a girl competing with the boys, and she describes feeling as if the boys found her annoying because she was better than them. As a result, the boys would throw an extra amount of snow at her during snowball fights to get back at her. She argues that this is a normal way to act between young girls and boys. Therefore, she learned that it was atypical for her, a girl, to compete with the boys. Luna argues that her being better at competitive activities was irritating to the

boys because they were not used to girls being able to compete against them (App. 4, ll. 37-49).

Anna had a different experience while growing up. She mentions that she competed with the boys during badminton practice as she was talented. She describes it as a natural process and that the boys accepted her since she was good. However, she mentions that some of the other girls who were not at the same level might not have had the same experience and probably were not accepted by the boys (App. 5, ll. 807-820). Anna grew up competing with the boys in an atmosphere where she felt accepted. However, as she describes the other girls not being accepted, it was uncommon for her to be a girl competing alongside the boys, even though they had not hit puberty yet. Further, Anna's description that she felt accepted seemed natural to her, but she did not question why the boys did not have to be accepted just as she had to.

On the one hand, Luna describes how she felt different for being a girl competing against the boys at a young age, whereas Anna tells how it felt natural. Nonetheless, Anna still describes how she had to be accepted due to her gender and that she was still an outsider to some degree.

5.2.2. Media Discourse

This theme focuses on the discourses about female athletes that are often the outcome of the media influences. Two sub-themes will be presented, focusing on Female Attractiveness and the focus on the athletes' Personal Life versus Performance.

5.2.2.1. Female Attractiveness

The participants experience the media having a heightened focus on their looks and a general tendency to be more concerned with female appearances than males.

Luna mentions that the journalists, often male, would focus more on female athletes' appearance than males. She describes how the commentators would call the women "Lemon Cakes" (*Danish: "Citronmåner"*) as a reference to them being "sour like lemon cakes," which is based on the women making grumpy faces while playing if they are not performing up to par (App. 4, ll. 188-197). According to Luna, this focus on the women's

facial expressions is not equivalent to the comments the male players receive (App. 4, ll. 209-215).

According to Luna, there seems to be a tendency for the journalists to focus more on female appearance than males. Luna further describes how female athletes most often are remembered if they are perceived as attractive rather than based on their performance and achievements (App. 4, ll. 305-315). She further argues that: “it doesn’t matter how... well one / one perform / Result-wise / it will almost always be the appearance of the sexual that gets... Attention” (App. 4, ll. 931-933). Luna argues that female looks become an essential factor since the media draws attention to these factors. According to Luna, male appearance is not important in remembrance (App. 4, ll. 335).

Another aspect concerning the attention towards female aesthetics is the choice of clothing; women can wear either shorts, skirts, or dresses, whereas men wear shorts (App. 5, ll. 439-441). Luna mentions a rule that almost got passed, which stated that women had to wear skirts or dresses to ensure an attractive presentation before the 2012 Olympics (App. 4, ll. 355-369). Luna criticizes this rule for being sexist and focusing too much on female appearances over performance, and that she feels as if women would become sex objects if this rule were to be approved (App. 4, ll. 361-369). However, even though Luna is offended by this rule, she still decides to mostly wear skirts based on a perspective of comfort, as she thinks the shorts provided by her sponsors are too short and vulgar (App. 4 ll. 377-388). This aligns with Anna's perception of female clothing in badminton, as she used to prefer shorts, but after she changed from one sponsor to another, she felt like the shorts were too short and revealing, making her change to skirts (App. 5, ll. 439-455). When asked about the possibility of wearing men’s shorts, since they are longer, Anna replied that it is a possibility and that some female athletes do that, but that she has gotten used to wearing skirts (App. 5, ll. 458-461). Although the skirts are argued to focus on female aesthetics, the participants do not find a problem with the skirts. Instead, the problem seems to be with the length of the shorts. In their opinion, the shorter shorts are the problem, as they are uncomfortable, too vulgar, and focus on female appearance rather than performance.

5.2.2.2. Personal Life versus Performance

This section focuses on how the participants perceive the media to be more concerned with the female athletes' personal lives than males' and how this affects the women.

Luna describes how the media seem more concerned with her private life than her performance. She mentions an example of an interview, which initially focused on her preparations before the world championships, but where the journalists inappropriately commented on her personal life and that she had just been on vacation (App. 4, ll. 228-234). She mentions how some coaches would comment on photos she posts on social media portraying drinks, which could be misunderstood as alcoholic beverages. The coaches would state that it seems inappropriate of her to post such photos as she should be a role model (App. 4, ll. 238-252). Luna argues that male athletes do not receive the same remarks about their personal lives but are praised for enjoying their lives. Thus, she argues that women are criticized for their personal lives and men are praised. Luna argues that there is a tendency for the media and people surrounding the athletes to focus negatively on the female athletes' personal lives compared to men (App. 4, ll. 246-248; 973-977).

Luna explains how the media can be a distracting factor to her focus on performance because she experiences the press making negative comments about her performance and personal life (App. 4, ll. 162-179). Luna describes the media as being too focused on the female athletes not developing enough, being good enough, or serious enough. Sofia also mentions that the media tends to focus on the bad things rather than the good ones (App. 3, ll. 620-626). Contrastingly, Luna notices a tendency for the press to defend the male players' performances if they do not perform (App. 4, ll. 217-223). According to Luna, this tendency seems to be gendered. It is not just in the badminton arena; Luna has noticed that there are mostly articles about male performance, but the articles about the female athletes are mostly about scandals. Thus, the female athletes reach the front page if they are a part of a scandal and not when they make good sporting results. She experiences that the only time the female badminton players get media attention for their performance is if the male players say "no" to the media (App. 4, ll. 450-452). She argues that the women primarily receive poor exposure or no exposure at all, and thus, she feels that women are being deprioritized and are secondary to men (App. 4, ll. 291-302; 450-452).

Luna exemplifies the documentary “Make Badminton Great Again” (Hvam, 2022), which focuses on how to make badminton popular in Denmark (BWF, 2022; App. 4, ll. 450-465). In this documentary, several male athletes are exemplified, both pensioned and active players. However, only one female badminton player is presented, the former player Camilla Martin, known for being a model for the Danish male lifestyle magazine “M!” (M!, n.d.). Luna questions why only male players should be considered to make badminton relevant in sports and the media (App. 4, ll. 454-467). Generally, Luna experiences a lack of focus on the female athletes’ performance compared to the attention the men get. She says, “I just feel like it is often... With women. They focus on anything besides the sport, rather than simply... The sport itself” (App. 4, ll. 967-969).

5.2.2.3. Interpretation of the word “Athlete.”

Throughout the interviews, the participants were asked how they understood the word “Athlete” in comparison to “Female Athlete” or “Male Athlete” as a reference to how they are referred to in the media and in common-day speech. Luna does not seem to emphasize the wording and would not gender-label the word “Athlete” herself but simply articulate her position as an athlete. She does not think her gender matters in this sense and thus, does not position herself as such when she introduces herself (App. 4, ll. 906-912). Anna mentions that she does not see a difference in the word's meaning. She does not experience other people questioning her position as an athlete solely because of her gender (App. 5, ll. 909-927). Thus, the participants do not seem to find the wording important since they position themselves as athletes, which is not a concern of gender to them.

5.2.3. Gendered Playing Style

This section focuses on the differences between men and women and their playing styles. The sub-theme Doubles and Mixed focuses on the differences between the playing style in the women’s doubles, the men’s doubles, and the mixed doubles. The sub-theme Space focuses on the different use of space between the genders. According to the participants, these sub-themes add a broader understanding of how the genders have different playing styles, affecting their performance.

5.2.3.1. Doubles and Mixed

This section focuses on the differences in playing style between men's doubles, women's doubles, and mixed doubles. The differences between the men's and women's singles have not been considered since none of the participants addressed this topic.

Sofia describes how the men's and women's doubles portray very different playing styles: The men's doubles is more aggressive, powerful, freer, playful, quicker, explosive, and is generally much more fun to play and watch. Contrastingly, the women's doubles is more defensive, played with less power, monotone, and boring to both play and watch (App. 3, ll. 302-309; 313-338; 354-358; 387-403). Sofia describes how there has been a change in the playing style since Coach #1 has become a part of the national team. He is more focused on the aggressive playing style, and he is trying to incorporate some of these aspects into the women's doubles, which she is very fond of (App. 3, ll. 290-309). Moreover, she has noticed a remarkable enhancement in their performance since they emphasized the aggressive playing style (App. 3, ll. 292-328; 351f). However, she mentions that it is not necessarily an advantage to play the aggressive playing style since most of the other women's doubles play more defensively (App. 3, ll. 313-317). Sofia also mentions the physical limitations of female athletes since it can be difficult for women to cover the entire court while playing the aggressive playing style, as they are not as quick to get to the corners as men (App. 3, ll. 400-403). These physical differences have been used to explain why women do not perform jump smashes (App. 3, ll. 414-417). However, several female players have started to apply this move to their playing style. Thus, it may not necessarily be physical factors that have limited the women from making this move, but perhaps a lack of training, according to Sofia (App. 3, ll. 430-437). Sofia mentions that other physical factors indicate a difference in performance, such as the men standing closer together on the court since they are bigger than the women. Thus, they must cover less ground (App. 3, ll. 495-498).

Regarding the differences between the doubles and mixed, Sofia mentions differences in the communicative levels. She experiences a more direct communication in the mixed, whereas it is more indirect in the women's doubles, as they do not wish to hurt one another's feelings. Sofia mentions that she and her partner want to be more straightforward in their communication and have talked about this several times. Yet, they stay concerned about

hurting each other's feelings and thus, keep the indirect form of communication intact (App 3, ll. 543-548). Contrastingly, she has experienced twice in her entire career that a man in the mixed has said something that she got offended about (App. 3, ll. 548-550). Sofia describes that her male mixed partner is more straightforward. Thus, their communication has been simpler and more direct than the communication between her and her double partner (App. 3, ll. 594-599). Anna also describes how the men in mixed are much more direct than the women in doubles. However, she describes a difference between the men who play mixed and the men who play doubles, where the men who play doubles are much harsher in their words, whereas the men who play mixed are less harsh yet still straightforward. She mentions that it would benefit the women's doubles if they were to bring this mentality into their practices (App. 4, ll. 351-363).

Anna further describes how she takes on different roles depending on what game she is playing; if she is playing doubles, she is more of a leader, and if she is playing mixed, she is more in the background. As she takes on the leading role during doubles, she sometimes gets comments about her being a bossy woman for taking charge, which annoys her to some degree. She explains how it can be perceived as a negative tone towards her being a female leader instead of focusing on the positives about her taking responsibility. Contrastingly, she finds herself less in charge in the mixed, as the men take the leading roles. She feels like both roles are natural to her, and she is okay with the men taking charge in the mixed category (App. 3, ll. 584-587).

Overall, the participants described several differences between the men's doubles and women's doubles and the doubles compared to the mixed. There are differences in playing style, differences in the level of communication, and differences in who is leading.

5.2.3.2. Space

This section covers some of the gendered differences in space usage. This includes the different spatial movements regarding the doubles and mixed, how they use the space within the gym, and the feeling of availability of space concerning each gender during the practices experienced by the participants.

Anna describes some differences between doubles and mixed concerning the available space. She explains how she wants to perform well in the mixed practices because there is a discourse that “boys are better than girls” (App. 4, ll. 209-211). Moreover, Anna describes how the men take up more space while playing mixed. Thus, they cover more ground than their female counterparts, which she accredits as biological differences, as the men are stronger and faster. Therefore, the female is closer to the net, covering less ground, and focused on positioning herself correctly so that she is not in the man’s way. The female must do the preparatory work so that the man has less ground to cover (App. 4, ll. 265-275). She describes that the spacing on the court is different depending on the gender, where the women are more locked into one position. Contrastingly, the man covers more ground and moves around more freely. She accredits this to the playing style of the mixed category, as there are biological differences between the genders. Thus, Anna describes that it makes the most sense for the man to cover more ground and the female partner to be locked in front (App. 4, ll. 260-281).

While they practice, the participants describe unwritten rules for which courts they should use for doubles/mixed practices. According to Anna, the women’s doubles have courts one and two, the mixed doubles have courts three and four, and the men’s doubles have courts five and six (App. 5, ll. 390f). However, Luna describes how the men seem to expect that they are allowed to take up more space than the women, which she accredits to a sense of hierarchy. Luna exemplifies that it appears as if the men expect it to be okay for them to be louder and take up more space and throw the rackets onto the women’s courts if they are upset. However, she argues that if the women were to do the same action, or if their shuttlecocks would accidentally hit their court, and the men would be verbally angry and upset at the women (App. 3, ll. 481-488; 533-541). Despite this notion, Luna mentions that Coach #1 tries to create an environment where the women can take up as much space as the men, saying that they are just as important (App. 4, ll. 477-480).

5.2.4. Social Roles

This theme focuses on the social roles of the genders. The underlying sub-themes include Communication, which focuses on the tone of voice, how it affects the female athletes, and how people’s mood affects their focus on performance. Thus, the participants describe how the social roles are affected by the communicative levels, as the female athletes become

inferior to their male counterparts. People's personal business seems to affect the female athletes' practices and thus their focus on performance. The second sub-theme, Hierarchy, focuses on how the participants experience the social roles to be affected by the hierarchy, which is mainly impacted by the overall rankings but also gendered. There is a focus on the tone of voice between the genders and how this can make the participants feel inferior to their male counterparts.

5.2.4.1. Communication

Luna describes that the male athletes often remark negative comments towards the female athletes, uttering condescending and superior phrases. She exemplifies recent practices, where she has been injured and thus, has had the male practice players feed her (shooting drills where she is in focus) without her being able to return the favor. She explains that some male practice players have been making snarky comments to indicate that they think they are better than her due to their gendered differences, although she is ranked higher than them (App. 4, ll. 583-613). Moreover, she mentions that if she were to stand up for herself, the men would argue that they were "only just kidding" (App. 4, ll. 627-655). Luna further mentions that many female athletes avoid conflicts, despite saying in the locker room that the male discourse is annoying (App. 4, ll. 739-742). She has noticed that out in the open; most female athletes laugh along with jokes they do not consider funny because they do not want to be pointed out as being boring or to be "aggravated bitches". Luna receives those comments whenever she puts her foot down and does not want to play along on the men's terms (App. 4, ll. 647-652). Anna also describes how the men openly say they do not want to play with the women since they are "not good enough" (App. 5, ll. 220f). She mentions that they say this jokingly, yet she argues that everyone knows that they are stating their truth, but hidden behind sarcasm, which annoys the women, putting the men in a superior position to the women (App. 5, ll. 220-227).

The communication also affects the impact on the players' moods in practice. Anna describes how the players' mood varies depending on what group she practices with; the men seem to leave their issues outside of the court, whereas the women can bring a bad mood into practice, affecting the rest of the group. Thus, the female athletes are careful not to hurt the other women's feelings. Anna ascribes these differences to the fact that they are women and are more concerned about hurting one another's feelings than men are (App. 3,

ll. 308-316). She further argues that female athletes are more inclined to let their emotions affect their practice, whereas the men get affected if they have a bad practice rather than a bad day. As such, the women's practices are affected by their personal issues, which affect the communicative levels on the court as the women are more reluctant to say things straightforwardly because they are concerned they will hamper the mood (App. 5, ll. 318-334). She is under the impression that the women take things more personal and dwell on them longer than their male counterparts, who she believes leave it on the court (App. 5, ll. 336-351). She perceives the female athletes as more sensitive, which affects the focus of the practice (App. 5, ll. 852-875).

Overall, there are two aspects of communication relevant to this thesis. The first is the tone of voice between the genders at the practices, which affects the social roles as the participants experience the male athletes acting superior. The second aspect regards the gendered differences in how the players' mood affects their focus on performance during practice. The participants describe that the women seem to take personal issues onto the court and are afraid to hurt one another's feelings. In contrast, the men seem to leave it outside the court and instead focus on performance. Thus, the players whose mood impacts the practice have a social role that influences the rest of the team.

5.2.4.2. Hierarchy

All three participants describe issues regarding the hierarchy, how this affects the positioning and people's social roles.

Sofia describes that the hierarchy used to be more distinct and has gotten better over the years, yet there are still several issues regarding hierarchy that affect the athletes (App. 3, ll. 649-651). She mentions that the men seem to get more attention than the women. In regards to the usage of the courts, where the men rarely get the outer courts, which is an unwritten rule that the players of lower rank are assigned to those courts (App. 3, ll. 669-671). She further describes how the men seem to feel entitled to the centered courts, and they are verbally expressing their discontent if they do not get those courts (App. 3, ll. 674-690). Sofia and Anna describe how some players get more attention than others from the coaches, which they ascribe to overall rankings (App. 3, ll. 691-695; App. 5, ll. 607-613). However, Sofia argues that there seems to be a degree of prioritizing of the male athletes,

and thus, it is not solely based on the rankings list (App. 3, ll. 707-716). Sofia describes how they are used to this hierarchy (App. 3, ll. 795-801).

Luna describes how the tension between the genders carries on to the court. She mentions that it seems as if the men believe they are higher in the hierarchy and thus, are allowed to speak with a harsher tone to the female players. Moreover, she describes that the men say snarky comments about the female players being inadequate if they lose a game when they play for the national team at tournaments. Luna describes that in those tournaments, the male players argue that their games are more demanding and why it is acceptable for the men to lose and not for the women (App. 4, ll. 676-688). Thus, Luna has a feeling that the men seem to rank themselves higher than the women, and as such, she describes that: “Overall, I feel that we [the women] are all overshadowed by the men” (App. 4, ll. 928-930). However, Anna describes that the hierarchy is not as caricatured in the mixed practices, where there seems to be more equality between the genders since they depend on one another. She experiences more respect from the male mixed players than the male doubles players, making the hierarchy seem less profound (App. 5, ll. 244-259; 657-666).

5.2.5. Patriarchy

This section focuses on some of the patriarchal issues that the participants experience about being female athletes in sports. The sub-theme of Sexism covers problems regarding sexual harassment, the female bodily focus, and a focus on their personal lives. The sub-theme of Authorities covers some of the gender issues that the participants experience.

5.2.5.1. Sexism

This section focuses on some of the issues regarding sexism that female athletes encounter or have encountered. Luna mentions some sexist comments that she experiences as only being catered to women, focusing on their sex- and dating lives. Luna argues that if the women are performing well at practice, they can be the recipient of sexist comments about their dating lives or if they had sexual intercourse the day before practice, which is considered the reason behind their happy mood or excellent performance. She argues that these comments are said condescendingly, taking away focus from their performance (App. 4, ll. 720-732). Luna describes how they had a former coach who would sexually harass the female athletes. He would comment on their sex lives, make sexual comments about

their bodies and positions they would take up in the gym, or squeeze the sides of their torsos to indicate that they had gained too much weight (App. 4, ll. 744-762). These comments further led to her almost developing an eating disorder, as she experienced him as controlling and manipulative towards the players (App. 4, ll. 708-782). Luna argues that she is sure that many female players would have stopped playing badminton had he not gotten fired. And although he was fired, the female athletes still had to accommodate the cultural setting of the sexist nature, which affected the female players' moods and desire for the game (App. 4, ll. 820-822).

5.2.5.2. Authorities

Luna describes how she has solely had male coaches throughout her career, thus, describing the culture as filled with male coaches (App. 4, ll. 840-845). She would find it unnatural to have a female coach due to her prejudice about women being too soft (App. 4, ll. 855-869). She associates this notion with the fact that she is used to collaborating with male coaches and the communication that comes with these gendered stereotypes in a male-dominated world (App. 4, ll. 880-887). Anna describes that she has had several female coaches, but primarily male coaches (App. 5, ll. 675-687). She also prefers the coaches to be more direct and less soft, which she ascribed some of her former female coaches to be (App. 5, ll. 693-695). Anna describes how she prefers male coaches, as they are more straightforward, and that she is not worried about them being too soft (App. 5, ll. 701-708). Nonetheless, Anna contrasts Luna's description of it being based on gender and says that the coaching style has more to do with personality (App. 5, ll. 722).

Luna describes some difficulties she has experienced with the authorities. She explains how the chief of sports is a man, and thus, it can be challenging to bring up gendered complaints because of his gender, and she is worried that she will be misunderstood. This especially regards the concerns she had about the former coach and the case about sexual harassment. Thus, she wonders why there are no more female leaders (App. 4, ll. 824-831). Sofia describes similar difficulties with the male authorities. She does not feel heard whenever she tries to explain how she feels that the female players are being deprioritized (App. 3, ll. 721-727). Overall, the participants experience difficulties with the male leaders and the sense of authority.

5.2.6. Education

This section covers the importance of pursuing a dual-career; when athletes study or work while pursuing high-performance sports (Barriopedro et al., 2018).

Sofia's earned a bachelor's degree before moving to Copenhagen to practice full-time at DNET. After finishing her bachelor's degree, she moved to Copenhagen and took a break from studying from 2018 until now, where she applied to continue her master's degree in the fall of 2022. However, during her educational break, she would work part-time besides playing badminton to stimulate herself in other ways (App. 3, ll. 58-70).

After graduating high school, Luna started playing badminton full-time. Then, after some years of focusing on badminton, she attended some single courses to prepare herself for the university in the summer of 2021. However, as it collided with the Olympics, she decided to drop out and attend those courses later. She describes how it is important for her to pursue a bachelor's degree while she is still young (App. 4, ll. 53-82). Nonetheless, for the time being, she does not want to pursue a dual-career since she wants to "enjoy it and do it 100 percent, instead of it only being 80 percent because other factors are stressing you" (App. 4, ll. 81f). As such, Luna describes how education is important to her and that it is something she wants to pursue, but she does not want it to take away the focus of her sports career. Luna further describes that some athletes will do something on the side to stimulate themselves in other areas. She has also felt this urge in the past, but currently, she wants to focus 100 percent on the sport (App. 4, ll. 77-82).

Anna pursued three-quarters of a year of studying for a bachelor's degree before dropping out. She is applying to start another bachelor's degree in the fall of 2022 (App. 5, ll. 30-43). Anna prefers pursuing a degree while playing badminton so that she would not have to do it after finishing her badminton career. Anna further describes that she prefers to do something besides playing badminton to get stimulated in other more intellectual ways (App. 5, ll. 970-978).

Anna describes that she has not noticed the same concern amongst the male badminton players. She explains that most men are "all-in" at playing badminton. She jokingly guesses that those who pursue an education primarily do it because of the financial outcome the

Danish government provides its students (App. 5, ll. 985-992). However, she also describes how her mixed partner is almost done with his degree, implying that the male athletes also pursue education. Nonetheless, she describes that he cannot wait to finish his degree to be a full-time athlete and focus 100 percent on badminton (App. 5, ll. 994-1001). Anna further describes that some men stay in the sport once they are retired from playing by becoming coaches, which is not something that the female athletes do in the same way (App. 5, ll. 1031-1043). Anna describes a general tendency where the men are primarily fulltime-athletes, compared to the women, who need something on the side to get stimulated in other areas.

Overall, the participants describe a tendency for the female athletes to be more concerned about their education and work-life after playing badminton at the elite level than the male athletes, who are more focused on presently being full-time athletes.

5.2. Summary

This section has described the thematic analysis and its application within this thesis. Six main themes were detected, which consisted of nine sub-themes, which include: the main theme Gendered Childhood Competition, the main theme Media Discourse with the sub-themes Female Attractiveness and Personal Life versus Performance, the main theme Gendered Playing Style consisting of the sub-themes Doubles and Mixed as well as Space, the main theme Social Roles and the sub-themes Communication and Hierarchy, the main theme Patriarchy containing the sub-themes Sexism and Authorities, and lastly, the main theme Education.

6. Discussion

This section will focus on connecting the theoretical section with the methodological aspect, the findings, and the analysis to comprehend a discussion on the cultural factors that may influence female athletes' performance. Thus, this section enlightens eight discussion topics concerning the cultural influences on children's upbringing, gendered differences in badminton, pursuing a dual-career, media discourse, and gender inequality in sports. Moreover, a comparison to the previous study (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022) will be presented, focusing on the parallels and discrepancies between the two studies. Lastly, a discussion on the study's trustworthiness will be incorporated.

6.1. Cultural Influences on Children's Upbringing

This section concerns the cultural influences of being a girl growing up while competing in masculine sports and activities, as presented in section 3.4.

Luna describes how she was one of the only girls participating in competitive activities in the schoolyard as a child and how she found the boys annoyed with her, which led to her experiencing it as atypical for her, a girl, to compete with the boys. Anna describes it as a natural process for her to be accepted by the boys to compete with them (Section 5.2.1.). However, Anna's description of having to get accepted based on her gender might represent a culture in which it is abnormal for girls to be able to take part in the competitive level. Section 3.4. describes that sports activities are still perceived as gendered, in which people unconsciously change their participation. This might explain why Luna experienced fewer girls in the schoolyard and why Anna was one of the few girls in competitive badminton. This aligns with the higher percentage of male participants in most sports, as described in section 3.4. Girls are not encouraged in the same way as boys are to develop specific bodily skills or use their full bodily capacities in free engagement with the world, as portrayed in Young's account in section 3.3.1. The girls might not be exposed to the same level of activities as boys, resulting in them not participating at the same level or developing the same number of skills. This might explain why fewer girls are at the competitive level, as Anna experienced since they might not have developed the same bodily capacities as their male counterparts. However, Anna and Luna's participation in competitive activities throughout their childhood could be argued to show that they embody free movement and

can develop the same amount of skills as the boys, despite the cultural perspective on male domination, which Chisholm argued for (Section 3.3.4.). However, it is arguable that the social representations of boys being more active and constructive than girls become reproduced when there are mostly boys competing in the schoolyard or participating in competitive practice. Thus, Young's account that children are taught to behave in certain ways based on their gender (section 3.3.1.) might also be reproduced. Thus, more girls should participate in these activities to transform these social representations, which might further liberate them from the cultural understandings of girls' roles in the schoolyard or while playing competitive masculine sports.

Arguably, the abnormal experience of being a girl in sports might have influenced the participants' unconscious focus on performance. Moreover, Young's account that girls do not get the same attention for developing specific bodily skills nor use their full bodily capacities might be factors that can hamper female performance on an unconscious level. Thus, it is arguable that if more girls participated in competitive activities throughout their childhood, they might get the same attention for developing these skills. Thus, the girls might be competing alongside the boys before puberty, which may enhance their level of performance, even as they get older.

6.2. Gendered Differences in Badminton

This section is concerned with the gendered differences in playing style in badminton from the participants' perspectives. First, the differences between the playing style in the men's and women's doubles will be introduced, including a focus on the jump smash. Then, the differences between the genders and bodily movement in the mixed will be presented, following the social roles and the meaning of gendered leadership. Lastly, the communicative differences will be discussed regarding their importance to performance.

In section 5.2.3., the participants describe a difference in playing style depending on gender; the men seem to play aggressively, and the women seem to play defensively. These gendered playing styles fit into Young's account concerning that men act and women react, as mentioned in section 3.3.2. However, Sofia describes that she prefers the aggressive playing style and that it feels more fun, free, liberating, and playful. She describes how their space usage differs between the two playing styles, making her and her double partner

play better with the aggressive playing style. They take up more space as it seems more available for their manipulation and grasp, which was otherwise described as constricted for the feminine existence in section 3.3.2. Arguably, their experience of playing better with the aggressive playing style applies to Young's account about women adapting to male movement modalities to emancipate themselves (Section 3.3.4.1.).

Another aspect concerns the jump smash. In section 5.2.3.1., Sofia argued that women are not capable of making this move due to biological differences between the genders, making the women's doubles more boring. However, she mentions that some players have incorporated this move into their playing style, enhancing their performance. Thus, the notion that women are not capable of jump smashing might be the construct of several factors. For one, there are biological differences between men and women. Second, some cultural indicators have socially reproduced the notion that women are not capable of making this move, which is reinforced by Young's account that women lack a sense of confidence in the capability of their bodies (3.3.2.). Sofia describes that young boys are taught the jump smash, which the girls are not. This reproduces the social representations of Young's account that girls are not encouraged to develop specific bodily skills in the same manner as boys are (Section 3.3.1.). These social representations are reproduced as coaches do not teach the girls to do the jump smash, and thus, the women's performance and usage of this move is hampered at an early age.

Chisholm (2008) argued that women could overcome the gender limits of their situation by cultivating their body's full and free movement (Section 3.3.4.). As such, women must clear themselves of the notion that they are not capable of doing the jump smash to learn how to incorporate this move. As Sofia described in section 5.2.3.1., the jump smash transforms the women's doubles into a more aggressive playing style. Still, it can be difficult for all women to incorporate this move since the playing style of the women's doubles is typically more defensive. Moreover, as men are physically stronger and faster, and since the court size does not differ depending on gender, the women must cover a bigger area than the men, indicating a preference for the defensive playing style. However, there has already been a call for action towards the more aggressive playing style as Coach #1 has incorporated this more, and some of the international players are incorporating the jump smash into the women's doubles (Section 5.2.3.1.). The social representation of women

playing defensively has been transformed, liberating the female players. Thus, their performance might be enhanced (Section 5.2.3.1.).

Another factor influencing the gendered playing style concerns the bodily movement in the mixed category. Anna describes differences in the playing style between the doubles and the mixed. The spacing in the doubles seems to be more equally divided between her and her partner. Contrastingly, the spacing in the mixed seems unbalanced as the man covers more ground (Section 5.2.3.2.). It is further described that the women are more locked into one position whereas the men move around freer, which is accredited to biological differences. However, the female player being locked into one position and thus, seemingly moving more enclosed, relates to Young's account regarding the phenomenological space available to women (Section 3.3.2.). This can be associated with the indication that the surrounding imaginary space is confined for women positioned close by the net. Thus, they seem discouraged from reaching out from this space. Therefore, this discussion is twofold: on the one hand, Anna describes this division of space to be the typical characteristics of the movement in the mixed, which is due to the biological differences, and thus, their performance depends on the gendered division of space. On the other hand, the fact that the women seem enclosed in their space might indicate the social representations regarding women and space and thus, may hamper the female players' performance.

Social roles are also an important factor regarding the differences in the gendered playing style. Section 5.2.3.1. described how Anna takes on different roles depending on what type of game she is playing; she is more of a leader in the women's doubles and more taken aback in the mixed (Section 3.3.3.). Both social roles feel natural to her. In section 3.4., it is described that sports are a male-dominated institution, and the fact that the women look to men for leadership can reproduce these social representations. The women do not liberate themselves by following the norm and the natural feeling of whom to go to for leadership. Chisholm (2008) argued that women must overcome any tendency to look to a man for leadership if they want to overcome normative femininity and masculine domination and thus, liberate themselves from patriarchal thoughts (Section 3.3.4.). Arguably, women should take on leadership if they want to enhance their performance and emancipate themselves. However, Anna describes that she is okay with these social roles and that they might be good for the game since the man does cover most of the ground and has a complete overview of the court. Nonetheless, Anna describes in section 5.2.3.1. that she receives

negative comments about her being “bossy” when she is taking on a role of leadership, which could make her reject female leadership. To transform this perspective on female leaders, it is arguable that there must be a call for action to embrace female leadership instead of accepting the norms of women being secondary.

The last aspect concerning the gendered differences in badminton that will be discussed is the impact of the players’ moods or attitudes in the practices. In section 5.2.4.1., Anna describes how the female athletes’ moods affect their practices. If one of the players is in a bad mood before practice, it will affect the rest of the group, taking away their focus from the performance. Anna further describes how this does not seem to be a factor in the men’s practice. She ascribes these differences to stereotypical gender traits, which aligns with Kassin et al. (2017)’s notion that women are perceived as more sensitive and emotional (Section 3.4.). This factor seems to hinder their performance. Thus, to enhance their performance, it is arguable that the women must adopt some male modalities to improve their performance, as Young might have implied according to Prange (2018) (Section 3.3.4.1.). Moreover, Sofia mentions how the communicative levels differ from the doubles to the mixed; in the doubles, she is more concerned about hurting her partner's feelings, making the communication less direct. Contrastingly, she does not have this concern in the mixed, resulting in a direct form of communication. Sofia also mentions that she prefers the more straightforward communication style, but it is difficult to apply in a female setting (Section 5.2.4.1.). Arguably, the women might have to change their communication style to increase their performance in practice.

This section has focused on the differences in playing style between the men’s and women’s doubles, the use of the jump smash, the different social roles in the mixed, and the differences in the communicative factors that may influence performance.

6.3. Pursuing a Dual-Career

This section focuses on the participants’ concerns about pursuing a dual-career. This aspect is relevant to the thesis as it shows some gendered tendencies on whether the athletes focus 100 percent on the sport or if their attention is divided.

The participants explained that they were concerned with pursuing an education on the side of their badminton careers (Section 5.2.6.). Sofia and Anna describe that they need something on the side, as they want to be stimulated intellectually. Luna explains that most female athletes describe this feeling. However, she wants to focus 100 percent on badminton and pursue a dual-career later in her badminton career. Thus, as Luna describes, their attention might be divided into other areas, which could be a factor that affects their performance since they might not have 100 percent of their focus on badminton (Section 5.2.6.). This indicates that the emphasis on dual-careers might move the athletes' focus onto other aspects than performance. Thus, there might be some advantages and disadvantages to pursuing a dual-career; for one, the players get stimulated in other areas, which seems to be an advantage. On the other hand, it seems to be a disadvantage since their attention is divided elsewhere.

Anna mentions that there seems to be a difference concerning dual-careers between the genders, as the men seem to be more “all-in” about badminton. She describes that it appears as if the men are not as focused on pursuing a dual-career, but rather focus 100 percent on badminton. This aligns with studies that show that women more often complete upper secondary education than men (Barripedro et al., 2018). However, this tendency cannot be generalized to all male athletes, as she mentions that her mixed partner is currently pursuing his career. Nevertheless, it is arguable that since the men are perceived to focus 100 percent on their sport, they do not divide their attention elsewhere.

Generally, there seems to be a connection between pursuing a dual-career and the focus on performance, as Luna described in section 5.2.6. While the participants experience more females focusing on dual-careers than males, this might indicate a gendered focus on performance.

6.4. Media Discourse

This section concerns the challenges that the participants describe experiencing with the media.

The participants describe that the media seems to be more concerned with their looks and personal life than their performance (Section 5.2.2.). This aligns with Young's account that

women have to “perform femininity” and that the media is more concerned with female appearance, marital status, and age (Section 3.4.). These accounts reinforce stereotypes that women have to behave and move like girls, which arguably hampers their free and full bodily movement (Section 3.3.1.). Thus, as the media focus on these female traits, the discourse regarding female athletes is that they must look pretty and that their personal lives are important. These factors take away the focus from female performance, both for the viewer and the athletes. The focus on female appearances in sports may arguably reproduce stereotypes about the importance of the male gaze, as described in section 3.3.4.1.

Section 5.2.2.2. portrays Luna’s description of how she is aware of the media’s negative comments while playing and how these can be distracting factors. Luna further describes how the media makes negative comments about the women’s appearance, calling them “Lemon Cakes” when they make grumpy faces instead of focusing on their performance. Thus, the media focusing on female appearances and personal lives are factors that can be perceived as decreasing women’s performance as it can be distracting. This aligns with the notion that feminine bodily comportment derives from women’s contradicting experience of their bodies as both a capacity and a thing (Section 3.3.1.); The women seem to be in a constant battle between the media’s focus on their looks and personal lives compared to their focus on performance, as described by Luna in section 5.2.2.2. As the media’s attention on their personal lives arguably takes away focus from their performance, the women are unconsciously reminded that their performance is not an essential factor. Thus, it might be difficult for the athletes themselves to focus 100 percent on their performance since it seems as if other factors are more important to the viewer.

The media seems to be more concerned with the men’s performance, as they receive more airtime than women (Section 3.4.). This aligns with Luna’s description that the women primarily receive airtime if there is a scandal or if the men say “no” to an interview (Section 5.2.2.2.). Thus, as the media stereotypes the message that most sports are masculine activities (Section 3.4.), there is not much room to focus on female performance, which might unconsciously reproduce social representations of their performances not being a vital matter. Thus, female athletes might focus more on their appearance than males, as the media discourse tells them that it is of importance, hampering their focus on performance. This may further reproduce social representations about the women being the Other

(Section 3.3.3.). Arguably, women might be deprioritized and perceived as secondary through the media discourse.

Another factor in the media discourse is the focus on clothing in badminton. As Luna mentioned in section 5.2.2.1., the Badminton World Federation (BWF) wanted to glamorize its image by making a rule that required female players to compete in skirts before the 2012 London Olympics, which received significant backlash from critics concerning it being sexist, causing BWF to abandon the rule (Eugenious, 2012). Luna also criticized these rules for being sexist and concerned about female attractiveness compared to performance. The fact that BWF tried to implement such a rule suggests that the male gaze is still important in female elite sports and that performance is secondary (Sections 3.3.4.1. and 3.4.). Regardless, the participants describe that they prefer wearing skirts over shorts since they seem more comfortable. They further describe that shorts can feel too short, revealing, and vulgar (Section 5.2.2.1.). However, the fact that women prefer skirts over shorts might be socially reproduced as they could be culturally taught to wear skirts. The women could wear men's shorts as a solution to the women's shorts being too short, yet they prefer the skirts. With that being said, it seems as if there is still a more significant focus on female attractiveness over performance since their options are either skirts, dresses, or too short shorts.

Overall, there are some indicators that the media discourse displays women's personal lives and appearances to be important, which might take away focus from performance.

6.5. Gender Inequality in Sports

This section is concerned with issues concerning gender inequality and focuses on gender labeling, sexism, the influence of male leaders, and how the hierarchy among the players affects equality in sports.

In section 3.4., gender marking was mentioned as a sports psychological issue in which women's sports are described as gender marked more often than men's sports. However, the participants describe that they do not emphasize the wording of "athlete" (Section 5.2.2.3.). Thus, they do not seem to be influenced much by gender labeling, nor do they seem concerned about it. This might indicate that the development regarding gender

labeling in sports is pushed toward more gender-neutral markings, as mentioned in section 3.4. Thus, de Beauvoir's notion of women having to gender label themselves before other assertions (Section 3.3.3.) might not be as problematic as it used to be. Some of the more traditional gendered issues in sports might be transforming. Thus, it might not be abnormal to be a female athlete today, despite the gender markings still not being of equal concern in the media, as described in section 3.4. However, as women have historically not been participating in sports simultaneously as men (Section 3.1.2.), the objectification of female athletes may have normalized the social representations of gender-labeling female athletes over male athletes. Through normalization, the female athletes might have been enculturated into experiencing female gender labeling as normal due to the male-dominated nature of sports. This might explain why they do not experience gender labeling as an issue. Therefore, this notion might indicate that women are still, to some degree, perceived as the Other, despite the transforming social representations of women's roles in elite sports and the developing equality concerning gender labeling in sports. However, the participants do not mention this as an issue. Thus, it must be considered that society has changed and that gender labeling is not as problematic as it used to be, which is also reflected by the development described in section 3.4.

Another factor of gender inequality regards the gender of the coaches and leaders in sports. As mentioned in section 5.2.5.2., most of the coaches and leaders in Danish badminton are male, which reproduces the notion about leaders predominantly being male in sports (Section 3.4.). Luna has never had a female coach, which she still prefers not to have, as she is worried about them being too soft (Section 5.2.5.2.). This might be a product of the social representations of coaches being predominantly male. However, Anna mentions that she has had female coaches and was not worried about their gender but personality traits. Therefore, it is arguable that once the female athletes are exposed to female coaches, the social representations of a coach might transform, aligning with LaVoi and Baeth's (2018) account (Section 3.4.). As the transformation of the coaching staff seems to differ depending on the participant, this is a two-folded discussion: On the one hand, social representations regarding sports being male-dominated might be reproduced as Luna describes how she has never had a female coach, nor would she prefer it. On the other hand, Anna's account shows that some of the gendered issues that Young proposed in the 1980s (Section 3.3.3.) seem to develop and transform the social representations of women being the Other through gender labeling. Nonetheless, studies show that most leading positions

are taken up by men (Gill, 2017). Thus, it is arguable that there is still room for improvement.

Other concerns might affect women's performance when it comes to male leaders. Luna describes how they receive sexist comments from both the media and a former coach who used to harass the female athletes at DNET sexually. Although he got fired, and it seems as if DNET took care of the problem, it still shows some of the challenges female athletes must manage. Luna mentions that some of the girls contemplated stopping their careers due to this incident. Thus, sexism can affect the pursuit of participating in elite sports. Luna's description of how the coach would make sexist comments regarding their body and positions (Section 5.2.5.1.), concurs with Young's account that women get objectified if they open their bodies in outward directedness (Section 3.3.3). Luna mentions that his comments about her weight affected her eating habits in an unhealthy way. Thus, it may have hampered her performance since it took away her focus from the sport. Another concern is that Luna had difficulties stating her concerns to the chief of sports due to his gender (Section 5.2.5.2.). Sofia also describes a problematic tendency to go to the chief of sports, as she does not feel heard when she tries to explain how the female athletes feel deprioritized compared to the male athletes (Section 5.2.5.2.). This goes into the discussion about having more female leaders in sports, as this might create a safer environment for some of the female athletes, which can raise self-perceptions (Section 3.4.).

Hierarchy might also influence gender equality in sports. The participants describe hierarchy to play a role at DNET regarding several different elements, affecting their social roles. Sofia describes that the men seem to get more attention than the women, which can be seen in the usage of the courts, as the men rarely get the outer courts. Sofia describes that it seems as if the men feel entitled to those courts and, thus, higher ranked than the women. Contrastingly, Anna describes the courts as divided equally between the genders (Section 5.2.3.2.), creating a discrepancy between the participants. Thus, Sofia's account argues that the usage of the courts influences the hierarchy at DNET, whereas Anna's account challenges this perception. However, Sofia further explains how the men act superior toward the women due to their hierarchical status. Both Sofia and Anna ascribe the hierarchy to the rankings list and not solely to gendered aspects (Section 5.2.4.2.). In contrast, Luna explains it to contain gendered tendencies, as she has encountered male practice players acting superior even though they are lower on the rankings list (Section 5.

2.4.1.). Thus, the participants seem to disagree on what the hierarchy is based on, with accounts that argue for gendered tendencies and accounts that claim for the ranking list.

As mentioned in section 5.2.4.2., Luna experiences the men to believe they are higher ranked in the hierarchy, which she accounts for their degrading behavior towards the women. She further explains how they do not perceive the women's games as hard as the men's. Anna further adds that the men openly state that they do not want to practice with the women because they perceive them as inferior. Moreover, Luna describes how the men speak to the women in a condescending tone, making them seem superior (Section 5.2.4.1.). This notion aligns with de Beauvoir's account of the Other (Section 3.3.3.), as the man is seen as the Absolute, and thus the hierarchy seems to affect the social roles. Moreover, Luna describes how the men take up more space during practice and expect it to be acceptable to throw the rackets onto the women's courts, which is not accepted vice versa (Section 5.2.3.2.). Luna further describes how the majority of the female players' do not speak up for themselves, as they are worried about the consequences, even though they are annoyed by the condescending tone (Section 5.2.4.1.). Thus, they become anomic minorities (Section 3.1.1.). As the men speak condescendingly toward the women, it is arguable that the communicative language does not favor female athletes. Thus, one could argue that the women cannot unfold themselves completely, as they are perceived as secondary. Therefore, their performance might be hampered, as they must be concerned with the men's superior tone and superior usage of courts. However, as women are perceived as minorities, it is arguable that they should behave nomically and provoke external conflicts to refuse these norms of the majority (Section 3.1.1.). While Luna has been doing this, she has received negative comments. Nevertheless, according to Moscovici (Section 3.1.1.) these actions must be taken to transform the social representations of women being secondary in sports. Thus, by actively creating a conflict, the women could reinforce power, which might change their position regarding performance.

Anna does not experience the same sense of hierarchy in the mixed compared to the men's doubles, which she ascribes to the factor that they depend on one another in the mixed, making the hierarchy less profound. The participants describe a feeling of the men acting superior to the women. These experiences are consistent with two of Young's accounts of oppression, namely cultural imperialism and marginalization (Section 3.3.4.1.). Cultural imperialism is relevant as the dominant group, the male athletes, protect their norms by

neglecting, overhauling, annulling, and stereotyping the women's standards and experiences as less than theirs. Arguably, they reinforce the hierarchy and the social representations of the men being superior. The marginalization also applies as the participants experience the men relegating them to lower standing and the edges of society, as they expect to be prioritized regarding the usage of the courts. The participants describe how the men directly state that the women's matches are not as tough as the men's, and thus, they seem to relegate the women to lower standings. Therefore, it can be argued that gender inequality is reinforced through the hierarchy and emphasized through a male-dominated perception of sports. The participant's description of the men acting superior might influence their performance as the women do not experience getting as much attention.

Overall, there seem to be some issues regarding equal rights in sports from the participants' perspectives. These tendencies apply to sexist comments from male leaders, the hierarchy, and male leaders in general. Gender labeling does not seem to affect the participants, and the institutions are aware of sexist tendencies, as DNET fired the sexist coach, facilitating equality. However, the male athletes seem to act superior to their female counterparts, indicating that other factors may be emphasized over performance, influencing the women's focus on performance.

6.6. Comparison Between the Previous Study and this Thesis

The research on cultural factors of women's performance in elite sports has taken two parts, as described in section 2. Thus, this section will enlighten the parallels and discrepancies between the findings from the previous study (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022) and this thesis. This comparison aims to find factors that affect women's performance in elite sports.

One of the factors the previous study focused on regards and how the genders approach their space differently. The study emphasized gender segregation in the gym, where the observed men used the centered courts, and the women used the outer courts. This corresponds with Sofia's description (Section 5.2.4.2.) that the men usually get the centered courts and seem to feel entitled to those. This also fits with Luna's description that the men take up more space in the gym (Section 5.2.3.2.). However, this contradicts Anna's description of the courts being evenly divided (Section 5.2.3.2.). Nonetheless, it is arguable

that the men seem to take up more space in the gym than the women due to the previous findings and Luna's and Sofia's accounts. During one of the practices, eight observing coaches were present, who primarily paid attention to the male players, making the women seem to be secondarily prioritized. Arguably, the men would get more attention, and thus, their range of enhancing performance might seem better due to their positioning on the courts and coaching awareness. This aligns with Sofia's account that the men seem to get more attention (Section 5.2.4.2.).

The previous study observed only male coaches, aligning with the notion that sports are predominantly male-dominated and led by male leaders (Section 3.4.). Moreover, it is arguable that the women are perceived as secondary since the head coach was the men's coach at DNET. Further, the findings that Luna never has had male coaches and prefers male coaches reinforce this tendency and perception of women being too nurturing to take on leadership (Section 6.5). However, Anna's description of having had female coaches and attributing coaching style to personality transforms this notion.

The previous study found that the men seemed to move freer and use more space than the women, which correlates with Sofia's description of the different playing styles between the doubles (Section 6.2). Moreover, the observations indicated that the women would move more timidly, act more passive, take up less space, and take less charge than the men in the mixed, which correlates with the findings of this thesis (Section 6.2.). Thus, it is arguable that the men act and the women react (Section 3.3.2.). One could argue that the women restrain themselves to some extent, hampering their performance.

The previous study found that the men would be verbally much louder than the women, which aligns with Sofia and Anna's notion that the men seem more straightforward (Section 5.2.4.1.). The previous study also found that the men had more non-verbal reactions. If the women had nonverbal reactions, they were mostly about something negative happening in the court, affecting their moods. This aligns with Anna's description of how the female players' moods affect their performance (Section 5.2.4.1.). Thus, it is arguable that the women's tendency to be silent, have indirect communication, and influence moods might hamper their performance. This thesis found that the women seemed to experience a sense of hierarchy regarding the tone of voice at DNET, in which the men would speak condescending to the women, putting them in a superior position (Section 6.5). This might

align with the higher level of verbality as perceived in the previous study. Thus, it is arguable that the men position themselves higher, hampering the women's focus on performance as they are perceived as secondary.

The previous study observed the differences in clothing between the genders: the women mostly wear skirts or dresses, and the men wear shorts. These findings correlate with the findings of this thesis, as Luna and Anna address the choice of clothing styles. However, the previous study assumed that the women wearing skirts would be inconvenient for their bodily movement, which contrasts with the participants' perspectives in this study, as they find the skirts more comfortable (Section 5.2.2.1.). Although Luna addresses the rule by BWF, and thus the focus on female appearance (Section 5.2.2.1.), wearing skirts does not seem to hamper their movement. Yet, something culturally-induced might take away focus from performance when women wear skirts, as discussed in section 6.4. The focus on female appearance further aligns with the thesis' findings regarding the media's focus on female appearances (Section 6.4.). Moreover, the thesis' found that the media discourse focuses more on female appearance and personal life than their male counterparts. This could indicate that female performance is not prioritized, which might unconsciously hamper the women's focus on their performance as they must be aware of other factors. Another factor that implies that the focus is less on the women's performance regards the sexual harassment of the former coach that Luna describes (Section 5.2.5.1.). These condescending comments might emphasize a sense of patriarchy, which reinforces social representations of women being secondary, and thus hampers their focus on performance.

Some of the findings did not compare, including the focus on the gender roles and their responsibilities in the previous study. The women were ordered to sort the balls after practice by a coach, which the men ignored, and the women seemed to be more organized before practice. The stereotypical gender norms were not articulated in this thesis. Thus, they may not seem important to female athletes, or they might implicitly not think about them as they are socially reproduced. Another factor that did not correspond was the focus on the participants' childhood and their emphasis on dual-careers in this thesis. These notions could not be observed during the first study, as this was a told story from the participants' past. Moreover, gender labeling was not emphasized in the first study for the same reasons. However, implementing them in this thesis adds another dimension to the cultural factors that may influence female performance. Due to my prolonged position in

this field, I was expecting gender labeling to be an issue, given the theoretical framework and my position as a former elite basketball player. In basketball, gender labeling is an issue as the best men's league is called "Basketligaen" [The Basketball League] (Basketligaen, n.d.), and the best women's league is called "Kvindebasketligaen" [The Women's Basketball League] (Kvindebasketligaen, n.d.). However, the participants did not perceive this to be an issue, indicating the progression regarding gender equality in sports.

Overall, there are several connected tendencies from both studies and some factors that did not seem to be consistent. Generally, there appears to be a tendency for the male athletes to gain more attention, as they take up more space and use the centered courts more than the women. While getting more attention, they arguably have a higher performance span. The male-dominated field of coaches and leaders reproduces the social representation of male leaders in sports. However, Anna's mentioning of having had female coaches might transform this notion, and thus, there might become more female role models in sports, which may help focus on female performance. The bodily movement has been described to differ depending on gender, where the men's playing style seems more aggressive than the women's playing style. It is further described that the women are starting to take up the aggressive playing style, which appears to enhance their performance. Another factor that may influence performance regards the communicative levels; the women seem more indirect and concerned with affecting each other's moods, whereas the men seem more straightforward. The women express that they prefer the more direct communication style, as the indirect might take away focus from their performance. Lastly, the media's focus on women's appearance and personal life might take away focus from performance, and thus, the media discourse may hamper the female athletes' performance.

6.7. Trustworthiness of the Study

This study has applied the semi-structured interview as a qualitative method and further applied thematic analysis. As the research work is interpretive, the quality of the study must be evaluated. Moreover, it differs from quantitative research, which contains the positivist tradition. The positivist tradition focuses on validity, reliability, and generalizability as the quality criteria used to evaluate the study (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). The fundamental research purposes, assumptions, and inference processes differ in qualitative research. Thus, Lincoln and Guba's (1985; as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005) four criteria for

evaluating interpretive research work will be applied to captivate the study's trustworthiness. These four research criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The study's credibility concerns the adequate representation regarding the constructions of the studied social world. Multiple activities can be implemented to investigate and improve credibility, including triangulation, peer debriefing, checking interpretations against raw data, and member checking. Moreover, the coding process and procedures need to be transparent (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005; Bradley, 1993). The triangulation can be perceived as strengthened since it is a follow-up study. Thus, various methods have been applied to investigate what cultural factors impact female athletes' performance. These methods include semi-structured interviewing in this thesis and participant observations in the previous study (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022). This thesis also applies several theoretical perspectives from independent sources, strengthening the triangulation. The interview guide and the analysis coding have been generated with no peer debriefing, which might diminish the credibility as a second opinion could address a potential researcher's bias. The design of the interview guide might have affected the quality of the data since one person created it. Thus, the identified data from the interviews show more factors concerning cultural and gendered influences on female performance in elite sports compared to factors that indicate otherwise. Therefore, my position as a researcher could be affected by the fact that I am a woman who has previously participated in elite basketball, which could have created a bias in the creation of the interview guide and during the conducted interviews. However, I did have my advisor debrief the analysis and interview guide, which could strengthen the credibility. Moreover, the asymmetric power structure of the researcher controlling the direction of the conversation might have influenced the credibility, as mentioned in section 4. Regarding member checking, it requires getting feedback and validation from the informants on the collected data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). The informants were briefed about the research question and the overall focus of the thesis, though the interview guide was not discussed in detail. However, during the interviews, the informants were asked different questions, as mentioned in section 4.2.2. This enhances the credibility of the data collection since the data was collaborative. Nonetheless, the study's credibility could have been enhanced if the informants were shown the data after transcribing them to gain their potential critique and validation of the researcher's analysis of the participants' experience. This might have addressed some of the potential researcher

biases. Lastly, the coding procedure is shown in Appendixes 3-5 in the comments section, and thus, the coding seems to be transparent in this thesis. Therefore, the study's credibility adequately represents the female athletes' experiences of what cultural factors might influence their performance. However, further applications could have been provided to strengthen the credibility.

Transferability concerns how well the researcher's working hypothesis can be applied in other contexts. The researcher must provide rich data sets and descriptions for other researchers to judge the transferability of the findings (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005; Bradley, 1993). Readers must be informed about the approach and procedure throughout the study, enabling them to form their critique (Frost & Kinmond, 2014). Thus, the interviews were transcribed using Tanggaard and Brinkmann's (2020) approach, as described in section 4, which gives other researchers the possibility of transferring the findings to different contexts. Moreover, the interview guide and the fully transcribed interviews are included in Appendixes 1, 3, 4, and 5, making each methodological step's intent transferable. Regarding the coding and analysis, these steps have been described in section 5.1. Moreover, the theoretical framework has been included in section 3, which illustrates several theoretical frameworks. Thus, it is arguable that the thesis has generally incorporated transferability.

Dependability regards the coherence how the researcher accounts for changing circumstances in the phenomena and the coherence of the internal process through internal audits. It is determined by checking the consistency of the processes of the study. The purpose of dependability is to show that the findings are consistent and repeatable (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). As stated above, a detailed interview guide and rules for transcription have been included to comprehend any need for replicating the study. However, guidelines regarding the coding could have been stricter to enhance the dependability, although the codes were outlined in the comment section of Appendixes 3-5. Moreover, measures to evaluate the stability of the data in other environments have not been included due to the time-consuming nature of revisiting the initial coding after a long period or having peers replicate the study.

Confirmability concerns how well the data characteristics, which the researcher posits, can be confirmed by others who review or read the study's findings. Moreover, it regards the

internal coherence as free of researcher bias so that other people can read the data and confirm the results (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). Audits can be applied to establish confirmability, which involves recording the actions and decisions made throughout the thesis and their outcomes to demonstrate the research processes (Frost & Kinmond, 2014). Thus, the internal coherence of the research product needs to be determined. This regards the data, the findings, and the interpretations of those. Therefore, raw data, field notes, coding manuals, and process notes could be applied (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). In this thesis, the raw data has been shown in Appendixes 3-5, which portray the transcribed interviews and the coded comments, and Appendix 1 illustrates the interview guide. However, to make the study more confirmable, audits such as field notes, process notes, a journal, or a researcher diary could have been applied, further addressing a potential researcher's bias. The data has been discussed from existing literature and studies (Section 3) to enhance the credibility of this thesis. The thesis describes the coding process, but it has not been exhaustingly described.

This section has gone through the four research criteria to ensure the trustworthiness of this thesis. Overall, there seems to be a tendency for the study to be trustworthy. However, more actions could have been taken to enhance the trustworthiness.

7. Future Research and Research Implications

This thesis has emphasized cultural and gendered factors that may influence female athletes' performance through the female athletes' perspectives. This section focuses on how research can be further investigated in the future. Moreover, the research implications will be presented to comprehend how the gained knowledge can be applied.

7.1. Future Research

This section implements seven aspects regarding future research, which will be described below.

The gender of the coaches could be investigated. As described in section 5.2.6., Anna denotes more male athletes becoming coaches following their playing career than female athletes. The social representations of coaches are male-dominated, as mentioned in section 3.4. This might reinforce male athletes' career goals to pursue the career path of coaching. Therefore, it could be interesting to research coaches' choice of pursuing this career path and research which males and females pursue coaching. It could be further interesting to investigate if there is a correlation between those who pursue a dual-career and those who mainly focus on their sports compared to those who decide to become coaches; is there a connection between people's career paths, the gender pay gap, and gender? In this sense, there might be a connection between the social representations of coaches and the role models set through an economic aspect while growing up. Some men might pursue coaching careers as this is the more common career path once their playing career is finished, whereas some women have educated themselves while playing sports. Thus, it could be interesting to research this phenomenon, as there might be some connections to female representation in sports.

One could research the differences between the genders and how they perceive education while playing professional sports. A quantitative study could be pursued. The athletes could be asked questions regarding their impression of the importance of following a dual-career, how many male athletes' are full-time or part-time, and their plans once they retire from professional sports. By asking such questions, one might be able to map out how the

genders approach these tendencies differently and thus if these factors impact their performance.

The economic aspect regarding the influences on athletes choosing a dual-career could also be interesting to research. The gender pay gap in sports is evident and is exemplified by the gender pay gap between the male NBA players and the female WNBA players, in which the NBA players earn an estimate of 100 times the salaries that the WNBA players earn (Ramdat, 2021). Thus, the social representations of careers, economics, and sports might differ depending on gender. It could be argued that since boys may have male role models who earn a living through their sports, pursuing an education might not be strongly emphasized. However, girls might not have role models who make a living through their professional sports. Thus, the social representations learned throughout childhood might influence the women's perception of the importance of a dual-career compared to men's.

Researching the male athletes' perception of the cultural factors that influence performance could also be captivating. Possible research questions include what gendered factors they perceive as important, how their childhood development affected their choice to pursue elite sports, and their perspective on female athletes in sports. Therefore, semi-structured interviews could be applied to male athletes. The triangulation could be strengthened since another perspective would be applied in the same context.

Regarding the difference between the men's and women's doubles, it could be interesting to incorporate the jump smash into the practices of younger girls. Thus, it could be researched if the cultural factors might change the playing style and how much the biological factors influence their movement. Applying this move could be a call for action and transformation regarding the stereotypical gender biases. By embodying free movement, the girls might be able to develop the same amount of skills as the boys are currently developing. Thus, they might participate and compete at the same level as the boys before puberty, enhancing their performance.

Farr (1993) described that if people understand their social representations, they can understand why they behave as they do (Section 3.1.). Arguably, the athletes could change their behavior and transform their representations to embody their movement and enhance their performance if they understood their social representations. Incorporating the

bystander effect could be interesting. It states that if people understand the situational forces that make them intervene or hesitate, they are better prepared to overcome these situational forces (Darley & Latané, 1968). Thus, future research could be intriguing if female athletes are informed about their social representations. Accordingly, their situational forces could change their behavior, leading them to enhance their performance.

Lastly, a study replication could be conducted in other fields to research how well the findings translate to different sports and environments. The transferability and universality to other sports could be investigated by conducting such research.

7.2. Research Implications

This section focuses on research implications and how to implement the gained knowledge from this thesis.

A workshop could be applied with the Danish national team, focusing on several aspects. By focusing on the different communicative levels and how the women prefer direct communication, the athletes could understand their social representations of female communication. By informing them of these situational forces, the women might change their communication styles and thus, improve their performance by eliminating distracting factors. Moreover, by explaining the concept of spacing, the women might become aware of how they position themselves and how they can break these patterns and change their behavior, improving their performance. Other actions could emphasize the aggressive playing style or other forms of female embodiment that may enhance their performance. Further, by creating awareness about female minorities in sports, the female athletes might change from anomic to nomic minorities and thus, creating and maintaining conflict by opposing the secondary female standards.

Overall, change might occur by creating awareness about women's social representations. Thus, I have already had a meeting with 15 male coaches in Aarhus about the gendered concerns of performance in reference to the previous study (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022). They all seemed to agree about these factors, some surprising and others expected, and wanted to change how they approach female athletes. Thus, by making the coaches aware of cultural factors affecting female performance, they might change their coaching style,

enhancing female performance. Moreover, creating a workshop emphasizing bodily awareness could improve female performance, as the women might be able to frame what aspects they want to work on.

Therefore, creating awareness about the gendered differences that affect female performance might enhance a focus on female performance, and thus, the gained knowledge could help female athletes enhance their performance in the future.

8. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate cultural factors of performance through the problem statement: “How do cultural factors of gender affect women’s performance in elite sports from the perspective of elite female athletes?”.

This thesis is a follow-up study to a previous study, which focused on cultural factors through participant observation (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022). However, this thesis has emphasized the female athletes’ perspective through semi-structured interviewing to comprehend the problem statement. The theoretical framework emphasized Moscovici’s theory of social representations and Young’s account of bodily comportment. Moreover, the thesis implemented a critical perspective on Young’s account and the challenges of female athletes in a sport psychological and philosophical framework. The thesis applied thematic analysis to analyze the three female athletes’ semi-structured interviews, which identified six main themes and nine sub-themes. As a result, eight topics were discussed compared to the problem statement.

Overall, several factors seem to affect female performance in elite sports from the participants' perspective. First, it is arguable that the participants’ childhood might have influenced their performance unconsciously, as the participants experienced it being abnormal for them to participate in competitive activities. Other findings suggest a difference in the playing style between the genders, where the men’s doubles is more aggressive, contrasting the women’s doubles, which is defensive. There has been a call for action toward an aggressive playing style, enhancing women’s performance. Moreover, the social roles in the mixed and the differences in the communicative levels seem to influence women’s performance. Arguably, the women could enhance their performance if they were to implement a more direct communicative style, as the indirect communication seems to distract their focus on performance. Additionally, the women’s moods hamper the practices and thus deemphasize performance. By articulating the communicative elements, the women might enhance their focus on performance over distracting factors. The thesis further found the pursuit of a dual-career to divide the athletes’ attention. Arguably, chasing a dual-career might interfere with their focus on performance. The media discourse seemed to influence the women’s perception of important factors of playing badminton. The media portrays the female athletes’ personal lives and appearances as important, which might take

away focus from performance, making the media a distracting factor. Equal rights in sports appear to affect women's performance as well. Sexist comments from male leaders, the hierarchy between the male and female players, and the number of male leaders in badminton are all factors that influence female performance. However, gender marking did not seem to concern the participants. Nonetheless, gender equality seems to be evolving, yet there is still room for improvement, and thus, women are still perceived as secondary in many ways. Therefore, they might not have the same focus on performance as male athletes do.

Comparing the findings from the thesis with the previous study (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022) emphasizes a strengthened connection between cultural factors and female performance. The connected factors included the usage of the courts, where the men usually positioned themselves on the centered courts, The notion that the men seem to move freer, contrasting the constricted female body movement, the difference in communicative levels, and the focus on women's clothing and appearance. However, some findings did not correlate, including the focus on gender roles and responsibility, the emphasis on childhood competition and dual careers, and the mention of gender labeling. Nevertheless, several factors were consistent in the two studies, making the factors seem equivalent.

Since the thesis has implemented a comprehensive theoretical framework, studies from other sports, and a previous study based on participant observation (Randrup-Thomsen, 2022), it is arguable that the findings in women's badminton can transfer to other sporting fields. Thus, several factors that affect women's performance in elite sports based on the participants' perspectives have been discovered.

9. References

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