

**Case Study: Social Relations, Equality and Self-Image among
Participants of A Multicultural Wrestling Class**

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<p>This bachelor's thesis is a descriptive case study. It focuses on a non-competitive multicultural wrestling group.</p> <p>The study builds a picture of the participants' feelings of social belonging in two environments: in the wrestling practice, and generally in Finland. The study aims to find out if the feelings are similar or different in these two environments. It further contemplates the potential of wrestling as a fruitful environment for intercultural encounters and group cohesion.</p>	
<p>Keywords social sciences, integration, cohesion, wrestling, sport</p>	

Table of contents

1	Introduction.....	2
1.1	The focus group.....	2
1.2	Objectives.....	3
1.3	Research questions.....	4
1.4	Limitations.....	4
1.5	Structure.....	5
2	Concepts and Literature.....	6
2.1	“Bonding” and “bridging” social capital.....	6
2.2	Equality in battle.....	8
2.3	Sport participation and self-image.....	9
3	Data collection.....	11
3.1	Methods.....	11
3.2	Process description.....	12
4	Results.....	13
4.1	Group composition.....	13
4.2	Social relations.....	16
4.3	Perceived equality.....	23
4.4	Self-image.....	28
4.5	Summary.....	30
4.6	Conclusions.....	32
5	Discussion.....	34
5.1	Research reliability and validity.....	34
5.2	Wrestling as an environment for social belonging.....	35
5.3	Suggestions for further research.....	37
	References.....	38
	Attachments.....	39
	Survey for the Participants of the Wednesday training (Finnish).....	39

1 Introduction

This bachelor's thesis is a case study which presents a wrestling class of a Helsinki-based sport club. It focuses on the social aspect of sport and aims to record the participants' feelings about personal and social matters in relation to sport and generally to life in Finland.

The Introduction chapter begins by introducing the sport club and class in focus of the study. It then continues to present the objectives and research questions of the case study. After that, it recognizes the nature and limitations of this study. Finally, it introduces the structure of this written report.

1.1 The focus group

The club in focus has branches for multiple sports: alongside wrestling it provides training for judo, boxing, weightlifting, powerlifting, as well as track and field. The wrestling branch is quite a successful and lively operator in the Finnish wrestling field. It provides training sessions for children, juniors and adults. For adults it has four training slots per week.

This bachelor's thesis focuses on one of the weekly training slots: the Wednesday class. In contrast to the other training slots, the Wednesday class is profiled as a non-competitive class that focuses on conditioning through wrestling¹. As such it provides a goal-oriented but relaxed atmosphere for training.

Some participants of the Wednesday class use it as their only wrestling workout during the week, whereas some participants attend it as one part of their wrestling regime and are active on the club's other training days as well.

¹ Finnish: *kuntopaini*. A conditioning-oriented, non-competitive wrestling practice.

The class has both native Finnish and immigrant participants and will be discussed in this study as a multicultural group. However, it is not profiled by the sport club as a multicultural class: it is a basic training session open for all the members of the club.

This bachelor's thesis is not a product ordered by the sport club. Instead, it measures the feelings of participants about personal and social themes that go beyond sport participation. Because of this, the sport club and the participants are described but not specifically identified in this study.

1.2 Objectives

This bachelor's thesis reports feelings of the Wednesday class participants about social themes. The aim is to gain an understanding of their social relationships, perceived equality, and self-image.

The themes are examined in two different points of view. On the one hand, the focus is on the wrestling environment: how does the participant feel about the group cohesion and his own role as a member of the team? On the other hand, the themes are discussed on a general level: how does the participant feel about life in Finland and about himself as a part of the Finnish community?

In short, this study examines the cohesion in the Wednesday wrestling group and compares it to the perceived cohesion in the Finnish society in general. The social cohesion between immigrants and native Finnish people in both environments is one of the main points of interest. Opinions are collected from all participants of the class, regardless of their cultural background. The answers are discussed separately when necessary.

1.3 Research questions

This study has three points of focus that are examined through the following questions:

1. How do the participants describe their social relations
 - a. in the Wednesday wrestling class
 - b. in Finland

2. To what extent do the participants feel that they are equal with their peers
 - a. in wrestling
 - b. in Finland

3. In general, how do the participants see themselves as individuals?

1.4 Limitations

The nature and value of this study is descriptive. As such, it collects feelings of the participants of the Wednesday class and provides no definite answers to wider questions of sport and social sciences.

Although the study discusses the themes of sport participation and social wellbeing concurrently, it is impossible to say whether there is a causal effect between them or not. For example, it can be carefully assumed that physical activity is probably one of the elements that provide positively to the construction of self-image. It cannot, however, be stated that this positive self-image is a direct result of sport participation.

Furthermore, the results are limited to the group of individuals that is on the focus of this case study. The group does not form a quantitative sampling group outside of this case study. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to a wider context.

1.5 Structure

This bachelor's thesis begins by introducing the main concepts and some relevant literature on sport and social sciences. It then continues to present the methods and data collection process of the case study.

The main chapter consists of the presentation of results. The themes are first introduced separately. They are then summarized together and analysed according to the research questions.

Finally, the Discussion chapter contemplates if a multicultural wrestling environment like the Wednesday class could be seen as a productive platform for building social relationships, contributing experiences of equality, and improving self-image. It also presents some wrestling-specific group cohesion principles and methods.

2 Concepts and Literature

This chapter introduces the main concepts and literature used in the study. They are presented in three subcategories, following the themes of the research questions. The chapter begins by presenting two relevant concepts of social interaction. It then moves on to contemplate equality and its presence in battling conditions, such as wrestling. Finally, it brings up some frequently presented views about the relationship between physical activity and self-image.

2.1 “Bonding” and “bridging” social capital

Social capital is a concept that describes networks, connections and complementarity between individuals. A community where people help and care for each other would be considered rich in solidarity, and thus rich in social capital. In contrast, a society that might be otherwise successful but where people live in isolation, would be considered poor (or at least, not so rich) in social capital. (Putnam 2000, 19)

Social capital has two aspects: individual and collective. The individual aspect describes how good connections may assist in achieving personal goals. Finding a career opportunity through an acquaintance is a good example of the individual benefits of social networking. However, the effects of social relationships extend beyond the individual scale. A community where people trust and work in favour of each other, is considered more efficient than a distrustful one. (Putnam 2000, 20-21)

According to the American political scientist Robert D. Putnam, social capital has at least two dimensions on the community scale. In his famous book “Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community” (2000) he introduces the most important dimensions as bonding and bridging social capital.

*Bonding social capital*² refers to the relationships inside a certain community. It could be the dominant form of social capital in clubs that are defined by certain attributes of their participants: for example, by ethnicity, gender, or social class. Although bonding social capital sometimes comes with the exclusive element of making a difference between “our group” and “others”, it is not unambiguously a negative phenomenon. Bonding social capital can describe the feelings and acts of solidarity between people who live in a certain neighbourhood, have a similar hobby, or belong to the same team. (Putnam 2000, 22) In the context of sport, the meaning of bonding social capital is quite synonymous with team cohesion.

Bonding social capital describes the close-knit relationships between community members. The feeling of belonging in a certain community is important. Care and psychological support from community members are needed in many occasions throughout life, not least when an individual is at crisis. Correspondingly, a close community is also present during the efforts, joys and milestones of life. These qualities define the importance of bonding social capital. (Putnam 2000, 22)

*Bridging social capital*³, on the other hand, describes the relationships between separate communities. Putnam (2000, 22) names the civil rights movement, youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organizations as examples of this inclusive form of social capital.

Bridging social capital improves the spread of information and opportunities. By connecting an individual to multiple communities simultaneously, it can also create wider forms of identity. (Putnam 2000, 22-25)

Bonding and bridging social capital are not exclusive in relation to each other. Putnam (2000, 25) states that “many groups simultaneously bond along some social dimensions and bridge across others”.

² Bonding (or exclusive) social capital

³ Bridging (or inclusive) social capital

The importance of both bonding and bridging social capital is recognized also in the context of multiculturalism and integration. When a person moves to a foreign country, it is extremely important that he integrates well and feels at home among the native population. To ensure a thorough integration process, he should build relationships with the native population and learn about their language and culture. (Siirto and Hammar 2016, 199) Therefore, integrating and mingling with the native population requires opportunities for gaining bridging social capital.

However, bridging social capital alone is not enough to ensure a positive integration. Experts of immigrant work also recognize a need for bonding social capital. Keeping in touch with family, relatives and friends over national borders may be a crucial source of support and motivation. Furthermore, finding people with similar cultural and linguistic background in the new home country can help an immigrant in his integration process. Being able to speak one's own language at times and to interact with people who have experienced similar situations can help the person feel more at home. (Siirto and Hammar 2016, 199)

Thus, bonding and bridging social capital don't work against each other. They are often both needed to ensure a positive social atmosphere.

2.2 Equality in battle

This study aims to find out, if sport has some special elements that are built on respect and equality and could be used to understand team cohesion among wrestling participants.

John Hughson, an England-based professor of Sport and Cultural Studies, writes about athletes as modern representatives of heroism in his article "On Sporting Heroes" (2009). He talks about these athletes in two categories: prowess heroes and moral heroes. Even though his article focuses on elite level athletes and their sociohistorical value, some of its themes can be used in a more general context to shed light to the idea of equality in sport.

According to Hughson, the status of prowess heroes comes from their achievements. They present their expertise through their performances, which in the case of athletes, is their sport. Heroism is not achieved solely by winning. The level of the rival is what makes the battle important and meaningful. There is no glory in defeating a weaker opponent. On the contrary, achieving perfection requires a comparably supreme rival. (Hughson 2009, 86-88)

This statement suggests that a battle environment requires an elevated level of respect and recognition of the rival's skills and accomplishments. In my view, this creates opportunities and space for equality.

Accordingly, many athletes profile themselves as respectful and accessible characters who are conscious about social matters. This way, they combine characteristics of prowess and moral heroism. (Hughson 2009)

Unfortunately, of course, the two don't always meet and prowess heroism isn't always linked with moral virtue. There are always some athletes who choose to create their image by blustering and confronting their opponents in a hateful manner. (Hughson 2009)

But skills are the most important qualities that are needed when facing an opponent. And when only the skills matter, there should be less room for evaluating the opponent by his social status or cultural background.

2.3 Sport participation and self-image

Organized sport has many qualities that can help a participant to can help the participant to re-evaluate his self-image. One of the most important qualities is the social aspect of sport. Organized physical activity has potential in boosting the participant's self-image by creating an environment for social belonging. An inclusive team cohesion

works as a source of encouragement and support, an element that is also needed for continued participation. (Coalter 2005, 12)

Continued participation has in turn been identified as an efficient way of gaining conditioning and health benefits, both of which contribute to the perceived personal abilities. Participation can also lead to improved sport-specific and social skills, and has potential in shaping personal values. (Coalter 2009, 7) Thus, physical activity creates opportunities for re-evaluating one's self-image.

Self-image is often also connected to physical appearance. In the modern society, a sporty appearance is often considered aesthetic, so much so that it can even work alongside dressing style as a status symbol. According to this view, a trained body is a sign of goal-oriented work and discipline. (Thiel, Seiberth and Mayer 2013, 72, 89) For some participants, this desirable appearance is one of the motivations to do sport.

3 Data collection

This bachelor's thesis is a case study whose data was collected through both quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as participant observation. This chapter presents the methods with more detail and then continues to describe the data collection process.

3.1 Methods

Firstly, this bachelor's thesis uses *quantitative data*. This data was collected by a survey that was given at the end of the training session to all the participants present. In harmony with the research questions of this study, the survey consisted of questions about social relations, perceived equality, and self-image. The majority were multiple choice questions, but the participants also had a chance to clarify some of their answers in writing. The data that is later presented through diagrams, is the output of this collection method.

Secondly, the quantitative reports are reinforced and clarified by *qualitative data*, which was collected by semi-structured theme interviews. The themes, as well as certain key questions of the interviews were decided beforehand but there was also room for additional discussion. A group interview for Afghanistani participants was used to bring more detail into recorded perceptions of group cohesion and equality. This supplemental information will be discussed alongside the survey results in the following chapter. A personal interview with the coach provides insight to the discussion chapter, which reflects the potential of wrestling as an environment for intercultural cohesion.

Thirdly, *participant observation* was used to bring insight to the group cohesion during the training sessions. I first attended the training sessions in April 2017 as purely an observer. At this point, the participants consisted merely of men, most of whom had already wrestled for several years. However, as stated before, the sessions were open to everyone, regardless of their gender or experience. I was thus immediately welcomed and encouraged to join the training. As a person with no experience in wrestling, I first

hesitated but after a few weeks I found myself on the wrestling mat with the group. My attendance in the weekly Wednesday training has continued ever since. My personal experiences will be used in this bachelor's thesis to describe the group cohesion and to add both female and beginner's perspective.

3.2 Process description

The quantitative survey was distributed at two separate trainings to reach a sufficient number of wrestlers to represent the average participant amount of the Wednesday group. Filling the form took about five minutes and was done on location. Thus, no forms were left unreturned. The participants willingly took the survey and presented positive attitude towards providing material to the study.

Qualitative interviews were done twice. The first was a group interview with four participants whose cultural background is in Afghanistan⁴. The second was a personal interview with the coach. The themes of the interviews, such as team spirit, have also been touched in unofficial situations while chatting with the participants during training sessions.

I have practiced participant observation for this case study since the spring 2017 until the submission of this bachelor's thesis at the end of the year. Participating to the training sessions has been a good chance to get close with the wrestling team and experience their thoughts and perceptions. During the summer there was no separate Wednesday training slot, and the training sessions were combined with other wrestlers of the club. Hence, summer trainings had more competition-oriented participants and the sessions were accordingly more advanced. This bachelor's thesis specifically describes the Wednesday wrestling participants and thus the relevant observations leave out the summer period.

⁴ This group was chosen because my aim is to continue this study in my Master's thesis in Middle Eastern Studies for the University of Helsinki. The upcoming thesis will have a more cultural focus. It will majorly concentrate on the themes of integration in the Afghanistani participants' point of view.

4 Results

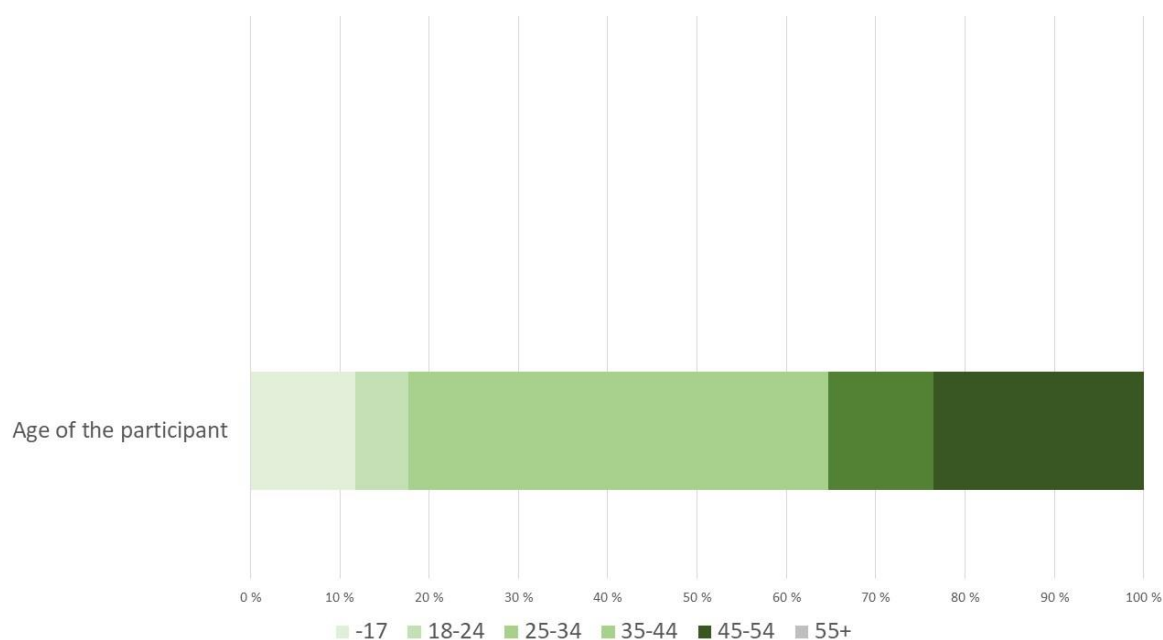
This chapter begins by presenting some general background information about the wrestlers who participated in the survey. Then the results are presented and categorized according to the research questions. The summary and discussion sections bring the results together at the end of the chapter.

4.1 Group composition

Altogether seventeen wrestlers participated in the survey. This number presents the average amount of wrestlers at Wednesday training quite coherently. The Wednesday trainings are open to all wrestlers of the club, and therefore the participant amount varies. In addition to the core group who attend the Wednesday training almost every time, there are often one or two visiting wrestlers who mainly do their training in the more competitive slots on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays.

The majority of the Wednesday wrestlers are male. In addition to myself and my usual practice companion who have started to attend the trainings regularly, there are some occasionally visiting female participants. Out of the seventeen participants who filled the survey, fifteen are male and two are female.

Table 1. Age structure of the participant group



It is fairly common in wrestling that participants of different ages can train together. While there obviously are separate groups for children and juniors of different ages, there are also sessions where both adults and minor participants can attend. Younger wrestlers can learn and get inspired by watching the older ones perform, and by wrestling with them during practice. This practice was visible in the summer trainings.

The Wednesday trainings are predominantly meant for adult wrestlers. Table 1 visualises the age structure of the survey participants. The youngest two were 17 years old at the time of filling the survey. One participant reports his age between 18 and 24 years. The biggest group consists of participants between 25 and 34 years old, their count is eight out of seventeen. Two participants locate their age between 35 and 44 years, and four participants between 45 and 54 years.

However, in addition to the official members of the group, the Wednesday sessions are sometimes attended by young children who come to spend time there while their parent takes part in the training. These children sometimes join in the warm-up activities and, when there are two or more of them, sometimes also wrestle together. Most of them are familiar with the sport through attending the children's training groups.

Table 2. Attendance in the Wednesday training and experience in wrestling

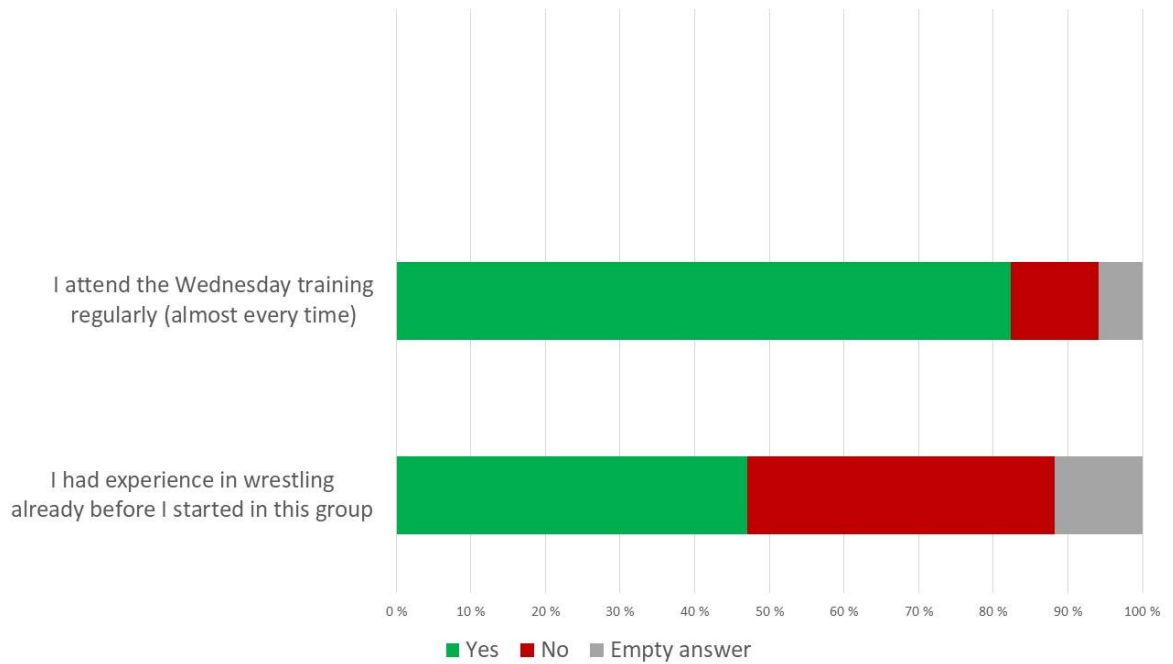


Table 2 depicts the wrestling background of the participants. Fourteen out of seventeen identify as regular participants of the Wednesday training. Eight report that they had wrestling experience before joining the Wednesday group, while seven state that this group has been their first experience with the sport. Discussions and interviews with the participants clarify that while a couple of participants are still quite new to the group, many who have originally started from the Wednesday group (and thus answered no to this question) have now been active wrestlers for multiple years. Many of them have since also started to attend the more advanced sessions alongside the Wednesday slot, and some have even started to compete.

In addition to the Wednesday training, the participants engage in a variety of other sports. All participants report that they do sports several hours per week. Some but not all replies also specify how many of these weekly activities are done in a coached environment, how many independently, and how many with friends. Most of the participants state that they have engaged in sports for several years or since childhood.

However, three participants report that at the time of the survey, they have been physically active for one year or less. At least in two of these cases, their engagement with sports has started simultaneously with their attendance to the Wednesday wrestling. All

three report that at this point they also do additional sports on top of the Wednesday participation.

Active citizenship of the participants is also examined by asking whether they are currently employed, at school, or neither. All seventeen identify as either students or workers. No one identifies as unemployed.

In general, the participants seem to be quite independent and active in planning their lives and physical activities. They have found their ways to the Wednesday practice without considerable marketing. Eight participants state that they originally found the group either through friends, relatives or family members. Only one had found his way to the group by browsing classes online. In short, new participants primarily seem to find the group based on its good reputation and friend recommendations, instead of marketing.

Some participants tell that their first touch with the class had happened spontaneously. They had been doing their own training at the gym of the sport centre where the Wednesday classes take place. They had opened the door to the wrestling area to see what's in there, and had been invited to try and join the practice. This description tells a lot about the inclusiveness and group spirit of the Wednesday class, which is the topic of the following section.

4.2 Social relations

The first research question aims at building an understanding of social relations both inside the Wednesday trainings, and in the general lives of the participants. This is done by first investigating the atmosphere of the Wednesday training and then moving on to the relationships between participants in more detail. Finally, the social atmosphere of the wrestling sessions is compared to other environments.

Table 3. Perceptions of the general training atmosphere

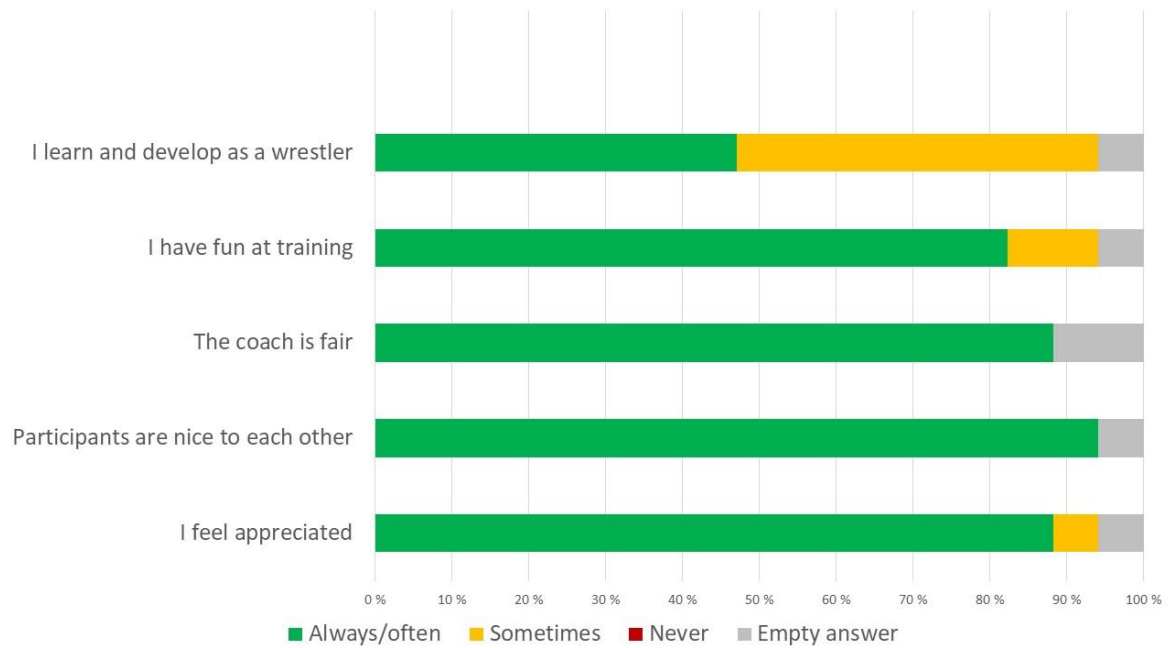


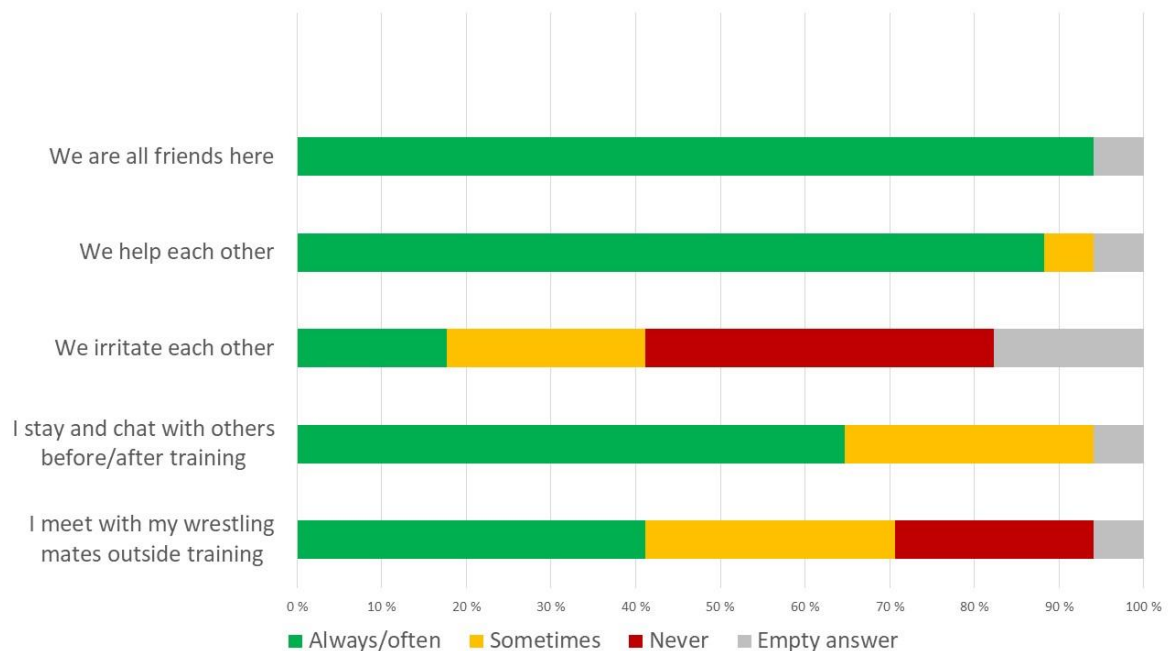
Table 3 depicts the participants' opinions about the general training atmosphere in the group. Eight participants state that they learn and improve their wrestling always or often at the Wednesday sessions. An equal amount report that they sometimes learn. This division can be partly explained by the variations in wrestling experience between participants. For those who have more experience, most of the technical lessons can be already quite familiar. However, the background is not the only explaining factor. A participant who has a long history in wrestling and who still goes to competitions, states that despite his experience he always or often develops at trainings, which tells about his motivation and willingness to learn.

Despite the differences in the perceived development, participants give a good general rating to the Wednesday practices. This leads to the assumption that alongside the actual wrestling, the training sessions have added value in other respects. Fourteen, which makes a clear majority of the wrestlers, indicate that they always or often have fun at the training sessions. Two report that they sometimes have fun. One participant has left the entire section of general atmosphere questions blank, so his empty answer should not be interpreted as a negative statement.

All the wrestlers who answered the question give their coach the highest possible rating by expressing that he is fair always or often. In addition to the fifteen positive ratings, there are two blank answers: The first is from the coach who filled the survey along with the participants. For obvious reasons he doesn't state his opinion to this question. The other empty answer is from the participant who left the whole section blank.

Similarly, sixteen participants establish that the participants are almost or often nice to each other. Fifteen add that they always or often feel appreciated during the training sessions and one perceives that he is appreciated sometimes.

Table 4. Social relations at the Wednesday training



The training atmosphere section of the survey continues with questions about social relations that can be seen on table 4.

Not counting the participant who left the whole section blank, everyone insists that all the wrestlers of the Wednesday group are friends with each other. Fifteen participants estimate that they always or often help each other, and one rather feels that it happens sometimes.

My personal observations support the impression that the culture of help and encouragement stands out in this group. Starting from my first session as a beginner, other participants have been very inclusive. They would adjust their wrestling according to the level of their opponent and share ideas of what moves to try against them. Furthermore, at situations where two beginners practice a skill with each other, a more experienced teammate would often take a break from his own practice and spontaneously assume the role of an assistant coach. This way, the beginners get needed assistance and attention when the coach is employed elsewhere.

The culture of assistance seems to come naturally with no guided instructions. One participant has analysed this group spirit in the free writing section. To the question “Is the group spirit in wrestling similar than in other sports?” the participant has answered as follows: “No. Wrestling encourages and supports. We advise each other and share good experiences.”

The inquiry about whether the participants irritate each other divides opinions quite notably. The most popular opinion, with seven supporters, is never. Four state that participants irritate each other sometimes, whereas three suggest that it happens always or often. However, the participants who recognize the element of irritation, still give a good rating to the team cohesion and training atmosphere in general. It is therefore unclear whether they report actual negative feelings or, for example, friendly competitive sarcasm.

Most participants have a habit of staying and chatting with teammates before or after training. Eleven wrestlers estimate they do this always or often, and five suggest they do it sometimes. The question about meeting with teammates outside the trainings divides the group more. Seven participants do it often, five sometimes and four never.

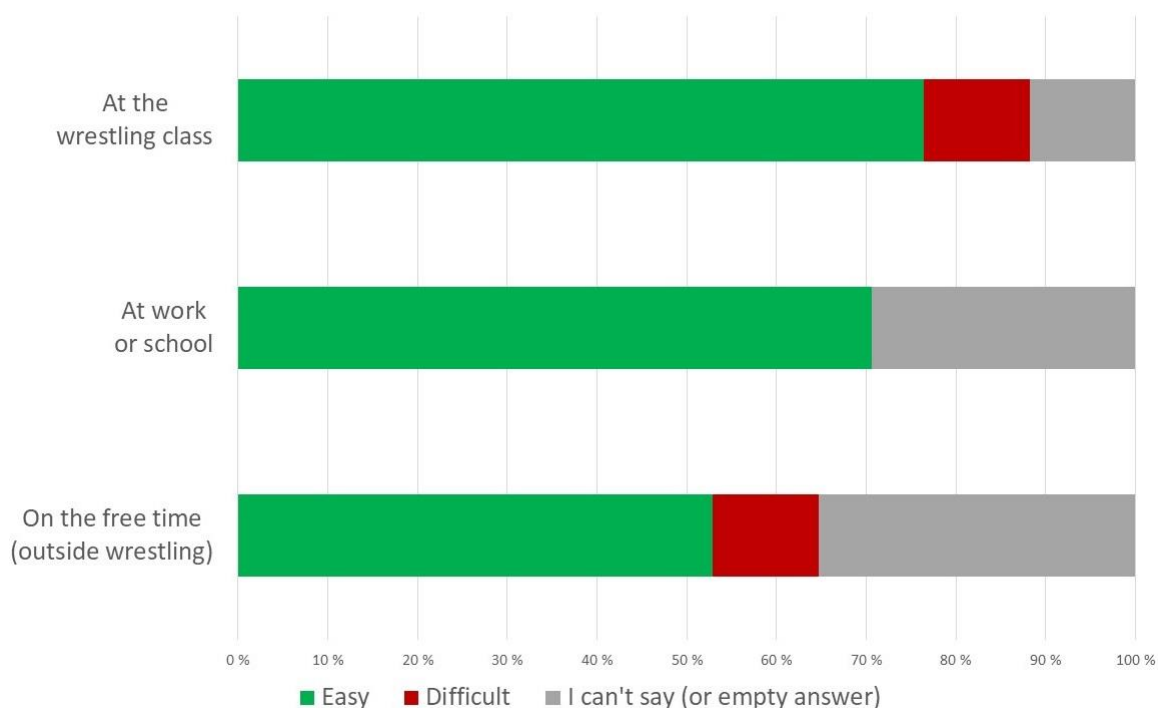
During the technique session of each training, participants usually choose one partner with whom they train the skill of the day. At the end of the session it is time for more versatile wrestling. At this point, it is customary that partners are changed every few minutes.

Based on my individual experiences a beginner participant, it appears that the wrestlers are quite open for including and wrestling with all members of the group, regardless of their wrestling skills, cultural background, or gender. During the group interview with Afghanistani participants, I pointed out that the interviewees have a habit of being very helpful during the classes. They admit that they also received help when they were beginners and add that they are willing to wrestle with everyone in the group.

The survey further clarifies whether each participant is willing to wrestle with everyone in the group or only with some. If the latter option was chosen, the participant was asked to determine the elements that affect the partner choice: age, weight or size, wrestling skills, language skills, social relations, or some other reason. Fifteen participants confirm that they wrestle with everyone in the group. However, one of these fifteen answerers specifies that his choices are partly affected by the opponent's weight or size, as well as wrestling skills.

Only one participant prefers the alternative box that indicates only wrestling with certain teammates. The participant specifies the choice by mentioning the partner's weight and wrestling skills, and hopes for skilful partners who can share their skills and wrestling tips in the process. No one mentions friendship-based preferences or language skills as a ground for choosing partners.

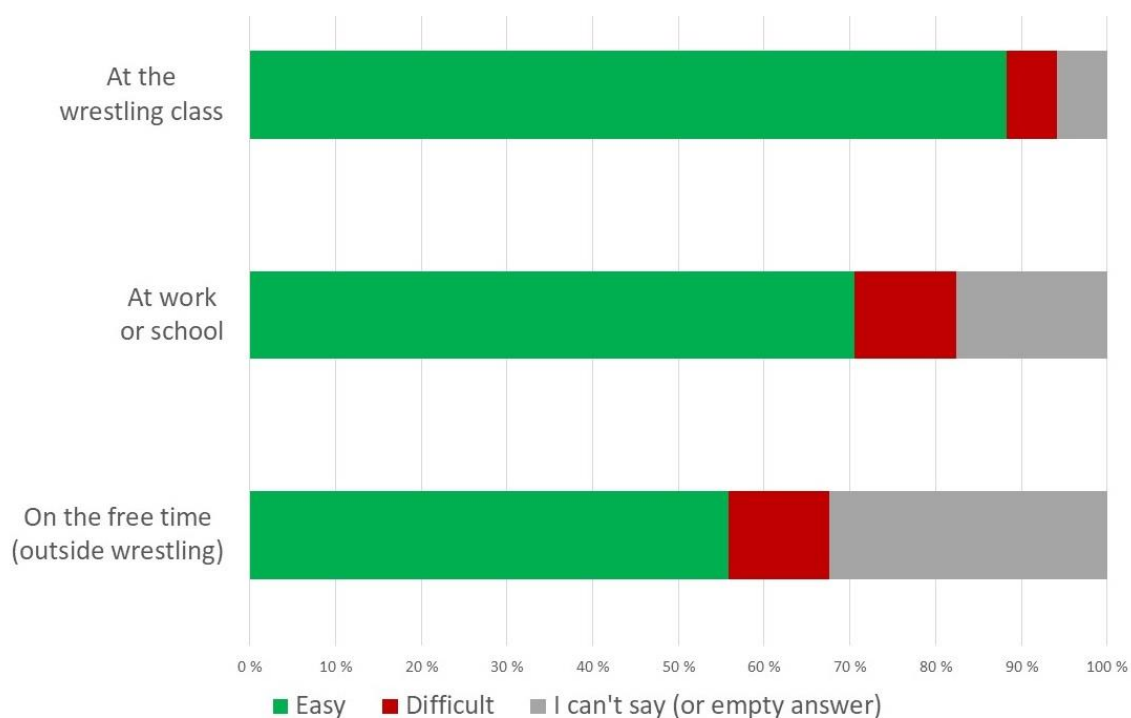
Table 5. Social environments: getting to know new people



As can be seen on table 5, the wrestling class gets a good rating as an environment for meeting new people. Thirteen participants think that getting to know people in the wrestling class is easy. Two consider it hard and two don't agree with either option. The number of participants who think that getting to know people in the wrestling class is easy is slightly higher compared to other environments. Twelve participants think that getting to know people is easy at work or school, whereas nine consider it is easy on their general free time.

In the open question section of the survey, many participants specifically mention the positive group cohesion and new friendships as some of the most important characteristics of the wrestling group. While some participants think that their experiences in other sports are quite similar, others emphasize that in their opinion this club has the best group spirit.

Table 6. Social environments: asking for help or advice



A similar comparison depicts the participants' willingness and courage to ask for help in the wrestling class and in other environments. As visualised in table 6, asking for help or advice is considered easier in wrestling compared to other environments. Fifteen participants find asking easy during the wrestling class. Twelve participants feel the same about work. Nine and a half ⁵ answers give an easy rating for free time environments other than wrestling.

Similarly, the number of participants who think that asking for help or advice is hard is slightly higher in other environments than wrestling. While only one participant admits that asking for help is hard at the wrestling class, two participants recognize a similar difficulty in their work or school environment, and two in their general free time. The amount of undecided answers is also higher in other environments than in wrestling. This tells that in general, asking for help in wrestling is considered straightforward and simple, and doesn't cause a lot of conflicting feelings.

⁵ In places where a participant has chosen two options, a value of 0,5 is given to both answers. In this case, a participant has checked both "easy" and "I can't say" options.

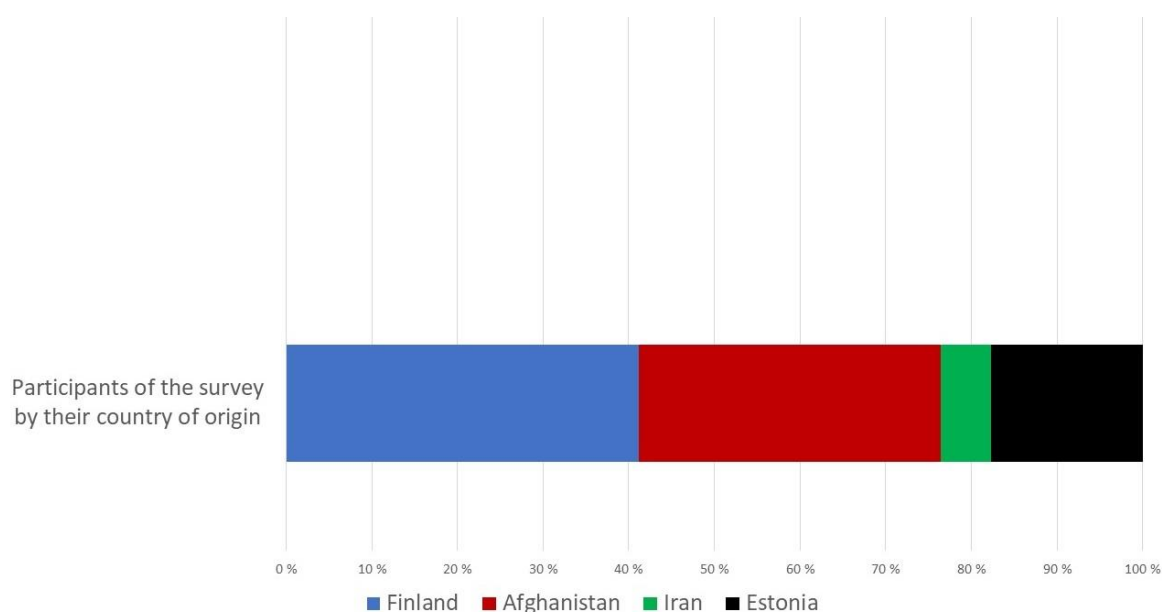
In the big picture, the Wednesday practice is rated high for its social atmosphere. The relationships between participants are good and most are willing to wrestle with everyone in the group. Compared with other social environments, the wrestling practice is assessed as an easier place for meeting new people and asking for advice.

4.3 Perceived equality

The second research question measures the participants' feelings about general equality in Finland and compares it to the perceived equality in the more specific Wednesday wrestling environment. The aim is to find out if there are differences between these two, and what kinds of factors might cause them.

First, the composition of the participant group is presented by their countries of origin. Then their thoughts about equality in general and in the wrestling environment are introduced and compared. Finally, at the end of this section, some of the participants' freely expressed ideas about the subject are brought out to clarify their feelings.

Table 7. Participants of the survey by their country of origin



As mentioned before, this group is not specially designated for people with immigrant backgrounds. Instead, it is open and inclusive for everyone, which is made visible in table 7. The composition of the participant group who filled the survey is quite coherent with the average attendance of the Wednesday wrestling. Out of the seventeen participants who filled the survey, seven are native Finnish, six originate from Afghanistan, one from Iran and three from Estonia.

Most of the participants who have moved from other countries have already lived in Finland for several years, the range being between one to seventeen years. In many respects they are quite well integrated in Finland. While there are no definite ways to measure the level of integration, it is quite commonly assessed through employment and active participation (Gothóni and Siirto 2016, 15) as well as the readiness to socialize with native Finnish people (Siirto and Hammar 2016, 199).

As presented in the group composition section, all participants state that they are either in working life or students. They are also physically active and have independently joined a local Finnish sport club.

Furthermore, the participants associate with native Finnish people and most of them speak Finnish fluently. The ones who are still quite new in Finland sometimes use their friends as interpreters during the training sessions. However, they learn quite quickly and based on my own observations, they are increasingly independent in communicating in Finnish during practice.

Table 8. Equality in Finland and in the wrestling environment

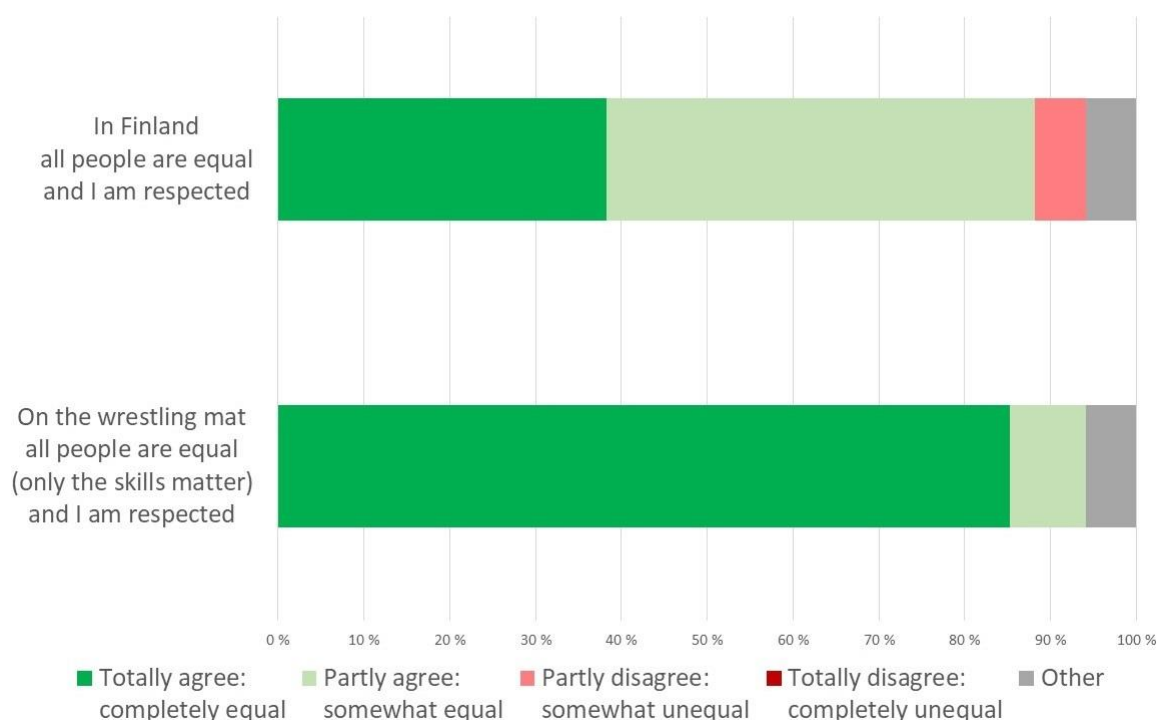


Table 8 shows that despite of the advanced level of integration, the participants show some doubts about the general equality in Finland. At first glance, the overall picture of equality seems quite optimistic, as most of the participants consider Finland as completely or somewhat equal. However, it cannot be left unnoticed that most participants do not choose the unambiguous option.

Six participants state that in their experience people are completely equal in Finland. Eight participants give a more moderate rating but still choose the option somewhat equal. One participant is divided between the first two options, whereas one feels that people in Finland are somewhat unequal. One participant leaves the question blank but clarifies in writing that there are many racists in Finland.

Interestingly, there is no clear division between immigrant and native Finnish participants in their perceptions of equality. The most optimistic answer gets support from both immigrant and native participants. Similarly, both immigrant and native participants assess the general atmosphere in Finland more reservedly as somewhat equal. The most pessimistic perceptions are also presented by participants from both groups: the experience that people are somewhat unequal is presented by a native Finnish par-

ticipant, while the blank answer with a mention about racism comes from a participant with an immigrant background.

In comparison, there is a notably wide consensus that on the wrestling mat participants are completely equal with each other. Fourteen and a half answers support this statement. Only one and a half ratings are given to the option somewhat equal. No one has chosen either of the options that emphasize inequality.

In the survey the participants were given a chance to explain their feelings in an open format. The following statements are the results of open questions where participants were asked to describe the characteristics of wrestling socially and in general as a sport.

- “Wrestling is a versatile sport where people respect each other, regardless of their age or race.”
- “Equal. Hard but fair.”
- “Battle without violence.”
- “Participants respect each other, there is no politics on the wrestling mat, and same rules apply to everyone.”
- “In wrestling people respect each other. I’ve gained friends and my physical condition has improved.”

While all the written descriptions above come from Finnish participants, Afghanistani wrestlers stated similar opinions in the group interview. They described that all of them had found wrestling some years ago by joining this group, but they had had a lot of experience and background in other sports. When asked about what made them stick with wrestling, they consensually listed some good qualities of the sport as follows.

- “People in wrestling are nice. It is a good sport and it gives you a nice body. And the coaches are great.”

They were then asked whether they generally feel equal with other people in Finland. To this question the answers were more divided.

- “No. Many Finnish people are racist.”
- “It depends on the person.”
- “It depends. You cannot generalize.”

The interviewees were further asked to describe the situations where they encounter judgemental attitudes and how these attitudes become visible.

- “You can’t really notice when you’re doing sports, like wrestling. But when you go and have a beer with people, when they’ve had a couple of pints, then you notice.”
- “There is also a lot of it at work.”
- “But you cannot generalize. There are good and bad people, like in every society.”

The interviewees feel that the negative attitudes can be seen in the way that people behave and encounter them. The question, whether people confront them in a similar or different manner at the wrestling class, made them laugh warmly.

- “No one can treat each other badly here, that would be bad. I haven’t noticed anything. There is no such behaviour on the wrestling mat.”
- “I’m not sure [about the reason] but I think it’s because people come here to do sports. And even if you wouldn’t like our kind of people, you wouldn’t want to waste your time in that kinds of things, you’d want to focus on the sport.”
- “Another thing is the warm up football that we play at the beginning of each training [...] Since we came here, that was the start of the fun [warm-up atmosphere].”
- “We brought a sense of joy and humour to the football games. We started to joke with each other. Maybe it was quite similar before we came here, but not as much.”

The interviewees add that they have never noticed discrimination at the wrestling sessions, or situations where someone couldn’t find a wrestling partner. They have similar positive experiences of team spirit in other sports, and feel that physically active people

are generally nicer than people who mainly spend their time in pubs. They further reckon that if they hadn't started wrestling, they'd still be teaming up with other active people and finding social relations in Finland through sports.

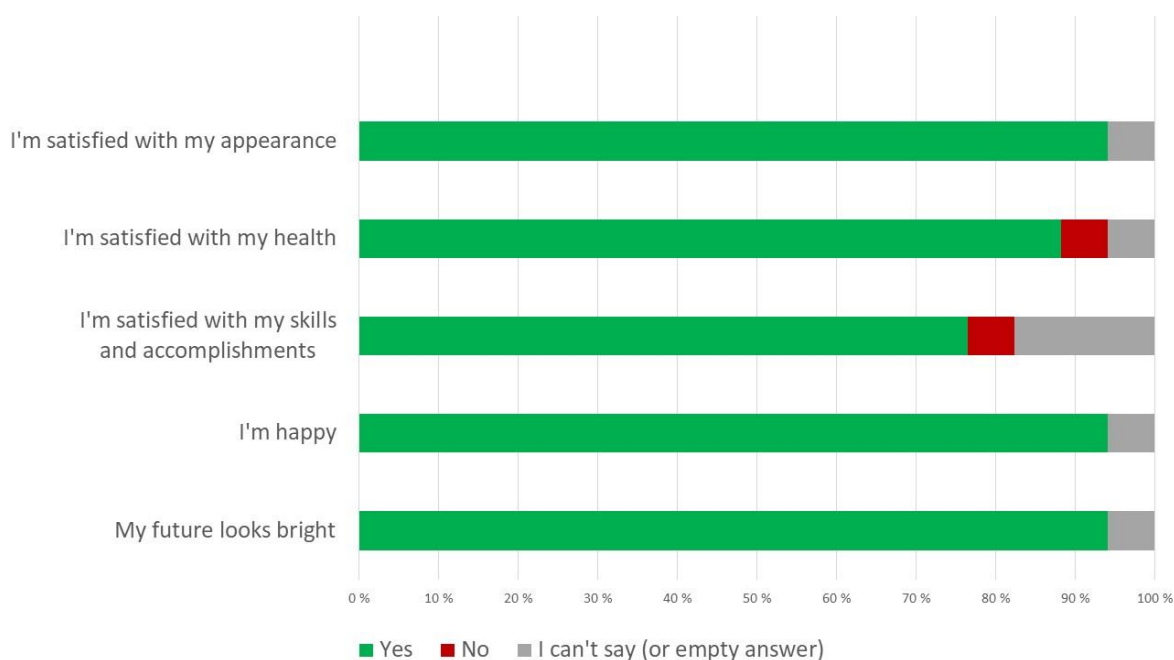
These more detailed answers give insight to the perceived differences between general equality in Finland and equality in the wrestling environment. Most of the participants state that people are completely or somewhat equal in Finland, but the majority of this support consists of the moderate view. Even though the general rating seems quite satisfactory based on the diagram, the interview brings out negative experiences that may partly explain why the general atmosphere is considered somewhat equal more often than completely equal.

The wrestling environment, also presented in table 8, gets a more solid rating as a completely equal environment. While some state that the same element of equality and social cohesion is present in all sports, others link it specifically to wrestling and even this specific club. The experience of complete equality is described and explained by the absence of politics, a sense of respect regardless of personal backgrounds, fairness, and a sense of humour.

4.4 Self-image

The third research question addresses the self-image of participants. As stated earlier while assessing the level of integration of the immigrant participants, the wrestlers in this group are quite active and, to a good extent, appear to be in charge of their life choices.

Table 9. Self-image of the participants



Based on the question battery shown in table 9, the self-image among participants is notably positive. Sixteen participants are satisfied with their appearance. Fifteen are satisfied with their health while one wishes it was better. The question about skills and accomplishments seems to demand the biggest amount of contemplation. Thirteen are satisfied, one not satisfied, and three cannot determine how they feel. Sixteen out of seventeen participants define themselves as happy, while one is undecided. A similar amount has an optimistic feeling about their future and think it looks bright to them.

Social relations are also important building blocks of a positive self-image. All participants report that they feel that they have enough friends. Sixteen out of seventeen also define that they have at least one close friend with whom they can share and discuss important things.

It is widely recognized that sport participation can increase feelings of inclusion and positively affect the ways in which an individual sees himself. However, many of the effects of physical activity are indirect and it is impossible to measure cause and effect. (Coalter 2009)

It is therefore not possible to state that engagement in sport is the direct source and explanation for the positive self-image of the participants. However, it can be argued with some reservation, that sport participation is probably one of the elements that increase their positive feelings about themselves.

This can be argued based on the statements of the participants. As reported throughout this bachelor's thesis, many participants give value to wrestling as a source of several things that are linked to a positive self-image. According to them, wrestling provides social relationships, creates positive challenge, and helps in building a good-looking body. Many participants also mention the feeling of energy and refreshment that they achieve through wrestling.

However, the participants remind that a balanced life requires something else alongside sport participation. In the group interview for Afghanistani wrestlers, one participant described it as follows.

- “We are athletes, but we are also people who like to have fun. We are not only obsessed with training. We do a sufficient amount of training but also a sufficient amount of partying.”

4.5 Summary

This section summarizes the participants' overall impressions in a compact form. It builds a general picture by providing answers to the research questions based on the presented results.

1a. The participants give a prominently positive rating to the group cohesion at the Wednesday class. This impression is visible in the survey results. Furthermore, it is confirmed by interview statements and my observations as a participant. Based on the results it appears that alongside the goal to develop as a wrestler, there are also social reasons for the participants' engagement with the group. An encouraging atmosphere,

good social relationships, and the fairness of the coach were specifically mentioned in this regard.

1b. Slightly more than half of the participants consider it easy to make friends in all the specified environments in Finland: at the wrestling practice, at work or school, and on the free time. Slightly more than half of the participants also find it easy to ask for help or advice in all of these environments. In both respects, wrestling gets more positive evaluations about social possibilities than other environments in Finland.

2a. An outstanding majority feels that on the wrestling mat everyone is completely equal and respected. No politics or prejudice is brought to the wrestling practice. It seems that for most, the wrestling class combines several attributes that build an ideal environment for equal coexistence. Some participants feel that a similar kind of group spirit can be found in all sports, while others experience that this level of equality and group cohesion is specifically characteristic to wrestling or to this specific club.

2b. At first glance, the perceived equality in Finland seems to be on a satisfactory level. Most participants assess the overall Finnish environment as completely or somewhat equal. However, the more careful option of these two is dominant, and participants have some reservations for their ratings about the general equality in the society. Some also share experiences of discrimination.

3a&b. The principal finding of this study is therefore, that according to the perceptions of the Wednesday training participants, the wrestling practice provides a more equal environment than the Finnish society in general.

3. The self-image among participants is quite positive. While it cannot be unambiguously proved that positive self-assessments are a direct causal result of sport participation, the participants themselves mention physical activity as an important source of good feeling and contentment.

4.6 Conclusions

This section links the findings of this bachelor's thesis with the earlier presented concepts and literature.

As established earlier, according to Putnam (2000, 19) most groups possess both bonding and bridging social capital, which affect different dimensions of the group. The observations of this bachelor's thesis support the proposal.

The Wednesday wrestling group appears to have a highly appreciated group cohesion that can be interpreted as bonding social capital. An internal solidarity and a culture of help and encouragement is strongly visible in the group. This impression is supported by both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as participant observation.

At the same time, the Wednesday class bridges across many social dimensions. It brings together participants of different ages, cultural backgrounds, languages, wrestling skills and genders. The training culture encourages versatile involvement and makes no difference between participants.

Wrestling as a sport is linked with the element of respect by multiple participants. No signs of inequality or prejudice are experienced at practice. In other words, only the sport itself matters.

Wrestling is described by one participant as battle without violence. The Wednesday training, in particular, promotes the element of friendly battle. Unlike the example given by Hughson (2009), it doesn't appear to be a majorly competitive environment. Thus, it cannot quite be compared to Hughson's idea where a high-level athlete pursues perfection by facing and defeating a superior opponent. That said, the training sessions do encourage involvement with more skilful opponents by bringing together both experienced and beginner wrestlers. In this setting, however, the experienced wrestlers are seen as mentors rather than opponents that should be defeated. Based on the gathered statements of this study, participants feel that they learn and are inspired by wrestling with their superiors.

It is also likely that sport participation is connected to personal wellbeing, as summarized by Coalter (2005). It is not within the possibilities of this bachelor's thesis to determine in what ways and to what extent sport participation is interrelated with self-image. However, the participants' responses suggest that physical activity has a positive effect on their self-image. Furthermore, they feel that it provides experiences of refreshment, social belonging, increased energy, and improved physical appearance.

5 Discussion

The final chapter begins by evaluating the validity of this bachelor's thesis. Secondly, it focuses on wrestling as a sport and contemplates, what kinds of qualities its training culture has in the context of social belonging. Finally, suggestions are made for further research in this field of study.

5.1 Research reliability and validity

This bachelor's thesis is a description of Wednesday training participants' feelings. It builds an understanding of their social relations, perceived equality, and self-image. The reliability and validity are evaluated in the context of two things: Firstly, this bachelor's thesis is a case study. Secondly, its nature is descriptive rather than undisputed.

Because this bachelor's thesis is a case study, the conclusions cannot be generalized to describe a wider group of people. It shall therefore be evaluated, how well the conclusions portray the Wednesday group.

The number of participants who filled the survey represent the Wednesday group quite coherently. Altogether there are 26 people on the participant list of the Wednesday practice. However, as mentioned before, the Wednesday group is open for all the wrestlers of the sport club, and quite many of the people on the list only come to Wednesday trainings occasionally. The average number of participants at each training is about 15. The survey used in this bachelor's thesis collects the thoughts of 17 participants, 14 of whom report that they attend the Wednesday training almost every time. Based on this it can be said that the active core group of the Wednesday practice is quite well represented in this survey.

The categorizations of participants based on their country of origin also match the average attendance of the Wednesday training quite appropriately, and no group is clearly over or underrepresented. The recognition and accuracy of these proportions is neces-

sary, because this study addresses the participants' feelings of equality and life in Finland.

The nature and value of this bachelor's thesis is descriptive. It is a representation of the Wednesday group participants' perceptions of the covered themes. This study cannot provide scientific accuracy in describing the connections between sport participation and social or individual themes.

5.2 Wrestling as an environment for social belonging

This section reflects the training culture of wrestling on the social perspective. It contemplates if wrestling has some sport-specific qualities that could explain the participants' positive perceptions about social cohesion and equality in the training atmosphere. This section is based on a recorded interview with the Wednesday group's coach.

In the coach's perspective, the group cohesion in the Wednesday group comes quite naturally. There are no specific group cohesion exercises that would be primarily designed for bringing the participants closer together. On the other hand, like the Afghanistani participants in their interview, he mentions that their traditional warm-up football is a liked routine that makes the wrestlers work as a team.

The coach reckons that as a sport in general, wrestling puts the participants into close and intimate situations, which are quite different compared with most sports, even team sports. Also, the culture of switching practice partners and wrestling with different people during practice, brings the participants closer together. Even though weight differences and such practical things have some influence on the partner choices, the idea is to wrestle with many different people at each training, instead of choosing one good mate to practice with. The coach agrees with the idea that even though wrestling is technically an individual sport, the training culture is highly team-oriented.

What is worth mentioning about the atmosphere of this specific club and their wrestling department, is that they do not aim to pressure participants to compete. Many of their wrestlers choose not to compete, but still they are equally motivated and attend their training regularly. Both young and adult participants can individually choose whether they want to compete or simply to focus on their own development in a more relaxed manner. Most likely this is one of the main elements that build the sympathetic and pressure-free team atmosphere.

Sport participation in a supportive club like this can promote personal growth. During the coach's involvement with wrestling, he has witnessed some cases where an individual participant has been quite shy and reserved when they've first started wrestling, but during the following training years has opened up and developed both socially and physically.

The coach feels that the participants, who have moved to Finland from another country, have quickly established themselves as members of the team. Even though there has been variation on the language skills and some of the participants have moved to Finland quite recently, it hasn't prevented anyone's participation. The coach phrases that there are no colours, languages or nationalities at the wrestling practice. Instead, everyone is there to practice the sport together. In this regard, his thoughts go well along with the ideas that Afghanistani participants state in their interview.

The coach says that so far he hasn't had any separate education about how to encounter people with diverse cultural backgrounds, but these values have been learned at home and in the everyday life. According to him, the atmosphere of equality in wrestling, at least in their club, derives from the philosophy of the coaches and the staff. When the coaching staff is approachable, the participants are able to join in the social atmosphere of the sport.

He reckons that the members who come from other countries bring richness to the club, and native Finnish participants can benefit from learning something about their wrestling culture as well as their general culture. The spirit of the club comes from the willingness to welcome everyone, regardless of whether they are male, female, native

Finnish, or have moved from somewhere else. And regardless of whether they have previous experience in wrestling or not.

Expressed in the concepts of this bachelor's thesis, the spirit of the club bridges across various social dimensions and brings together people of diverse backgrounds. In this spirit, the club's wrestling branch works as a safe and positive environment for bridging interaction, co-operation and cohesion.

5.3 Suggestions for further research

In my own upcoming master's thesis for the University of Helsinki, I will take a slightly different point of view for analysing the data used in this case study. The research will focus majorly on the feelings of the Afghanistani participants and link the results more closely with literature references.

As case studies, both this bachelor's thesis and the upcoming master's thesis are limited to the specific group and cannot be generalized to describe a wider group of people. As a suggestion for future research, a wider survey could be made for both native Finnish and immigrant people about their perceptions of equality in different environments in Finland.

Social relations, feelings of equality, and self-image are themes that are constantly relevant. In the increasingly multicultural society, it is important that these themes are studied. The studies can provide ideas for building environments for intercultural encounters and bridging social capital. Even though these kinds of individual and social themes are difficult to measure coherently, described feelings can work as a valuable source of information and understanding.

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Attachments

Survey for the Participants of the Wednesday training (Finnish).

Kysely kuntopainiryhmän osallistujille: liikunta ja sosiaaliset suhteet

Omat tiedot	
Sukupuoli	Mies Nainen _____
Ikä	- 17 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55 + _____
Kotimaa ennen Suomea (vai aina ollut Suomi)	
Kauanko olen asunut Suomessa	
Kauanko olen harrastanut liikuntaa	
Montako tuntia viikossa harrastan liikuntaa	Ohjatusti ____h Omatoimisesti (yksin) ____h Omatoimisesti (ystävien kanssa) ____h
Muut harrastukseni (Esim. lukeminen, elokuvat, musiikki, taide...)	
Työ ja opiskelu tällä hetkellä	Käyn töissä ____ Opiskelen ____ En kumpaakaan ____

KUNTOPAINI (KESKIVIKKOTREENIT)

<p>1) Miten löysit keskiviikkoryhmän ja tulit mukaan? Kerro omin sanoin. (Esim. kuulit kaverilta, olit jo seuran jäsen muissa ryhmissä, tulit sattumalta paikalle ja sinut kutsuttiin mukaan?)</p>
--

	Kyllä	Ei
2) Käyn keskiviikkoryhmässä säännöllisesti (melkein aina)		
3) Olen harrastanut painia jo ennen kuin tulin tähän ryhmään		
4) Kehityn painijana ja opin uutta treeneissä		
5) Treeneissä on hauskaa		
6) Valmentaja on reilu		
7) Osallistujat ovat mukavia toisilleen		
8) Minua arvostetaan		
9) Olemme kaikki kavereita		
10) Autamme toisiamme		
11) Ärsytämme toisiamme		

	En koskaan	Joskus	Usein
12) Jään juttelemaan muiden kanssa ennen treenejä tai treenien jälkeen			
13) Tapaan painikavereita myös muulla ajalla			

	Kaikkien kanssa	Vain tiettyjen kanssa
14) Kun vaihtelemme treeneissä paria, harjoittelen		Jos valitsit tämän, mikä vaikuttaa parin valintaan? Ikä? Koko/paino/pituus? Painitaidot? Kielitaito? Ystävyysuhteet? Muu, mikä? _____

TASA-ARVO JA KUNNIOITUS

	Kyllä	Ei
15) Suomessa kaikki ovat tasa-arvoisia ja minua kunnioitetaan		
16) Painimatolla kaikki ovat tasa-arvoisia (vain taidot ratkaisevat) ja minua kunnioitetaan		

Jos haluat, kerro tästä omin sanoin lisää.

Jos kokemukset painissa ja muussa elämässä ovat erilaisia, mistä uskot sen johtuvan?

YSTÄVÄT JA SOSIAALISET SUHTEET

	Kyllä	Ei
17) Minulla on tarpeeksi ystäviä		
18) Minulla on ainakin yksi läheinen ystävä, jonka kanssa voin puhua myös vakavista asioista		

	Helppoa	Vaikeaa	En osaa sanoa
19) Tutustuminen uusiin ihmisiin painitreeneissä			
20) Tutustuminen uusiin ihmisiin töissä/opiskelupaikassa			
21) Tutustuminen uusiin ihmisiin muulla vapaa-ajalla			

	Helppoa	Vaikeaa	En osaa sanoa
22) Neuvojen tai avun pyytäminen painitreeneissä			
23) Neuvojen tai avun pyytäminen töissä/opiskelupaikassa			
24) Neuvojen tai avun pyytäminen muulla vapaa-ajalla			

MINÄ

	Kyllä	Ei	En osaa sanoa
25) Olen tyytyväinen ulkonäkööni			
26) Olen tyytyväinen terveydentilaani			
27) Olen tyytyväinen taitoihini ja saavutuksieni			
28) Olen onnellinen			
29) Tulevaisuuteni näyttää valoisalta			