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Stereotyping by omission and commission: creating distinctive gendered spectacles in the televised coverage of the 2015 Australian Open men's and women's singles semi-finals and finals

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the way that commentators produced spectacle in the Eurosport coverage of the men's and women's singles semi-finals and finals at the Australian Open 2015. This was an event where gender representations were under global social media scrutiny after two female players were asked to 'twirl' for the audience. We used a two-

phase thematic analysis. Semantic thematic analysis showed that more personal descriptions were directed at women than men and these often described off-court features. Men's descriptions included detailed and specific portrayals of physical characteristics, while women's bodies were seldom specifically described. Discourse analysis showed that men's games were spoken of as physical clashes between titans. In contrast, women's matches were described in aesthetic rather than physical terms and diva-like personalities and relationships were important features of women's game narratives. While male bodies were described in specific detail where relevant to technical features of the game, women's bodies were only described indirectly and non-specifically. For the women's game this dialogical repression of specific body-talk in combination with a strong focus on aesthetic judgements invoked stereotypes by omission, simultaneously reinscribing gender stereotypes and emphasizing their importance by communicating taboo. These gendered commentaries create distinctive gendered spectacles for the men's and women's events.

*Keywords:* tennis, gender, media, spectacle, commentators, sex differences, television broadcasting of sports

Sport is an important context for the reproduction and reification of hegemonic masculinity in modern society (Messner, 1988). The media play an instrumental role in shaping gendered sports representations and identities, constructing male and female athletes and narratives of sport in ways that promote and preserve traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity (Messner et al., 1993; Kian and Clavio, 2011).

Despite women's increased participation in high-level sports in recent years, and sustained academic critique of gendered media coverage, little has changed in the quantity or

quality of sportswomen's media representation (Bruce, 2015). If anything, both televised and print coverage of women's sports has decreased over time in relation to men's (Cooky et al., 2015; Packer et al, 2015) and is qualitatively different to men's sport coverage (Cooky et al., 2015).

In this paper, we analyse announcers' speech (including play-by-play announcers and colour-commentators) in televised coverage of the men's and women's 2015 Australian Open. This particular tournament was marked by international media controversy after two female players were asked to 'twirl' after their matches to show off their outfits (Yip, 2016). We explore how announcers' talk produces distinctive gendered spectacles for men's and women's tennis and the ways in which meaningful *absences* may communicate gender stereotypes in tennis (Hills and Kennedy, 2006) in what Billig (1998) calls *stereotyping by omission*.

## **Literature Review**

### **Media Representation of Sport and the Construction of Gendered Identities**

It has been argued that "the influence of sport as a gendered cultural practice and spectacle is a result of its marriage to the communications industries" (Burstyn, 1999: 105) and that, through its relationship with the media, sport is one of the "primary forces helping to preserve and maintain hegemonic masculinity in Western societies" (Kian and Clavio, 2011: 58). The ways in which women are represented in sports coverage has been the topic of sustained academic critique and social activism.

While media representations of women's sports have responsively shifted in recent years, televised coverage of women's sporting events has in fact proportionally decreased over time (Cooky et al., 2013). Cooky et al. (2015) argue that, despite the decline in overtly sexist language, male and female athletes continue to be represented differently. Female sports players are less frequently being represented as sexual objects, but increasingly as

(potential) wives, girlfriends and mothers. This evolution of representations avoids overt sexism but nevertheless maintains subtle gendered and patriarchal differences.

Announcers have a particularly powerful role in the creation of gendered spectacles of sport for the majority of spectators who experience the event through broadcast media (Duncan and Brummett, 1987). Audiences are not naturally occurring: they are produced as media outlets to create public interest and shape perceptions by choosing what and whom to cover (Cooky et al, 2013). Announcers play an important part in this process. They are experts in the field, have centre stage for the duration of the event, and have the power to frame representations of the event by building atmosphere, developing a narrative in which players or teams are protagonists, and representing events to the audience (Parker and Fink, 2007). In many ways they have more power over the representation of sport than those responsible for the visual representation of a game (Duncan and Brummett, 1987; Hills and Kennedy, 2006; Koivula, 1999; Whannel, 1984).

In commentary, descriptors of male athletes are often embedded in traditional masculine ideals of bravery, risk taking, and bodily strength while descriptors involving skill and physicality are comparatively absent in commentaries of female athletes. Instead, announcers tend to focus on the grace and femininity of the players, on their personal lives, and on their appearance (Kennedy, 2001; Koivula, 1999). For example, Billings, Halone and Denham (2002) analysed broadcast basketball commentary and found that men were primarily described in terms of physicality and athleticism and women were evaluated in respect of their personality, background and appearance. More recently, despite the London 2012 Olympics being dubbed 'the Year of the Woman' by the media, female athletes were given a secondary status compared to male athletes, were frequently referred to as 'girls' and were described in terms of their appearance rather than their athletic abilities (Kian et al., 2013).

### **Tennis as a Site for Gendered Discourse**

Tennis is one of the few popular sports in which men and women compete in the same tournaments, are awarded equal prize money in top-level events, and receive similar amounts of overall broadcast media coverage during the major tournaments, at least compared to other sports (Kian and Clavio, 2011; Flake et al., 2013). Although gender differences in amount, type and content of media coverage are still present, tennis provides a site for assessing the ways in which gendered discourses are produced where extensive measures have been taken to promote neutrality and equality (cf. Crossman et al., 2007).

Despite this apparent equality, however, discourse surrounding professional tennis remains substantially gendered. Whereas power and gentlemanliness are associated with male players, female players are hyperfeminised (Hills and Kennedy, 2006; Kennedy, 2001). Kian and Clavio's (2011) analysis of media commentaries of the 2007 U.S. Open found that newspapers minimized the female players' athletic ability, focusing instead on physical appearance, attire, and personal relationships. Vincent and Crossman's (2007) analysis of broadsheet newspaper narratives of gender in the 2004 Wimbledon Championships found that gendered narratives were tailored to individual players' intersectional identities in terms of age, race, nationality and other characteristics. Accordingly, during interviews male tennis players are asked questions that focus on the game whereas female players are asked far-reaching questions about themselves and their off-court lives (Fu et al., 2016).

While male players are constructed as 'naturally' physical and athletic, for female players the physical athleticism required to succeed in professional tennis is often constructed as a gender category violation and related to grotesque femininity (Vincent, 2004). However, constructions of physicality are also related to race: black players are portrayed as "'natural' athletes, who rely on their athleticism rather than their intelligence, work ethic, and tactical

awareness to succeed” (Vincent, 2004: 438). The discourse of the ‘natural athlete’ is therefore a complex marker of both race and gender (McKay and Johnson, 2008). For example, Vincent et al. (2002) showed that marginalization and trivialization were prominent in the gendered newspaper coverage of all female tennis players. However Anna Kournikova (a white woman) was hyperfeminised whereas Serena and Venus Williams (black women) were described in terms of physicality with Amazonian imagery and racial bigotry (Vincent et al., 2002).

The continuing ideology of male superiority in tennis was recently highlighted in a statement made by chief executive of the Indian Wells tennis tournament, Raymond Moore. Speaking ahead of the women’s final, Moore claimed that women’s tennis “rides on the coattails” of men’s. Leading men’s tennis player Novak Djokovic later supported these claims, saying that while he applauded women for fighting for equal prize money, men “should fight for more because the stats are showing that [they] have much more spectators on the men’s tennis matches”. He went on to argue that “as long as it’s like that and there is data and stats available upon who attracts more attention, spectators, who sells more tickets and stuff like that, in relation to that it has to be fairly distributed” (“Novak Djokovic: Men’s Tennis Should Fight for More Prize Money than Women”, 2016).

Djokovic’s argument about male superiority does not rely on the notion that men are inherently better athletes, but that they draw bigger audiences (and presumably media and match revenue) and create a more impressive and popular spectacle than women’s tennis. However, spectacles are socially produced; the players themselves are just one element of the commercial sport system that produces the game as a cultural event (Law et al., 2002). Advertisements, endorsement campaigns, and other forms of media coverage contribute to this “sport-media-commercial complex” and particular versions of masculinity and femininity are key components of spectacle production (Messner et al., 2000).

The Australian Open, first held in 1905, is the first of four Grand Slam tennis tournaments in the calendar year. In 2015 the event attracted live crowds of 703,899 and a large but unknown media audience viewership via 296 media organisations from 44 countries (Australian Open 2015 – The Final Word from Tennis Australia, 2015). Media representations of gender in tennis were globally spotlighted during the 2015 Australian Open, when Eugenie Bouchard and Serena Williams were asked by Ian Cohen, a male announcer, to twirl for the audience after their victories, foregrounding their identities as women and highlighting their appearance. Both players complied with the requests, although with visible embarrassment and surprise. Williams said later “I wouldn’t ask Rafa or Roger to twirl. Whether it’s sexist or not, I don’t know ... I didn’t really want to twirl because I was just like, you know, I don’t need all the extra attention” (“Serena Williams: I wouldn’t ask Rafael Nadal or Roger Federer to twirl”, 2015). The event was quickly labelled ‘Twirlgate’ by the media (Mitchell, 2015) and the tournament was embroiled in a global media frenzy about sexist gender representations in tennis, with the terms ‘twirl,’ ‘twirlgate,’ and ‘Ian Cohen’ hitting five year peaks in internet popularity during the week of the incident (Google Trends Compare, 2017). This tournament is therefore an important site for studying the way that gender is represented by the media whilst under scrutiny.

Yip (2016) explored the representations of female and male players at this event in online media over the course of the 2015 Australian Open and found that female players were portrayed more negatively than males, with descriptions of women focussing on athletic weaknesses, negative aspects of skills and off-court features such as their appearance and off-court relationships. Male players were more often described with focus on positive features of their athleticism, power and skill.

### **Ideological Repression and Stereotyping by Omission**

Billig (1998) proposes that just like an image comprises of positive and negative space, symbolic representations are produced by both action and inaction; by what is done and not done, and by what is talked about and what is not talked about. He argues that “on occasion, speakers are involved in a joint activity of avoidance, so that particular ways of talking are repressed dialogically” (Billig, 1998: 206). In everyday conversation, the fear of appearing rude, racist, sexist, or politically incorrect results in self-censorship, which can lead to issues such as race and gender becoming silenced and repressed. This repression is *hearable* in silences (cf. Hills and Kennedy, 2006) and, rather than ameliorating prejudice, reinscribes stereotypes and emphasizes their importance by communicating taboo (Durrheim et al., 2011).

Prejudice can be communicated implicitly when individuals omit negativity in their descriptions of others, analogous to ‘damning with faint praise’ (Bergsieker et al., 2012). Noticeably *not* talking about something can implicitly draw attention to it. This *dialogical repression* is common when people have self-preservation concerns, such as when they are communicating on potentially contentious topics to public audiences, and is particularly powerful as an expression of prejudice when describing already prejudiced social groups, such as people of colour and women (Bergsieker et al., 2012; Billig, 1998). It is also likely to be effective when stereotypes about a group are ambivalent. For example, Fiske et al. (2015) found that if an outgroup is viewed ambivalently, listeners continue to infer the negative dimension even when it is omitted from communication.

Stereotyping by omission may be an important way that traditional gender stereotypes are perpetuated in sport (Hills and Kennedy, 2006). As a result, gender equality in broadcasting cannot be achieved simply by censoring sexist representations and avoiding coverage of women's sports (Cooky et al., 2015). For example, the omission of women's sports from news and television broadcasts creates the impression that women are excluded



because they are inferior, and this implication is even more powerful when men and women's sporting events coincide.

It is not merely the amount of coverage that sporting events receive that can communicate gender values by omission. Rather, it is the content of representations of games and how athletes in men's and women's events are described. If announcers consistently speak about male athletes' physical strength and athletic ability, and then omit these dimensions when speaking about women, audiences can infer that women do not possess these traits, or that they are not important to the women's game.

### **The present study**

In the present study we examine the footage of the finals and semi-finals, exploring how male and female players were represented by announcers in the games themselves along similar dimensions to those identified by Yip (2016). We also explore how gender differences are discursively constructed by what is left unsaid about women compared to men (and vice-versa) through *stereotyping by omission*.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

The sample consisted of the Eurosport broadcast coverage of the singles semi-final and final matches (including pre- and post-match commentary) of the 2015 Australian Open for men (770 minutes of footage) and women (389 minutes of footage) first broadcast between 25 January 2015 and 1 February 2015, all of which followed 'twirlgate.' Eurosport had rights to broadcast the event in 62 countries (Australian Open, 2015), although it is not known how many of these included the English audio channel. There was more footage for men because they played longer games than women (best of five sets and best of three respectively). Serena Williams, Maria Sharapova, Ekaterina Makarova, and Madison Keys

played in the women's matches, and Novak Djokovic, Andy Murray, Stanislas Wawrinka, and Tomáš Berdych played in the men's. These data were transcribed using an abridged Jeffersonian transcription notation which encodes details required for discourse and conversation analysis including pauses, volume, laughter, overlaps and interruptions (O'Connell and Kowal, 1999) including timestamps to allow reference back to original footage during analysis. However, transcriptions have been simplified for presentation in this paper, retaining only features that are reported in the present analysis. In the extracts presented below, announcers are distinguished as male (M) or female (F) and talk by different announcers in a single extract is labelled A(M)1, A(M)2 etc. The same commentary team announced each match, but since discourse analysis treats individual's talk as representative of broader symbolic frameworks the identifiers below do not distinguish between individuals across extracts.

### **Analysis**

This study applied both semantic thematic and discursive thematic analysis to the selected sports coverage, first analysing the overall patterns of semantic content and then exploring the discursive functions of these representations. A combination of these methods was chosen in order to assess the extent to which observed patterns were evident across the data corpus, while providing a rich analysis of the functions of these gender constructions.

For the semantic thematic analysis, coding guidelines were adapted from MacQueen et al. (1998), and included six basic components: the code, a brief description, a full definition, guidelines for when to use the code, guidelines for when not to use the code, and examples. A code book was developed deductively from Balyi et al.'s (2013) model of long-term athletic development. The non-mutually exclusive codes used in this analysis were the gender of the player being referenced (male/female), and five dimensions of performance: personal (relating to individual attributes or activities of the player themselves,

e.g. “Andy Murray is committed to Davis Cup too”); technical (related to the skill element of performance; e.g. “Perfect execution of that backhand volley there”); tactical (related to the tactical element of performance; e.g. “He needs to play defensive tennis”); physical (related to the body or a physical component of performance; e.g. “He is a finer physical specimen and a stronger individual physically”); and mental (related to emotion or a mental component of performance; e.g. “He either overthinks the situation too much or relaxes too much”). This component of the analysis explored the extent to which announcers drew on particular repertoires in the men’s and women’s events.

The discursive thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) explored the themes identified in the semantic analysis, treating language as social performance contributing to the construction of social reality (Willig, 2008). This component of the analysis investigates the way that announcers’ representations produce representations of gender, and the social consequences of those representations.

### **Procedure**

All researchers read the transcripts carefully before engaging in analysis. Coding for the semantic thematic analysis was conducted in stages. First in the training and calibration period a subset of the data was coded by all coders with a draft version of code book. Differences in coding were discussed and notes were made in the coding rules to help harmonize interpretations. Minor changes to the schedule were made at this stage to accommodate unexpected features of the data. This process was repeated until coders reached agreement on how to apply the schedule. Once coders were consistently in agreement each researcher coded a portion of the dataset in the coding phase.

The discursive thematic analysis was conducted using the themes identified in the semantic analysis, and these were progressively extended and elaborated as the text was read and re-read. Relevant extracts were collated and placed into codes and themes. These were

articulated and further developed through additional rounds of coding in an iterative process (Smith et al., 1995). This process of analysis focused specifically on the active use of language to describe, evaluate, defend or blame (Willig, 2008). Ideological dilemmas that highlighted the presence of tensions and contradictions among the representations used by speakers were identified and explored. Emerging findings were compared across men's and women's events to identify contradictory themes and omissions, paying particular attention to their discursive functions (Billig, 1998)

## **Results**

### **Semantic Analysis**

In total, 641 statements were coded describing men, and 256 describing women. The most common descriptors related to technical aspects of performance for both male (32%) and female players (39%); see table 1. However, beyond this the characteristics focused on by announcers varied between women's and men's matches.

Male players were described in terms of mental, physical, tactical and personal characteristics. Descriptors of mentality and physicality each accounted for 15% of all male comments, tactical descriptors accounted for 17%, and personal comments accounted for 21% of the commentary. In contrast, 32% of comments towards women were personal. For women, mental (11%), physical (6%), and tactical (12%) characteristics combined accounted for fewer of the announcers' observations than personal comments alone. The key differences between women's and men's commentary regarded physical and personal attributes, where women received 32% personal comments compared to 21% for men, and physical descriptors constituted 15% for men and just 6% for women. This phase of the analysis indicated that physical and personal descriptors were important sites for producing gendered descriptions. The relative absence of physical descriptors for women was particularly intriguing given that

previous research has shown that women's sports coverage often highlights their physical appearance (Kennedy, 2001; Koivula, 1999).

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### **Discursive Thematic Analysis**

The framework identified in the semantic analysis mapped relatively well on to the features identified in the discursive thematic analysis; but as we iteratively worked to identify the discursive *function* of talk we inductively condensed these to three maximally descriptive themes: *performance* (physical and technical features); *relationship between the players* (physical and personal features), and *mentality* (mental and tactical features). Physical descriptors were sometimes oriented to *performance* descriptions, and sometimes to relationships between players and thus contributed to both themes.

#### **Performance.**

*Physical performance.* Congruent with the semantic analysis, a key difference between men's and women's commentary regarded physicality. In men's matches, raw masculine terms such as "strong", "powerful" and "in amazing condition", along with metaphors like Berdych being a "fire power", or Murray being a "wall", are used frequently. The announcers also refer to the physical nature of the game itself, and describe the players as "breathing heavily", "showing signs of wear and tear", and playing as though their "life depends on it". The announcers discuss the male players' bodies and physical attributes directly and in close detail, referring to Wawrinka's "strong upper body" and physique multiple times throughout the course of the match:

A(F): He is a strong build, a very strong physique. He's kind of, you know the way when you look at the build of say, Djokovic, who's very light defined physique, whereas Stan's power comes from those legs and my goodness does he use those knees.

In a second semi-final match, the announcers compare Berdych's legs to those of other male players:

A(M): He has strong legs, Berdych, but I think that they've, I think they've gone smaller. I think he's a little skinnier too. I think he's been working on speed rather than strength just like Andy Murray, just like Novak Djokovic has done of course, Rafael Nadal as well.

In contrast, the female players are rarely referred to in terms of their physical attributes and when these are referenced they are cautious, non-specific and were used to infer inner qualities rather than specific features of physicality. For example, in one match, an announcer non-specifically notes that Serena Williams "makes great use of all of the large muscle groups in the body"; and later that Sharapova's "shoulders are pretty tense," which uses her posture to index inner emotion. Despite these comments being physical in nature, they are noticeably less specific and evaluative than those used for the male players. An exception is when Serena Williams is described as being "immensely powerful" which, while evaluative, is not referencing particular body parts in the same way as descriptions of the men and is possibly referencing her intersectional identity as a black woman (McKay and Johnson, 2008).

While the announcers sometimes discuss the female players in terms of their physicality, the comments are less frequent, more cautious, and less specific, than those used for the male players. The relative scarcity of direct descriptions of body parts relevant to the game of tennis for women compared to men potentially indicates ‘gender trouble’ (cf. Durrheim, Mtose, and Brown, 2011), suggesting areas where talk about women is potentially risky. This self-policing of body talk potentially avoids criticism (e.g. for causing offense by evaluating a woman physically) but simultaneously defends heteronormative gender categories by avoiding the treatment of exceptional physicality, strength, speed, aggression and so on as ordinary femininity.

Instead, the female players are described indirectly via the aesthetic and technical features of their shots and technique. For example, in the women’s final Serena Williams is said to “make it look easy”, while other female players’ serves and shots are described as “sluggish”, “elegant”, “powerful”, “strong”, “beautiful”, “lovely” and so on. These technical attributes are used as a way to indirectly describe the players, and are perhaps regarded as a safer and less controversial way for the commentators to speak about female players than direct and specific talk about body-parts.

*Performance as gendered spectacle.* The announcers continuously emphasise the speed, power, and skill involved in the men’s matches, describing them as “gladiatorial” clashes of “fantasy tennis.” The players are depicted as “super-human”, Godlike creatures, while their serves are referred to as “weapons”. In the final, one announcer remarks “At least [Andy Murray]’s human. I was wondering for a while”. Even before the men’s semi-final begins, the announcers emphasise that an “epic battle” is about to take place between Andy Murray and Tomáš Berdych:

A(M): In a few moments Andy Murray and Tomáš Berdych will take to court in what's sure to be an epic battle to determine who will make it to Sunday's Australian Open Final.

Men's actions on court are characterised by excessive physical aggression, risk and danger throughout, as the following extracts exemplify:

A(M): Ahwww my word he's made it wow incredible. That's a good play by Berdych he's risky with the drop shot but it's a good drop shot at the right time, just can't expect somebody to get this and make it ... Berdych's forehand, it's so dangerous you almost hold your breath as he's getting ready to hit it.

A(M): Yeah, what a shot from Djokovic, razor sharp ... Well he tried to step it up there aggressive hitting.

A(M): It's a terrific turn around by Murray looking to be so much more aggressive.

In contrast, the announcers frequently use traditionally feminine words to describe women's play, commending Williams's ability to "defend beautifully", describing shots as "fabulous" and angles as "lovely" (where, for example, the word "beautiful" is used only once in the men's final). In comparison to the battles witnessed in the men's matches, the women's matches are portrayed as more graceful and refined affairs:

'A(M): Third ace beautifully struck.'

'A(F): Most beautiful serve that I have ever witnessed on a tennis court.'

'A(M): Fabulous from both women.'

'A(F): That was a very soft second serve from Williams.'



‘A(M): Well she’s getting going today quite beautifully.’

‘A(M): That is just a shot of pure beauty. It looks effortless.’

‘A(F): An ace and then a beautifully timed winger, couldn’t ask for anything more.’

‘A(F): I mean it’s a thing of absolute beauty a serve.’

This language is in stark contrast to the powerful and God-like commentary used in reference to the male players. A sense of awe and wonder is evident in the commentaries of each of the men’s matches. Each male player is portrayed as an almost mythical creature with supernatural abilities of strength and power. In contrast, the women are constructed as soft, pure, and elegant beings who, while performing in a beautiful manner, do not possess the super-human athleticism of their male counterparts. These portrayals, shaped by the omission of powerful language in favour of aesthetic language, create two distinct spectacles for the audience: one of power and might that warrants admiration and reverence, and a second of aesthetic beauty that, while impressive and deserving of admiration, is not awe-inspiring.

**Relationships between players and their off-court interests.** In both the men’s semi-final and final matches, the relationship between the players is described in predominantly physical terms. The commentary continuously assesses each player’s physical strengths and weaknesses, highlighting that the relationship between the players is based primarily on the technical aspects of competition:

A(M): Murray is more skilful, Djokovic is probably a better mover... Two guys who have grown up together, used to know each other when they were twelve years old. They’ve been double partners as juniors, they’ve practiced together and their careers have more or less mirrored each other, although Djokovic stole a march on Andy

early on his career. Murray's game has evolved in a different way than Djokovic's. He's just gotten better, Murray's just a little bit of a different player every time.

The players are described as partners who have grown up and improved together. While the game is depicted as a battle, and the players as rivals, in the men's' games the announcers describe the players as ultimately benefiting from playing against one another.

A(F) So I think we can expect an absolutely brutal contest. It might be very physical but both of them will be battling for that baseline; ah you know positioning on the court both looking to be as aggressive as they can I think they bring out the best in each other.

In contrast, the commentary of the women's matches focuses more often on the personal (and non-technical) relationship between the players and on their off-court interests. In Key's semi-final against Williams, an event that sparked her interest in tennis is described:

A(M): Of course we went through yesterday, the fact that, when she was four years old she watched Venus Williams playing a match on centre court at Wimbledon in a white dress and said to her mother, I wanna play tennis and I want one of those dresses.

This is constructing Key's motivation starting playing tennis as being equally motivated by a desire for the outfits and a desire to play the sport. Later the announcers suggests that she could use her prize money to "buy a few handbags that she said that she wants," again hinting that fashion is an important motivation for her:

A(M): she will be able to console herself with six hundred and fifty thousand Australian dollars, Madison keys

A(F): buy a few hand bags that she said that she wants

More specifically in terms of relationships, in the women's final Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams are described as having had "their scraps in the past." By this stage in their careers Williams and Sharapova had played 19 games, of which Sharapova had only won two, and it is stressed that Maria is competing "against her nemesis":

A1(M): When we saw them at the net just now, ah, they both looked very grim.

A2(F): Yeah, it was quite frosty actually and I thought it was very noticeable how separated they were when they walked down that tunnel to come out onto the court, there was absolutely zero eye contact even when they were at the net doing the photographs and everything so clearly, you know, this is gonna be a big battle today and uh, both of the definitely have their game faces on.

Although the announcers use the word battle to describe the women's match (which echoes the militaristic language used to describe men's matches), the conflict characterised in terms of feminised, personal and emotional rivalry. By referring to the match as a "scrap", focusing on their relationship ('nemesis'; 'frosty'; 'separated'; lack of eye-contact;) and features of appearance (posing for photographs; 'game faces'; see Bissel, 2006) the announcers reduce the "battle" to a petty schoolyard-type squabble compared to the men's match, which is presented as '*epic battle*' and "an absolutely brutal contest". Elsewhere the announcers specifically note the relevance of the women's off-court relationship to the match:

A1(M): What is the atmosphere like, uh, between them, y'know on the tour?

A2(M): Frosty at best. I would say and it brings an edge to this final, it really does and Serena seems to be able to find another gear whenever she plays Maria Sharapova. It's going to be fascinating as this unfolds.

The announcers later state that in order for Sharapova to beat Williams, she will have to find Williams's weaknesses (constructing Williams in terms of weakness rather than strength). They describe the match as a "cat and mouse game", which constructs a substantially different spectacle compared to the "absolutely brutal contest" of the men's final. Specifically, it emphasizes the relational and – dare we say – 'catty' elements of the women's spectacle, suggesting that the game is primarily about trying to out- move and out-manipulate one another. For example, although the following extract calls for an "aggressive...first strike," the actual play is described as being about movement, being "hurt ... in the corners" and not "feeling a hundred percent":

A(M): Well these mini-opportunities, the love fifteens, the fifteen thirties, are, are huge for Sharapova. And I really feel that's when she has to be aggressive and look to get that first strike in. The problem with extending the rallies against Serena is her movement gets exposed. Serena is the better mover I think Sharapova has to look to hurt her in the corners if she's not feeling a hundred percent then get the ball away from her she can't let her stand and hit.

The announcers play on the perceived personal rivalry between female players, going so far as to hint at hatred between the players:

A1(M): Think she's thought at all yet 'I hate playing Serena Williams'?

A2(F): (laughs) Well she did concede she found it quite hard in her interview before the final but she said I'll try and find a way and she is.

Consistent with the men's match, the commentators use the players' head-to-head history to build drama. However, in contrast to the men's game this commentary redirects the focus from the skills of the players and their qualities to interpersonal emotion ('hate'). The announcers are once again creating a different spectacle for the women's game: while the male players are seen as equals, who have encouraged each other to improve and grow, the female players are depicted as cat(ty) and mouse(y) enemies who have a deep personal rivalry that impacts on their game.

**Mentality.** Although the semantic thematic analysis showed that the mentality of the players is referred to with similar frequency in the men's and women's matches, the ways in which players' mental tactics are described are different. In the men's final, the announcers remark that Murray's physical advantage over Djokovic does not guarantee his success; he also requires mental strength and determination to ensure the title:

A(M): He has got to tell himself he is a finer physical specimen. He is a stronger individual physically than Djokovic. Physically he has to prove now that he is stronger than Djokovic. Mentally it's all really up to the mental capacity of both players. The determination here to win this title. Murray can still do it. Djokovic can falter.

The men are expected to use both physical attributes like strength, size and stamina, and mental capacity and determination to beat their opponent. (Note as well the ease with which announcers rate and compare men's bodies). In the men's final it is suggested that Murray's fear of losing to Djokovic is 'driving him on', suggesting that Murray's fear is converted to determination and is a positive feature. Murray is later described as being so dangerous that he has the ability to attack Djokovic both physically and mentally.

A(M): He's so dangerous when you think he's wounded Djokovic, whether it's physically or mentally.

In contrast, mentality is constructed as a weakness in the women's matches. Before the final, the announcers discuss an interview with Sharapova, in which "the only interesting thing" she spoke about was her inability to focus on the positive.

A1(M): Well she needs that mentality from the start of the match today. That would help wouldn't it?

A2(F): Well the only interesting thing she said about that match was she said 'I was dwelling too much on the negative'. She said 'I felt I was dwelling too much on the negative, uh, and that I wasn't playing well instead of dwelling on the positive'. Well the only reason I bring that up is because in tennis you get so obsessed with your own problems on your side of the net that there's such a tendency to forget that the other person is having just as bad a time, hopefully worse.

In the interview referred to here, Sharapova had explained how "happy" she is with the "way [she's] progressed" in some matches where she's "had to pull from behind" and others where

she has had to “keep [her] focus when [she’s] playing well,” how she had recently won a title and she is “taking that confidence over here to Melbourne and getting to the finals” and “when it’s a final situation and knowing that [she’s] a big competitor, [she’ll] do everything [she] can to try to win the match. Despite these many examples of Sharapova *not* dwelling on the negative, the announcer regarded Sharapova’s brief moment of ‘focus on the negative’ in a generally positive interview as the ‘only interesting thing she said,’ implying that her mental weaknesses are more important than any other aspect of her mentality. This is consistent with previous findings that women players are generally represented as emotionally fragile rather than mentally resilient and tough (Bissel, 2006). Whereas Murray was encouraged to remember that Djokovic might ‘falter’ (above), suggesting a temporary fault or error that could be exploited, the solution for women is to remember that the other player is probably ‘having just as bad a time.’ For women, victory is not assured by being ‘dangerous’ ‘physically and mentally’, or by converting doubts into determination, as the male player is narrated as doing, but by hoping that her opponent is having a worse time than she is. Women’s winning mentality is therefore constructed around passive endurance.

Women’s match mentality was also frequently constructed around the challenge of controlling emotion and their doubt about their ability to cope. Later in the women’s final, the announcers note that Serena Williams is “so used to winning that if you can put a doubt in her mind she doesn’t know how to cope” (and in contrast to Djokovic who is described as “so dangerous when you think he’s wounded”). In many of the women’s matches, the announcer’s descriptions of their women’s mentality focus on their vulnerability:

A(M): Well it might be the wind, it might be the nerves, it's probably a combination of the two but it's, eh, it's not looking pretty for Sharapova at the moment.

A(M): Sharapova looked a little more vulnerable in the last service game.

A(F): And it looked like that Makarova was kind of intimidated a little bit from the beginning.

A(M): She looked very nervous at the start yesterday.

Even when mentality was depicted as active and essential to success in the women's game, the announcers constructed women's mentality in distinctly gendered terms:

A(M): Well I love it when you hear from Matt, when you hear from a champion about the sort of mental intimidation as well. They're both trying to do it to each other of course ... They are the divas of the game.

While mental intimidation implies dominance, the use of the word 'divas' makes the mental tactics of women seem more attention-seeking and dramatic than when this tactic is used by men. The word 'diva', associated with demanding and dramatic women, is rarely associated with men. This description of women *trying* to intimidate each-other like *divas* implies that female competitors' attempts to mentally dominate each-other are over-the-top and petty. Men, on the other hand, are described as using mentality in terms of determination and domination. The men's matches are depicted as titanic clashes that incorporate complex physical skills and mental tactics. The interest in the women's matches are portrayed as comparatively uninteresting affairs, where mentality can lead to the downfall of a player rather than to their success.

**Stereotyping by omission.**



The analysis above shows that the spectacle of men's tennis was constructed directly and unapologetically. Male strength and aggression was valorised with specific reference to physicality; and bodies were described specifically, especially in relation to physical aspects of sports performance. Like previous studies, our results show that the spectacle of women's tennis is constructed more around players' appearances, off-court interests, interpersonal relationships and feminine qualities such as beauty, vulnerability and grace. However, possibly because of furore surrounding "Twirlgate", these characteristics were often indexed indirectly – particularly comments about appearance and women's bodies. It is their shots and play that are described as graceful or beautiful – not the players. The viewer can nevertheless infer that graceful is as graceful does; if a shot is graceful then so, surely, is the player who plays the shot. Specific descriptions physical characteristics were particularly absent from descriptions of women in contrast to men. In concert with the clear emphasis on femininity in the spectacle of women's tennis, this absence of talk about women's bodies can be interpreted as stereotyping by omission: simultaneously (1) de-emphasizing the physicality of women's tennis (and thereby feminizing it) and (2) marking physical aspects of women's appearance as relevant taboo. Omissions are hearable as "trouble" in talk, simultaneously indexing stereotypes as relevant and unspeakable (Durrheim et al., 2011).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The 2015 Australian Open was a particularly interesting event for the study of media representations of gender. The social media uproar that followed 'Twirlgate' put the media in general, and announcers in particular, under the spotlight for the remainder of the tournament (Yip, 2016). The world was watching for any sign of sexism and we assume that announcers were particularly careful about how they spoke about women. We argue that this care was demonstrated in the types of topics spoken about and avoided for men and women, resulting in stereotyping by commission and omission. Although there are clear limits to the extent that

this analysis of footage of six matches at a single tournament can be generalized, and there are certainly other ways that these data can be analysed and interpreted; our analysis does demonstrate how sensitivities (for example about gender or race) may result in suppression of certain kinds of commentary which – rather than solving the problem – can result in stereotyping by omission (Billig, 1998; Durrheim et al., 2011).

The semantic component of our analysis showed that announcers spoke differently about men and women. In line with Yip's (2016) analysis of online coverage of the event, women received about twice as many personal comments than men (and these more frequently focused on off-court aspects) and about two-thirds as many detailed comments about their physical characteristics. Confirming the recent trend identified by Cooky and colleagues (2015), women's physical characteristics were referenced less frequently and even then only in general and non-specific terms.

Like previous studies, our discursive thematic analysis found that the physical performance of men was talked up and constructed as mythical, gladiatorial, and superhuman (Anderson, 2008; Duncan and Brummett, 1987; Kennedy, 2006). Male spectacle was narrated around a 'clash of the titans' metaphor, in which the game became something greater – a clash of mythical proportions and historical significance (Shaw, 2007). Active male bodies (and specific body parts) were referred to directly and evaluatively, specifically in relation to athletic ability and performance as it related to technical aspects of the game (e.g. height, leg strength, stamina). These physical characteristics were linked directly to metaphors of war and combat.

The off-court personalities and relationships of male players were referenced infrequently and primarily in reference to technical matters, like skill development. In contrast, women's off-court relationships, interests and histories became central components of the spectacle being produced. As found by Messner, Duncan and Jensen it was women's'

reactivity rather than their agency that announcers used to construct dramatic narrative; specifically women's psychological and emotional conflict. Much like Bissell (2006), we found that the spectacle of women's tennis was constructed around diva-like off-court personalities, interpersonal drama and aesthetic features of performance (cf. Crossman et al., 2007). Yip's (2016) analysis of online coverage of the same event showed similar trends, with narratives of women focussing on athletic and mental weaknesses and personal factors like appearance and relationships.

Women's physical characteristics were barely referenced, and when they were it was indirectly, without reference to specific body parts or characteristics. Instead, women's play was characterised aesthetically. These gendered aesthetic descriptions (e.g. beautiful; elegant; lovely; fabulous; soft) make gendered aesthetics relevant without discussing bodies directly (Ferez, 2012; Shugart, 2003).

In these commentaries stereotyping was achieved both by commission and omission (Bergsieker et al., 2012; Billig, 1998). The men's spectacle is characterised by narratives of mythical battle and combat, specific reference to players' physicality, and the *absence* of talk about interpersonal relationships and off-court drama. The women's spectacle is characterised by frequent reference to the aesthetics of play, players' off-court relationships and interests, and the *absence* of talk about combat and specific aspects of their physicality. In this way, stereotyping by omission made women's bodies highly relevant to the spectacle, but only in unmentionable ways. The frequent aesthetic judgements of women (but not men) confirms the importance of (beautiful) bodies to women's tennis, and suggests that the lack of reference to women's physicality is not because it is unimportant to the spectacle, but because it is taboo (cf. Hills and Kennedy's, 2006 discussion of silences). The element of play that is frequently spoken of for women but not for men (off-court relationships and characteristics) does not function as dialogical repression in the same way, because there are

no hints in the representation of men's games that these features are important but not spoken about. In other words, since hobbies and off-court relationships (irrelevant) are not essential to the game of tennis in the same way as physicality (crucial), the relative absence of talk about women's physicality is a meaningful marker of stereotyping by omission in a way that the relative absence of talk about men's hobbies is not.

It is likely that announcers were being admirably responsive to recent critiques arguing that female players are commodified for their appearance (Billings et al., 2002; Cooky et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2001; Kian et al., 2013; Koivula, 1999); particularly so in light of the 'Twirlgate' controversy in the early rounds of the competition (Yip, 2016). However, in avoiding women's physicality altogether (and in contrast to frank talk about men's bodies) they engaged in dialogical repression and stereotyping by omission, producing gendered representations that are similarly unequal but more difficult to identify or challenge.

If announcers are 'damned if they do and damned if they don't', what then are they to do? We suggest that the answer lies in deliberately creating a single spectacle for men's and women's matches: consciously using the same adjectives, metaphors, and narratives to describe players and produce narrative interest; discussing the bodies of men and women equally and specifically, but aesthetically non-evaluatively and only in so far as such discussion is relevant to technical features of the game.

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**Table 1. Descriptors used for men and women**

	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Personal</b>	<b>Mental</b>	<b>Technical</b>	<b>Tactical</b>
<b>Men</b>	15%	21%	15%	32%	17%
<b>Women</b>	6%	32%	11%	39%	12%