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**THE PATRIARCHY OF THINGS**

**On a world unsuitable for women**

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## Contents

Introduction

- Chapter 1 Language constructs
- Chapter 2 Who owns the public space?
- Chapter 3 'Pink it, shrink it'
- Chapter 4 Technology, lust and Internet
- Chapter 5 Work it
- Chapter 6 Dress for success
- Chapter 7 What we cultivate
- Chapter 8 Get well soon
- Chapter 9 Othering others

Closing words

Thanks

## Introduction

I once got clobbered with a cleaning mop and called a 'puttana' by an old woman in Pompeii because I had dared skip the long queue outside the ladies' toilet and instead gone to the men's room to pee. Over the past fifteen years, I have told this tale many times; it's my little anecdote about the price I had to pay for defying the norm. So far, the bottom line of this story has been: my, what an antiquated, reactionary world view that woman had, and yes, it's likely that cultural differences between countries and generations played a role. From time to time, this story has also served as evidence on how women stab each other in the back instead of showing empathy for the daily struggle of simply being a female. It took an external prompt to realise that the core of the issue might be found altogether elsewhere.

This was when, five years ago, I created a five-minute piece for a radio feature on 'potty parity'. That hadn't even been my own idea but an assignment by a senior editor . I researched online and found a thesis by a woman who had done her Ph.D. on toilet design and had developed urinals specifically for women. Bettina Möllring, professor for industrial design in Kiel, gave me tons of information about the history of toilets and all the patriarchal injustices that shape our daily lives - too much to squeeze into a five minute slot. So I did what I always do when I sense a journalistic gold mine: I continued my research and once it felt right, I pitched my story about how public toilets and patriarchy are linked to several editors in charge of longer formats (both in radio and in print media). The reply was – no thanks. Given that the subject matter was peeing, there was no shortage of wordplays. The topic was not perceived as pressing (hehe). A story about urinals for women? That has no standing here (hehe). But my favourite refusal was simply this: this was not a matter of any political or societal relevancy. If that was the result, my pitch must have been truly abysmal!

Or perhaps I had stumbled onto something else by accident? Bettina Möllring had told me about the resistance she has been encountering for decades, about male decision-makers dismissing the importance of gender equality in matters of peeing with a patronising smile - politics was about more serious issues than this dribble. It was like fighting windmills, according to Möllring. Was I, too, now swinging my lance at windmills? The only difference being that my male decision-makers were editors rather than politicians?

Bingo.

And thus, this book tracks my journey of research through the deeply rooted patriarchal ideas that leave their imprint on our society and their influence on the every-day design of our environment and our lives. It is also a book about the anger experienced by anyone who has set out to shake up existing structures, ideas and designs - and about how they learn to cope with the backlash of the dominating patriarchy.

The history of patriarchal design unfolds like this. The male is the ultimate yardstick. Literally. Which results in genuine discomfort<sup>1</sup> for at least 50 percent of the population. Not

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<sup>1</sup> Though "discomfort" would suggest, we feel it constantly, when the truth is, constant pain often creates a feeling of numbness.

just when queueing for the loo. Who survives a car crash? Or an illness? What, precisely, is an illness and what isn't? Why is language the way it is? Why are there such huge differences in sports depending on whether the athlete is a woman or a man? Who is a city built for? Why are all the major streets named after men? Why are the pockets in my jeans useless? Why is the Internet set up the way it is?

My research quickly made clear that I could not write a book about the patriarchy without also writing about capitalism and discrimination, because so many of the stories I found had one central issue: the preservation of power. And who has power? Rich people. White people. Men. Most of the power in this world is held by rich, white, cis men.

I have talked to many women during my research, women from diverse backgrounds and generations. It turned out that I talked only to women; which I had not planned for, but I quickly found out that my requests for an interview triggered curious reactions in men, reactions of the sort that I had no desire to deal with.<sup>2</sup> So I chose to have fun with my work instead and talked to female scientists, experts, pioneers, activists, women who in the course of their lives had encountered obstacles and decided to remove them - for themselves and for those who would follow. One thing's for sure: their stories and experiences have broken paths diverging from those cemented boulevards, paths that hopefully will be easier to follow for future generations. Life will become a walk in the park for all, so the promise at the end of the feminist rainbow. Of course, it will!

Seriously, though. I believe that if we manage to instigate conversations about these mechanisms outside of academic discourse and our own progressive bubble, in other words, if we can draw attention to these issues, we all win. This book and the examples given herein could be a start; it is not a comprehensive inventory or even an encyclopaedia of patriarchal design. The number of things I list here is far smaller than the list of things I did not find in the first place, or which I had to leave out for lack of space.

At some point during the writing process my tax advisor asked why I was doing such little radio work these days, and when I explained that I was writing a book about patriarchal design, his reaction was, 'Oh my God, should I be scared?'<sup>3</sup>

This fear that grips men whenever women expose shortcomings became ubiquitous in my research. At the beginning of May 2020, the Funk collective STRG\_F published a documentary on a related topic, the #GenderDataGap, on YouTube. This was triggered by a book by Caroline Criado-Perez entitled *Invisible Women*, which lays out how academic studies, which then often lead to research and development, are, in the majority of cases, based on male data. This data imbalance, which has developed over time and today is firmly established, has resulted in a world based on male data, i.e. on calculations that have been standardised by men. In the first few days of being up on YouTube, the documentary by

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<sup>2</sup> This went all the way from hearing that the premise for my book was utter garbage to, 'Thank you for your interest, I checked out your website, here's the link to my son's page, he is a male model.'

<sup>3</sup> This combination of question mark and exclamation mark is an 'interrobang', a complex mixture of OMG and WTF. It applies to a lot that is mentioned in this book and is therefore a really useful punctuation mark, even though nowadays it is hardly ever used any more.

STRG\_F received twice as many negative ratings than positive ones. And several thousands of angry comments, mainly by guys who implied that the filmmakers (male and female) were trying to take something away from them personally.

In our patriarchal world, male privilege is hanging on tooth and claw in equal measure to its fragility. For proof, just look at the comment column for any random feminist publication.

A long-time friend, an older colleague with whom I discussed the research and writing process from time to time, suggested I should take care not to write a 'nasty' book. Leaving aside that 'nasty' sits right next to 'bitchy' in the poison cabinet of sexist adjectives and that I am sure that no male author has ever been given this advice regarding the tone of his book - this comment demonstrates something else: It is considered okay to become aware of injustices and to write about them, but if you must attach any emotion to this, then please don't make it something as negative and unfeminine as anger – because that will render it 'more difficult to be taken seriously'. 'Then women to hyenas grow', Friedrich Schiller wrote in 1779 in his epic poem *The Song of the Bell* – dangerous, anarchical, where would we end up if we women gave in to our feelings? This is quite simply unfeminine, no, inhuman, even animalistic.

In her book *Rage Becomes Her: The Power of Women's Anger*, the author Soraya Chemaly says that we live in a society that is excellent at coming up with a pathology of women's anger rather than taking it seriously and seeing its potential for the change that we strive to achieve.

From childhood onwards we learn that anger is ugly and that we women, when we suffer an injustice, are permitted to ask for help or to be sad, but please let's not get angry. This is logical: sadness is passive. A sad woman is a suffering victim, she presents no danger to the existing order. Anger, on the other hand, has the potential to grow into action. Anger can motivate someone to write a book. Or, in the words of the US-American women's rights campaigner and author Audre Lorde: 'Anger can grow into something that works like "corrective surgery" for society.' If someone's nasal septum is so crooked that they can't breathe any more, you have to break the nose before things can get better ...

So I have not submitted the anger that led me to write this book to any censorship; rather, I have let it pull me forwards. However, I have tried to keep the fragile male ego in mind and be gentle when breaking noses – as David Graeber notes in his book *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*, the mere suggestion that there could be a perspective other than their own habitually makes men react as if they have been violated.

Despite the occasional impulse to raze everything to the ground, I firmly believe that a societal change that is aligned with feminist values must be of an inclusive nature. This means that the quality of life must improve for *everyone*. A car design that, in the case of impact, protects the life of not only a male driver but also a female one, is beneficial to everyone, men included – since who would not prefer a wife, girlfriend, mother, daughter, sister etc who is alive, irrespective of her religion and the colour of her skin, the state of her

bank account or her sexual orientation. And if we follow this train of thought through to the end, we automatically get to intersectional feminism.

The term was coined by the US-American civil rights activist and law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw over thirty years ago, as a 'lens or prism that throws into sharper focus how diverse forms of inequality are interlinked and have a negative feedback loop. Not every type of inequality stems from the same origins.' The aim is to examine the relationship between the various mechanisms for centralising power by focusing specifically on people at the intersection of more than one type of discrimination, for example sexism, poverty and skin colour. As an example, take a woman with a migration background who works as a cleaner, whose living conditions are insecure and who has no pension. What benefit does she get from the fact that the woman she is cleaning for is breaking glass ceilings as a manager in a power pantsuit? None of that changes anything about her situation. Equality and social participation do not trickle down from top to bottom just like that. Neither does wealth that is achieved by tax breaks for the rich.

This is not a book on feminist theories – others have written about that (read their books!). Rather, this is a book about life, practical experiences, every-day occurrences.

Feminism, in order to be successful, cannot be limited to serving me, a white, privileged, heterosexual, cis woman. It must highlight and fight *any* source of discrimination and suppression, in other words not just sexism, but also discrimination based on skin colour, age, physical attributes, sexual orientation, religion ... <sup>4</sup> This book does not cover all of those topics; the agreed upon page volume as well as my knowledge are too limited for that. But fear not, elucidating literature on intersectional feminism is easy to find!

Recently I told a female artist that I was writing about design, and she asked whether I meant things like the 'phallic lemon squeezer by Philippe Starck'. I Googled what that was, and no: there may be passages here and there about phallic design, but an iconic – if impractical – lemon squeezer does not meet my criteria for patriarchal design, given that this particular design is equally impractical for all users, male and female, at least judging from the online reviews I have read. It does not discriminate between men and women, between white and non-white, young and old – it is simply a designer fruit squeezer that doesn't work very well. Function follows form. The fact that this inherently flawed thing, had it been invented by a woman, would probably never have achieved this iconic status, may be due to patriarchal structure, but in and of itself, it is not a patriarchal design.

Design is the shape we give our ideas. Everything we humans have ever made has gone through a design process. This comprises both items in our material world – such as cars, sex toys, drills, bicycles, clothes – and immaterial things such as social design: the public space, city planning, but also language, laws and politics. A further, vast and ever-growing space

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<sup>4</sup> This thought is also behind the decision to use : rather than \* to indicate both genders. More on this in the chapter about ableism (chapter 9).

where ideas take shape is the Internet, social media, algorithms, community guidelines and whatever else is part of this cyberspace.

This book examines why the world is the way it is, and why many people are dissatisfied with the status quo. It looks at what we could do to change this world. It is the story of the floral-patterned dress and of football boots, the story of video games, sex, and religion. It covers items that are designed for a specific gender for no reason whatsoever, ideas and inventions that have only one purpose: to keep a good woman down. It also looks at items that should be designed for a specific gender but aren't, again for no reason whatsoever, preventing women from accessing their full potential, whether this is a question of performance or survival. And it shows how the patriarchal design as the fundamental design principle is behind almost everything that surrounds us.

But let's start at the beginning.

## Chapter 5

### **WORK IT**

In my humble opinion, the International Space Station ISS is one of the coolest work places in the entire world - what am I saying, in the entire universe! A place where astronauts from (so far) 19 different states have been peacefully collaborating for over 20 years - floating, researching, repairing and showing kids in a popular television show how to make Spaghetti Bolognese in zero gravity.

But if you have a closer look at the details of the space station, you will find that the sojourn up there cannot be equally comfortable for everyone, since even the ISS is a den of patriarchal design. A photo taken in 2019 shows the astronauts Jessica Meir and Luca Parmitano doing something spacey together<sup>5</sup>, with Parmitano's feet hooked under one of the blue rails installed everywhere on the station in order to offer the users some stability in zero gravity. Meir, a woman who is a good ten inches smaller than her male colleague Parmitano, can't do that; the small round window would be out of sight and out of reach for her if she were to hook her feet under the rails in front of it. This isn't dangerous, but it's clumsy and it is not fair.

Of the 240 people who have been stationed on the ISS since 1998, all of 34 were female<sup>6</sup>. The number of women in space has risen over the past few years, and in October 2020, Meir and her colleague Christina Koch went on the first entirely and exclusively female 'spacewalk'. And yet, the infrastructure on board the ISS has barely changed in over 20 years; female scientists still have to cope with working conditions that were not designed for them, but for their larger and heavier male colleagues.

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<sup>5</sup> It really is not possible to see what they are doing, and unfortunately no amount of research helped me find out what it was.

<sup>6</sup> Status in May 2020

And then, at some point, they return to Earth as esteemed and celebrated astronauts, they are invited to talk shows and celebrated as heroines. Heroines with an aftertaste, as in the case of Samantha Cristoforetti. During the show *Kölner Treff* in May 2020 she got to talk about how space gloves were too big for her, only to go on having to then justify having left her daughter alone during her sojourn in space, and to top it all, the fiddler André Rieu cracked a poor joke about who was cleaning up there in the space station now that she was gone.

And now we get to the positive spin on this space anecdote: almost every one of us ladies is a bit of an astronaut on the ISS. Or at least, we all share the inconveniences of a workstation that was not designed for us.

[...]

### **Women's sports is not an achievement? (And not work, either)**

In my generation's German teenager comedy *Mädchen, Mädchen* a young girl pedals through the city on her racing bike. She realises that the friction caused by the saddle feels good. More than good, to be precise... Rubbing herself against the saddle, leaning against a streetlamp, Inken (played by Diane Amft) experiences her first orgasm. Something in the realm of this mental image must have been on the minds of medical experts when, just over 100 years ago, they diagnosed – or rather, conjectured – that bicycling triggered hysteria in women, an 'illness' that resulted, inter alia, in the following symptoms: egotism, a craving for recognition, and lust. All things that no man wanted to see in his wife, which is why women had to be stopped from cycling.

Someone whose experiences on a bicycle saddle have been anything but lustful is the British cyclist Hannah Dines. 'Having a vagina means having pain,' she wrote in an article for the *Guardian* about her life as a competitive cyclist. She explained that humans with vaginas are used to coping with pain. They menstruate, which sometimes causes intense pain,<sup>7</sup> and likewise the first sexual intercourse can be extremely painful – or indeed every instance of sexual intercourse, for a variety of reasons. And I'm not even mentioning bladder infections or urinal tract infections, which may also occur more frequently after having had sexual intercourse. Anyone who has ever squeezed a child out through their vagina knows that that, too, is accompanied by excruciating pain, sometimes with echoes for months afterwards. So we grow up knowing that our sexual organ can be not only a source for pleasure but also for pain, and that this – to a degree – is part of the deal of being a cis woman. But in the case of Hannah Dines, the pain was caused less by her physical constitution but rather by the design of her bicycle's saddle, which had failed to take the female anatomy into consideration.

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<sup>7</sup> I will elaborate on the condition called endometriosis in chapter 8.

When she joined the British Cycling federation in 2014, aiming for a medal at the Paralympics – an ambitious goal that would require daily training – she knew that she would have to pay a price for her success in the saddle. That same year, when it happened for the first time that layers of hardened skin and hair sloughed off her vulva in clumps and she flushed it all down the loo, she found that unpleasant but not surprising, given the endless hours of rubbing against the saddle. Part of the process, Dines thought at the time. But it didn't stop there, went beyond scraping off callused skin and painfully ingrown pubic hair. Soon she suffered from putrid, chronic inflammation of her outer labia and lymph nodes. Over the course of the years, some areas became numb, the pain lessened for a while. But the remaining hardened areas grew and led to additional pain while cycling.

In her first Paralympics in 2016, Dines placed fifth, followed by gold in the world championships, so all that pain had not been in vain. But in 2018, after five years of intense training, she reached her personal pain threshold. She just couldn't go on anymore. She looked around for medical help, and once biopsies had established that the growths were not cancerous, it also became clear that they would have to be removed by surgery. But being in the saddle was a non-negotiable on her way to success, as it is for all female cyclists across the globe. That's why for a long time she assumed that she herself was the problem, the shape of her lower body which for some reason was incompatible with the saddle, with all the saddles in the world, really. Add to this the fact that women in competitive cycling are still not being taken seriously the same way their male colleagues and coaches are, and that the medical staff on most female teams is male. All of this has resulted in women quite literally sitting out the problem, the chronic inflammation of tissue or urinal tract, the painful swellings and growths, until it is too late – until surgery becomes necessary.

Anna Weiß works for a magazine on mountain-biking and is an expert on outdoor sports. One of her tasks is to advise companies on how to include women as a target group in their planning. I spoke to her about the invisibility of women in professional cycling.

**Women believe it's their own fault or that there is something wrong with them. The topic as a whole has a strong undertone of shame and embarrassment, in an industry that is extremely sexist to start with. Add to this that women who speak up must fear to lose their contracts, which they had to fight for very hard in the first place. Nobody wants to be the one to foul the nest, because this carries a huge risk of personal disadvantages.**

Anyone who gets on a bike ends up sitting on a saddle, that applies to everyone, and yet saddles are shaped and designed to suit male butts and genitalia – which, as Dines points out in her article, can be shifted out of the way. This is not to say that it's always comfortable for the guys; professional cycling is by its very nature an uncomfortable occupation. But in the world of male athletes, there is awareness of the problem and constant research into solutions. Not so for the women.

**To give an example: A few years ago, I attended a PR event of a major US-American manufacturer. They made a huge fuss about the launch of a new saddle. They had statistics on which athlete had sat on it for how many hours and had attached sensors to the tester subjects' perineum to measure the flow of oxygen; we were allowed to test these sensors with our fingers. Being the only woman inspecting this, I asked, 'Has this saddle been tested on women? What are your findings?' Silence. The answer, when it came, was: 'It's not possible to measure this in women. It's much too complicated.'**

Indeed, cycling can cut off the blood flow into the penis, which can lead to a numb feeling and temporary erectile dysfunction. That is why a lot of money is being poured into researching the phenomenon of the 'numb pecker'. In 2019, the same manufacturer launched a saddle for women, but it is hard to establish how much effort and money has gone into developing that. This is due to two vicious circles in professional cycling, both of which demonstrate very clearly how men - once they have reached the conclusion that women, too, can do things such as mountain-biking - still see themselves as the measure of all things.

**The problem is that those in a position to make decisions have to rely on surveys and studies whenever they want to launch a new product onto the market. Ideally something with hard facts and numbers. Where can they get these studies? If the company has money to spare, they will hire a market researcher. More commonly, they will consult studies conducted on behalf of specialist media, such as our publication or other mountain-biking magazines. And who works in these magazines' editorial offices? Mostly men. The content is designed by men for men. Guess who they sell it to? Mostly to men. And then that magazine conducts a survey asking how many women pursue mountain-biking. The result? One percent ! Odd, that. But this is the number that is given to the product managers who then say: oh well, that's not a market for us, we don't need to invest any money.**

Yet sometimes they notice that out there in the real world there are women on mountain-bikes. It should be possible to sell something to them! And there you have the next trap: they consult imaginary women instead of real live ones.

**To put it provocatively, they claim that two things matter to women: how they look and whether it's safe. So let's produce a bike that is pink, with little flowers, with a really high handlebar, a sort of buttress to alleviate fears of flipping over. And women are obviously beginners, meaning they don't invest much money. Consequently, the bikes are heavy and made of lower-quality components. And there you have it, your 'women's bike'! Of course, any woman who is serious about cycling will say: no way I will ride a bike like that. So 'women's bikes' sell less, which**

**leads the manufacturers to say, 'Great, now we're offering a special design for women and they don't want it. Apparently, there's no target group for us here. So let's scrap it all and align our entire marketing to male customers.' It's a vicious circle.**

Likewise, the annual product cycles<sup>8</sup> don't exactly encourage investment of time and money for research, regardless of whether it's about mountain-bikes or racing bikes. But sometimes, when a woman like Hannah Dines publicly talks about her experiences and how her intimate zones<sup>9</sup> are affected, this at least sets something in motion. Professional cyclists as well as amateurs contacted her. The US-American cyclist Alison Tetrick spoke up about a very similar experience; she too had to undergo vulva surgery, and since as a professional athlete she has access not only to a larger platform but also to money and sponsors, she commissioned the development of a saddle that reduces chafing - and thus pain - to a minimum. Actual saddles for humans with a vulva, because of course not all vulvas suffer the same way. That is why currently individual saddles made of carbon are being developed, using a 3D printer that can produce an exact imprint of anyone's butt or vulva. That sounds grand, but it is also expensive, and not everyone will be able to afford this since female professional cyclists still exist only on the fringes of the media (and as a footnote)<sup>10</sup>.

A Yale University study of 2012 found that the height of a racing bike's handlebar is decisive for the degree of pressure exerted on the female pelvic floor and the external labia. Raising the handlebar can lead to a decrease of the pressure in these areas and thus also prevent pain, injuries and the resulting loss of sensitivity. Interesting! Let us return briefly to the beginning of this chapter and the notion prevalent at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that women should not ride bicycles because that would trigger hysterical feelings of lust. Now guess what kind of warning was issued after the publication of the Yale study? The *Bild* tabloid came up with this: 'SHE doesn't want to have sex anymore? That might be because she's just been on a bike tour...' In late 2019, RTL television recycled this *Bild* article and doubled down on the issue: 'Ladies, let's stick to this then: those who love their bike, push – and don't get back on it.' Hahaha!<sup>11</sup> Without wanting to get into a media debate here: a lot is revealed about our kind of society if the results of a study on the risk of injury to women is (a) reduced to sexual apathy and (b) the solution is seen not in a better design for bicycles but in the suggestion that women should stop cycling.

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<sup>8</sup> Companies launch a new, 'better' bike every year, which allows time only for a few tweaks here and there.

<sup>9</sup> Or would it be better to say, her private spheres?

<sup>10</sup> There is no official female Tour de France, which doesn't mean that women don't do the tour - they always reach the finish line one day before the men do. The project is called 'Donnons des elles au vélo', and it is a guerilla revolt of indomitable female athletes who demonstrate that it is possible to deliver outstanding athletic performances, away from all the media hullabaloo created by sponsors who invest hundreds of thousands of Euros in state-of-the-art research. I'd like to imagine that when they cross the finish line, they quietly hum 'everything you can do, I can do better'.

<sup>11</sup> This is addressed to women, yet the German original text used the masculine form of 'who'.

But back to those women who just won't give in and who engage in competitive cycling. The truth is that we don't even know what they are capable of, and there is precious little to indicate that this might change in the future. That sort of change would require the proverbial reinvention of the wheel, and lots of time and money. And yet, perhaps cycling will go the route of professional winter sports, which has seen significant changes in recent years.

Take ski jumping, for example. The first documented ski jumping competition took place in Norway, in Trysil, in 1862. A young woman by the name of Ingrid Olavsdottir Vestby jumped about six metres above the head of the gasping audience, farther than many of her competitors. Wearing a long skirt, of course, as was customary back then. And handful of women followed in her footsteps, but female ski jumpers remained an exception and had to get special exemptions in order to participate in competitions; for a very long time, this sport was considered dangerous for the female anatomy. The uterus in particular seemed to be an obstacle to the air jumps somehow, which is why the president of the International Ski Association FIS, Gian Franco Kasper, stated in a radio interview in 2005 that ski jumping appeared, 'for medical reasons, not appropriate.' And when I say 'for a very long time', I mean it – I was surprised to find that this persisted until 2014, when female ski jumpers were allowed to participate in the Olympics for the first time, after decades of applications and rejections by the commission, claiming among other things a lacking degree of professionalism. Ski jumping for men, in comparison, became an Olympic sport in 1924, a full 90 years earlier. The purported 'lack of professionalism' among female ski jumpers is part of the typical chicken-and-egg problem which keeps popping up in professional competitive sports. More than just talent is required to achieve top results; you need money, training opportunities, competition experience and, of course, professional equipment. Jumping to first place in a long skirt, that just doesn't happen anymore.

Ski jumping may be an example taken from extreme sports, but it is by no means the exception. Women as a target group have been neglected across the entire spectrum of ski sports, at least as far as competitive sports go. Sure, women have always been skiing, but only as a hobby, as a leisure activity in the winter holidays. That's why, from the manufacturer's perspective, it seemed obvious that the typical female hobby skier placed particular value on skis that looked different from those the men used: they had playful gimmicks such as colour or ornaments. Other than that, the skis were just shorter and lighter because it was assumed that women were not particularly good skiers and therefore needed an 'easier' beginner's alternative to the male high-tech ski. Even if some snuck into male competitions in disguise and every now and then also placed high, they simply did not have the equipment necessary to achieve top results.

Given that these days, the female target group represents 44,5 percent of the market for winter sports products and that over the past few years there has been some progress in the

area of winter sports at competitive level, there are some companies now under female leadership that employ women, conduct research into equipment for women, and then carry out their design accordingly. Their goal is not only to make up for the lost decades, but also to facilitate top performances for and by women in the future. And still, with regard to sports equipment we keep encountering the erroneous assumption by companies that anything requiring strength, performance and speed is, by tradition, an exclusively male domain.