



The Identity Factory: Tennis Personas in Production

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PUBLICATION DATE

01-05-2022

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The Identity Factory: Tennis Personas in Production

By Adriana Szili

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



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The Identity Factory: Tennis Personas in Production		PhD Thesis
Name of executive author	School/Institute/Division if based at Deakin; Organisation and address if non-Deakin	Email or phone
Adriana Szili	Deakin University	acszili@deakin.edu.au

2. Inclusion of publication in a thesis

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Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank P. David Marshall who has provided me with unwavering support and guidance throughout this whole (very long) process. I am so very grateful for all of the time you have put in to help me through each step of this research.

I would also like to thank Dr Kristin Demetrious who has also come along for the journey and helped me significantly in undertaking this research, your guidance has been very much appreciated.

To my family, my two very patient children, Scarlett and Caleb, and my very understanding husband, Manuel, there is no possible way that I could have done this without your support (and in particular, all of the farm trips you went on to give me time to complete my work) and I am thankful that I have you all in my life.

I would also like to add my sincere thank you to the Cowan family for their support in “the end result”.

Finally, to my mum and dad, you really helped me believe that I could do this, so thank you. And while dad isn't here to see this finished in its entirety, hopefully he knows somehow that it's finished and can be proud that his three children all finally got their doctorates. This thesis is dedicated to my dad's memory and his constant love of learning.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the complexity in constructing the persona of female tennis players. The 2015 Australian Open has been used as a central focus during this study to highlight the dynamic intersection of media power, celebrity and sport in this Grand Slam tennis tournament; as well as offering an insightful way to explore the way meanings for female tennis players are produced, interpreted, and distributed. Focusing on gender, class and race, the research aims to gain a deeper understanding of how the personas of female tennis players are constructed and formed, and to what extent, if any, they have control in this formation.

It finds, while female tennis players consent to their commoditisation as a promotional tool through rigid contractual arrangements, they have little agency in the negotiation of “self” or control of their public representation, a circumstance with implications more broadly for normative understandings of gender, class, and race as “otherness”. Drawing on a triangulation of face-to-face interviews, autoethnographic observation and textual data, the analysis sheds light on the relations of power at play between institutions like the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA) and the International Tennis Federation (ITF), global audiences as “fans” and the performative role with which female athletes are compelled by market forces to engage with at this level.

An immersive exploration of the 2015 Australian Open sets the groundwork for further concentration on situated moments after the event. This includes a relational look at more prominent players such as Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova and their male counterparts. This leads to the consideration more specifically of how certain Australian female professionals as constructed subjects fall from the normative ideal or contest and reject this constructed rendering of image and ultimately public identity. In unravelling their complex relationship with fans, it shows how female athletes attempt to control their constructed (commoditised) persona in social media forums like Twitter to achieve authenticity. The thesis contributes to the field of celebrity and persona studies by using an autoethnographic perspective to unpack processes and dynamics shaping individual subjects and their relationships to the public. It will have important implications for understanding cultural barriers to women’s participation in sport and in society saturated with promotional cultures more broadly.

Research questions are:

- What ideas, values and texts shape and legitimise the construction of a female tennis player’s mediated persona?
- What is the inter-relationship between sports and media organisations and female tennis players’ (that works to construct and harness female tennis players’ persona) at various stages of their career?
- What power (agency) do female tennis players have in shaping or challenging their public persona and what are the implications of this?

Introduction

Tennis is a strange sport: I know this because I spent most of my childhood and early adulthood hitting a tennis ball over a net for hours and hours, and that was my life. It is difficult to articulate how a sport such as tennis can shape you as a person and how the strange phenomenon that you become entwined with can make lasting impressions that you do not realise while you are immersed in it. I call this involvement in tennis a strange phenomenon, because it all makes sense and then it doesn't. You know that something is happening to you but can't quite put your finger on it and then you are steered in different directions, but you are the one driving. It makes sense at some level, and then you scratch your head because, just as quickly, it doesn't. Then you retire from the sport and reflect on how you developed throughout this process as a person. This is exactly what I have done: my own personhood was created, moulded, formed and manipulated at each stage of my career, and continues to shift even in retirement from the sport. I really believe that this process is a worthy investigation and this 'strange phenomenon' is what I will endeavour to explain in the thesis.

The way in which female tennis players personas are dynamically constructed by a variety of sources is the underlying theme of investigation in the thesis. For purposes of this thesis, the study of persona refers to the investigation of the elaborate systems, both through the media and otherwise, that have an impact on how one constructs their identity, with a clear intention (Marshall, 2013). This constructive process, as will be discussed in due course, is complex and interlinked with various other external forces that effectively churn out the image of a person that the public interprets in our heavily

mediated environment. Hence, the name of this thesis is titled “The Identity Factory: Tennis Personas in Production”. I will propose that the persona of female tennis players is a product of the factory-like mentality that they have very little control over.

Before I launch into some background information, I would like to share a little of the learning journey I have had in writing this thesis. When investigating the various phenomena that will be shared in later chapters, and through discussions with my supervisory team of P. David Marshall and Dr Kristin Demetrious, we continually discussed many of the curiosities that occur when female tennis players embark on a journey that requires both a public and private persona and how the environment in which players find themselves impacts on this. I am bringing this to attention because there were many occasions where I just did not see this as worthy of discussion or investigation. Both supervisors would often ask me to expand on certain cultural areas and bring to the fore other instances where they felt that there were expectations, power relations or other phenomena at play. Regularly, I just wouldn't see it because immersed in this culturally dominant environment for many years, these aspects were quite normal.

Perhaps then, the reader may find the insights, events and observations uncovered, rich and interesting, and not typical or expected. This highlights the process that occurs when people are exposed to an environment for prolonged periods. It has been very difficult to step outside of this space and attempt to be an onlooker but has been beneficial to this research in gaining multiple perspectives. It is important to note here that this really is the fundamental difference between my thesis and other works that

have been published in this area. I am able to be an inside/outside investigator and attempt to see both perspectives. Ordinarily, this type of research is conducted by an outsider who hasn't experienced an insider's perspective. The feature that sets my research apart from others is that dual perspective that hasn't been apparent in other publications and, while this has been difficult for me to separate, it has been useful in my analysis of the persona of the female tennis player.

Tennis as a sport is fairly simple in terms of how players progress through the system. In Australia, where I grew up, a player will start in local junior tournaments, then progress to national competition and then move on to the international stage. Once a player reaches the professional circuit, they move through tiered level tournaments. These include International Tennis Federation events (ITF) and the Women's Tennis Association events (WTA). Each tournament is worth a certain amount of money that is calculated as a collective sum which is specified as the total worth or prizemoney of the event (i.e. \$50,000) (WTA Rulebook, 2021). The similarities between junior and senior events is that both have a points structure, whereby the tournament is worth a certain pool of points. As a player progresses, they obtain more points: this describes how there is a ranking system in place. After each year, a player must defend their points in order to maintain or move up in the ranking system. The other important aspect about tennis is that the real pinnacle, in terms of tournaments, is competing in the four Grand Slams (Mason, 2021). These are: the Australian Open, the French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open. These economic realities for tennis players form part of the dominating cultural framework that shapes identity that I explore in this thesis.

Practice makes perfect

For the purposes of contextualising my motivating interest to investigate this topic, I will share with you some background information on my own involvement in the sport. I was first given a racquet and ball at age 5. My brother and sister would play tennis at the local courts in Adelaide, where I grew up, and I would tag along. Soon enough I had a coach and was spending as much time as I could on tennis courts, practicing each stroke with meticulous care and precision. Unbeknownst to me, it was at this time that my long journey into this strange sport began.

Not long after, I was winning national competitions, representing Australia in junior tournaments around the globe and became a member of both the South Australian Sports Institute and the Australian Institute of Sport. Suffice to say, my junior career was much more impressive than my adult career; however, I still managed a few decent results in the WTA and ITF tours, along with a Grand Slam appearance. The key point here is that for many years, I was a professional athlete – a title that not many have the privilege of acquiring.

This information is relevant to the thesis because I have lived through the experience of what it is like to go from an amateur player to professional athlete. Despite the fact that I didn't experience the success of someone like Serena Williams, I have first-hand knowledge of the forces and dynamics propelling a female athlete into a highly mediated and institutionalised sport such as tennis. I felt compelled to share my experiences and investigate this complex sport and really see what goes on when a female tennis player becomes entangled in a web that she must attempt to navigate and

still play sport at an elite level. As previously mentioned, this type of insider/outsider or dual perspective investigation of female tennis players has never been done before and provides valuable information in understanding the process that female tennis players go through in developing their persona.

Further to this is that after retirement, I worked at Tennis Australia, the governing body of Australian tennis. Having this background and contacts within the sport has allowed me to delve deeper into this analysis by gaining access to players, coaches and Australian Open areas that others may not have necessarily been able to obtain. This reinforces the dual perspective that I have been addressing. Other researchers in this field have not acquired and disseminated this information in a way that I am, and I feel privileged to be able to share it.

After moving on from Tennis Australia I became a secondary school teacher and am still presently working as an educator. With that comes yet another shift in persona for me. As teachers, we stand in front of a class performing in each and every lesson, in the staff room and when we interact with parents. It is not dissimilar to what I experienced as a tennis player, but at a much smaller scale. Interestingly, I can't shake the tennis player brand that has stuck with me for so many years. Students bring up images and articles on Google and present them to me – myself in a past life – with such enthusiasm and sometimes amazement that the teacher before them had a visible and public life outside of the classroom once. I am always perceived and read as “the tennis player” no matter what I else I do: and I have to admit that I find this enduring persona/identity surrounding me odd. I have been the subject of school trivia and I am

often asked about my playing career by staff and students. It is like I have been forever branded and I have very little control in changing that. This notion is really useful in terms of the connection between branding and persona in professional sport and more specifically is a pathway to understanding the professional tennis player's persona. Effectively, on a much smaller scale, this churning out of a persona is indicative of my argument. I am branded, with no control over the images that are put up on the internet and no matter what, I have been part of this production line, irrespective of my desire to be on or off the conveyor belt.

This is also a cathartic experience for me. While tennis has given me a lot of positive experiences, I feel that there are also some negative elements that, even over the years, I can't seem to shake off. I am hoping that, once I have finished this thesis and shared my thoughts and ideas, I can put this part of my life finally to rest. I hope to regain some of this control and acknowledge my past but still have some element of authority in my persona as an adult, some 20 years since I played my last professional tournament.

Tennis: business in motion

Tennis is one of the world's most popular sports. It encompasses both fandom and participation that has extensive global reach. The sport is highly mediated and is hugely popular on the internet, has TV rights deals that can generate millions of dollars in revenue, is prominent in sports headlines and has a comprehensive fan base with top players having an enormous global profile (Das, 2019). In 2014, the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) made USD\$107.1 million and the WTA Tour generated

USD\$69.7 million to make a combined total of USD\$176.8 million in revenue (Statista, 2020), proving that this sport is a powerful business. Tennis is often labelled as a universal sport, given that it is usually ranked in the top seven sports of each country globally, and is a major sport of interest in Asia, Europe, Australasia, Latin and North America (Biggest Global Sports, 2019).

The players who participate in the sport at an elite level are faced with many challenges that come with a high-profile sport. Speaking from my own experience, at around the age of 16, I was faced with the prospect of moving away from my home to train in the Australian Institute of Sport, which at the time was based in Melbourne. Despite the fact that I had great coaches, was happy and performing well, economically I had to make the decision to move as I was not able to receive the benefit of funding unless I was based in Melbourne. This is a prime example of the pulling power that an institution has and, sadly, if you cannot fund your participation in the sport yourself, you are left at the mercy of external influencers that may not always be looking to serve your best interests.

Another challenge is the development and continual negotiation of a public persona. Players must adapt their personas across a variety of media, from on-court to press conferences, to their online profiles and fan interactions. This requires a careful interplay that is complex. Decisions about privacy, what to divulge and also being interesting enough to have a fan base, all while trying to ensure that they maintain their results on-court, is a complicated relationship that is not just navigated by the player

themselves, but a whole host of people that take part in the development of the multiple personas that a tennis player requires in order to combat this highly mediated space.

Speaking from experience, media training was something I took part in. I vividly remember sitting in the media rooms at Melbourne Park, being told how to respond to questions that the media may ask us and then going through scenarios and practicing our responses. Even then, I could sense that there was something odd about it. I felt like we were robots being programmed how to respond, and I also remember thinking how boring that we all were saying the same types of things and working on deflecting from the questions that we didn't want to answer. This is what happens though, a churning out of sameness, that people, while all different, are programmed to respond in the same way to a worldwide audience, so as not to upset the status quo. It reminds me of a production line of cars, all effectively the same, but some may have the pricier model with leather seats or keyless ignition. It is the same for tennis players, where your luxury models (the top tier players) are the cars with the leather seats. We are all the same but with some differences that set us all apart and then how we are judged is based on our performance (much like the car). Performance is not just determined on-court: it ranges from media interviews to social media posts to how a person behaves off-court. All of this comes together to form the persona of a player.

Given the exposure that these athletes now have to a worldwide audience, lines are blurred between athlete and celebrity. Many of the higher ranked tennis players are now considered to be 'Sports Stars' who have a team of agents, sponsors and advertisers who all help propel them into the celebrity stratosphere. Combined with social media,

we are now seeing a potential shift from performance-based fame acquired by talent, hard work and results of tennis players to media-constructed acclaim (Cashmore, 2006).

The concept of persona and performativity is not a new notion. In the mid-1900s Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung discussed persona as the compromise between society and how an individual ought to appear (Jung, 1992). In 1959, Erving Goffman provided an in-depth account of self-performance through the identification of roles that people play in a variety of social settings through his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1990). P. David Marshall has investigated the notion of persona in a more contemporary society and explored how the different masks of persona are constructed by sophisticated media and communications systems and then executed by individuals (Marshall, 2010).

Gender is another aspect that further complicates this idea of persona and performativity. In her book, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler discusses the notion that gender is in fact unstable and encompasses a variety of repeated acts (Butler, 2006). Further, gender inequalities are a result of social practice and structures, rather than inherently developed from nature and, as such, can be altered and changed (Marjoribanks & Farquharson, 2011). Together, linked with the highly mediated sport of tennis that is filled with underlying social norms and values, you can often find tension and instability in how a person chooses to represent themselves and how they are represented by media outlets and institutions.

Sport, culture, and the learning journey

The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding into how the personas of female tennis players are (constructed) formed and to what extent, if any, they have control in this formation. This group of subjects is of considerable interest as they are often marginalised and sexualised by the media, often as a direct result of being female but also because they are athletes in an area traditionally considered to be more dominantly, a masculine activity. The juxtaposition between representation by external forces, including the wider media outlets in combination with the WTA and the ITF and their ability to choose the way they present themselves via social media seems difficult but is extremely interesting and important research. Given the intricacy of the topic, this research was narrowed down to focus primarily on Australian female tennis players. Further, given my close relationship with the sport in Australia and the players, I was able to gain access to, and conduct interviews with, some of the situated subjects in the sport in Australia. This made for a more targeted approach to the investigation but also opened up opportunities for extension into an internationally focused study of the topic in the future.

The construction and harnessing of female tennis players' personas for commercial purposes is the focal point for this research. It is, however, important to note the multi-faceted nature of the research. That is, there are many factors that must be considered when investigating this subject. The underlying driver of this research can be categorised into six themes as outlined below:

- The interrelationship between gender and sport with a more specific focus on tennis.
- The connection between presentational and representational media and the way that persona is formed within and through this relationship (Marshall, 2014).
- The interconnection between celebrity and sport with a more specific focus on tennis.
- Self-branding and the notion of self. The interplay between the desire to be different but the same.
- The control that institutions have in the creation of persona.
- Performativity and self-presentation both historically (including a discussion on the 19th century Dandy) and in contemporary society and links we can make with female tennis players.

I have drawn on much scholarly work in relation to persona, gender, celebrity, performativity and used this information as a way to understand and explain the process of constructing the persona of female tennis players. Three key theorists have been used throughout this thesis to further highlight the complex nature of persona construction. These are; P. David Marshall and his work on celebrity and persona, Judith Butler and her theories surrounding gender, and Erving Goffman and his ideas surrounding performativity. Each of these scholars have been looked at in depth to help explain the process involved in creating mediated personas.

Before I launch into an overview of each of the chapters, it is important to discuss the difference between online and mediated personas. An online persona relates to the creation of a public self that is disseminated online (Moore, 2020). It consists of a continuum of 'publicness' where people can represent themselves to a public that can vary from a smaller scale (i.e. friends) to a large scale audience (i.e. global reach) (Moore et al. 2017). Whereas a mediated persona, while still an expression of the self to a public, is more closely tied to commercial interests where an individual looks to monopolise the mediated climate for personal gain, whether that be notoriety or financial gain, and is a clear negotiation between personal, corporate and institutional agency (Moore et al. 2017). Both online and mediated personas overlap, hence why this thesis will discuss both forms of persona throughout this thesis and how each of these elements can impact on the formation of the persona of female tennis players.

To further investigate this topic, a range of analytical techniques have been employed to gain a fuller understanding of this complex navigation. A combination of interviews, autoethnographic observation and textual analysis have been used in this research and have been set out in the following chapters. Below is a summary of each:

Chapter One is a review of the literature that is currently available on the various topics that are underlying this research. The literature has been thematically divided and investigated in numerous categories. These are:

- Media and Sport;
- Celebrity;

- Gender, Media and Sport;
- Online Cultures; and
- Self-Branding

These areas are discussed in-depth and are linked into how the research literature can be applied to understanding the development of the persona of female tennis players.

In the second chapter the methods used to collect data and investigate the findings are discussed. Three data strands were collected: These are interviews, autoethnographic textual samples, and observation. The interviews were conducted with Australian female tennis players at various career stages and one WTA Tour tennis coach. The textual samples highlight the institutions relevant to Australian female tennis players, studying the Channel 7 news reports during the summer season of tennis in the 2014/2015 time period. Further textual material was gleaned from Australian female tennis players' Twitter feeds during the 2014/2015 summer season of tennis. The observational analysis was an immersive experience at the 2015 Australian Open, which included watching matches and press conferences during the 2015 tournament. Further, insight investigative work has been included in the textual analysis, which consists of a discussion between the 19th-century dandy and Serena Williams to highlight the historical aspect as related to persona construction. This insight chapter has been directly informed by the research garnered through the interviews and textual analysis and serves as an example for other areas for investigation that are directly informed by the insights generated via the analysis and how they can be applied to highly visible professional women athletes and their navigation in related spaces. The

investigative work highlights the factory-like process that is involved in creating mediated personas, and how no player is immune from this process. The insight chapter is not based on interviews, but is built from a textual analysis and investigated from the platform this research base has opened up for further exploration of the formation of female tennis personas.

The third chapter provides insight that is based on the research conducted and the ideas that have been acquired through the previous research. It outlines the historical context of persona development and provides a contemporary example of its application by comparing the 19th-century dandy to Serena Williams through textual analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to start to identify, through the case of the dandy, how we can begin to understand the construction of a public self and make links with a prominent female tennis player such as Serena Williams. This comparison proves useful in an extension of this topic and how it can be applied in comparison to other historical and or contemporary areas within society. Further, it explores the notion that no-one is immune from this complicated self-negotiation: whether you are Serena Williams or a historical figure, this complex creation has been occurring throughout our history.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the key institutions that are relevant to this study by using textual analysis during this discussion. The aim of this chapter is to inform the reader of the background into the institutions that play a role in tennis and, more specifically, female tennis. The purpose of this chapter is to put into context the relationships between the institutions and players with the aim to gain insight into how subjects relate to one another. Further, it is an explanation into the power that

institutions have over female tennis players and how this affects the development of their persona.

The fifth chapter provides a textual analysis of this research. It encompasses a study of the 6pm news broadcast of Australian television network Channel 7. This analysis takes place from 1 December 2014 and ceases at the commencement of the tournament on 19 January 2015. Channel 7 was selected for this analysis as it held the rights to the Australian Open and, as such, it was hypothesised that there would be significant promotion of the event and representation of players who would be participating in both the 2015 Australian Open and warm-up events.

Chapter Six builds on the textual analysis with ethnographic observations. The grounds and matches at the 2015 Australian Open were observed and analysed to see how players conduct themselves on-court but also observed how their images are used in advertising at the event. Finally, press conferences were observed to view the interaction between the press and players.

The seventh chapter advances the discussion with an analysis of four interviews that were conducted during the December 2014 and January 2015 time period. These interviews comprised three female Australian tennis players and one male tennis coach who works on the WTA Tour with female tennis players. These interviews were conducted to gain insight into how those involved in the sport see their persona develop within the mediated world in which we live.

Complementing this and again using textual analysis, Chapter Eight is a study of short microblogs or 'tweets' posted on the social media site Twitter by Australian female

tennis players. A total of four female tennis players' tweets were analysed between 13 December 2014 and 14 February 14, 2015. This chapter provides insight into how the players themselves choose how they are represented and their relationship with social media.

The conclusion highlights the findings from the research and discusses how the previous chapters prove that the process involved in creating the persona of female tennis players is a complex and multi-faceted. In addition, this chapter also provides an opportunity to garner ideas for further research into this area. The concluding remarks also discuss findings of the research and the challenges that were faced when conducting research such as this. In addition to this, recommendations are also made for possible future investigations in this area.

A key insight into this research is the complex navigation that the female tennis player must undertake in order to create a persona. There are so many external forces, such as the media, WTA Tour and sponsors, all with their own agendas that are looking to manipulate players' personas to suit their own needs. This construction must work alongside the players, who have a vested interest in how they would like themselves to be portrayed. To have some control in this, they (the players) often have their own representational media accounts, such as Twitter, and can, at some level, represent themselves the way in which they see fit through their on-court negotiation and interviews with the press. Together, this becomes a complicated series of events that is ever evolving and often with minimal input from the player, which is what makes this construction of the self so intriguing.

This research is valuable because it provides a parallel personal account of the challenges faced when I was trying to construct my own persona coupled with external accounts and research that also investigate this phenomenon. Research of this structure has not occurred in relation to this topic and provides multiple perspectives on the issues raised that would otherwise not be investigated through the usual means of an external researcher.

Chapter One: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the literature that assists in the investigation into the construction of female tennis players' personas. It allows for a closer look at the different kinds of self-projection and how various factors influence this, namely those related to the media. As tennis is such a highly mediated sport, the relationship between various media platforms such as television, online and print media and female tennis players is constantly being negotiated. Female tennis players must continuously perform in various spaces with a fluid and always changing persona. This chapter explores the various academic traditions that help in understanding this root construction of their persona or public self by female tennis professionals.

The presentation of the self has become a focal point for many within contemporary society (Marshall, 2014). In his influential book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) explored this notion of self-presentation through the concept of performance and identified the specific roles that people play in accordance with their social situation. The term 'persona' has been used in parallel with 'self-presentation'. Persona is derived from the ancient Greek word for mask and according to Perlman (1968, p.4) "a person makes himself known, felt, taken in by others, through his particular roles and their functions. Some of his personae – his masks – are readily detachable and put aside, but others become fused with his skin and bone". For Jung (1992, p.158), persona is "a mask of the collective psyche" and is not real, rather it is "a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be". Essentially, the study of persona seeks to investigate the presentation of the self, which

is precisely what this thesis deals with (Marshall, 2014, pp. 153-170). In terms of how this is applied to the present day, Marshall (2013, pp. 370-371) states that “persona allows us to explore the masks of identity as they are both constructed by our elaborate media and communication systems and enacted by individuals with a degree of intention and agency”. With this in mind, the construction of the persona of different generations of female tennis players becomes quite complex considering the influence that the media has on the construction of the public self in conjunction with the intent of the individual.

The formation of female tennis players’ persona is considered in relation to a number of categories. Firstly, the interaction between sport and the media is examined.

Representation is at the core of any study relating to media and sport. Boyle and Haynes (2009, p.107) state that “mediated sport is saturated with ideas, values, images and discourses which at times reflect, construct, naturalise, legitimise, challenge and even reconstitute attitudes which permeate wider society”. Norman Fairclough (2001) says;

The name given to and accepted by a rather diverse and loosely affiliated group of approaches to language (and, more broadly, to semiosis – including visual images, body language and so forth). These approaches have in common a concern with how language and / or semiosis figure in unequal relations of power, in processes of exploitation and domination of some people by others.
(Fairclough, 2001, p.25).

Thus, the experience that female tennis players have had with this interaction is vital in establishing the influence that the media has had on the development of their persona.

Celebrity is the second area that is explored to further investigate the persona of female tennis players. The commercial links between top sports stars, agents, advertisers and sponsors has progressively tightened in recent times (Horne and Tomlinson et al., 2013); thus, intensifying the dynamics involved in the production of sports stars. In terms of celebrity, there is now a shift from fame achieved through a *bona fide* process to media constructed acclaim (Cashmore, 2006), mobilising various institutional and social actors in facilitating this process. This is further evidenced by Russian tennis player Anna Kournikova's celebrity status in the late 1990s and early 2000s that was mainly achieved through the drive of the media along with the various people involved in her PR team. Well before she was famous, Kournikova was already being moulded into the celebrity that she became. *New York Times* tennis writer Ben Rothenberg, in a "No Challenges Remaining" podcast with WTA writer Courtney Nguyen, claimed that even from a young age Kournikova was noticed for her looks as precursor to her stardom. Rothenberg states that "even before her results started, even when she was a junior, people talked about her at IMG – which is creepy and gross, but it still happens to this day; "Oh my God, you should see this 12-year-old, she's beautiful," and that "people saw her as a package, and she became that" (Rothenberg and Nguyen, 2019). This is a clear example of how a management company, in this case IMG, had the ability and influence to shape the Kournikova persona from the outset and that this "package" was effectively to be sold.

Thirdly, the relationship between gender, media and sport as a performance is investigated. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (2006) problematises this notion of gender performance. Butler states that gender is unstable and comprises stylised and repetitive acts. Butler states that gender is an overarching imitation of the conventional and commanding ideas of what it is to be male or female. According to Kane and Greendorfer (1994, pp. 28-45), the media reinforces stereotypical views of women by their reportage of female athletes by trivialising and often sexualising them, thus producing a tool for patriarchal oppression. The way in which female tennis players situate themselves within this system provides valuable insight into the formation of their persona and in the constitution of public personas more widely.

Online culture is the fourth category for analysis. In her book *Life on the Screen*, Sherry Turkle (1995, p.9) states that “in cyberspace we can talk, exchange ideas and assume personae of our own creation”. Further, in *The History of Inner Devices*, Turkle states that common communication devices such as mobile phones, become intimate machines that can form strong and eroticised bonds (Turkle, 2008). By creating their own persona online and the relationship that this bears with representational media and even their own ideas of self-presentation, we can see that the construction and evolution of the female tennis player’s own persona is quite a complex one, especially when we add to it issues of gender, shared intimacy and indeed the celebrity culture.

Lastly, a closer look at the presentation of the self, particularly the ‘public self’ and the ‘branded self’ is addressed. As mentioned previously, the presentation of the self is becoming increasingly central to many within today’s society (Marshall, 2014, pp. 153-

170). Papacharissi (2013, p. 207) states that “the process of self-presentation becomes an ever-evolving cycle through which individual identity is presented, compared, adjusted, or defended against a constellation of social, cultural, economic, or political realities”. This will be particularly useful when analysing the persona of the current crop of WTA Tour and retired players. The kinds of personas that have emerged and are emerging in women’s professional tennis are formed in these overlapping worlds and the discourses that they produce for the construction of a public identity and can be further investigated through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA analyses texts closely and their interactions and “sees texts and interactions as part the material processes of social life, or as materialities in which social life is ongoingly produced, reproduced and changed” (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 26-27).

Media and Sport

A brief survey of the provenance of ideas in sport and culture provides a useful context to understand the significance of this project. According to Scanlon (2006) there are many commonalities between modern and ancient forms of mass entertainment (such as sport). The author asserts that sport in the ancient world differed depending on the location. For example, for the ancient Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Hittites and Minoans, only the elite would conduct sporting events in a display of power with the contestants themselves accruing no real honour: the sponsor received the accolades. In contrast, in ancient Greece the individuals received the honour rather than the sponsors. Although sporting events in Ancient Rome were still financed by the elites as in ancient Greece and other early civilizations, they differed in that they were primarily a mode of

entertainment for the mass population rather than a display of power (Scanlon 2006, pp. 3-21). The notion of mass entertainment is analysed in greater detail by Patrick Brantlinger (1983 p. 53) in his book *Bread and Circuses*. According to the author, “patterns of ‘high’ and ‘mass’ culture can be drawn from ancient history”. Further, he suggests that the ancient Roman ideals whereby the mass population can be kept conformable, muted and distracted from intellectual thought (for example, being concerned with politics) through the availability of cheap food and entertainment is still relevant. Hence, he uses the analogy of ‘bread and circuses’ (Brantlinger, 1983).

From the early 20th century, sport and media had begun to further strengthen their relationship with one another (Delaney and Madigan, 2009). Boyle and Haynes (2009, p.42) state that “at an institutional level this is a relationship that has evolved and developed, often accompanied by a substantial degree of tension”. According to Delaney and Madigan (2009) newspapers were key contributors to the popularity of sport by sponsoring sporting events and providing the information that the mass population so desired about their favourite sports and athletes. Further, the sensational stories that journalists of the time produced for print helped propel athletes into stardom who were worthy of acclamation.

For most people in today’s society, sport is what happens in the media (Whannel, 2008). The scale and intensity of media sport is colossal. Sport in the present day is consumed by billions of people through various channels including magazines, the internet and sports radio channels. Televised sport events and media contracts are worth billions of dollars (Real, 1998) and sport has now become a trading commodity

(Zhang et al., 2017, p. 10). There has been an increase in the commercialisation of sport and the commodification of athletes which has profoundly impacted on and changed the culture of sport (Rowe, 2004).

According to Smart (2007), from the 1870s to the 1920s, international competitions, tours and events began to flourish. The author claims that during this period, the popularity of sport was seen as a means to create a profitable industry in a market that was largely unregulated in a capitalist economic system. This resulted in an increased demand for sporting goods and equipment which spawned a number of sporting goods companies such as Spalding, Slazenger, Dunlop and Converse. Further, Smart (2007) maintains that today, many of these sporting goods companies have formed enormous empires, aided by teaming with athletes to promote their brands. In fact, the athletes themselves have spawned into brands in their own right, combining athletic ability and sponsorships that are worth millions of dollars. For example, clothing companies such as Nike have been known to team up with athletes such as Maria Sharapova to create a more fashionable image for athletes. When Maria Sharapova, in conjunction with Nike, revealed her 2019 US Open dress, it was called 'chic' and 'stylish', with others commenting that it could be worn on a night out or for a special occasion (Pop, 2019).



This photo shows Maria Sharapova modeling her 2019 US Open dress (Tennis World USA, 2019).

Consumers often form an allegiance with brands that are affiliated with celebrities. In the case of fashion and sport, if the pitch works, the athlete is propelled into the minds of the audience (O'Reilly and Braedley, 2008, pp. 270-287) and thus entwining celebrity, sport and capital.

The rise of mass media has also affected the way in which sports are played through its scheduling of events and matches and people's experience of competition (Smart, 2005). Sage (2010, p.150) further elaborates on the media's position in the social transformation of sport by stating that "the media have played a role in the creation of some sports, the popularity of others, and rule changes in others; media sports has also been on the forefront of social changes through clothing, language, fashion and entertainment preferences".

Frandsen (2016) discusses the notion of mediatisation in sport. This approach is a theoretical framework that considers the relationship between media, culture and society and ingrained within that is sport. Frandsen (2016) also discusses the mediatisation of organisations. She states that "organisations are structures within which individuals are organised and act, but they are also corporate agents that act and perceive themselves as acting on a societal level" and that organisations then act and react once they become aware of media presence (Frandsen, 2016, p.388).

New media has also impacted significantly on a proliferation of mediated sport. As Hutchins and Rowe (2012, p. 1) state, "digital-convergent media are playing an ever-increasing role in the production, presentation, and consumption of media sport".

According to Kassing and Sanderson (2010, pp. 113-128), prior to the emergence of

new media, fans only had access to sports heroes via print media, television or sports talk radio. However, the authors state that, in contemporary society fans can now access their favourite athletes via the internet and interact with them on a daily basis. Further, for the athletes, these new technologies are able to serve as a means for self-presentation.

Athletes are now able to communicate their dissatisfaction of any negative media representations and defend their position on various topics or even challenge regulations with relative ease through various platforms such as Twitter. For example, Hambrick et al (2013, pp. 196-218) state that athletes use Twitter to challenge unfavourable media narratives. The researchers conducted a study relating to Lance Armstrong, who was famously stripped of his seven Tour de France titles after being found guilty of doping, and his use of Twitter during times of negative press. They claim that Armstrong would use Twitter as a means to try and renegotiate negative press. The authors attest that during heightened times of unfavourable media reporting, but during pre-doping admission, Armstrong used three strategies. These were; attacking (speaking out against his accusers), bolstering (offering details about his personal life and achievements) and stonewalling (giving more intimate accounts and details of his personal life) (Hambrick et al, 2013, pp. 196-218). Interestingly, after the Oprah interview where he admitted to using drugs, Armstrong opted to continue using the three previous strategies but also included; mortification (apologising), simple denial, shifting blame, provocation, victimisation, conforming (additional justification for his actions) and finally retrospective regret. Despite this though, it must be noted that before the Oprah interview the researchers charted 503 tweets, compared to post-

Oprah interview with 37 tweets (Hambrick et al, 2013, pp. 196-218). This is a significant drop. It suggests a clear desire from Armstrong to be less prolific on Twitter during this time. Arguably then, this is a form of agency that Armstrong had, but this was only able to occur at one level through omission given the drop in tweets. This could be seen as a passive response rather than publishing content that would help in reforming his persona, which would be a more proactive method. As such, I argue that the agency he had in this was limited and he was still significantly at the mercy of the external media.

In 1998, Lawrence A. Wenner coined the term 'MediaSport' to explain the melding and merging of interests between media and sport (Billings, 2011). According to Wenner (1998, p. 3):

Big time 'MediaSport' played well can be a compelling game. The monies involved stagger the imagination and rival small national economies. What may at first seem a national preoccupation takes on global implications. What starts as a sporting contest played between lines becomes transformed into a spectacle that seems to have no bounds.

This notion of the spectacle of media sports has been explored further by Smart (2007, p. 19), who states that "sport is now an established part of a globally extensive entertainment industry and sportsmen and sportswomen have eagerly embraced the notion that they have a responsibility not only to be successful in competition but also to entertain spectators and viewers by participating in the promotion of sport as a spectacle". The author continues by then claiming that the athletes have come to realise

that, for many, sporting success is partnered with global acclaim and a media profile (Smart, 2007, pp. 113-134).

The interrelationship between the media, sport and athletes is a complicated one. McNeil (1998, p.113) asserts that “the relationship between the media and athletes is conducted on slippery but negotiable terrain” and that “the foggy boundaries existing between news and entertainment media allow sports media to focus on marquée athletes and events”. Furthermore, Smart (2005, p. 66) claims that “the present cultural status and meaning of any sport is a complex product of the various contributions of those directly and indirectly involved at all levels-clubs, players, associated organisations, governing bodies, commercial corporations, sponsors, advertisers, sportswriters, broadcasters, spectators, readers and viewers”.

The way in which the media then represent athletes further adds to the intricacy of this relationship. According to Cashmore (2010, p. 458):

(Athletes’) representations in the media, including advertising, TV talk shows, and other public appearances can be shaped according to an image. But unlike actors, singers, models, and other members of the entertainment industry, athletes have to perform to an unscripted drama. If they don’t compete well, their public presentations will eventually be seen as fraudulent.

Cashmore uses tennis player Anna Kournikova as a prime example of this as she received millions in endorsements and a huge media profile. However, consumers were conscious of the deceit when she was unable to win any of the major singles events in which she played (Cashmore, 2010). While tennis players are required to, as Cashmore

(2010) puts it, perform to an unscripted drama, there are elements within the sport that are highly scripted. For example, some of the press that players undertake are often performed to a script. This makes for an interesting and complicated relationship between these two elements that requires complex navigation for players.

The media has also been responsible for the transformation from sportsperson to celebrity. The stardom of athletes is on par with (and often surpasses) other entertainers (Smart, 2005). Whannel (2002, p. 342) claims that in today's media saturated society, appearance, style and personality are key features in creating fame stating that "in postmodern culture, where surface appearance dominates over substance, sports stars become more like characters of a soap opera-no more or less *real*". Further, Whannel (2002, p. 343) asserts that the nature of sport has changed so much that its dominant concern lies with show business and promoters and agents who are scouting for charismatic alluring athletes to transform into walking money. This transformation from athlete to celebrity will be discussed in greater detail later in the next section of this chapter.

Considering these points, the persona of an athlete is unstable and dynamic as it progresses. From the beginning there is a greater focus on 'playing sport' in a relatively uncomplicated world of junior competition to then becoming a product of global consumption that must appease sponsors through various contractual obligations while, predominantly via the media, the gaze of a massive international audience watches their every move both within and outside their chosen sport. The construction of the

modern sports persona then is in a number of significant ways organised, situated and expressed through the lens of the media.

Celebrity

Although celebrities are often associated with divine qualities, the term celebrity in fact refers to a fall of the gods and the rise of democracy and secular societies. The original terminology derives from the Latin word *celebrem*, which has connotations with 'fame' and 'being thronged'. It also has ties to the Latin word *celere* which links to the English word *celerity*, meaning 'swift'. The Latin root of the word celebrity implies that there is a relationship between a person possessing singularity and a social structure whereby the character of fame is momentary. The French word *célèbre*, which means 'well known in public' also holds a similar meaning (Marshall, 2014; Rojek, 2001). Furthermore, it infers that fame can exceed boundaries of a religion and court society and essentially ties celebrity to a public while acknowledging the unpredictable, unstable and transitory nature in human sentiments (Rojek, 2001).

According to Inglis (2010, pp. 4-5), celebrity has replaced the earlier notion of renown. This term was reserved for prominent men who served in clearly defined roles such as a 16th-century jurist, scholar, cleric or senior mercenary who brought honour to his office and was acclaimed in public by way of his accomplishments. Renown then was less concerned with the man himself, rather the significance of his actions and their contribution to the betterment of society. Further, one had to try and retain renown, as it was often transient (Braudy, 1997). However, Inglis (2010, pp. 4-5) states that as a result of the rise in urban democracy (i.e. new ways of thinking), the increase in media

and communications, coupled with the individualisation of the modern sentiment, fame is now far more rewarding and thus changed public commendation from an expression of devotion to contribute to society into celebrity.

For Rojek (2001, p. 6), the emergence of celebrity culture is the product of three interrelated historical processes, that is, “first, the democratisation of society; second, the decline in organised religion; third, the commodification of everyday life”. Marshall (2014, p. 6) adds to this by stating that “the restrictions of a former hierarchy are no longer valid in the new order that is determined by merit and/or the acquisition of wealth” and that “celebrity can be thought of as a label that works to differentiate layers of the bourgeoisie”. In addition, the author asserts that “celebrity status invokes the message of possibility of a democratic age” and “it is the ideal representation of the triumph of the masses”. Furthermore, Turner (2014, p. 10) states that “celebrity is a genre of representation and a discursive effect; it is a commodity traded by the promotions, publicity, and media industries that produce these representations and their effects; and it is a cultural formation that we can better understand”.

Boorstin (2006, p.79) states that the term celebrity relates directly to a person who is “known for his well-knownness”. He claims that: “His qualities – or rather his lack of qualities – illustrate our peculiar problems. He is neither good nor bad, great nor petty. He is the human pseudo-event. He has been fabricated on purpose to satisfy our exaggerated expectations of human greatness.”

Boorstin (2006) also differentiates between heroes and celebrities by stating that:

The hero was distinguished by his achievement; the celebrity by his image or trademark. The hero created himself; the celebrity is created by the media. The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name.

This highlights the distinctive view that heroes did 'great' things and displayed 'great' qualities, whereas celebrities are a manufactured product (Van Krieken, 2012).

It can be argued that in terms of female tennis players, the WTA Tour is mixed with those who fit into either category and those who are a fusion of the two. For example, Serena Williams is considered one of the most successful female tennis players to have played the sport in terms of her on-court achievements. However, as Coleman-Bell (2006, pp. 195-207) states, "from tennis championships and endorsement deals to entertainment endeavours, Serena Williams' image has become the site of a highly lucrative celebrityhood". Whereas someone like former player Anna Kournikova may be considered further towards the side of celebrity due to her lack of on-court achievements but creating a sizable media profile. Arguably, Kournikova's well-knownness' was for reasons not attributed to her sporting ability.

To further extend on this point, and the distinguishing qualities between hero and celebrity, Joshua Shuart (2007) developed a study that sought to determine how celebrities, in particular athletes, can influence consumers. He surveyed 222 college-aged students to determine whether credibility of celebrity or hero was a predictor in the purchasing of products. For the purposes of the study, a hero was considered to be a distinguished and admired person with qualities that are worthy of being followed, whereas celebrity was defined simply as a person who is famous. Shuart's study is

relevant to this thesis as Anna Kournikova was one of the test cases. Interestingly, she was classified as being “low hero and high celebrity” whereas Venus Williams was considered as being “high hero and high celebrity” (Shuart, 2007, pp. 126-140). In the case of Kournikova, this is interesting given she initially became famous based on her involvement in professional sport (arguably starting with potential to earn hero status), but then seemed to move towards celebrity during her career.

According to Rojek (2001, pp. 17-20), celebrity status is found in three forms: *ascribed*, *achieved* and *attributed*. An ascribed celebrity refers to lineage or status that relates to bloodline such as royalty. Achieved celebrity relates to the recognised accomplishments of an individual, such as sports stars or musicians and actors. However, achieved celebrity does not alone refer to a matter of talent or skill. Rather, in some instances it can be the result of concentrated representation of a remarkable individual. When this occurs, it is referred to as an attributed celebrity. Generally, this thesis refers to achieved celebrity; however, there are certainly instances where attributed celebrity comes into play. These nuances point to complexity that make the celebrity aspect of a sportsperson fruitful to this study. For example, as previously mentioned, Anna Kournikova, who arguably directly ascribes to the attributed celebrity.

Gamson (1994, p. 54) argues that the artificial manufacturing of celebrity causes a “strange new interplay between hierarchy and egalitarian democracy”. He asserts that:

On the one hand, it brings its own radical egalitarianism: a world where attention will be distributed more evenly, if in shorter increments; a world where stardom is more accessible since the inborn requirements are fewer; a world in which

anyone can lip sync can feel the glow of celebrity. On the other hand, it celebrates (even as it attacks) a new, powerful elite: the media, the industry, the star makers, able to make and control images, able to direct mass attention through marketing machinery.

Arguably, this 'accessibility' to celebrity would be enticing in terms of fame, adulation and monetary gains to the younger generation of female tennis players that form part of this case study, particularly considering many come from humble backgrounds. For example, Maria Sharapova grew up in a poor Russian family and her dad took her to the United States so she could pursue her tennis career with only \$700 (Elkins, 2018) and, despite this, has a realistic opportunity to form part of this group. It can be hypothesised that these tennis players succumb to the manufacturing of their persona by agents and PR companies as a means to catapult themselves into the spotlight. Through this progression, the dynamics of the relationship shifts as they establish their celebrity.

In terms of the present-day celebrity, Turner (2014, p.3) states that "the contemporary celebrity will usually have emerged from the sports or entertainment industries, they will be highly visible through the media, and their private life will attract greater public interest than their professional life". In addition, the celebrity in the current era is further propelled into stardom via the process of globalisation. Lee (2006, p.94) asserts that these stars "become icons, people who embody a set of cultural practices and ideological beliefs that can then be transmitted across cultural boundaries, 'wrapped' in the persona of celebrity".

Andrews and Jackson (2001) state that according to many, the modern sports celebrity began with *The New York Journal* in 1895, when William Randolph Hearst established the first sports section within a newspaper. This was soon popularised by other newspapers of the time as it provided a mechanism to transform athletes into figures who were celebrated nationally and, potentially, internationally. Further, the authors maintain that this produced a process of familiarisation of the athletes and the public soon wanted to know more, which in turn led to an increase in newspaper circulation.

Smart (2005, pp. 7-11) claims that “sport has become an integral part of the entertainment industry and high-profile sporting figures have acquired fame and are accorded the status of stars and celebrities”. The sporting celebrity, Smart contends, expands far beyond the sports arena:

In the case of sporting figures, it is in good part their participation in endorsement activities and advertising that extends their profiles beyond a specific sporting field and leads them to become identified as celebrities. It leads to them becoming famous beyond their respective fields of play, well known even to those who know little or nothing, and care even less, about sport and their specific sporting abilities.

It is important to note here that initially, sporting celebrities are not just known for their ‘well-knownness’, rather it is their sporting ability that is first noticed. However, as Cashmore (2010, p. 439) claims, “once (sporting prowess) is noticed they can garner recognition by their appearance, their partners, their presence at events, and practically anything that interests their audience” and “when their athletic performance declines,

they can still draw attention". This is certainly evident within the female tennis population. For example, young Canadian Eugenie Bouchard was catapulted into stardom throughout her semi-final appearance at the 2014 Australian Open. Once her presence was noticed, press conferences and interviews seemed to be more focused on her life outside of tennis – for example, if she was single or who she would like to date (to which she answered Justin Bieber, which produced a further flurry of celebrity-like coverage of the athlete) (Huffington Post Canada, 2014).

Smart (2007, pp. 9-10) claims that sport is considered to be one of the few remaining institutions that still holds cultural recognition and acclaim; that is, notable performances and exceptional prowess is held in high regard, where what is achieved by its performers still manages to retain authenticity. In addition, Smart (2007, pp. 9-10) also states that, although they may be considered as heroes to many, this is often overshadowed by celebrity.

Thus celebrity, sports stars are employed to endorse products, which results in a social and cultural signifier that is now a brand. According to Rojek (2008, pp. 172-189), "cultural intermediaries assemble the sports celebrity as a system that is designed to make spectators consume commodities" and that "there is a hierarchical relationship between the corporation (agent of commodification), celebrity (the idealised object) and the spectator (the commodified subject)". This in turn operates as a system of control and manipulation.

Sport and this idealised object, the celebrity, are entwined within popular culture, which makes it so accessible and arguably powerful, especially in terms of how corporations

can promote athletes that can provide them with the opportunities of acquiring celebrity status. As Jackson et al (2005, p. 8) states, “[sport] has an appeal that stretches beyond the field of sport per se with sporting themes, images, narratives and celebrities located within and across a complex and increasingly global system of intertextual promotional cultures including movies, art, fashion, music and politics”.

The reception of sporting celebrities tends to differ from other forms of celebrity.

According to Andrews and Jackson (2001, p. 8):

In sport, there is a perception that spectators/viewers are confronted with real individuals participating in unpredictable contests. Hence, the seemingly visceral, dramatic immediacy of the sport practice provides the sport celebrity with an important veneer of authenticity that sets him or her apart from celebrities drawn from other, more explicitly manufactured, cultural realms.

Furthering the significance of this point, Andrews and Jackson (2001) claim that the process by which sports celebrities are manufactured is rather shaky. They maintain that sport celebrities commonly emerge and remain in the spotlight due to strong performances in their respective sporting competitions. However, difficulty can arise for those who manage sports celebrities when the athlete, of whom they have meticulously groomed to fit a particular image of persona, fails to perform in their sport or has been part of indiscretions not related to their sport. As previously mentioned, Cashmore’s (2010, p. 458) notion of fraudulent behaviour among poor performing athletes further resonates with this idea of underperforming athletes having a phony or forged persona.

Celebrity is an important theoretical aspect to this research project because it enables us to chart a progression from athlete to celebrity and how a female tennis player progresses from one to another along with the constant negotiation and renegotiation of both spaces. As evidenced, celebrity personas are carefully formed and manipulated by the various media institutions that are more concerned with profitability than the welfare of those they represent. Sporting celebrities are often considered to be more 'authentic' because much of their renown is based on performances within their sporting domain. However, when performances wane, for many, the persona of the individual shifts and some of these athletes may be considered as 'frauds'. For the female tennis players explored in the research project, this complicated representation of the sporting celebrity is key in understanding how the media shape, mould and, at some level, take ownership of the persona of these athletes. How the female tennis player responds to this along with how they see and negotiate their own complicitness with a prevalent celebrity culture is essential to the study. The literature reviewed here that deals with celebrity and specifically sport and celebrity provides a highly relevant way to understand the constructed female professional tennis player persona.

Gender/Media/Sport

According to many disciplines – including sociology, anthropology and psychology – popular belief lies in the assertion that sexual difference is central to the definition of identity, in structuring thought and the organisation of society. This idea has been explored in greater detail via various schools of feminist thought (Rodgers, 1999, pp. 39-53). A prominent view in feminist ideology is that gender is in fact a social construct

rather than a biological one (Creedon and Cramer, 2007). According to Simone de Beauvoir (1972, p. 295), “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” and that “no biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine”. For Kate Millett (1983, p. 27), “male supremacy, like other political creeds, does not finally reside in physical strength but in the acceptance of a value system which is not biological”.

Judith Butler (2006, p. 152) draws similar conclusions pertaining to the social construction of gender. The author extends de Beauvoir’s notion of a female ‘becoming’ a woman rather than being born one by stating that:

...if gender is something that one becomes – but can never be – then gender itself is a kind of becoming or activity, and that gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort.

However, Butler’s work on the performativity of gender is what is most useful to this study. Butler (2006, p. 185) states that:

Acts, gestures and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause.

The author continues by claiming that;

Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.

In the embedding of such meanings, Butler (2006, p.191) discusses the way in which gender requires the performance to be repeated. This reiteration is a “reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation”. Butler then proposes that “gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts”.

Building on this point and according to Spaaij et al (2015, pp. 400-401), “gender is the most visible site of inequality in sport” and that “hegemonic masculinity justifies the lesser regard, and its associated lack of resources provided to women’s sport by asserting that the patriarchal organisation of sport is natural, normal and is therefore somehow right”. This further reinforces the notion of gender being repeatedly performed through various acts to ingrain it within the norms of society.

Arguably, for the female tennis players that this study examines, the fluidity and rather unstable nature of gender and performance will shift significantly when players come from the ITF circuit to the WTA Tour. This may be largely due to the influence of other institutions such as the media or management companies. Then, perhaps, the repetition of gender norms are ‘re-experienced’ when these players gain a media profile whereby

the media, PR companies and sport institutions may become the agents for the recurrence. However, at retirement, the female tennis player's gender performance may shift again due to its non-static nature in addition to the media having to shift the representation of their 'product' from a tennis player to retiree.

As Busby (2020, p.44) states, gender performance and discourse are not only related to language, rather it is multi-faceted and relates to culture, institutions and various levels of economic and political processes. This reinforces the theme throughout this thesis - that is, the way that the gendered performance of female tennis players is impacted significantly by factors outside of their immediate control.

The pressured road to professionalisation

Historically, sport was generally considered to be an amateur activity reserved for the upper-class. Huggins and Williams (2006, p. 135) state that "the cult of amateurism was very much entwined with the desire to keep sports socially exclusive and to maintain class authority but this was rarely mentioned in public". Further, the authors maintain that amateurism stemmed from a Victorian ideal that sport was to be played for its own sake with honour and putting in one's best effort. Participation, playing style and conduct was of ample importance with the sport being played in good faith and competitiveness was deemed to be socially unacceptable.

However, in the late 1890s, particularly in British societies, there was significant class-conflict between the upper-classes and the bourgeoisie (Lake, 2011, pp. 876-894). The

bourgeoisie of the late Victorian period had reached a new level of prosperity which in turn allowed for less work and more spare or leisure time (Hargreaves, 1993, pp. 53-66). According to Vinen (2000), this change was also felt by the British working-class, who at the time were given better working conditions, an increase in wages and a reduction in working hours. This provided an opportunity for an increase in consumption. For example, more was spent on cheap cocoa, tea, coffee and food imported from outside of Europe in addition to recreational activities (such as sport). Thus, a society that focused on consumerism and amusement began to flourish (Hargreaves, 1993, pp. 53-66).

This trajectory continued. According to Weiss (1969, p. 192), for the past century people who were not part of the upper classes were able to use sport as a way to climb the social ladder. We can also draw comparisons to this in terms of gender. Weiss states that:

A rich man does not need to become a professional player. Since he has more leisure time than most, he also has more time to devote to sport. As a consequence, he may become an amateur athlete. Though there are many amateurs who have little money or status, and though there are many professionals whose earnings are fairly modest, by and large the line between amateur and professional is mainly a line between the unpaid members of a privileged class and the paid members of an underprivileged class.

Smart (2005 p. 43) asserts that “intrinsic to the development of modern sport is a process of transformation that led to recreational activities and pastimes becoming

formally organised, rule governed and regulated, as well as more competitive and serious". The author continues by stating that "the increasing seriousness of recreational activities and pastimes that were being steadily transformed into modern sports in part reflects the respects in which sport events with the popular cultural appeal to attract spectators were being recognised as having a commercial potential" (Smart 2005, p. 43).

Tennis is a key example of a sport where the divide between amateur and professional was felt significantly. According to Smart (2005, pp. 58-64), tennis clubs of the 19th century were attended by the socially exclusive members of society where the amateur gentlemen players frowned upon the professional as a socially inferior being. During this time, tennis clubs had employed groundsman who also offered advice to patrons for a small fee. This opened up new ways in which to play the game with a more aggressive style having been adopted by many and thereby attracting more youthful players to the sport.

Towards the end of the 19th century spectators began to be more interested in the sport, which resulted in the emergence of entry fees into tournaments. Further, the author maintains that tournaments became more international with Americans competing at Wimbledon and Englishmen travelling to the American Rhode Island tournament, thus exposing the sport to an international audience. Smart (2005, pp. 58-64) maintains that from the 1920s, the players' expenses increased, mainly due to travel which resulted in the payment of players to cover costs. As a result of this, the professionalisation of the sport was further solidified. This type of payment continued until the "Open"

tournaments in 1968. In relation to tennis, the term “open tournaments” refer to the tournament allowing people to qualify into the event before it begins (effectively a mini tournament pre-event), which allows some of the lower-ranked players an opportunity to compete on a larger stage (Simonsson, 2021). Today, professional sports such as tennis are international businesses, commodities and related corporations and governing bodies that hold powerful economic value and cultural significance (Smart, 2005, pp. 58-64). For example, according to Andrew Lisa of Go Banking Rates (2016), in 2015 Roger Federer was worth an estimated USD\$320 million and in 2015 had earned USD\$58 million in endorsements alone. In the same year, Maria Sharapova won USD\$145 million and had earned USD\$23 million in endorsements. Further, Tennis Australia made revenue of almost A\$255 million from the 2015 Australian Open (Carter, 2016), which increased to A\$320 million at the 2018 event (Sharma, 2019), showing that the sport is big business.

Traditionally, women in sport were often given the role of an admiring spectator of males during competitive sporting events (Hargreaves, 1993, p. 55). When women did participate in sports, they were required to adhere to the stereotypical views of women at the time. As Hargreaves (1993, pp. 53-66) states, during the late 19th century “women were obliged to show restraint, be refined and respectable, and conform at all times to the ‘ladylike’ modes of behaviour prescribed for them”. During the Victorian era, tennis was considered to be an appropriate sport for females to compete in, however they were tied to Victorian conventions of dress. This included full skirts, long-sleeved blouses that were high-necked and corsets. Further, they were required to maintain a decorative appearance (Cashmore, 2010).

These full outfits inhibited their performance. Various suggestions were put forward but challenged. For example, trousers were unacceptable as it was seen to debase male dominance and shorter skirts were viewed as indecent (Doughan and Gordon, 2006). French sportswoman Suzanne Lenglen was considered to be one of the greatest tennis players to have played the game and was known to steer away from convention. She won Wimbledon several times and turned professional in 1926 for a reported sum of \$100,000 to join a tour of players in the US that sports promoter Charles C Pyle organised (Smart, 2005). Despite tennis being an accepted bourgeois and feminine sport, Lenglen had to contend with a negative stereotype that related to professional sportswomen (Stewart, 2009). Lenglen was also renowned for her style. She often wore loose-fitting skirts that finished just below the knee with tops that exposed her arms. Although Lenglen defied the traditional mode of dress, her outfits ultimately had greater impact than her on-court prowess (Cashmore, 2010). The current crop of WTA Tour players are also subject to this phenomenon as their appearance often overrides sporting ability.

According to Woolum (1998), once tennis had solidified itself as a professional sport in the late 1960s, women were still treated unequally in relation to men, particularly in terms of prizemoney. The gender imbalance in tennis as a sport is highlighted by the rather provocative fact that the USLTA (the male-controlled governing body for tennis in the US at the time) failed to schedule any women's professional tournaments during 1970. Woolum (1998) states that this outraged leading tennis player Billie Jean King who, at the end of 1970, had helped set-up a separate tour for women (the Virginia Slims circuit now known as the WTA Tour). King's hard work appears to have paid off,

at least in terms of prize money, with the current WTA Tour players earning the same amount of prize money as men in the coveted Grand Slam events. However, it can be argued that the media's portrayal of these athletes is still debatable as they are often exploited and perceived as objects for a male gaze.

Gauntlett (2008) suggests that specifically in relation to the media, representation of gender has historically reinforced stereotypical norms. The Gauntlett (2008) maintains that throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, television shows in the US incorporated 20 to 35 per cent of female characters into their scripts and during the 1970s male characters tended to be portrayed as assertive and or aggressive, victorious and the decision-makers, whereas females were depicted as passive, supportive and weak. This was much the same in films and although there were many females who had important roles, they were often in need of saving or protection by their male co-stars. In magazines and advertising in the 1940s and 1950s, females were often advised on how to create a 'happy home' for their hard-working husbands and the importance of the housewife was regularly reinforced (Gauntlett, 2008).

From the 1990s and beyond, Gauntlett (2008) states that gender roles appeared to be more equal and less conventional. Television did not seem to conform as easily to the gendered stereotypes of men and women from the previous decades. The author uses the sitcom *Friends* as an example. In this television show, three men and three women co-existed as a friendship group rather than a family unit. The men, while given traditional models of masculinity were also gentle and sensitive. The women were still feminine in the traditional sense but also considered to be intelligent and 'non-

housewifey'. Gauntlett (2008) argues that despite this seemingly 'equal' relationship between genders, males in television shows were still generally the leading actor and political discussion still tended to be dominated by men. In relation to movies, Gauntlett (2008) claims that men and women seemed to have been scripted with similar skills. However, leading men still appear to outnumber leading women and much like the previous decades, men tend to be the heroic characters that save their female co-stars, who are required to be attractive by popular conventions. Although stereotypical notions of gender in advertising have said to have lessened, sexism today has become more varied, indirect and subtle. Nonetheless, driven by the cultural significance of fitness for the past 30 years, advertising has increasingly promoted images of toned women and men who are considered to be conventionally attractive (Gauntlett, 2008).

However, for Gill (2009, p. 1) another important dimension is an "extraordinary contradictoriness in the construction of gender in today's media". The author explains that:

Confident expressions of 'girl power' sit alongside reports of 'epidemic' levels of anorexia and body dysmorphia; graphic reports of rape are placed cheek by jowl with adverts for lap-dancing clubs and telephone sex lines; lad magazines declare the 'sex war' over, while reinstating beauty contests and championing new, ironic modes of sexism; and there are regular moral panics about the impact on men of the new, idealized male body imagery, while the re-sexualization of women's bodies in public space goes virtually unremarked upon.

Gill's views on gender and body image resonates with many female tennis players. In fact, former WTA Tour tennis player Zina Garrison told reporter Mark Hodgkinson in an interview for *The Telegraph* in 2007 that she was bulimic during much of her time spent on tour and that the pressure of females to look good can take its toll on players.

Garrison states that: "There's already the pressure to do well in the sport, and then there's more pressure to look good on-court, and then there's the pressure to look good for your sponsors, and in other pictures. That's tough". She continues by stating that "in tennis, as in all women's sport, there is a lot of talk about women's bodies. People are looking at your body the whole time". The article further discusses the public scrutiny over Serena Williams' body and the drastic weight loss of Slovakian player Daniela Hantuchova, who was alleged to have had anorexia (Hodgkinson, 2007).

Linking to this aspect, Cooky (2011, pp. 210-227) discusses the contradiction in gender construction in the media by drawing on the link between Maria Sharapova and 'girl power', which had particular potency in the 1990s to early 2000s. The author states that 'girl power' was designed to promote female empowerment through the consumption of popular culture. In this case, 'girl power' is evident in a Nike advertising campaign featuring Sharapova, titled 'Pretty' which arguably reproduced and challenged traditional notions of femininity simultaneously. According to Cooky (2011, pp. 210-227), the commercial shows Sharapova on her way to a tennis tournament and, en route, a host of admirers are filmed gawking at her. Sharapova then scornfully looks at her admirers, suggesting that she does not appreciate the attention she receives based on her looks. At the end of the commercial Sharapova is seen returning her opponent's serve with her famous grunt. The commercial constructed an image of Sharapova that acknowledges

her as a powerful athlete who should be appreciated for her athletic accomplishments. Cooky (2011, pp. 210-227) asserts that “Sharapova’s glaring distaste for her admirers’ sole appreciation of her beauty opens a symbolic space for Sharapova to reject the common practice wherein female athletes receive media attention primarily based on their appearance”. However, Cooky (2011) maintains that in the current era the empowerment of girls is now more commonly linked to sexuality or a ‘strip culture’ thus resulting in yet another shift. Interestingly though, Sharapova still links with brands and companies that promote beauty: for example, she became co-owner of skin care company, Supergoop in 2014 (Vogue, 2014). Therefore, it can be hypothesised that the female tennis players used in this study will have felt these shifts, contradictions and tensions which further complicate the shaping and maintenance of their personas.

This construction of gender and gender stereotyping is also continually reinforced within the sports that these athletes compete in, making this a powerful mix of ideologies that are constantly being promoted. For example, in artistic gymnastics both men and women perform floor routines on the same sized mat and are both judged on acrobatic ability, however the men are scored namely against athletic power and strength, whereas women’s overall score is affected by grace and elegance. Further, women must also showcase their skills to music and ensure that they wear the correct types of leotards, hairstyle and jewelry (Leong, 2018), which is not dissimilar to the focus that is often placed on the appearance of female tennis players.

More specifically related to this study is the relationship between the media, sport and the way in which gender is represented. According to Creedon (1994, pp. 1-5), “gender

values are at the core of the media system” and mediated sport is “an incredible source of information about gender values”. The author attests that “at the most fundamental level, gender even influences which games or activities are defined as ‘real’ (read ‘macho’) sports”.

In relation to men, Denham and Duke (2010, pp. 109-132) state that “mediated sport texts consistently reproduce traditional gender assumptions, idealizing a brand of masculinity grounded in strength and stamina, self-reliance, and sacrifice”. Whannel (2002, p. 10) asserts that there is a societal expectation for men to take an interest in sport, with the direct opposite being the presumption for women. However, when the opposite of these strongly held expectations occurs, each gender is seen to be somewhat abnormal. Whannel (2002, p. 10) states that “sport confers and confirms masculinity; an interest in sport problematizes femininity” and that “the social institutions, cultural practices and modes of representation associated with sport are still largely male-dominated”.

As previously mentioned, Kane and Greendorfer (1994, pp. 28-45) claim that the media portrayal of women reinforces stereotypical views of women and they are often marginalised and trivialised in the process. Interestingly, Razack and Joseph (2020) looked at Naomi Osaka and representations of her and the instances of anti-black misogyny. This study focused more on the representation of the athlete, although it does discuss Osaka’s resistance to some of the external representations of her through her own self-representation, being female and of Haitian and Japanese descent. Kane and Greendorfer (1994, pp. 28-45) also state that as sport is often associated with

physicality “it reproduces male physicality and strength”; hence males will be perceived to excel more in sports than females. Essentially, the physicality of the male body is seen to represent power and control unlike the female body, which is represented as submissive and fragile. They continue by maintaining that as a result of this thwarted representation of female athletes, the media “undermine their athletic achievements” and that “this type of media portrayal results in constructions of female athleticism as less than male athleticism”.

Perhaps the WTA Tour’s ‘Strong is Beautiful’ campaign was designed as a way in which to counter these stereotypical views of women. As the WTA (2014) states, the slogan was designed to “draw upon athleticism and grace” in promoting women’s tennis. This resonates with the previously mentioned notion of Butler (2006), who claims that gender is unstable yet performative and manufactured, which may be what the WTA Tour is attempting to do: to manufacture a new gender performance that forces us to reconsider the stereotypical notions of gender and conclude that females can be both ‘strong’ and ‘beautiful’.

In terms of persona, it can be argued that the tennis players used in the case study have to negotiate their persona in relation to what the WTA Tour are trying to promote, which adds to the complexity of constructing an identity. Further, the wider media’s representation of gender permeates with many stereotypical notions of sexual identity; and by playing sport, these female athletes have to continually negotiate their sense of self in a domain that has traditionally been considered for men. The professionalism of

sport has also further complicated the situation as female athletes are now vying for economic gain and are perhaps moulding their personas with this in mind.

Online Cultures

The internet links millions of people daily in virtual spaces and, according to Turkle (1995), this innovation has impacted on our lives from the way that we understand communities to the construction and essence of our own identities. Turkle (1995) continues by maintaining that for most of the world, the Internet forms part of a daily routine, from checking emails, booking airline tickets to posting ideas or even our most intimate thoughts to other people, many of whom we will never meet. Further, Turkle (1995) argues that the construction of our own identities features prominently when navigating our way through cyberspace and that the boundaries between the real and virtual are becoming blurred as we are able to establish and then re-establish our persona with relative ease.

According to Marshall (2014, pp. 160-161), the dominant form of media over the past 200 years was representational media. This includes books, newspapers, radio, film, magazines and television. Representational media was designed to represent a culture through stories, narratives and images. The author argues that this form of media is being superseded by presentational media. This category of media is “is performed, produced and exhibited by the individual or other collectives and not by the structure of representational media which is almost by definition large public and private media corporations” (Marshall 2014, p. 161). The growth of presentational media has been combined with the development of online applications that allow the user to produce

their own content and thereby provide an opportunity for self-expression through, for example, social networking sites. Despite this opportunity for users to utilise representational strategies that are perhaps less cultivated, they are still tied to a form of presentational media. In addition, the author asserts that “presentational media is also involved in the redirection of traditional media content so that it is blended with interpersonal chats, other images and a panoply of other kinds of content as it is shared across personal networks” (Marshall 2014, p. 161).

Slade (2015, p. ix) reinforces this change in media forms and discusses it in relation to fandom and television. She states that:

Social media has changed the face of fan cultures and how fans interact with and about the medium of television. Social media has brought about a revolution in fan culture, from fan uprisings to save programs to entire groups and pages dedicated to mourning lost programs and characters.

Arguably then, the same reactions can be considered in terms of fans of athletes and their now more intimate relationships with one another.

Erving Goffman, in his groundbreaking book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, writes about the ‘performance’ of individuals based on context. Goffman (1990, p. 26) states that “a ‘performance’ may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants”.

Goffman also discusses the regions that these performances take place in and distinguishes these by referring to them as ‘front stage’, meaning in the public view and ‘back stage’ that relates to the place away from the audience. The front stage is where

the 'actors' adorn their 'masks' and perform for the audience, whereas the backstage is where they can unmask themselves and relax. However, if an intruder enters the backstage the actor is required to perform again. Further, Goffman discusses the terms 'expressions given' and 'expressions given off'. 'Expressions given' relates to the verbal cues given when communicating whereas 'expressions given off' involves the actions that the individual conveys. Goffman (1990, p. 14) claims that as a result of this there may be some instances of misreporting. He states that "the individual does of course intentionally convey misinformation by means of both of these types of communication, the first involving deceit, the second feigning". The work of Goffman features heavily within thesis and will be discussed in more detail throughout the subsequent chapters.

There has been a significant amount of research into online identities [see Matic (2011); Paechter (2013); Papacharissi (2013); Marwick & Boyd (2011); and Lebel and Danylchuk (2012)]. One such example that relates closely to this research is Liam Bullingham and Ana Vasconcelos' (2013, pp. 101-112) paper titled 'The presentation of self in the online world': Goffman and the study of online identities'. In this paper the authors use Goffman's theories on self-presentation and apply them to the construction of online identities. The authors analysed the identity and interactions of 10 bloggers and Second Life inhabitants to compare their online presence to Goffman's theories. In their research findings, the authors affirm that most participants choose to represent themselves online fairly closely to their offline personas. They assert that this is aligned with Goffman's notion of the 'front stage' where we deliberately choose to adopt an identity. In addition, they state that there were numerous expressions 'given' by the case study participants which further corroborates with Goffman's theory of expressions

'given' and 'given off'. The respondents emphasised certain features of the self and at the same time minimised others, and thus creating an edited version of the self.

More specifically in relation to Social Networking Sites (SNS), Papacharissi (2013, p. 206) describes the complex nature of self-presentation on this online platform by stating that:

The process of self-presentation is complicated in the context of SNSs that combine a variety of audiences, of variable privacy or publicity, into a single crowd of spectators observing the same performance but from a variety of vantage points, depending on their relationship to the performing self. The individual must then engage in multiple mini performances that combine a variety of semiological references so as to produce a presentation of the self that makes sense to multiple audiences, without sacrificing coherence or continuity.

In doing these multiple mini performances and at the same time modifying each one, the author asserts that the boundaries of the public and private become blurred.

In terms of celebrity, the stars of today are considered to be 'extra-textual' beings (Marshall, 2014); that is, their mediated existence is beyond what they are famous for. Arguably, the emergence of new technologies has facilitated this by way of sharing more 'private' and personal information. According to Marshall (2010, pp. 35-48), the performance of these celebrities is crucial to the identity of any public figure. The author states that "celebrities perform in their primary art form-as actors, musicians, singers, athletes – as well as the extra-textual dimensions of interviews, advertisements/commercial endorsements, award nights and premieres". The author

claims that celebrities are reconstructing their persona for the online medium. He argues that social media such as Facebook and Twitter facilitate “a construction of character for a kind of ritual of the performance of the self” and that “it is highly conscious of a potential audience as much as it is a careful preening and production of the self”.

Alice Marwick and Danah Boyd (2011, pp. 139-158) conducted a study on the performance of celebrity on Twitter in their article titled ‘To See and be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter’. The authors state that celebrity is an “organic and ever-changing performative practice rather than a set of intrinsic personal characteristics or external labels”. Additionally, it involves “ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona”. In addition, the authors maintain that the terrain for those who are famous is complex and tricky. Further, the supposed detachment from a famous person’s public persona and ‘authentic’ self is inflamed by outside media such as tabloid magazines that publish the views of gossip columnists who claim to reveal what the particular celebrity is ‘really’ like. Hence, the influence of PR agents, assistants and bodyguards are employed to help the star manoeuvre their way through this territory and act as an agent between the celebrity and fan.

In relation to sport, the notion of a consumable persona as stated by Marwick and Boyd (2011, pp. 139-158) is further investigated by Colapinto and Benecchi (2014, pp. 219-233). They argue that technology has significantly moulded athletic culture so much that digital technology has enhanced the traditional media and sport relationships and

established the rise of the internet and social media as “strategic communication platforms”. Thompson et al. (2017), who explored fans' perception of social media events and used the Grand Slam tennis tournaments as a case study to investigate their responses to the events, also highlights this notion of social media as being “strategic communication platforms”. Colapinto and Benecchi (2014, pp. 219-233) claim that “the behaviour and the statements of an athlete can affect the related sponsor and this explains why the social media profile is not a personal entertainment tool, but a window acting as a commercial”. However, as Hutchins and Rowe (2012) state, sometimes athletes can encounter “*information accidents*” so if they commit a social faux pas, they can be publicly ridiculed and thereby damage their public identity. This can have devastating implications for the athlete in terms of endorsements, sponsorships and public notoriety.

Social media is an additional dynamic in the contemporary mix of conditions. Lebel and Danylchuk (2012, pp. 461-480) discuss how Twitter has altered traditional views of the fan-athlete relationship with fans now being under the impression that they can gain direct access to their sports heroes. They claim that for the athletes “there is power in the direct communication that Twitter affords – it allows athletes to exert more control over their identity and public presentation”. Interestingly, and relevant to this research, the authors have conducted a content analysis of all professional tennis players’ tweets for a period of time surrounding the 2011 US Open. They used Goffman’s dramaturgical analogies to compare these to the athletes’ tweets. The main focus of the study was to discover how male and female tennis players choose to present themselves via Twitter and how their presentational strategies vary based on their gender. The study found

that the male athletes were followed by more people and were more influential as the producers of content. In addition, athletes were more inclined to be 'backstage' performers and thereby allowing more intimate access to the private self. Further, male athletes were seen to be presenting themselves as 'sports fans' and women were more inclined to put more effort into managing their brand (Lebel and Danylchuk, 2012, p. 475).

Capturing these changes, Marshall (2014, pp. 153-170) has developed the term 'micropublics' to define the development of the new public persona. Marshall (2014, pp. 153-170) states that "micropublics identify a newer duality: these are the followers and friends that are connected to a range of content via a particular individual that is simultaneously a 'private' network, but regularly and publicly updated and responded to in the tradition of broadcast and print media forms that makes it a quasi-public network". Marshall (2014, pp. 153-170) refers to Ashton Kutcher, who became famous from his role in *That '70s Show* to highlight the fusion between the presentational and representational. Kutcher used Twitter to 'tweet' what was supposedly personal and intimate details of his life and his media profile was so prolific that he was regularly commented on in representational media. Marshall (2014, pp. 153-170) continues by stating that "even more interesting is how Kutcher has been complicit in thinking through how the new forms of social media change the balances of power and connection to a wider group of players".

Not dissimilar to Kutcher, the agency that one individual subject has over their mediated self is central to the way in which we understand the construction of the female tennis

player's persona. With PR agents, governing bodies and sponsors at the helm of the vast majority of female tennis players, it is questionable as to how much these players are actually involved in constructing their personas. In addition, the representational media also contribute to this construction and thus reinforce the notion of a micropublic.

Although many of the points that have been raised by Lebel and Danylchuk, 2012; Marshall 2014; and Kutcher 2014, are relevant to this study, they do not specifically focus on the goal of the research; that is, the negotiation between the media and the person and its impact on the shaping and constructing persona. In addition, the study aims to use the female tennis players as a means to understand how much power people have in shaping their personas and how their persona changes when they become celebrities, which is lacking in the current literature. However, it is evident that the emergence of new technologies such as the internet and social networking applications has had a significant effect on the construction of the self. The complexity of self-representation and identity construction has increased since the proliferation of online media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook. The review of the literature shows that celebrities like tennis stars today either conform or reject their portrayal as depicted in more traditional forms of media. This is combined with their online representation, which makes for a complex amalgamation. The agency one has over their identity construction and how this becomes mediated in the online environment proves most interesting to this case study considering the power that outside forces (such as PR agents) have over celebrities. The question is how the power shifts, if at all, when people move from a relatively unknown status to celebrity and what effect this has on their individual public persona.

Self-Branding

It is important to begin this section on self-branding with a discussion of the terms 'agent' and 'agency'. According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (2002, p. 41), an agent is "a person who or thing which produces an effect; (the cause of) a natural force or effect on matter". 'Agency' is defined as an "active operation or action", "intervening action towards an end" or "an action personified; a source of action towards an end". In relation to the study, there are two 'agents' at play operating under two different paradigms. The 'agent' is the PR representative or the manager but also the celebrity or professional athlete. 'Agency' refers to the companies, sponsors or media institutions but the celebrities and athletes too. Both relate to the power that they possess in terms of the representation of the famous person. Latour, in his book *Science in Action* (1987), states that the actions of individuals always occur within shared actions and that we must consider actors in a broader sense. That is, we are to separate our dominant idea of subject and object as different entities. This is an interesting parallel of two interrelated terms and offers insight into the construction of a mediated identity while at the same time questioning who has real 'agency' in this process.

According to Turner (2014), celebrities are constructed with a view to make money. He claims that their images and names are used to market myriad different consumable items. Further, media executives are well aware of this influence and are eager to have them involved in projects to attract audience attention. However, Turner (2014) argues

that the celebrity as an individual also can develop their own persona to be a commercial asset and make career choices that are committed to that intention.

Furthering this point, Cashmore (2006, pp. 6-12) argues that celebrities are heavily reliant on presence (for example, appearing on television shows, advertisements and in magazines) to maintain their position in the “celebrity labour market” and while consumers are interested in them they will continue to keep their celebrity status. In addition, the author also states that celebrities are essentially “walking advertisements” and that “celebrity culture is at one with commodification – the process whereby everything, including public figures, can be converted into an article of trade to be exchanged in the marketplace”.

Piazza (2011, pp. 15-16) discusses the value of celebrities, claiming that “as with any commodity, a celebrity’s value is determined in the marketplace by the consumer”. In terms of branding and what Piazza (2011, pp. 15-16) describes as *brand value*, the author states that “a brand is all of that intangible stuff that makes consumers want a commodity. A celebrity’s price depends on how the consumer views their brand”. This is particularly interesting in relation to the female tennis players in this case study.

Considering that celebrities must create their brand essentially to be sold to a massive public, it can be argued that this would significantly evolve throughout their careers.

Those starting their foray into professional tennis might envisage what brands they wish to endorse and how they want their own brand to be formed. For mid-career players, their brand must be sustained by continually maintaining a mediated presence (as Cashmore (2006) notes). This ensures their longevity in the spotlight and regular cash-

flow. Those who have retired are then able to reflect on the success of their brand and if in retirement they are still a consumable product.

In terms of the public and their connectedness to celebrities, Thompson (2006, pp. 104-119) discusses the rapport that consumers have with *human brands*. According to the author, this term refers to any well-known person who is publicly visible and represented by marketers. Celebrities become a *human brand* as they “can be professionally managed and because they have additional associations and features of a brand”. The author states that by creating strong attachments with consumers, the marketers and celebrities are able to construct a perceived interpersonal relationship with consumers. Antonovica and de Estiban Curiel (2016) also investigated this through analysing the marketing of Rafael Nadal and consumer response to his brand endorsement.

Thompson (2006, pp. 104-119) claims that people often feel as though these celebrities or *human brands* form part of their close circle of friends. This is important to ensure brand loyalty. Arguably, this is an important consideration for the female tennis players in this case study when constructing their personas. If they are able to construct their persona in a way that provides an assumed closeness to their fans, they will be able to reap the benefits in terms of notoriety in addition to monetary gains.

The connection between celebrities, brands and consumers can be linked to the notion of parasocial relationships. This refers to evolution of psychological connectedness that audiences have with celebrities or other mediated personas. Celebrities who develop parasocial relationships with audiences are then often viewed as a reference group, and as such, can influence customer values, judgements and emotions (Aw & Labrecque

(2022, p.2). This in itself highlights the importance of the celebrity brand and the link between fans and celebrities to ensure the longevity and reliability of their endorsement.

Marwick (2013, p. 192) discusses how the emergence of the internet has changed self-presentation and self-branding. Marwick (2013, p. 192) states that “self-presentation (or self-branding) involves marketing strategies to sell the self, and since internet media are more accessible in a way that television or radio advertising is not, social media allows for a level of strategic, business-focused identity construction that would otherwise be impossible”. This further correlates with Lebel and Danylchuk’s (2012, pp. 461-480) findings that female tennis players were more inclined to put effort into managing their brand online. Arguably then, the female tennis players in this case study are acutely aware of the importance of managing their brand, particularly online, and shape their personas to ensure that their performance of the self is aligned with this, thus creating continuity.

In today’s climate, athletes are considered to be highly consumable brands. O’Reilly and Braedley (2008) claim that they are able to combine sporting prowess with lucrative sponsorships and endorsements that are worth millions of dollars. O’Reilly and Braedley (2008) state that celebrity athletes are much the same as other consumers insofar that meaning for them is mostly created from objects, people and places around them that are combined to create their own image. This is of interest to consumers as it is seen to be exclusive and unique. In addition, O’Reilly and Braedley (2008) assert that celebrity athletes also seek to differentiate themselves by creating their own trademark that will be recognised solely as their own brand. It is also important to note that endorsements

and sponsorships are a major source of income for celebrity athletes: thus, constructing a consumable persona is important (O'Reilly and Braedley, 2008).

Maria Sharapova is a prime example of an athlete who not only has succumbed to commoditisation process but has personally benefited financially from self-branding. In 2012, Sharapova earned \$23 million in endorsement and appearance fees and, until her retirement in 2020, was one of the world's highest paid female athletes. The celebrity athlete launched a new line of candy called 'Sugarpova' in 2013. To coincide with the launch of her new business venture, Sharapova announced to the world's press that she was considering changing her name to 'Sugarpova' for the two weeks of the 2013 US Open. Shortly after, she changed her mind and kept her real name (Toor, 2013). Although likely a publicity stunt that was the brainchild of various media agents, the incident brings up an interesting point about self-branding on how it can alter one's persona. If Sharapova had in fact changed her name, she would have essentially morphed into the product itself that would take self-branding into a divergent space. Further, it resonates with Marshall's (1997) notion of celebrities as 'extra-textual' beings with Sharapova being famous for other reasons than her sporting ability.

As evidenced, self-branding plays an important role in the construction of one's persona. While the various media and marketing institutions are, for the most part, responsible for a celebrity's brand, the individual does have some power in this process. It is important to understand that celebrities and celebrity athletes are brands in and of themselves and are sold in a marketplace much like any other commodity. Therefore, strategic decisions must be made by both the celebrity and their team of marketers to

ensure that both the products they endorse and their own brand are aligned with the persona that the celebrity is to present to the public. Consumers are therefore made to feel a connection with the star, thus creating more revenue for the products endorsed and the popularity of the celebrity. This research into self-branding is therefore critical to the investigation of female tennis professionals' personas and the strategies deployed in the various stages of their careers to maintain an economic and exchangeable value.

Summary

The construction of persona is complicated and multifaceted. Once a person becomes mediated (for example, celebrities and professional athletes) the complexity of 'self'-manufacturing increases significantly. The mediated persona of an individual sits centrally in an intricate web that intersects with many areas that play a role in manufacturing persona. The performance of these individuals is interesting insofar that they are required to maneuver their way around how they want to see themselves represented and how outside forces (for example the media) represent them. There is a constant tension and dialogue between the individual, the public and media along with its various institutions. Further, the values that underpin society also form part of this web. Considering the elaborateness and amount of input that other people or organisations have in constructing one's persona, it is questionable as to how much power the person involved has.

In relation to the female tennis players that are the subject of this study, it is important to understand the outside forces that have the power to shape or control one's persona. This question, concerned with persona and relations of power, is a central focus of this

review of the current literature and in this, the relationship that sport and the media have is key to a deeper understanding. The commercialisation and commodification of sport has impacted greatly on how we perceive sport culturally (Rowe, 2004). The way in which the female tennis players' personas develop is altered as they have initially gone from relatively 'unknowns' to now having the gaze of the media and a mass audience thrust upon them. In the transition, players who have left the ITF Tour and advanced to the highly mediated WTA Tour, the shift in persona would be particularly noticeable.

Hence, the media and sport continually reproduce stereotypical notions and assumptions of gender (Denham and Duke, 2010, pp. 109-132). The female tennis players interviewed are situated in a space traditionally upheld by men and the media often maintain these values by trivialising and stereotyping female athletes (Kane and Greendorfer 1994, pp. 28-45). The female tennis players involved in this case study are required to perform in an arena that has been traditionally oppressive for women. The impact that notions of gender and their relationship with the sport and the media is vast as these female athletes are having to continually negotiate their own self-impression in a space that has for so long considered them to be secondary to men.

The celebrity status that athletes now subscribe to also plays a vital role in how these female tennis players' personas are moulded. Celebrities are now considered to be 'extra-textual' (Marshall, 1997) and in order to be tennis "celebrities" these athletes are also becoming famous well beyond their on-court achievements. These female tennis players, combined with their media and PR teams, are required to uphold this celebrity status to continue their popularity and ensure financial gains well beyond their tennis

careers. This would undoubtedly be carefully considered prior to the athletes' participation in the more mediated WTA Tour and then continually negotiated and renegotiated as they continue their careers.

The rise of online cultures and the emergence of presentational media has impacted on the way that we present ourselves and construct our identity (Marshall 2014, pp. 153-170). Considering the team of people that are involved in the manufacturing of the celebrity and athlete persona, it is important to question how much power the individual possesses or, at the very least, think they possess in constructing their own self.

This study allows for a closer look at the different kinds of self-projection and how various factors influence this, namely those related to the media. Its premise is that tennis is a highly mediated sport and that the relationship between the media and female tennis players is constantly being negotiated. Female tennis players must continuously perform in various spaces with a fluid and always changing persona. This chapter has explored the various academic traditions that help in understanding this root construction of their persona or public self by female tennis professionals.

However, there is a fundamental difference between the academic literature and the inside perspective that this research of this thesis can provide. Using the current literature that is available as it relates to persona, I am able to extend on the concepts and ideas of scholars who have previously written on the themes outlined in the literature review and the themes guiding this research, as specified in the introduction. I am able to provide a more holistic analysis through my own experiences, the insider perspective and using the current literature as a guide, or the outsider's perspective, to

navigate the complexity of persona construction. Further, my relationship with some of the key stakeholders in Australian tennis has allowed me to gather information from within the confines of the sport and project these throughout the analysis. This dual mode of analysis is something that has not previously been conducted, thus making this study valuable in the area of persona studies.

A real advantage of this study is this investigation of tennis personas is completely new and has not been tackled until now. Through this literature review I have brought together how personas are created through looking at works by previous scholars in relation to celebrity, gender, media, sport and online cultures. Within these works, the closest link we get is from outsider perspectives – those who are analysing this phenomenon through the lens of an outsider. These works are not specifically tied to persona development nor are they explicitly linked to the development of female tennis players' personas.

Some of these more recent works include Thompson et al. (2017) who explores fans' perception of social media events and used the Grand Slam tennis tournaments as a case study to investigate this. This is clearly an example of an outsider perspective and focuses on the fans, rather the player. Antonovica and de Estiban Curiel (2016) investigated the marketing of Rafael Nadal and consumer response to his brand endorsement. Again, this type of investigation forms part of my research in terms of branding, but doesn't discuss its impact on persona. Razack and Joseph (2020) looked at Naomi Osaka and representations of her and the instances of anti-black misogyny. This study focused more on the representation of the athlete, although it does discuss

Osaka's resistance to some of the external representations of her through her own self-representation. Razack and Joseph's (2020) study is the most closely linked to my work; however, it does not tackle the impact that the external representations and Osaka's self-representation has on her persona.

There are gaps within the literature. As I have mentioned, my work contains an additional pillar in building new knowledge as I am able to investigate the development of female tennis players' personas through the lens of both an insider and outsider. This type of original analysis is lacking, and I have not been able to draw upon previous research. Further, my research is targeted and specific; that is, I look closely at Australian female tennis players. This specific research focus ensures that the investigation was able to be managed and contained within the confines of this thesis. However, this highlights the fact that further research and investigation can be conducted into how the persona of other athletes in mediated sports is developed and how much control they are able to have during this process.

Chapter Two: Methods

Qualitative methods were selected in the investigation of the construction of persona of female tennis players. As Priest (2010, p. 6) states, qualitative methods allow us to “explore and assess things that cannot easily be summarised numerically”. Priest (2010, p. 6) asserts that this method of analysis relies heavily on the interpretation and analysis of the dynamics within society, unlike the quantitative methods that use more numerical measurements. Thus, the approach for this study is best suited to the qualitative method of textual analysis and infused within this method of analysis has been the implementation of autoethnography, interviews, interpretative phenomenology and semiotic analysis.

Autoethnography is an approach to research that encompasses personal background as a way to understand cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011). The research I have conducted is heavily informed by this approach through each of the chapters. This approach is what I have referred to as the inside/outside perspective. I have used my own personal experience and attempted to make meaning of the texts that I have analysed, while being informed of my past experiences.

During the process of ethnographic research, the researcher studies common values, beliefs, cultural practices and shared experiences in the hope of helping cultural insiders and outsiders (Ellis et al., 2011). As the insider, this research has allowed me to further understand the phenomena that occurs when young female tennis players are catapulted into a complicated world of institutionalised and mediatised sport. As I have previously mentioned, this has been a cathartic experience into understanding how this

sport shaped me and my own path in developing a persona for myself. Further, in terms of the outside perspective, it has enabled me to share some of these insights to a wider audience that may not have been aware of the control that external forces have when it comes to persona creation and development. The two perspectives together become a fusion of research that benefits both the cultural affiliate and the cultural outsider.

While my overarching research method is autoethnographic, I actually implement a more targeted approach to this thesis. I use what is described as evocative autoethnography. This approach refers to a more introspective focus that attempts to allow the reader to form greater connections with the researcher's feelings and lived experiences (Mendez, 2014). The way in which I demonstrate this approach is by attempting to take the reader on what could be considered a 'tour' of the phenomenon that I attempt to describe. This is why I have chosen to investigate such a wide variety of directions – to give the reader a more complete 'tour' of the outward influence that tennis players are subject to in the development of their personas through the analysis of tournament grounds, institutions and representations through various media platforms.

Hannigan (2014) used autoethnography as a way to investigate place and identity using her own practice as a visual artist. In her work titled *Narrative Inquiry and Auto-Ethnography: Interpretive Approaches to Research*, Hannigan (2014) analysed her own artworks that revolved around place and identity and then wrote from different contexts of her past. She then used this work as a way to further understand smaller stories. Hannigan's (2014) method shares a similarity to mine. We have both written from an

internal perspective but, unlike Hannigan, I have used this research to try to further my understanding of the larger social context related to mediatised sporting personas.

While the approach of autoethnography is used throughout each of the chapters in this thesis, it was most prevalent and useful in the observations, interview and institutions chapters. During the observations chapter I wrote as a participant observer during the 2015 Australian Open, meaning that I have had experience as both a participant as player and observer through my immersive observations. Having an insider perspective was valuable in my writing of the institution's chapter, as I was involved in Tennis Australia, the ITF and WTA as a player. Given I had played in the Australian Open, and worked there and at Tennis Australia respectively, I am able to apply my knowledge of the player/employee (insider) and spectator (outsider) throughout my analysis which, as previously mentioned, is something that has not been done until now.

The ethnographic approach has informed the textual analysis and serves as an important overarching methodological approach. As Syrjälä & Norrgrann (2018) state, during the practice of autoethnographic research, the self-narratives of researchers are able to provide insight into various experiences or ideas that may not usually be accessible or may be difficult to obtain. Without this dual perspective, this research would not have been possible. That is, I would not have been able to provide internal insight for my external observations, but more practically, I may not have been able to gain the access that I did to players and the 2015 Australian Open. I have no doubt that I was granted access to the 2015 Australian Open grounds, backstage areas and players because of my history as a player and as an employee of Tennis Australia. This

is a valuable aspect of my research and a key point of differentiation between my work and other similar research in this area.

Textual Analysis

Another important pillar in my approach to my research design is textual analysis.

Textual analysis enables me to explore the media's representation of female tennis players in general, the organisations that female tennis players are involved with, via observations and the players analysed throughout the insight chapters. The interviews with both current female tennis players, a past player and now media commentator, as well as a tennis coach allow for a comparison and greater insight into how much control one has over the construction of their own persona. Further, during these interviews, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is a qualitative research method that aims to provide a comprehensive investigation into the personal experiences of people (Smith and Shinebourne, 2012), was used as an approach to the analysis of the interviews conducted. These two methods provide a framework in which to compare different ways that identity is constructed and how the media plays an active role in the construction of persona. Through this analysis, the power the individual has in this process can be effectively interrogated.

The key elements of my textual analysis are concerned with place, activity, people and media stories. Place and the meaning made by people when related to a location and is investigated through the observational analysis which was conducted on the grounds of the 2015 Australian Open and through the analysis of institutions. Activity also relates to the observations analysis: this was investigated through my analysis of the activities or

events that took place on the grounds of the 2015 Australian Open which included observing players during their matches and press conferences for three days (22 January, 31 January and 1 February, 2015). During these observations I made notes as I toured the grounds and linked these to experiences or thoughts that I could draw on from my time playing at the event. The institutions chapter is also concerned with activity insofar that there is an analysis of the actions of institutions and how they interact with female tennis players. The investigation of people and their own stories is most prominent during the persona and performance interview and Twitter chapters; however, there is still an element of this that can be seen through the observation of players on-court and during their press conferences at the 2015 Australian Open. Media stories as the overarching subject matter have been analysed through several of the chapters and looks closely at the way that the media frame stories, which can impact on how persona is created and the way that players represent themselves can come into conflict with external representations. These include the work contained in the:

- performance and persona chapter;
- Channel 7 news analysis chapter;
- the chapter devoted to Twitter usage by players;
- the post-research analysis chapter; and
- the institutions chapter.

These chapters rely heavily on the analysis of printed, social media and visual stories, institutions that players are affiliated with and players. The analysis can be compared to that of a triangular mode of investigation. That is, I recorded observations and then

formulated links to research and my own experience of the phenomenon before me.

This method allowed for a more complete analysis that encompassed more than the usual text and researcher mode of analysis that doesn't draw on personal experience.

Textual analysis is primarily concerned with the cultural and political connotations derived from representations. It examines "the formal internal features and contextual location of a text to ascertain what readings or meanings can be obtained from it" (Hartley, 2011, p. 246). According to McKee (2014, pp. 31-43), textual analysis seeks the evidence that people produce throughout the course of daily living about how they make sense of the world around them. In terms of conducting a textual analysis, the author states that "when we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an informed guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text, in order to help us understand how the people producing and consuming that text make sense of the world". The observational analysis conducted is a prime example of how textual analysis enabled interpretation and informed guesses surrounding the 2015 Australian Open grounds and how they can play a role in shaping the persona of female tennis players (in Chapter 6).

The textual analysis approach is also beneficial to this study as it allows me to investigate the way in which humans create meaning through their interactions with one another. As Fairclough (2003, p. 10) states, "part of what is implied in approaching texts as elements of social events is that we are not only concerned with texts as such, but also with interactive processes of meaning-making". The element of social events is important when looking at the organisations as a mode of meaning making. The control

of female tennis players that these organisations yield and their interactivity with the athletes when developing persona seeks to develop a deeper understanding of this process.

At this point it is important to note that my textual analysis is fundamentally different from the usual form of this type of approach. As previously mentioned, the textual analysis I employ has a two-tier perspective of the insider/outsider. Ordinarily a textual analysis helps to understand social meanings and representations by looking deeper at particular texts. In my case, I am able to do this, but with the added benefit of previous inside knowledge of the institutions, events and people whom I am analysing, having spent many years interacting with the subjects. This provides a more holistic approach that has not been as apparent in other research.

Kersen (2016) discusses the inside/outside perspective in his paper titled 'Insider/Outsider: The Unique Nature of the Sociological Perspective and Practice' and problematises the issue of perception relating to sociologists and their role in research and addresses this via the inside/outside perspective. Kersen (2016) states that in order for the wider public to fully understand the role of sociologists, sociologists need to work with those on the outside to link the two worlds of insiders and outsiders. Practically, this means using the insider perspective by working together with outsiders to form a more accurate understanding of the role that sociologists play in research and understanding society.

Iqani (2012) used textual analysis to interpret consumer media in her book *Consumer Culture and the Media: Magazines in the Public Eye*. Iqani (2012) states that this

approach was used to highlight two key ideas. Firstly, the idea that “all media texts are socially embedded, and their analysis thus needs to be contextualised within an understanding of the power relations that shape texts and the intertextual plurality of social life” (Iqani 2012, p. 49). Secondly, the notion that “consumer media texts are multimodal, and their analysis must thus take into account various elements as well as the verbal and visual” (Iqani 2012, p. 49). This is precisely what my research aims to prove: that is, a multi-faceted approach to analysing the way in which female tennis players’ personas are constructed and that social norms and ideals play a key role in this construction of the self.

Pirinen (1997) conducted a study on the construction of women’s position in sport by using textual analysis of articles on female athletes in women’s magazines. It focused on the way in which Finnish athletes were treated by women’s magazines and how media representations construct hierarchical relations. The study consisted of an analysis of 82 articles on female athletes and were selected from five Finnish magazines. The study concluded that magazine texts serve as a way in which disempowering and empowering positions for women can be constructed and that the nature of hierarchical relations are complicated. This study is a solid example of how the researcher can draw informed conclusions based on the analysis of texts and how this relates to cultural systems. Much like Pirinen’s (1997) study, through the textual analysis in this thesis, it becomes apparent that the systems of society are complex and must be carefully navigated to understand better in order to ensure that female tennis players have an opportunity to control their own self-projection.

Semiotic, interpretive and critical analyses play a central role throughout the textual inquiry. Weerakkody (2009) discusses the differences between each of these forms of analysis. She further states that semiotic analysis attempts to uncover the more profound meanings of messages through the relationships between signs and their meanings (Weerakkody 2009). Interpretive analysis allows for the development of theories related to how people 'do' things and what they achieve during this process. It uses observation and coding of messages to achieve this. Finally, Weerakkody (2009) states that critical analysis centres on looking at various media messages to focus on what may be amiss with them, how they link to societal power relations and how and why they should be altered.

This form of analysis has been successfully used by María del Mar Rubio-Hernández (2011) in her paper titled 'Sports players: the heroes of the mediated sacred sphere'. Rubio-Hernández (2011) focuses on Rafael Nadal and the players of the national Spanish soccer team to analyse how they are depicted as national heroes in advertising. In her findings, she attests that in terms of sacred worship, sport has eclipsed religion as a result of its eminence within popular culture and that the media plays a vital role in this representation of sports stars. This approach informs my research by looking closely at how the media represent athletes and major sporting events and, in our case, the 2015 Australian Open through analysis of the Channel 7 news items and through the immersion at the 2015 Australian Open during my time spent at the event and is also prevalent in the performance and persona chapter.

Khomutova and Channon (2015) used semiotic analysis as part of their investigation into the representation of female athletes in the Legends Football League (formally known as the LFL: Lingerie Football League). The authors used semiotic analysis to study commentary and visuals in 26 LFL matches that were broadcast in 2013. The study found that the representation of these female athletes was conflicting and would oscillate between sexualised and powerful athletic representations. This is what we tend to see in the representation of female tennis players. There is a normative social influence that takes place in the representation of female athletes.

Durett and Wolff (1994) conducted a study to examine how athletes become heroes. The authors surveyed 64 readers of *L'Equipe*, a French daily sports newspaper. They conclude that “champions are distinguished not only by their results, but also by their virtue, and become real heroes only if they are able, whether through defeat or victory, to win our esteem” (Durett and Wolff, 1994, p. 144). Durett and Wolff (1994, p. 145) also found that by using semiological analysis they were able to “attribute a meaning to the associations revealed by analysing the correlations”. This again reinforces the importance of how semiotic analysis can provide great insight into how the persona of female tennis players is somewhat dependent on meaning that they generate, but also in terms of how wider society generates meaning. This has a direct impact on how persona is constructed.

A range of texts are used to analyse the way that female tennis players create and manage their personas. The representations of female tennis players are explored further by an analysis of the Twitter pages of four Australian female tennis players

during the 2014/2015 summer season of tennis using TrISMA, that enabled me to acquire the tweets of players from Twitter which were downloaded into spreadsheet that was subsequently analysed. TrISMA – Tracking Infrastructure for Social Media Analysis - is a tracking platform that enables researchers to access and track public communication by subscribing to major social media data sources (QUT Digital Media Research Centre, 2022). This analysis was conducted during a one-month period prior to the 2015 Australian Open, during the event and one month after its completion. The “informed guess” in this instance, as stated by McKee (2014, p. 31-43), which involves predicting the most likely interpretations of the text, is that the players themselves have little agency over their own representations and it is hypothesised that this impacts significantly on their own attempt to construct a persona.

An insight chapter has been included as an addition to the textual analysis within this study. This insight chapter focuses on a comparison that encompasses a historical understanding of persona development by comparing the 19th-century dandy to Serena Williams as a way to historically position persona development and contrast it with a highly mediated athlete. This chapter has been written post data analysis, as a way to extend on the ideas that have been generated from the study and to gain further understanding of the phenomenon associated with persona construction. Further, this chapter also serves as an entrée into other areas for research exploration and extend on how the development of persona can be applied in different forms of analysis. The textual analysis is also informed by autoethnography given my association with the sport and the insights I have gained from playing high-level tennis. In addition, there is an element of institutional and media analysis here with the discussions based around

the institutions that are associated with female tennis players and how the media represents mediated female tennis players.

Germane to this, Neman (2015), discussed the communication styles of celebrities with a focus on their speech via Twitter. Neman (2015) found that celebrities used Twitter as the main mode of public relations. He states that Twitter was used predominantly for promotional purposes; however, celebrities do use this method of communication to interact with fans, friends and family and will use different speech depending on the audience that they are addressing. This is a clear example of the way that celebrities negotiate their identities to conform with the persona that they are attempting to produce; and it justifies the importance of analysing the Twitter usage of Australian female tennis players within this study.

Interviews

Interviews are an additional pillar to the textual method of research. A total of four interviews were conducted with information-rich subjects. The decision to utilise a smaller number of interviewees was to continue with the autoethnographic theme and also draw on personal experiences throughout the interview process. Each interviewee was known to me personally, and as such, resulted in a more intimate discussion throughout each interview. Further, the interviews were conducted at length, with each interview taking approximately forty minutes. This created an in-depth discussion with each subject. The interviews consisted of two players at the beginning of their careers, a retired player and a coach/manager of female tennis players. This provided an invaluable opportunity to discuss first-hand how those within the sport see the

construction of persona of female tennis players and the way in which it changes and develops over a period of time.

According to Berger (2011, pp. 135-155), interviews allow us to acquire information that cannot be otherwise obtained through observations. The author states that they are generally a conversation between a *researcher* (someone who seeks information relating to a particular subject) and an *informant* (someone who presumably holds information relating to a subject of interest). When conducting interviews for research we are able to “find out about people’s ideas, their thoughts, their opinions, their attitudes, and what motivates them by talking to them and asking the right questions” (Berger, 2011, pp. 135-155).

Berger (2011) discusses four types of interviews that are found in academic research. These are: informal interviews, unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews. Firstly, informal interviews are non-focused and are normally conversations that are had between the researcher and informant. This method is usually employed by the researcher to gain the confidence and trust of the informant. Secondly, unstructured interviews relate to an interview that is still focused; however, the researcher exercises little control over the informant’s responses. Thirdly, in semi-structured interviews the researcher relies on a list of questions that he/she has developed, but tries to maintain the casual nature of an unstructured interview. Finally, a structured interview is more controlled as the researcher uses an interview schedule. This is a specific set of guidelines that are used to lead the researcher to ask respondents for answers to questions (Berger, 2011).

As the interview needs to have some focus and containment, informal and unstructured interviews do not suffice. Structured interviews are less likely to elicit extended responses and are too controlled. Therefore, the type of interview best suited to this study is a semi-structured interview as it provides some continuity in terms of questioning. It also allows the informants to elaborate on their responses and provides opportunity to expand on different points that may be of interest to the study. Further, due to my involvement in the sport and my relationship with the interviewees, I was often already aware of some of their points, which enabled me to guide the interview to a much deeper level than would have otherwise been possible.

To investigate the process used by advertising agencies to select celebrity endorsers, Erdogan and Baker (2000) conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 advertising agencies in the UK. Erdogan and Baker (2000) chose this approach as they identified a gap in the academic literature in relation to the process advertisers follow when selecting celebrity endorsers. The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews is mirrored in this thesis as there is little information available about how tennis players and those within the sport view the development and management of personas. In terms of Erdogan and Baker's (2000) work, managers of advertising companies were interviewed to discuss their process in the selection of celebrity endorsers. It was found that while there is a process, this is generally informal and unwritten. Generally speaking, celebrities were considered based on factors such as popularity, availability and credibility, which actually echoes the sentiments of how sports celebrities can be viewed which will be discussed in later chapters.

Below are the guiding questions used during the interview process:

Guiding Questions

Sponsorships/Endorsements:

1. What brands are you currently sponsored by (if any)?
2. Why have you chosen to take sponsorships/endorsements from these particular brands (if applicable)?
3. What brand do you think would be most closely identifiable with you? Why?
4. How do you think sponsorships have helped/ will help you shape your identity?
5. Who sources/sourced your sponsorships/endorsements?
6. Have you had any sponsorships/endorsements in your career that you felt were not truly representative of you? If so, why did you choose to endorse it?

Presentational Media: Online/SNS

1. Do you use any online platforms to endorse yourself (for example, Facebook, Twitter)?
2. What process do you follow (if any) when determining what you disclose online and what you keep private?
3. Do you personally update your online profiles (if applicable), if not who does?
4. Who is your favourite player to follow on Twitter and why do you follow them (if applicable)?
5. How much control do you feel that you have over creating your own online profile?
6. Which female tennis player do you believe has a successful online presence? Why?

7. As you are now in the midst of your career how important do you think it is to ensure your online profile is updated and followed?

8. What are some of the things that you do (if any) to increase your following online?

Representational Media: Print, Television, Radio

1. How accurately do you feel that you have been portrayed by the media?

2. How much control do you think you have in what is reported on you throughout the media?

3. What are some of the strategies that you have been taught or learnt in attempting to have the media report on you in a way that is favourable to you?

4. Which female tennis players do you think are portrayed accurately in the media and why?

5. How do you or think you will cope with the media reporting on you in a way that you feel is either inaccurate or puts you in an unfavourable light?

Fame/Celebrity

1. What do you find enticing about fame (if anything)?

2. What is your own interpretation of what a celebrity is?

3. How much control do you think that the top players have in relation to their media profile?

4. Describe the way in which you feel that your identity has changed as you became more well-known (if at all)?

5. How do you anticipate the negotiation between your private self and public self will shift or has shifted (if at all) as you become more famous?

6. Which female tennis players do you consider to be celebrities and why?
7. How important is it to you to continually uphold a media profile?

The Team: Coaches/Agents/PR

1. How do you or think you will manage the relationship between what your coaching team tries to instill in you (for example, staying focused purely on competing) and your management team who want to garner exposure for you off the court?
2. What do you think the main role of your agent (or an agent in general) is?
3. What do agents/PR representatives advise when creating your mediated persona (if applicable)?
4. Does your agent control any of your online profiles (for example, your Twitter account)? [Alternate Question] Do you believe agents control players' online profiles?
5. How helpful (if at all) do you think agents are in ensuring that a mediated persona that you are happy with is upheld?
6. How often do you discuss your media profile with your agent (if applicable)?

Privacy

1. What do you think the main difference is between your 'private' and 'public' self?
2. What process do you follow when deciding what to disclose on a public forum and what to keep private?
3. How do you think the amount of information that you disclose publically shapes your public persona?

4. How much information do you reveal about yourself to the public and why do you think that it is this figure?
5. Generally, people want to know personal information about those in the public eye. How do you decide what to keep to yourself and what to share?
6. Do you ever feel pressured into either disclosing or not disclosing information about yourself. If so, why?

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and Autoethnography

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a research approach that has been used during the interview analysis. As Walker (2018, p. 5) states, “interviews tend to be the method used to collect data when IPA is the methodology”. IPA often is used in research as a way in which to analyse and interpret data, usually in the form of interviews and/or transcripts with those who have had similar experiences (Walker, 2018). Walker (2018, p. 8) also states that;

Reflexivity plays a vital role in acknowledging our inability as researchers to be totally objective when analysing material. It provides us with an awareness of when and how we might have been subjective or biased, leaning toward the material that will help to support our hoped outcome (Walker, 2018, p. 8).

Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008, p. 215) state that IPA is a “rigorous exploration of idiographic subjective experiences and, more specifically, social cognitions”. As mentioned previously, IPA generally is a collection of data from a researcher who has conducted semi-structured interviews. These interviews are usually seen as more

conversational. Allowing the interviewee to take the lead in the conversation often results in data that is different to what the researcher may have predicted (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008). Further, IPA acknowledges the role of the researcher as their thoughts and feelings serve as a way, to at a point, authorise or legitimise the analysis (Walker, 2008). The role I play in this research is fundamental as a point of difference in this thesis, given my background in the sport and the acknowledgment of me, as the researcher in this process of analysis and having the dual insider/outsider perspective. The conversations that I had with the participants, at some level, become a shared conversation, which is most valuable to the study and serves as a way to delve deeper into the topic, given the more familiar relationship between myself and participants. This dual method that I have used is a fusion between IPA and autoethnography, has enabled me to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the perspective of female tennis players and how they construct persona, which is the real point of difference between this thesis and other similar works in this research area.

In her doctoral thesis titled 'Finding the Edge: Online persona creation in fringe art forms' (2014), and further integrated into her collaborative developed persona work (Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2020, pp. 133-153), Kim Barbour uses IPA as a research method to investigate the online personas of fringe artists. Barbour states that IPA has not yet been used in the study of cultural practices and those involved in their creation. Rather, the use of this approach has been most prominent in the health sciences and most notably in psychology. As Barbour argues, IPA endeavours to understand a person's perception of an experience and places the researcher in a position to compassionately interpret and comprehend their experience. Thus, IPA is both

phenomenological and interpretive. While this approach is quite new, it provides an opportunity to further explore the construction of the female tennis players' persona during the interview stage by closely looking at the experience that the case study informants have had in the creation of persona as opposed to behaviour alone.

I have been able to integrate the IPA research method and combine this with my autoethnographic approach to this research. The real value that I bring to this research is my previous involvement in tennis, both as player and my links to Tennis Australia. As Adams et al. (2017) states, autoethnography allows the researcher to express an insider perspective and allows them to articulate experience more broadly than another researcher may be able to. Further, this type of application humanises the research experience by using a 'lived through' lens that brings together an understanding that both researcher and research subjects are both valuable (Adams et al., 2017).

A key advantage of this approach is that it can open up different ideas and ways of thinking, or even empathy, in how various experiences can be considered as a result of the dual insider/outsider perspectives that have been established (Méndez, 2014). That is, other researchers that have had no internal experiences, may not have been able to holistically investigate and interpret data gathered as opposed to someone who has had insider experience.

What I did:

Observations were made throughout the two-week event (Monday 19 January to Sunday 1 February) and were focused on three different aspects. Firstly, observations made on the grounds of the tournament were conducted to analyse how the media

portrays players and promotes an event that is driven by revenue. Secondly, women's singles matches were observed. This was conducted to analyse the on-court personas of female tennis players and note demeanour, dress and on-court routines along with differences and similarities among these players. Lastly, press conferences were attended. This took place to observe the interactions between players and the media in addition to how players handled questions and behaved during these interviews.

The other observations made were that of the Channel 7 News items pre-Australian Open. The data is as follows:

Channel 7 News: Data from 1 December 2014-19 January 2015

Number of Channel 7 news viewings	Number of mentions relating to the Australian Open/ Australian Open Series Tournaments	Discussions of tennis on Channel 7 news
49	20	21 (consecutive from 30 December 2014-19 January 2015)

Note: Due to a technical fault outside of my control, the original recordings are no longer available. However, the analysis was conducted while I was in possession of the original footage and forms the material investigated in this chapter.

Limitations:

In any research design there are always constraints and conflicts that need to be considered for the data analysis. Thus, although the research design I propose is advantageous in forming a more complete understanding of a phenomena, it is also important to acknowledge its limitations. A fundamental issue with this type of research is objectivity. Researchers are generally accustomed to distancing themselves from the research, whereas autoethnography does the opposite (Méndez, 2014), thus potentially resulting in a less objective analysis. I feel that this can be combatted through an understanding that although there can certainly be elements of shared experience between both researcher and subject, the two experiences are still individual and it is with this recognition that you can develop a well-informed investigation. Further, the triangulation of textual analysis, interviews and observations helps to ensures objectivity in the analysis.

Other limitations to this study are that although I have been immersed in tennis, I have not been subject to the major media attention that someone in the top-10 would have experienced. I have had some experience with this, but not to the extent that a player of this calibre would have had. Further, the interview and Twitter subjects were Australian and only formed a small pool. The views of the interview and Twitter subjects are not representative of a wide group: so to investigate this further, a larger sample size would be necessary. An additional limitation is that the textual analysis of Channel 7 news was

only one broadcaster: further research could investigate other broadcasters and representational media and how athletes are represented and the impact this has on how they present themselves.

Another limitation is the pool of interviews that was used, which was small. Despite this, the interviews did provide reinforcing ideas that had been discussed throughout this thesis, namely that the media, sponsors and social norms play a significant role in the development of the persona of female tennis players. Further, the focus on Australian female tennis players in the Twitter chapter and Interview chapter is also a limitation: a wider pool would be needed to extend on the ideas generated here and serves as an exciting opportunity for future work.

Additionally, using one event in this analysis, that being the Australian Open and one news broadcaster of the 6pm Channel 7 News is also limiting. However, given the parameters placed on this research it would have been untenable to investigate anything more than a local focus. Despite this, the research developed here opens up avenues to look at persona development from almost any organisation or other sports. For example, further research can be generated relating the development of persona in team sports and how competing with others in a team can impact on how an individual's persona is developed. There could also be further investigations into other professions such as the education or legal sectors. This research provides a solid basis that these other types of research projects can draw on when looking at the construction of persona in other fields.

Ethics approval:

Prior to undertaking this research I was required to apply for ethics approval as my research involved interviewing participants. The ethics process required me to provide detailed information about the purpose of this research and a thorough response as to how I was going to obtain information from the research participants.

The ethics approval process required me to provide a list of research questions, a plain language statement that participants would need to sign prior to taking part in the interviews and successful completion of the online human ethics quiz. (See Appendix 1 for HAE approval letter).

I was also required to conduct regular progress reports throughout the duration of this thesis. These progress reports were completed yearly and were undertaken in accordance with the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Of the four interview participants, three of them agreed to be identifiable and one chose to remain anonymous and was therefore de-identified. The participants were all over the age of 18 and participated freely and without any form of compensation. Each subject was provided with a disclosure statement and within this was a section that required them to dictate the way in which they wished to participate in the study, as either identifiable or anonymously. I, as the researcher went through this document prior to each participant signing this statement and they were aware as to the outcome of the research and avenues for dissemination.

Summary

The methods discussed have been selected for this research as they provide a good balance between outside representations of professional athletes and the internal thought process behind how they feel they are represented and how they wish to represent themselves. Using textual analysis through a framework of semiotics allows for a greater understanding as to how gender is reinforced through mediated sport, the interconnection between celebrity and sport and the role of the individual in the creation of persona. In addition, these methods allow for a greater understanding of how a female tennis player can be influenced by factors external to them, such as institutions.

The use of IPA and autoethnography provides a greater understanding into the athletes' experience in the construction of their persona through a dual lens, of both interviewee and interviewer. Further, this allows for a richer analysis and acknowledges my role within this process. It is hoped that from this comparison further questions arise and provide insight into this complex construction of the self that can lend itself to further research in this area.

The methods outlined in this chapter serve as a valuable way to investigate the way in which the persona of the female tennis player is constructed and the control that they have throughout this process. Through textual analysis, I have been able to analyse representations of female tennis players and how this wider representation can impact on persona development. Further, through interviews and adopting an interpretative phenomenological approach to these, I have been able to hear directly from female tennis players and those associated with them to analyse how they believe that their

personas are impacted on by external factors. A key benefit within my research method is that I use autoethnography as a means to understand both the internal and external culture that plays a significant role in the creation of persona and how some of the key stakeholders, such as the media and institutions can play a significant role in this process.

Textual analysis is the primary research approach employed in this study and serves as a key tenet in the reading of people and events. As mentioned earlier, the textual analysis relates to place, activity, people and media stories. In terms of place, I have employed this approach when observing the grounds of the 2015 Australian Open and via the analysis of institutions. I also used autoethnography when walking through the grounds and analysing the various institutions that female tennis players are involved with by using my previous experience as a member of the institution/event that I was analysing. This is an example of the inside/outside perspective as I have been able to use my previous knowledge as an insider to unpack the observations made, but having conducted these observations as an outsider.

Activity is effectively investigated in the same way as place. That is, it relates to the observations analysis, which was investigated through my examination of the activities or events that took place on the grounds of the 2015 Australian Open, which included observing players during their matches and press conferences and through the analysis of institutions. Again, this was conducted via an autoethnographic approach in order to facilitate both inside and outside perspectives.

The analysis of people is conducted via the interview and Twitter chapters, but also features in the analysis of players observed on court and in their press conferences at the 2015 Australian Open and in the performance and persona chapter. The use of IPA was the key technique employed in this chapter and is drawn from recent works in the study of persona and is most closely linked to the work of Barbour (2014) and how she uses IPA to understand a person's perception of an experience and places, which places the researcher in a position to sympathetically interpret and comprehend the experience of the research subject.

Media stories are a prominent feature that have served to investigate the construction of persona as created by female tennis players. This analysis is evident in the performance and persona chapter, Channel 7 news analysis, Twitter, institutions and post-research analysis conclusion. Media stories help understand the media reporting of athletes, the development of persona in general and how players choose to represent themselves. All of these areas come together and play a significant role in how we understand the way in which persona is created and then further established, which links closely with recognition that celebrity, sport and the wider media are tightly infused with the processes through which mediated personas are developed.

The next six chapters set out the findings of my three-pronged research design.

Chapter Three: Rejecting Norms – Performance and Persona

In this chapter I will discuss how female tennis players may reject or diverge from some of the stigma and social norms that are placed on them by virtue of being female athletes; and use this type of performance or idea in creating a persona of their own choosing. This exploration is not without limitations and, as I will discuss, there are many barriers to consider in this argument, however, it serves to reveal how not following suit can empower and therefore provide the opportunity for creating a persona that is influenced less by external forces, including those from institutions, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. To analyse this point, I have provided a discussion forum that links one of the most oppositional performers of the 19th century, the dandy, and Serena Williams, who is not only one of the most influential athletes of the 20th century, but African-American and female. Theoretically, the works of Erving Goffman, Anthony Giddens and Judith Butler will be applied to this discussion to further substantiate the claim that dandyism can be used to understand the contemporary construction of the public self.

The rationale behind the inclusion of this chapter is to highlight the fact that no-one is immune to the powerful influence of external forces at play in constructing their persona. I have used two very different examples to illustrate. I argue that Serena Williams, who is a highly mediated player, is constantly negotiating and renegotiating the construction of her persona and explain that this terrain is even further complicated by her African-American heritage and her gender. I use the 19th-century dandy as a case-in-point to emphasise the long history that people have had to grapple with in terms of

constructing their persona and how this construction is further complicated when the subjects do not conform to societal expectations, as is the case for both the dandy and Serena Williams. To that end, this chapter serves as an entrée into how persona is formed but may be rejected by a wider public if it upsets the usual conventions of society and provides further insight into the complicated and malleable process.

This chapter is an important addition to the thesis as it provides an historical understanding of how persona is structured and informs the readings of persona in contemporary society. It highlights the fact that persona and the idea of public presentation has been in existence for as long as people have. Showcasing this point allows us to understand that every public identity forms future identities. Using Serena Williams in this chapter and, given her highly mediated persona, she was a prime example to help emphasise the factory-like system of creating personas and has allowed me to highlight the process that it is likely any public identity will have to face.

The research method that I have implemented here is textual analysis. In the research methods used, this chapter is less reliant on my inside/outside perspective and is focused more on semiotic analysis of the parallels between the 19th-century dandy and Serena Williams and, more specifically, how the dandy and Williams form persona. I argue that while social norms typically play a crucial role in the forging of persona, the dandy and Williams have in part rejected these, making the development of their personas different to the norm and therefore worthy of investigation. Further, there are elements here of autoethnography and both an institutional and media analysis. In terms of autoethnography, I am able to bring my own experience to this analysis and

apply it to persona development as a female tennis player, but I also analyse the way in which institutions and the media impact on the persona of female tennis players through an autoethnographic lens. I use 'dandyism' as an example of a historical performer who was impacted by external forces in how their persona was shaped. Following this I analyse the dandy response to these constructive processes as an example of the complex relationship between self and outsider factors.

Dandyism is the quintessential performance of the self. It is highly stylised and meticulously constructed to produce a picture-perfect spectacle (Garellick, 1998). The same can be said for elite female tennis players of today. Many bear chic and customised outfits, sparkling adornments and enter the stadium without a hair out of place. Contemporary tennis player Serena Williams supports this comparison as she is often viewed as the epitome of the highly stylised, larger-than-life athlete. Williams was born into an African-American working-class family and is renowned for her flamboyant attire both on and off the tennis court. Her gender, class and race resonate with the stereotypical interpretation of the 'other' in contemporary society (Whitaker, 2011). This is directly comparable to the 19th-century dandy, who was considered to be an 'outsider' due to gender, sexuality and class (Yazan, 2012). Many have referred to Williams when discussing issues of race, gender, sexuality and ultimately 'otherness'. Schultz (2005, pp. 338-367) has addressed the cultural production of Williams' race and how women's tennis is a vehicle for marginalisation by ingraining whiteness as the normalised race. Coleman-Bell (2006, pp. 195-207) discussed the celebrity image of Williams and how gender and race create multiple meanings in the construction of her image. McKay and

Johnson (2008, pp. 491-504) have used Williams as a means to further investigate the class and racial interplay of 'black' athletes.

While there is substantial literature on Serena Williams in relation to these issues, this chapter aims to take a different approach and link the construction of her persona to dandyism. Throughout this chapter I draw on academic texts related to dandyism and Serena Williams and draw comparisons between the nineteenth century dandy and Serena Williams to explore the way in which persona can be constructed historically and in a contemporary society along with limitations within this construction.

Class and Race

The 19th-century dandy exemplifies a state-of-being that is absorbed in the creation and presentation of the self (Yazan, 2012, pp. 101-115). A significant feature of dandyism is the act of presenting oneself as a member of the upper class. This is usually constructed through one's attire with a motivation to be original and distinguished (Southern, 2011, pp. 422-424). As Alan (2006, p. 129) claims, "the dandy was important to the Victorians as a symbol on which to pin increasingly contested notions of both class and gender". However, dandies were generally considered as the outsiders of society due to class, sexuality and gender (Yazan, 2012, pp. 101-115). Comparatively, tennis is traditionally the leisurely recreational activity of the middle to upper class (Knoppers, 2009), and has been an 'approved' sport for females since the 19th century as it is considered to be more refined than other sports (Hargreaves, 1994). However,

for 'black' female athletes (such as Williams), the intertwined forms of oppression also extend to race (Cooky, 2010).

In British and French societies, capitalist practices were developing, urban populations were growing as a result of immigration and the working poor were growing in numbers. This contradicted the bourgeois culture of work and prosperity (Lezama, 2012). As Yazan (2012, pp. 101-115) states, "the mid-19th century was characterised by revolutionary social and political turmoil in which social climbing or distinction was the ultimate aim, and social ascendancy and character no longer needed to be viewed as inherent". This transformation of society was evident in the first few years that modernity was born. French poet Charles Baudelaire, writing during this time, characterised modernity as an awareness of the cessation of time. Further, he describes this phenomenon as a break from tradition, a feeling of newness and of disequilibrium by the consciousness of the ending of time (Yazan, 2012).

Serena Williams and her sister Venus, who has also had major success on the professional tennis circuit, were born to African-American working-class parents. Their father Richard Williams often professed they ascended from "the ghetto to the penthouse" (Powell, 2008, p. 231). In fact, many leading and celebrated female tennis players are born to parents who are far from affluent. Maria Sharapova is another example. Her father worked in construction and mother was a homemaker. At a young age, Sharapova's father took her to America to pursue a tennis career and funded this pursuit by taking on several jobs (Savage, 2008).

As Giddens (1991, p. 6) states, inequality in terms of class along with other areas that bias is present, such as gender and ethnicity, can be in part defined as contrasting access to self-actualisation and empowerment. Giddens (1991, p. 6), asserts that “modernity, one should not forget, produces difference, exclusion and marginalisation”. Giddens continues by stating that “holding out the possibility of emancipation, modern institutions at the same time create mechanisms of suppression, rather than actualisation, of self”. Therefore, it can be argued that both Williams and the dandy attempt to use the construction of their personas to counter this socially predetermined process of self-actualisation.

Both the 19th-century dandy and the 21st-century female tennis player are considered as the ‘other’ within their respective domains. Serena Williams, who by way of being an African American female, is stereotypically interpreted as the ‘other’ within society (Whitaker, 2011). The examination of how both the dandy and Williams construct their personas to grapple with this ‘otherness’ and their perceived success as a stylistic spectacle further strengthens the notion that the dandy has been resurrected and reformed as the 21st-century female tennis player.

Two centuries before Serena Williams, the icon of the Regency period and of dandyism, George ‘Beau’ Brummell (1778-1840) was born to the parents of commoners. According to Barbey d’Aurevilly in his 1843 essay on Dandyism and George Brummell, this dandy was unique and unreproducible (Garelick, 1998). He was most famous for his

fashionable dress and superb manners (Atkins, 1993) and is said to have propelled dandyism into England and France and heavily influenced social and literary movements of the time (Garelick, 1998). It has been claimed that Brummell had a fractured personality; however, it was reconstructed in a masquerade of other people's assumptions of him (Kelly, 2006). In fact, Goffman (1990 p. 44) stated that a performance is "socialised", moulded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented": this is precisely what the dandy ensured.

Interestingly though, tennis has originally been a sport that was once only available to exclusive white upper-middle classes. This is still perpetuated today at some level, with the elite members of society participating in the sport at many resorts, country clubs and academies (Douglas, 2012, pp. 127-145). Drawing on this historical orientation, these players may be seen as 'masquerading' in this originally white, upper middle-class sport as they make their way into the whirlwind of stardom and celebrity. This is particularly prevalent for Williams as she is constantly required to perform in an arena that is traditionally the domain of slim, white and svelte female players (Schultz, 2005).

As Giddens (1991) states, in pre-modern times, self-identity was absent. Giddens (1991) further explains by saying that identity in medieval Europe was quite fixed with lineage, gender and social status being the main attributes to determine one's identity. Further, one's appearance in pre-modern times was relatively standardised and reflected social identity rather than personal identity. However, in modernity, the self is

not a passive being. It establishes a course that can only become intelligible through the reflexive use of the wider social environment and is able to adjust according to the perceived demands of the setting. Both Serena Williams and 19th-century dandy George 'Beau' Brummell are prime examples of this notion of self-adjustment within their respective performances. Brummell, in his heyday, had sparked a friendship with the future George IV. This gave him exposure to the more aristocratic members of society. So, by way of fashion, Brummell was able to adjust his identity and essentially go from a 'no-one' (in terms of wealth and status) to a 'someone' who had a certain level of influence (George, 2004). Williams has also managed to reposition herself from 'nothing' to 'someone'. Williams' father has often commented on both of his daughters' successes and stated that "they have come from nowhere to get somewhere" (Powell, 2008, p. 231).

Central to this argument is the notion of difference and defiance against the laws or norms of the society in which one operates. Baudelaire called this a 'culture of difference' in relation to the dandy; that is, he does not follow the conventional rules that society has bestowed upon him and revolts against bourgeois values. The dandy would contravene the aesthetic construction of the self by highlighting the limits that society placed upon individuals (Seppa, 2004).

Williams further defies the norms of society by way of her American heritage. As Davis (2005, pp. 147-161) states:

Black incorporation is difficult because the dominant culture relies on a narrow conception of who is and can be American. Black people are considered unfit for

membership because cultural representations of American identity have been shaped and defined as non-black.

Throughout history, black families have been the subject of much scrutiny due to the dominant patriarchal white society. As a result, it has been difficult to find encouraging and inspiring images of black femaleness. Scrutiny and rejection often follow those who dare to upset this status quo (Douglas, 2012, pp. 127-145). Serena Williams is a prime example of someone who creates a 'culture of difference'. Williams achieves this through various channels. These include her oppositional dress, muscular frame that is in direct conflict to what is traditionally considered to be female and her race and class in what has been traditionally a white, upper-middle class sport.

Aloofness, cynicism, provocation and decadence are all key tenets of dandyism (Yazan, 2012). There is also an element of coldness and emotional detachment associated with the 19th-century dandy (Hadlock, 2001). Interestingly, both Williams sisters have been accused of many of the aforementioned attributes. For example, both sisters have been called aloof, self-absorbed and arrogant due to their extravagant lifestyles and adorning expensive accessories (McKay and Johnson, 2008, pp. 491-504). They are not the only players to bear this resemblance to the dandy, with Maria Sharapova also being criticised by many for her cold demeanour both on and off the court (Maine, 2020).

As previously mentioned, dandies were considered to be figures that disputed the oppressive nature of society. As Shannon (2006, p. 129) asserts, "dandies became

markers of class tensions whose function as a class critique was wrestled over by the bourgeoisie and the elite". Directly comparable to this is Williams, who is able to self-reflexively perform and have the audience recognise her race on her terms without an alternative to a double-consciousness. Williams "challenges the repressed and conservative status quo of traditional professional women's tennis" (Coleman-Bell, 2006, pp. 195-207).

Gender

The 'dandy' was a discernible figure in both French and British societies of the 19th century. Here, the dandy desired to be different during a time where the values of society were reflective of bourgeois values and attitudes (Houk 1997, pp. 59-73).

Similarly, through their performance in the competitive arena of sport, the female tennis player challenges the socially formed system of gender roles and principles (Kane and Greendorfer, 1994, pp. 28-45). Notwithstanding the general acceptance of female athletes in contemporary society, the author asserts that this acceptance is only partial (Brake, 2010) and challenged when the competitor strays from typically feminine traits. Furthermore, many desire to distinguish themselves through attire and performance that resonates with the dandy of the 19th century.

In terms of gender, Judith Butler's work in *Gender Trouble* (2006) relates perfectly to the situation faced by the dandy. Butler (2006) problematises the issue of gender by saying that gender is always performative. Butler (2006) discusses the performative nature of gender in relation to 'drag' and states that "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the

imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency” (p. 338). It is important to note here that 19th century dandies weren’t considered to be drag queens as such, rather they were seen as flamboyant individuals who took the utmost pride in their appearance (Stover and Himmelein, 2021), not dissimilar to what we see in terms of drag as a form of dress and performance. In terms of dress, we can form links between the notion of gender performance of the dandy and drag. That is, if we look at this purely from the perspective of performance and traditional notions of gender, we can see how the dandy manipulates this. Butler (2006, p. 338) states that gender is;

A production which, in its effect, postures as an imitation. This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualisation, and it deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to essentialist accounts of gender identity.

If we didn’t know any better, you could almost assume that Butler (2006) is referring directly to the dandy, insofar that they were fluid in their identity and were able to change meaning and identification of gender identity by their manner and dress.

To now link to sport, although ‘approved’ as a female leisurely pastime, to play competitive sport was incompatible with the traditional role of women as subordinate in a patriarchal society (Lenskyj, 1986). However, significant headway has been made, at least in terms of women’s participation in competitive sport, which has resulted in a major challenge to male supremacy, particularly in terms of attitudinal changes in society. For instance, Title IX (1972), a Federal US Law that prohibited discrimination against sex in education programs that receive funding by the Federal government,

played a pivotal role in this challenge and was reflective of social change (Kane and Greendorfer, 1994, pp. 28-45).

As Brake (2010) states, the gender divide in athletic performance is narrowing due to the elevated performances of professional female athletes. Cultural norms have shifted to encourage young girls to be involved in sport and femininity has shifted to create space for strong and confident female athletes. This shift transforms the traditional notion of gender that once assumed women to be passive and weak.

The mass media has played a pivotal role in both accommodating and at the same time suppressing women's involvement in sport. By simply reporting on female athletes, the media are supporting their involvement within sport. However, they are often trivialised and marginalised during this process (Kane and Greendorfer, 1994, pp. 28-45). The minimal coverage that female athletes receive is of a lesser quality than male reportage with cultural, racial and gendered stereotypes featuring heavily (Cooky and Wachs et al., 2010). Arguably then, there is a tension between reporting on female athletes, thus upsetting hegemonic power to the trivial reportage of sports women that reinforces gender hierarchy.

It is important to note here that the term 'dandy' was historically, and on the whole, attributed to men (Southern, 2011, pp. 422-424). In fact, French poet Charles Baudelaire, in his observations of dandies in France during the 19th century, stated that women could not be dandies as they were 'natural', which is the antithesis of what it is

to be a dandy (Garelick, 1998). However, Florence (1997, pp. 253-269) states that the common definition of dandyism is exclusively male with a connection to the social female body. However, if connected to psychic formation both males and females resist the dominant social rules of white heterosexual males, also known as heteropatriarchy.

Although dandyism has commonly been associated with men, there were (albeit very few) accounts of the female dandy, known as the 'dandizette', a term that only lasted a few years (Bailey, 1998). During the 19th century in Britain there were some females who were considered dandys or 'dandizettes'. These women maintained salons and even hosted extravagant affairs which defied the British custom that involved sending women out of the room after dinner to gossip while the men conversed over brandy (Hawkins, 2009). Gill (2007) states that 19th-century women who deviated from conventional femininity, for example, fashionable women who donned 'unnatural' styles of dress or women who possessed noticeably unfeminine traits such as self-assertion and coldness, were unequivocally linked to dandyism. While the existence of the female dandy is a subject of contention, this is not a concern for this research. Rather, the exploration of dandyism as a state-of-being is employed. Further, the public performativity of the dandy, who embraces his fashionable performance (George, 2004), is of chief concern and is directly comparable to Williams.

Many contemporary female athletes in general are the product of mainstream media framing; that is, the media focus on female athletes as sexualised beings rather than serious and competitive athletes. Tennis players are no exception. Many take on a

sexualised persona that results in an image that is presented and made readily available for the male gaze. An analysis of top female tennis players' official websites by Rotas (2010) discovered that while the media were producing and using these images that show the women pouting, semi-naked and often lying down gazing at the camera in a sexualised manner, players themselves were also posting their own personal images that were equally as provocative. This in turn places them as contributors to their own objectification and trivialisation (Bernstein and Kian, 2013, pp. 319-328).

Serena Williams is commonly known for her love of fashion, jewelry and shopping (stereotypically associated with femininity); however, her muscular physical appearance has been described as masculine. Interestingly, the media has further promulgated this by describing her as superhuman and animalistic. This was particularly evident in the 2002 US Open, where she donned a black catsuit. According to some, during this tournament it seemed that Williams' figure surpassed the boundary of femininity (McCullough, 2007).



This photo shows Serena Williams in her black catsuit during the 2002 US Open (Huffington Post, 2002).

According to Schultz (2005, pp. 338-357), the all-in-one figure-hugging catsuit was in part designed by Williams herself. The author states that by naming the outfit a 'catsuit', past racial ideologies that associate African ancestry with animalism again come to the fore. Interestingly though, as Schultz (2005, pp. 338-357) asserts, Williams embraced the term and described the outfit as innovative and sexy. It has been argued that as a result of her public use of the term, Williams has positioned herself, in part, as the instigator and product of her own representations (Schultz, 2005, pp. 338-357). However, Coleman-Bell (2006, pp. 195-207) claims that "the catsuit, with its connotations of the feline huntress, and the repetition of sexualised and racialised iconography, works to draw attention to and then displace the fascination with William's hyper-encoded sexuality". Further, the author states that Williams becomes prominent by a more "contradictory ambivalence, even deviance". This nonconformity is directly commensurate to dandies who challenged stereotypical notions of masculinity (George, 2004).

D'Aurevilly commented that the dandy had 'double and multiple natures, of an undecidable and intellectual gender' (Morgan, 1994). This correlates to Williams. She is highly feminised (in a stereotypical sense), yet her physique has been classed as masculinised, thus creating a persona that is two-fold, both masculine and feminine. In fact, Butler (1990) claims that gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently. In addition, the subject of 'woman' is no longer understood in stable terms that are enduring and there is very little agreement in what constitutes, or ought to constitute, the definition of 'woman'. This also resonates through the WTA Tours

representation of female tennis players. The WTA's 'Strong is Beautiful' campaign, launched in 2012, was designed to "draw upon athleticism and grace – a unique combination that has turned the stars of the WTA into the most recognisable and followed female athletes on the planet" (Women's Tennis Association, 2014).

The dandy's desire to be different and original has resulted in what some consider to be the first subculture in modern society (Grundmann, 2007, pp. 83-92). The same can be said for many of the current female tennis players and arguably this, to some extent, is being abetted by the WTA Tour. The word 'strong' is not usually associated with the stereotypical notion of what women are. Rather, the patriarchal terms passive, docile and weak are more commonly attributed to stereotypical notions of the female (Dworkin and Messner, 2002, pp. 17-30). Dick Hebdige (1979, p. 95) states that "each new subculture creates new trends, generates new looks and sounds which feed back into the appropriate industries". Arguably this has occurred with the WTA Tour. More of the female tennis players are 'bulking up' and as a result are being labeled as 'masculine'. Serena Williams has set the scene by having a muscular physique and therefore by many considered more masculine; however, she still possesses a stereotypical feminine persona by way of her desire to be fashionable and 'look good' both on and off court. This highlights the power of the institution in shaping the persona of female tennis players which will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Fashion and Sponsorship

According to Wilson (2001, pp. 26-50) the dandy has a long tradition in both England and France and is in fact a fusion of both cultures. Wilson (2001, pp. 26-50) states that in terms of fashion, dandyism was an oppositional style of dress or an anti-fashion. Further, Wilson (2001, pp. 26-50) claims that this mode of fashion “aims to express the dissent or distinctive ideas of a group, or views hostile to the conformist majority”. The desire for individuality and difference in dress also resonates strongly with the dandy and female tennis players. In terms of dandyism, Baudelaire stated that this phenomenon was a Romantic ‘cult of the self’ that arose from ‘the burning need’ to create ‘a personal originality’ (Yazan, 2012). Williams has always been vocal about the importance she places on her individual appearance and her love for accessorising. She has many notable examples of this, often wearing heavy earrings, sparkling bracelets and rings. One could assume that at Wimbledon, where the dress code is far more stringent, with players only allowed to wear predominantly white, Williams would find it difficult to customise her outfits and distinguish herself from the other players. However, she has worn gold shoes, a diamond tiara and had rhinestones sewn onto her outfits during the prestigious event (Edmondson, 2005).

It can be argued that this extends beyond Williams’ love of accessorising. Rather, she is striving for an ‘original self’ that can be easily distinguished from the other competitors. The ‘original self’ is a common thread on both female and male circuits. Top players often wear sport shoes that have their names sewn onto them. In addition, many of the top female players team up with fashion designers (for example Stella McCartney and Caroline Wozniacki) or bring out their own line of clothing (for example, Venus Williams

with Eleven) in an attempt to 'stand out' from the rest. I have provided two examples of this below. The first image is of the shoes that Rafael Nadal competed in during the 2019 Wimbledon Championships and the second image is of Venus Williams promoting her brand, Eleven. Both images showcase the personalisation of top-tier tennis players' attire and self-branding.



This photo shows Rafael Nadal's shoes from the 2019 Wimbledon tournament (Rafael Nadal Fans, 2019).



This photo shows Venus Williams posing for her brand Eleven (Zulily, 2020).

An early representation of the dandy can be found in Sue's (1843) *Les Mystères de Paris*. This novel depicts the *vicomte* de Saint-Remy, (supposedly) a wealthy young man, who by his beauty and taste made him an object of desire (Lezama, 2012). The notion of the object of desire is comparable with many of the female players currently on tour. As previously mentioned, the media are often responsible for the sexualisation and objectification of female athletes, but so too are the athletes themselves (Bernstein and Kian, 2013, pp. 319-328). However, the counter can be argued. Goffman (1990) claimed that people ordinarily convey an impression to others that is in their best interest to project in a particular context/situation. This can be argued from a post-feminist perspective for example, an emphasis placed on freedom of choice related to work, domesticity, parenting and physical and sexual empowerment (Tasker and Negra, 2007). Therefore, the female tennis player, particularly those placed within the upper rankings, are in fact 'empowered' by their choices and are 'conveying an impression to others that is in their best interest' in terms of both notoriety and monetary gains. After all, it is difficult to overlook the endorsements that female tennis players are earning (even if these endorsement revenues are still not as much as some of their male counterparts). For example, in 2013 Maria Sharapova earned US \$23 million, Serena Williams earned US \$12 million and China's Li Na earned US \$15 million, all from endorsements alone (Badenhausen, 2013).

The dandy was considered to be an object that was commodified and consumed by the public (Shannon, 2006). As Garelick (1998, p. 3) states, "long before the pop-music star and the motion-picture idol, the dandy had made an art form of commodifying

personality". According to Coleman-Bell (2006, pp. 195-207), Serena Williams' image is now highly lucrative in terms of endorsements and her image has been transformed into a profitable celebrity. Serena and her sister Venus have earned more than US \$100 million in contracts to endorse companies such as McDonald's, Nike, Wilson, Estee Lauder and Reebok (Coleman-Bell 2006, pp. 195-207). As a result, the media have constructed them within a narrative that is from "ghetto-to-glory" (2008, pp. 491-504). Arguably then, this representation sees them leave their 'ghetto' African-American heritage to climb the stereotypical social ladder and enter the 'glory' of fame and celebrity.

This discussion of the dandy and Serena Williams is valuable to this research as it highlights the potential consequences of forging a persona that doesn't necessarily align with social norms and practices from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Clearly, the dandy lived in a world that was not as heavily mediated or intense, which is why someone like Serena Williams possibly has a more complicated task of creating a persona, including that of representational media, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

As previously mentioned, this chapter serves as an introduction into the complex nature of persona construction and the difficulty that one has in forming their own identity that is completely their own. For the dandy, this complication had arisen from the social conventions of society and what was deemed oppositional to societal norms and for Serena Williams, this opposition was her gender and what commentators often referred

to as her masculinity and her race, coupled with the highly mediated world in which she navigates as a professional athlete. Hence this chapter has provided an opportunity for further thought on how persona is constructed and the deep history that we have in creating a persona.

Summary

This chapter provides insight into the factory-like operation that is involved in developing persona. By using an historical example of the dandy and using Serena Williams comparatively, I argue that no one is immune from the external forces that shape persona and the complications that arise when the typical notions of self-representation are not followed. By using the example of the dandy, I was able to highlight how the notion of public presentation is not a new one and that contemporary examples, such as Serena Williams, are still subject to the same processes that the dandy was some 200 years ago. Using the example of the dandy and Serena Williams provides a lens to show that every public figure is able to shape future public identities and that when there is a change to the way in which someone presents themselves that does not fit in with the norms of society, there is confusion in this process. Both the dandy and Serena Williams are prime examples of individuals who steer the production process in a different direction but are still subject to the same issues faced in the production of their personas. Extending on this historical discussion, I will discuss in following chapters, for women in sport this complicated arrangement continues in contemporary society with no-one having complete control over their own self-projection.

Chapter Four: Institutions

This chapter provides an overview of the types of institutions that female tennis players may be involved with over the course of their careers. It is important to put these relationships into context and discuss how female tennis players interact with these institutions and the requirements that are placed on them during their career. The thesis argues that the development of persona in female tennis players is complex and that external forces play a significant role in this development. The relationship between institution and athlete appears to be heavily reliant on one another – the institution needs the athlete to function and vice versa. However, in this chapter, drawing on the work of Michel Foucault (1979), I will argue that the institutions that form part of professional sport play a significant role in the development of the persona of female tennis players, and that control of persona development and maintenance relies heavily on the institution with the player having diminished agency in this process. It is important to note that while men also experience a similar complicated relationship with institutions, females have to navigate through a far more complex arrangement due to the social norms and values instilled into wider society about what it means to be a female. The challenges that females face in terms of sporting institutions will be discussed at greater length throughout this chapter.

For our purposes here, I will use the term ‘agency’ in terms of referring to “the capacity of individuals for independent action and free choice, while structure is used as an overarching label for patterned social arrangements that are sometimes defined as limiting individual freedom” (Carpentier, 2012, p. 26). The institutions, I argue, limit the capacity for players to freely express themselves due to the constraints placed on them

by the institution. This, at some level, was alluded to through my discussion of Serena Williams and the dandy in Chapter Three. That is, the institution more broadly speaking, was society as a whole. This chapter now focuses on an analysis of the specific institutions as they relate to female tennis players.

In approaching this task, relating to research methods, I draw on a combination of textual samples to provide a basis for analysis and observation as autoethnography as a way of further understanding and conveying broader meaning behind how and why these institutions operate the way they do. This approach also allows me to further develop a deeper analysis into how these institutions play a role in the formation of the persona of female tennis players. The significance of this chapter in terms of my methodological approach is that I have played on both the International Tennis Federation Tour (ITF) and the Women's Tennis Association Tour (WTA) and I have been an employee of Tennis Australia. This connection allows for greater insight into how these institutions operate and I am able to direct this through the insider/outsider lens. This dual approach allowed me to draw on my own experience as well as analyse the external discoveries to form more well-rounded conclusions within this chapter. The double perspective is valuable to this research because it provides an insight into the interaction between two key stakeholders, players and institutions through the lens of both parties.

In terms of a theoretical framework, Erving Goffman's work from *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* (2007) is closely linked to what

we discuss here in this chapter. Goffman (2007) discusses what he calls ‘total institutions’ and he says;

A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life. (Goffman, 2007, p. xxi).

Goffman (2007) categorises institutions into five distinct groups. These are; care for people who are harmless and incapable (i.e. aged care facilities), care for people who are considered to be incapable and a threat to the community (i.e. psychiatric hospitals), a place to house people who are considered to be a threat to the community (i.e. jails), a place to conduct work tasks (i.e. army barracks) and finally places that are considered to be retreats (i.e. monasteries) (Goffman, 2007, pp. 4-5). Using Goffman’s ideas as a framework we can link the institutions that female tennis players interact with to his group that he identifies as dealing with work tasks. The female tennis players involved in the various institutions essentially carry out work tasks in the form of participating in competitions and obtaining remuneration.

The interesting part here is how Goffman’s total institution theory can be linked to the tennis institutions. Goffman (2007) says:

First, all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority. Second, each phase of the member’s daily activity is carried on in the immediate company of a large batch of others, all of whom are treated alike and are required to do the same thing together. Third, all phases of the

day's activities are tightly scheduled, with one activity leading at a prearranged time into the next, the whole sequence of activities being imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of officials. Finally, the various enforced activities are brought together into a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfil the official aims of the institution. (Goffman, 2007, p. 6).

To compare to Goffman's theory, in terms of tennis, and using the WTA Tour as an example, the WTA poses as the central authority, all female players are treated alike, insofar that they are to adhere to the rules of the institutions and can be penalised if these rules are broken (i.e. fines for misconduct), the scheduling of tournaments and matches are sequential and tightly scheduled and all of this ties together to facilitate the objectives of the WTA as an institution.

The key takeaway from Goffman's ideas for our purposes is that institutions are highly regulated, regimented and are regularly surveilled by various personnel (Goffman, 2007, pp. 6-7). Further, Goffman (2007) states that "each grouping tends to conceive of the other in terms of narrow hostile stereotypes" (p. 7). So, in relation to the research being conducted here, the institution itself surveils and regulates the female tennis players that are involved in the institution and has the power to reinforces stereotypical notions. This then arguably disenfranchises the player, further reinforcing the idea that female tennis players lack agency in the formation of their personas.

There are four key institutions that will be discussed in these chapters. Of these, two are Australian, given the focus on Australian female tennis players in this thesis. The institutions explored are:

- Tennis Australia
- Australian Open
- International Tennis Federation (ITF)
- Women's Tennis Association (WTA)

Before I begin, it is important to understand in general terms what an institution is and what role they play in sport. According to the Oxford Dictionary [online], an institution is “an organisation founded for a religious, educational, professional or social purpose” (Oxford, 2021). The link between sport and institutions is that in the development of a sport, regulation, codification and universalisation occurs once a sport reaches a certain level of popularity and reach (Summerly, 2020). For example, as stated by Summerly (2020, p. 54), “sports that were previously the sole domain of royalty or upper classes, such as horse racing, would become regulated once they had broadened to the gentry or middle classes”. That is certainly the case for tennis, which was first an aristocratic amateur activity, transformed into the professional sport that it is today. Summerly (2020, p. 55) also states that once the institutionalisation has occurred, it “takes on other responsibilities including the establishment of a dominant philosophy that attempts to underpin the character of a sport”. Arguably then, those participating in the sport are also at some level required to align with this ethos, given the regulatory requirements of the institutions. Each of the institutions that will be explored in this chapter presumably endeavour to promote the sport itself along with controlling the behaviours of those involved through stringent regulation. This idea will be discussed further throughout the chapter and the ties that this has to the development of player personas.

To have a better understanding of the structure of institutions, it is instructive to draw links with institutions related to tennis and hospital institutions given the structured and clearly defined roles and responsibilities of both institutions. However, a limitation here is that tennis institutions come with the added issues of heightened mediatisation and fan and celebrity interaction whereas this isn't the case with the hospital setting.

According to Mackie (2016), "in a hospital, group processes are organised socially, with varying degrees of structuralisation in which both the patient and staff participate" (p. xxv). The participatory nature and structure by which institutions are formed is evident in the various institutions that revolve around tennis. That is, managers of large institutions and their employees interact with the players at varying degrees, but there is often a clear structure to these interactions. For example, during tournaments, players will interact with employees from institutions such as the ITF or the WTA and attend press conferences during events that are organised and timetabled by those involved directly with the institution. Staff in this instance are employees from the various institutions and patients are the players, they all interact with one another and conform to their roles within the institution.

Institutions can also be seen as a mode of control whereby people directly involved in an institution are rewarded when they perform or behave in a way that provides a favourable outcome for the institution. To expand on this point, the work of B.F. Skinner illustrates the correlation between positive reinforcement and behaviour. A behavioural psychologist, B.F. Skinner studied the responses of rats and pigeons in what he called a *Skinner Box* to analyse their behaviour when they had to perform a specific task (like push a bar or peck at a button) in order to be fed. In his studies, he concluded that

behaviour was based on events within an environment called 'reinforcements' and that behaviour was more frequent when it was followed by 'reinforcements'. For Skinner, behaviour was governed by 'reinforcements' and that there is a 'selection by consequences', that is, the reinforcing consequences drive behaviour (Marken & Carey, 2015). In terms of the interaction between tennis players and institutions, some parallels, albeit in a limited way, are able to be drawn. At a base level, it is clear that when a player wins their 'behaviour' or in our case here, 'performance' is reinforced by the institutions through remuneration. So, if a player continues to perform well, they will receive their financial reward or 'reinforcement'. Despite the positivist approach that Skinner uses, we can draw even greater conclusions through pure behaviour, that is, if a player behaves in a way that is honourable or presents a favourable image, they can be rewarded or 'reinforced' through public notoriety or sponsorship opportunities. This is not an exact comparison given that players don't have total control over their on-court performance, but we can use this idea of control and 'reinforcement' when trying to understand the behaviour of players off the court.

When looking at the institutions associated with tennis, it is also important to understand the value of representation. Institutions will represent players in accordance with their own institutional values. Shorkend (2019) compared art and sports institutions and argued that they both create culture by eroding social boundaries. Shorkend (2019, pp. 71-72) states that "culture is adaptive to the environment or a form of survival (a need for order); it is an integrated whole, symbolic (whereby we attach meaning arbitrarily), and a guide for behavior" and that in both sport and art people acquire knowledge about what to look for, how to evaluate certain moves/techniques and the meanings of these.

Shorkend (2019, pp. 71-72) says that “art and sport act as a sort of barometer of larger institutional ‘bodies’, social institutions such as the religious and the political, as one may conjecture that such ‘bodies’ ‘inform’ or structure culture”. In terms of representing female tennis players, institutions play a powerful role and are able to set agendas and frame athletes in a way that is fit for purpose and inform and manipulate wider cultural ideals that benefits the institution.

Joo et al. (2017) discuss the notion of institutional isomorphism in their publication titled ‘Institutional Isomorphism and Social Responsibility in Professional Sport’. Joo et al. (2017) state that isomorphism relates to the degree that organisations conform to norms and practices that are developed and institutionalised with an environment that recognises a social structure. The larger idea here is that institutions look to the environment to determine what is appropriate normative behaviour and actions. A central idea is that institutions look outwardly at society to determine their behaviour and act in accordance with what the organisation deems as the most appropriate social norm or structure. So for tennis players, in order to comply, they need to ensure that their personas fit the mould that has been set by the institution. This highlights the difficulty in forging an individual identity that is not so heavily reliant on external forces.

Tennis Australia

The first institution discussed is Tennis Australia. According to its website, Tennis Australia promotes tennis and participation, facilitates player development, stages local and international events and invests in tennis facilities around Australia (Tennis Australia, 2020). While it is clear that this organisation facilitates many areas of growth

of the sport through different programs, the focus here for our purposes is on elite player development.¹

According to Tennis Australia (2020), its player development program for elite athletes “is focused on giving talented players every opportunity to develop to their full potential” and that its program provides “coaching, physical conditioning, nutrition, wellbeing support and playing opportunities to nurture junior players to become our next champions!”. The Tennis Australia Annual Report 2014-2015 states that these opportunities are offered in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Canberra and Hobart. Players in the National Academy are either full or wildcard scholarship holders. To be a full scholarship holder, athletes must meet a certain set of criteria and wildcard scholarship holders are selected by the national head coach. To maintain a scholarship, all athletes must meet standards that relate to performance, attitude and behaviour. Scholarship holders have access to the following:

- Coaching, training, physical performance, and other sport science and medical support;
- Access to NA training environments and related activities;
- New Balance apparel and footwear;
- Access to professional team management via a tour coach and/or tour manager while on official Tennis Australia tours; and
- Travel subsidies when travelling to tournaments on an approved schedule (Tennis Australia, 2015).

¹ These programs run by Tennis Australia include Hot Shots, an introductory program for children to learn fundamental tennis skills at grassroots level, and Project Talent, which focuses on talent identification for more accomplished players.

Tennis Australia has restructured its player development program recently and is now offering more support to players from an older age bracket of 18 to 23 years old (Walton 2020). Tennis Australia chief executive Craig Tiley said "because previously when you were 21 you made the top 100. That was 10 years ago. Today you're 27, 28. It's a much longer journey and if Tennis Australia's support stops at the age of 18, you kind of drop off the cliff sometimes, so the last few years we've worked on bringing that back" (Walton, 2020). Tiley also said that the restructure would now see Australia's best players aged 15-18 based in Brisbane and be "aggressively progressed into the top-100" (Tiley, 2020). Furthermore, after players turn 18 and as long as they continue with a forward trajectory and meet performance indicators, Tennis Australia will continue to offer support to these players as they transition to the professional circuit (Walton, 2020).

I find it curious that the chief executive of a large organisation like Craig Tiley would use a term such as 'aggressively progressed' when discussing the management of young athletes who are starting their professional careers. Using the term 'aggressive' implies some force or push. It would be interesting to know what this constitutes in terms of athletes and exactly what it entails. While Tiley's comment may be dismissed as a relatively minor aside, I raise it as an issue because at some level it shows the sheer forcefulness and power of an institution taking hold of athletes and then powering them through, which is not dissimilar to a factory producing goods that go along a conveyor belt and meet up with the other finished goods. This production is arguably what happens to the persona of players who are fed through this institution. If players are being 'aggressively progressed' in terms of their playing, how can we be sure that this

isn't happening in terms of the development of their personas? It is important to note that resources are being provided to these athletes, and if their personas or the way in which they project themselves don't align with the way that the institution wants to be portrayed, there is little hope for them to continue to be supported. It suggests a kind of lording of power, especially when these athletes are at the beginning phase of their career and some would have little funding and resources if they cut themselves off from the institution that is supporting them. This potentially leaves many with few choices but to conform to whatever the institution wants from them, thus giving them little agency in their own self-projection.

If we look further into this idea that tennis players involved in the National Academy will have little agency in the construction of their own image or persona, we can find links between this notion and Michel Foucault's work in *Discipline and Punish* (1979).

Foucault (1979) claims that you can be forced or pressured into doing something when you are being observed. While these players in the National Academy are not in an institution such as a jail (where Foucault originally came up with the idea), they are still being observed through their performance and are required to meet certain criteria to ensure that they are still eligible for the various programs or funding. Arguably they are therefore controlled by the institution that is Tennis Australia and, if they waiver, even if this is through poor performance, they are effectively dismissed. The pressure to perform and comply must be quite high for these athletes. I know that I felt this from experience, and having come from a working middle-class family, I was always thinking about money and ensuring that I was doing what I could to keep in the 'good books' of the institution that I was effectively representing.

The Australian Open

Another institution that links in with Tennis Australia is the Australian Open. The Australian Open is the first of the four major Grand Slam tennis events, held in Melbourne during January each year. The tournament has global reach, breaking global viewership records in 2020 with 813.8 million broadcast hours of the tournament viewed and matches streamed live and free to 75 different territories (Australian Open, 2020). Further, attendance was at an all-time high in 2020 with 812,174 spectators in total, with 54 per cent of those individuals were from beyond Melbourne and 13 per cent from overseas (Australian Open, 2020). Along with the significant global viewership, the Australian Open also provides significant economic benefit to Victoria. The total amount of real gross state product generated by the 2020 Australian Open was \$387.7 million, which is an increase of 12 per cent from 2019 (Australian Open, 2020). These statistics clearly demonstrate the global reach that the event has along with its significant economic benefits.

There is a huge amount of money invested into the tournament. In 2017/18 the Australian Open spent \$215 million on events and operations (this includes all of the lead-up events to the tournament) (Mason, 2019). One would assume that when there is a significant amount of money being poured into an event, with the added pressure of a global audience, the tournament needs to ensure that it runs smoothly and showcases the best tennis players to entice audiences to watch the event. The other strategy that the tournament employs to ensure large global reach is to make it accessible to as many people as possible. That is, the tournament is not just about tennis, it is a

spectacle that those who are equally interested and not interested in tennis can enjoy. This notion will be discussed further in Chapter Six, but it is worth mentioning now in terms of how personas can be manipulated by a grand scale media event.

The importance of an event such as the Australian Open is significant insofar that players are able to showcase their 'brand' to a global audience. Contemporary athletes are now considered to be brands themselves, with global media platforms adding to their allure (Kunkel et al., 2020). Parmentier & Fischer (2012) discuss the fusion between brand and athletes by claiming that the brand is dependent on their playing or professional image and their media image or persona. The other link to highlight is that of athlete and sponsor. These relationships need to be solid with both parties having a clear understanding of what is required from one another in order for the athlete to fulfil their requirements with the sponsor and vice versa, and the image of the athlete must be able to transfer to the sponsor (Chavanant et al., 2009). Further, it is important to note that consumers who are repeatedly exposed to an athlete's brand are likely to be more satisfied with them and subsequently more committed to their brand (Kunkel et al., 2020), thus being mutually beneficial for both athlete and sponsor.

This link between the branded athlete and the Australian Open is relevant to this study as it highlights the importance of the relationship between the institution and athlete.

That is, the athlete is able to simultaneously advertise their brand, their sponsor and the Australian Open brand via one event, making the two-week tournament a gold mine for promotion. Interestingly, the Australian Open still has the potential power to decide which athletes are displayed on promotional material and what courts they are placed

on, along with the matches that they choose to televise alongside their broadcast partners. This selection process puts the tournament in a position where they are able to manipulate how much coverage an athlete receives and as such, if the athlete doesn't align with the core outlook or representation of the tournament they can, to some degree, choose to either promote or deflect attention from the athletes participating through strategic decision-making processes. For example, the Australian Open, as do the other Grand Slam tournaments, usually showcases local athletes during the competition. This is a clear strategic choice, following the assumption that local audiences will be interested in the local athletes.

The relationship between the Australian Open and the athlete is very much reliant on one another. The athlete promotes the event by participating and the tournament promotes the athlete (and their sponsors) by using their image and streaming matches to a global audience. However, arguably, the power still lies predominantly with the institution. If the player either does not perform or is less appealing to the audience, then the athlete may receive less exposure. Based on this, players who are forging a mediated persona and are seeking more exposure may opt to use this event as a platform to heighten their media presence and create a more 'appealing' persona to consumers to establish more followers. However, perhaps with the exception of the more senior and elite players, the agency of tennis players is still limited when it comes to an event like the Australian Open; that is, the tournament can simply provide less exposure to the athlete if they don't align with their objectives or image, and with this in mind the athlete may alter their persona to ensure that they align these and therefore lose their own sense of 'self' through the process. Although not every Australian female

tennis player will play in the event, it serves as a useful example in terms of the influence that an institution can have on the construction of an athlete's persona, particularly when they are at the early stages of their career or not as well-known as some of their counterparts.

International Tennis Federation (ITF)

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) is the next institution that will be discussed in this chapter. Before we proceed it is important to understand the relationship between the ITF and the other institutions discussed here. The ITF is the governing body of tennis worldwide. It was founded in 1913 and is responsible for regulation of the game, promotion of the sport and upholding its integrity, which includes anti-doping programs. Further, it sanctions and organises the Grand Slam events and other junior, professional, wheelchair and senior circuit tournaments. It is also responsible for the Summer Olympics and Paralympics and also maintains player rankings. The ITF has member affiliations – Tennis Australia is one of them – and is affiliated with many other associations, such as the Australian Open and the WTA (International Tennis Federation, 2020).

The inclusion of the ITF in this chapter is less about direct influence on the development of a player's persona, but rather has been included to highlight how a statutory authority controls the athlete and how this may impact on the development of persona. Unlike Tennis Australia, the Australian Open and the WTA (which will be discussed shortly), which are organisations that are more involved with the players themselves, the ITF is primarily responsible for the overarching governing and organisation of the sport in

general terms. Despite this, conclusions can be drawn in terms of how an institution such as the ITF can shape individuals and, as such, their personas.

The ITF is effectively an institution of control. The affiliated associations are mandated by the ITF rules and regulations. Using Foucault (1979) again and his work in *Discipline and Punish*, we can draw comparisons between the ITF and Foucault's notion of panopticonism. Foucault (1979) discusses the modelling of the prison system on the panopticon and how the panopticon works as a means of punishment in society.

A panopticon is a circular prison whereby all prisoners are constantly observed without the inmates knowing whether or not they are being watched and as such, the prisoners monitor their own behaviour out of fear of disciplinary action. Jeremy Bentham was actually the first to develop this concept in 1785. What he found was that the prisoners would discipline themselves as they were aware of the constant surveillance of authority and understanding that someone *might* be watching (Joukowsky Institute, 2021).

Foucault (1979) explored this notion in a more contemporary society and discussed how power is developed through surveillance and serves as means of knowledge and control. In modern society, we are constantly being surveilled via our modern communication systems and CCTV that is commonly located in most public spaces. Essentially, we are being watched and, as such, will often modify behaviour accordingly. Another point is that players who participate in televised events need to deal with this constant and concentrated observation via their televised matches on court and their time spent off court through CCTV and security that can be found on the grounds.

A link can be drawn between this theory and the tennis players, who are bound by the various institutions discussed in the chapter. For example, the ITF serves as the prison guard, who has overarching power and authority to observe and punish (if required). They house all regulatory control and, should a player waiver, there could be action taken against the offender. The player would be aware of this persistent observation and regulatory control and, using Foucault's theory, knowing that they are being observed and monitored, would modify behaviour in accordance with the rules that govern them. In terms of the development of female tennis players personas, knowing that they are constantly being watched (not forgetting the highly mediated nature of the sport, so not simply being watched by the institution/s but a global audience), they would arguably develop their persona either consciously or subconsciously being aware of this control through observation. As such, they may not completely reveal their 'true' self, given that they must at some level conform with the institutions that they are involved with. Thus, the question of agency in the development of persona is raised, insofar that a player simply cannot have complete agency of the creation and evolution of their persona if they are continually required to uphold the values and rules that govern these institutions.

Women's Tennis Association (WTA)

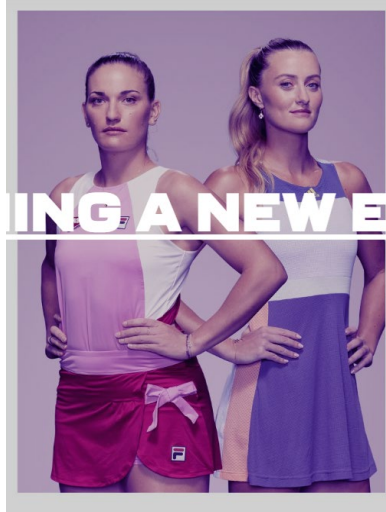
The final institution and arguably the most influential in terms of investigating the power that an organisation may have in the development of the female tennis players persona, is the Women's Tennis Association (WTA). The WTA is the main governing body for women's professional tennis around the world and is responsible for the organisation of

the WTA Tour. The WTA was founded in 1973 by Billie Jean King to create equal opportunities for women in sport. It is now considered to be one of the leaders in women's professional tennis, offering 55 events globally (including the four Grand Slams), attracting a global audience of 700 million in 2020 and providing US \$180 million in prizemoney (Women's Tennis Association, 2020).

The women who compete on the WTA Tour receive a significant amount of media coverage both on and off court, particularly those who are considered to be their star athletes (Police & Hambrick, 2020). The WTA promotes the vast media coverage and the promotion of their brand by stating that their "brand identity communicates and raises awareness of the WTA as the global leader in women's professional sport" and that "this identity strengthens its presence in key media and commercial properties (digital, broadcast, licensing) and imbues a sense of pride in the WTA brand and what it stands for" (WTA, 2019).

The WTA is clearly concerned with ensuring that its brand is held in high regard and that the players uphold this through their participation in WTA Tour events. Increasing the media coverage and profiles of the athletes participating in the tour can bolster revenue for the organisation, however the WTA Tour needs to also mitigate potential negative publicity which could result in lowering the profile of both organisation and athletes (Police & Hambrick, 2020). With this in mind, both the athletes and the institution need to ensure that they are doing what they can to maintain the WTA brand and both need to understand the potential fallout of any negative coverage (Police & Hambrick, 2020).

This is important as WTA Tour players are effectively representatives of the WTA Tour. So, the female players, at some level, need to ensure that how they frame themselves is aligned with the core values and normative expectations of the institution. This becomes complicated as, perhaps, the persona of a player may not completely be the same as what the WTA Tour would find desirable. A simple example of this is the images and the framing of athletes by the WTA Tour. The below image was found on the homepage of the WTA Tour. It depicts the doubles pairing of Timea Babos of Hungary and Kristina Mladenovic of France. The interesting thing about this photograph is that it shows the two women in their playing attire but have had their hair stylised and make-up applied. Mladenovic is eyeing the camera with a somewhat seductive gaze and their stance is strong and imposing. This image shows an interesting interplay between strength and beauty. It is almost as if the WTA would like viewers to see a fusion of athleticism and sex appeal. This also aligns with their 2014 'Strong is Beautiful' campaign that carried with it a similar message and marketing strategy. This is also another example of stereotyping gender and reinforcing the notion that female athletes are often sexualised, which reinforces the ideas discussed in the Literature Review.



This photo shows Timea Babos and Kristina Mladenovic (WTA Tour, 2020).

In more recent times, the WTA has undertaken a rebranding and marketing campaign.

This rebrand also consists of the new marketing slogan 'WTA For The Game'. The WTA states that the campaign aims:

To enhance brand synergy while building consistency for tennis fans, tournaments will have access to a range of marketing collateral, with scope to feature a wide array of WTA athletes, to meet their individual promotional needs. Using the slogan 'WTA For The Game' as a starting point, fans are provided new insights into the individual narratives of players as they describe the defining moments that have shaped their tennis journey and what gives their game purpose. (WTA, 2020).

By portraying players in a more alluring or sexualised manner, the WTA is arguably attempting to appeal to wider audiences, including those who may not even be tennis fans, but enjoy the spectacle of female sport. This is likely a strategic decision of the

WTA, given that sexually suggestive photographs tend to garner more interest and commentary (Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016), thus providing more exposure for the WTA. This is also problematic as it reinforces typical notions of gender representation and thereby makes it difficult for athletes to be anything but an object to be admired. There is also a fundamental issue that some may not choose this type of representation but might feel pressured into adhering to the image set out by the WTA.

Many obligations are placed on WTA Tour athletes, which are stipulated in the WTA Rulebook. For example, under 'Additional Mandatory Activities' in the 2019 WTA Rulebook, it is stated that:

During the year, the WTA may also designate other activities as mandatory, including, but not limited to:

- i. Tournament special dedication ceremonies or events;*
- ii. Sponsor and WTA-related off-court activities, such as award ceremonies, player parties, and sponsor special events; and*
- iii. Marketing and publicity activities for the WTA and/or WTA sponsors; however, each such marketing or publicity activity at a Tournament shall not exceed one (1) hour". (WTA Rulebook, 2019, p. 87).*

Further, in terms of marketing for the WTA, the 2019 Rulebook states that:

All players are required, if requested, to participate in one (1) activity per year (not to exceed five (5) hours, including travel time) for major marketing or publicity purposes for the WTA and/or a WTA sponsor that takes place in or around a Tournament in which a player is entered or at such other mutually-

agreeable date and location, subject to the following restrictions:

- (a) The five (5) hours must be within a single eight (8) hour period, unless otherwise approved by the player;*
- (b) The activity must be in conjunction with the promotion of the WTA and/or Tournaments;*
- (c) The activity cannot involve a WTA sponsor that is in category conflict with an existing player sponsor;*
- (d) The activity cannot constitute a direct individual endorsement by the player of a commercial product;*
- (e) The player must be given the opportunity to select the activity photographs to be used; and*
- (f) For activities involving player photography, where the WTA can clear the rights without expense, players shall be permitted to utilise photographs for non-commercial purposes on their personal websites and in player promotional materials, following a possible hold back period set by the WTA. In no event shall a player utilize the photographs in conjunction with a sponsor or third party activity or allow a sponsor or other third party to utilize the photographs (WTA Rulebook, 2019, pp. 94-95).*

The regulations imposed by this institution clearly demonstrate the power that they hold in terms of image and control of the athletes participating on the tour. With such rigidity it would be near impossible for players to deviate from the core values, beliefs and objectives of the WTA and, as such the portrayal of their persona effectively needs to

align with how the WTA wants them to be portrayed, making it difficult for them to forge their own identity that is completely independent of the WTA.

Throughout this chapter I have discussed the complex relationship between institutions and female tennis players. Each of the four institutions discussed have various levels of control over the players that participate on the professional tennis circuit. The common theme throughout, with varying degrees, is the power that the institution has over the athlete and therefore has in the development of players' personas. Each institution must seek to maintain their key business interests at the fore and with that comes the requirement that athletes affiliated with them must uphold, to an extent, their core values. In doing so they will self-regulate behaviour, making it near impossible to solely form a persona that is completely their own and, as such, have a minimal amount of agency in this process.

Through my experience and involvement in these institutions, I have been able to link personal ideas and views based on what I had lived through with the observations made via this textual analysis. These institutions play a pivotal role in how one constructs their persona but do not do this in isolation. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, society as a whole can determine the way a person presents themselves and then spark further issues when this representation doesn't fit the 'norm'. In this chapter we see an additional complication with more targeted institutions and how female tennis players need to align with certain aspects of an institution as a way of defining themselves. As we continue to explore this space, we will see further external forces that come to play in the development of the persona of female tennis players making

the creation of the self-projection of a person ever more complicated until they are churned out of the “persona machine” that I have alluded to in this research. This chapter has highlighted the power that institutions have in the development of female tennis players personas and how it is difficult for these players to forge their own path in developing self-projection without the involvement of institutions. The next chapter extends on the way that external forces facilitate the creation of persona through a textual analysis of news reports in the lead up to and during the 2015 Australian Open.

Chapter Five: News Reporting – Lead-up to the 2015 Australian Open

This chapter relates to how the media create, frame and disseminate stories to a wider audience. I have used semiotic analysis of textual samples throughout to observe and draw conclusions about how images and the reportage of female tennis players through stereotypical reporting and the use of signs and symbols can influence how female tennis players develop their personas. Further, the use of language has been analysed through denotation (literal or official meaning) and connotation (the variable meanings, for example emotions that may be related to a term). The chapter is important to this research because representation is central to studying sport and, as Boyle and Haynes (2009) state, mediated sport is filled with ideas and images that reflect, construct and at times challenge wider societal attitudes.

There is always significant media build-up preceding any large-scale mediated event and the Australian Open is no exception. Prior to the start of the Australian Open, there are various lead-up events that players take part in to prepare themselves for the Grand Slam. The ‘Summer of Tennis’, as is described by the various media outlets, which encompasses the lead-up events and the Australian Open, is heavily advertised and marketed. These events are called the Australian Open Series and are held early in the new-year. They include the ATP Cup, Brisbane International, Hobart International, APIA International Sydney and the World Tennis Challenge held in Adelaide. These events are televised on free-to-air television. During these telecasts, the Australian Open and affiliated sponsors are heavily advertised and promoted.

From 2015, Channel Seven, who previously had broadcasting rights to the Australian Open, further extended the deal to include the entire Australian Open series and signed a contract with Tennis Australia to ensure that this deal remained until 2019 (Tennis Australia, 2016). As a result, Channel Seven heavily promoted these events, both prior to and during the event. This is not surprising, given the large audiences that the Australian Open attracts. The 2015 broadcast of the Australian Open reached more than 13 million Australians (Tennis Australia, 2016), providing Channel Seven with countless opportunities to promote the event, advertise affiliated brands and companies, and the players themselves. Given that Channel Seven previously held the broadcasting rights to all of the Australian Open series events, they have power in shaping and disseminating information about the event which is beneficial to them and to the tournament's sponsors. This also applies to the way in which they wish to frame and present the players in these tournaments and the types of stories about the event/players that they choose to run.

This presentation of athletes and the stories/information disclosed will be investigated throughout this chapter. To analyse, recordings of the 6pm Channel Seven news were viewed one month prior to the 2015 Australian Open until the commencement of the tournament. The rationale behind looking at the news prior to the event was to see how this type of broadcasting frames players and entices audiences to watch the event when it begins. The types of stories that were broadcast and the language and imagery used to describe players and the event itself were studied to see how the media shape and present players to a wider audience and how, if at all, this impacts on the way in which players form their personas. It is also important to acknowledge that Channel 7 news is

an institution in and of itself. However, this is an institution that is external to tennis, and therefore was not included in the institutions chapter. Rather, the main concern in this chapter is to explore how a media outlet represents female athletes and a major mediated tennis tournament and using this information seek to determine how this impacts on the development of the persona of female tennis players.

As will be evident throughout this chapter, the news items presented will be a mixture of tennis-based stories in conjunction with more personal focus on the athletes who are being reported on. This mixed reportage enhances the parasocial relationship between tennis players and their fans insofar that they are having their story disseminated to a wider public that blurs the line between the professional and private through glimpses of private information being shared. In today's climate, this link between mediated tennis players and fans is also more closely intertwined as fans are able to comment on news stories where tennis players can return commentary. In addition, social media feeds of fans are often a mixture of friends and celebrities, further blurring the distinction between celebrity and fan (Usher, 2020) (some of whom may be the female tennis players who are discussed in this thesis). The inclusion of more personal focused news stories may also be strategic given that audiences are now, more than ever, craving opportunities for more shared and interactive experiences with their idols (Usher, 2020). So, having the capacity to learn more about tennis players' personal lives and then having the capacity to make commentary on these allows for deeper connection that historically may not have been possible.

The work of P. David Marshall (2014) has been used in this chapter to help understand how the representation of athletes can affect the development of persona. In his book titled *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, Marshall (2014) discusses how celebrity can be interpreted as a sign/text. As previously discussed in the Literature Review, sport and celebrity are closely intertwined with many athletes now considered to be celebrities (Jackson, 2005). Marshall (2014) discusses what he calls the *celebrity sign*. He says that “the celebrity represents something other than itself” (Marshall, 2014, pp. 56-57). Further, Marshall (2014) states that “the material reality of a celebrity sign – that is, the actual person who is at the core of the representation – disappears into a cultural formation of meaning” (Marshall, 2014, p.57). In terms of our purposes here, Marshall’s ideas connect with how media can use this celebrity sign as a way of reinforcing the agenda that they wish to set with the person at the core of the representation being merged into the way in which the media wish to frame them.

As previously stated in the Methods Chapter, the below table provides details of research conducted in this chapter:

Channel 7 News: Data from 1 December 2014 – 19 January 2015

Number of Channel 7 news viewings	Number of mentions relating to the Australian Open / Australian Open Series Tournaments	Discussions of tennis on Channel 7 news
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49	20	21 (consecutive from December 30, 2014 – January 19, 2015)
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*Note: Due to a technical fault, outside of my control, the original recordings are no longer available. However, the analysis was conducted while I was in possession of the original footage and forms the material investigated in this chapter.

While the focus is not on advertisements that relate to tennis, it is still important to at least note these, given they are also a form of representation and house popular ideas and beliefs. The types of advertisements that aired during the telecast each evening were closely related to the major event sponsors. These included a large volume of Kia (major car sponsor for the event) and ANZ. There was also an abundance of ‘Summer of Tennis’ advertisements promoting the series of events prior to the Australian Open. The ANZ advertisements are the most interesting for the purposes here. They used Novak Djokovic, who at the time was the top-ranked male tennis player in the world. ANZ used a series of stories of tennis players, most notably Djokovic, but also included Michael Chang (the youngest person to win a Grand Slam), 16-year old Korean player Duck Hee and Anna, an eight-year-old girl who has a passion for tennis and lives in country New South Wales. This was called the ‘Your Game, Your Way’ campaign and was designed to help promote the bank and strengthen ties with the Asia-Pacific region by strategically using stories that are targeted at a global, local and regional audience.

ANZ also gained naming rights to the China Development Program, an initiative that supports grassroots tennis in China (Zhou, 2016).

A question explored is why Djokovic who, at the time of writing, was at the pinnacle of his career and had chosen to team up with ANZ. During this partnership, Djokovic also began the #rallyforgood campaign in conjunction with ANZ. This campaign was the world's first tennis rally which required consumers to share a photo or video of themselves hitting a tennis ball and then share the post with a friend to keep the rally going. ANZ then donated \$2 for every shot shared and capped this at \$100,000. This money was then donated to community programs in the Asia-Pacific region (CMO Staff, 2015). It is clear as to why ANZ joined this campaign, by donating money to community programs in the Asia-Pacific region, ANZ boosts its profile. For Djokovic, apart from financial gains, he creates an image that is altruistic and charitable. This is not necessarily something that is outwardly and obviously associated with the player. Generally speaking, people like those who give and, for Djokovic, using the ANZ campaign to help a charitable cause via a reputable company may create a more 'likeable' persona that the public responds to. Further, the constant advertisements throughout the Australian Open bolsters his media profile, thus potentially creating a greater public self which could lead to further and larger sponsorship opportunities, and although Djokovic has been used as an example, this would also mirror the potential outcome for female tennis players.

Specifically, now looking at the news items that were viewed on the 6pm Channel Seven news, common trends emerge. Firstly, the types of stories can be clearly defined and categorised. For the research purpose, these have been broken up into three

categories: event specific, player specific and general interest. Each of these categories will now be expanded on in further detail.

Event-Specific News Items

The event-specific news items contained information that was relevant to the event itself. These included reports about the grounds, players who were confirmed to play and new formats and policies for the event. These types of stories began well before the start of the Australian Open, with the first story about the event being aired on December 2, 2014.

This story was telecast during the sports report with a lengthy discussion with Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley. The story began with the heading 'Open organisers celebrating Rafa's return'. The story initially focused on Rafael Nadal's recovery and commitment to play the 2015 Australian Open after having his appendix removed and then swiftly moved to focus on the coming Australian Open. The imagery then moved to Craig Tiley hitting on the Melbourne Park courts (where the event is held) using oversized racquets. Craig Tiley was then interviewed and said that he was delighted to hear that Nadal would be playing in the event and that all of the top-100 men and women singles players were confirmed to play. The story then focused on the issue of weather and the extreme heat that often plagues the event. Tiley then spoke of the retractable roof that was recently erected on Margaret Court Arena, which increases the stadium courts with retractable roofs to three and further aids in the smooth running of the event in the case of bad weather. This story also discussed the possible implementation of a traffic-light themed gauge of weather conditions, with a red light

indicating extreme weather and therefore allowing players to use ice vests when the weather becomes dangerously hot.

Arguably, this was simply a 'taste' and a reminder by Channel Seven to garner interest in the coming event by providing a general overview. The story included key features to spark the public interest in the event. They included an initial hook using Nadal and his return to the Australian Open. There was also an element of human interest, given that he had just returned from surgery. This was quite clever given the player's popularity in this country. They also included familiarity and a reminder about how the event is played in summer, often with issues relating to extreme heat and then provided the viewer with new information and the novelty of the new retractable roof, therefore possibly conveying to the viewer that despite the likelihood of hot weather, spectators could watch the tennis in relatively comfortable conditions, given that three stadium courts could now be covered. However, the story did fail to mention that two of the three courts require the purchase of a separate ticket.

The next news story specifically related to the event didn't occur until January 2, 2015, followed by a feature story within the main body of the news on January 4, 2015. During the sports report, on January 2, there was a mention about the courts being resurfaced in preparation for the tournament. The final event-specific story on January 4 was a more comprehensive story celebrating the opening of the new Margaret Court Arena. In the story, the roof was described as 'coming just in time for the AO' and that it was the fastest retractable roof in the world, closing in five minutes. The roof cost \$182 million and formed part of stage one of the \$366 million redevelopment of Melbourne Park. The roof was officially opened by Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews. Craig Tiley was again

interviewed and said that the new roof was a unique design, with those who have seen it being extremely impressed. Again, these stories were likely to have been aired to create an atmosphere of anticipation and excitement about the event.

General Interest Stories

There were only three general interest stories, with many not specifically related to the Australian Open. One story related to a male player who pleaded guilty to match fixing. The second story was about Elton John playing in a charity match, while the third story was about golfer Rory McIlroy being mocked at an event where the song 'Sweet Caroline' was played after his recent split from Danish tennis player Caroline Wozniacki. These stories aired mainly in early December and were, much like the event-specific stories, quite possibly aired to gain the attention of viewers and remind them of the coming 'Summer of Tennis'. These stories didn't garner enough evidence to form an in-depth analysis of this particular category.

Player-Specific Stories

Player-specific stories make up most of the content during these news items. This section will analyse the types of stories that were aired about the players who were due to compete in the 2015 Australian Open. These stories will be broken up into male and female sections, beginning with the stories regarding the male players.

As previously mentioned, Rafael Nadal began the month's analysis on December 2, 2014. This story covered Nadal's recent recovery from the removal of his appendix. The following day, during the sports report, a story aired on Nick Kyrgios teaming up with Serena Williams in Manila in the newly founded International Premier Tennis League.

Kyrgios makes many appearances during the Channel Seven news in the lead-up to the Australian Open. These stories about the player varied in content. The first longer feature aired about Kyrgios on December 22, 2014, which focused on his goals and expectations for the coming 'Summer of Tennis'. During the interview, Kyrgios talked about his recent reunion with his former tennis coach Todd Larkham and how he was looking forward to working with him again. He also said that he was motivated to do well on home soil. Interestingly, during the interview there was a smattering of Malaysian Airlines logos. There were banners in the background while Kyrgios was hitting along with Malaysian Airlines balls. Kyrgios was also wearing a Malaysian Airlines T-shirt during the interview.

Although nothing was mentioned during the interview, that same day it was announced that Kyrgios had become the new ambassador for Malaysian Airlines. Another interesting point is Kyrgios' heritage. His father is Greek and mother is Malaysian. Perhaps Kyrgios felt that by partnering with this company, he was maintaining his Malaysian heritage. This in turn creates an awareness of his heritage, which he is evidently proud to be associated with and often describes himself as 'Greek, Malaysian, Australian' (Schlink, 2014). During a 2015 interview, Kyrgios said that he was proud of his family culture and had visited his extended family in Malaysia many times, having flown there with Malaysian Airlines. He stated that he "has always associated the airline with home" and feels "privileged to become a friend of the airline", which, he went on to say, would enable him to maintain strong ties with his family's culture (Kimmorley, 2014).

As for Malaysian Airlines, their thought process would have been fairly simple. Given the tragedies of MH370 (the plane from Kuala Lumpur en route to Beijing, China that disappeared in 2014, killing all 227 on board) and MH17 (the plane that was shot down over Ukraine in 2014, killing 298 people on board), the company has been working towards a major overhaul. With it comes a new, youthful and talented ambassador, with Kyrgios taking up this candidature. Malaysian Airline boss Christoph Mueller reinforced this desire to create a new and improved brand for the airline. He said that “when you buy new clothes you feel like a new person, that’s what we’re trying to achieve with Malaysian Airlines” (Ironsides, 2015).

By associating himself with Malaysian Airlines, Kyrgios strengthens ties to his heritage. As he has stated himself, it is important to him to ensure that these ties are maintained. Arguably, this gives Kyrgios a sense of self and identity, as does the heritage of most people, however, not all of us have the opportunity to reinforce this via sponsorship from a major airline company. In addition, Kyrgios may have used this opportunity to show another side of himself as a person. He has forged himself a reputation as the ‘bad boy’ of tennis, however, when discussing his affiliation with the airline, Kyrgios’ reasoning was his strong family ties to Malaysia and the airline, portraying a softer side to his persona which has a strong bond with his family.

There were subsequent stories that followed. These reported that Kyrgios focused mainly on the back injury that he sustained prior to the Hopman Cup, which was why he was forced to pull out of the event. These stories were consistently framed in a way to suggest some urgency in Kyrgios trying to get his body ready for the tournament. For example, he was described as a ‘battler’ and that he was in a ‘race to get fit for the

Australian Open'. This was also apparent when there were other stories about injuries prior to the tournament. Lleyton Hewitt's fitness came into question, given his age and impending retirement. As was Roger Federer's: in a story titled, 'Forever young', Federer was called the 'nice guy of tennis' and then questioned about his health and recent recovery from injuries and was described as being 'healthy and eager'. There were also injury concerns for Andy Murray, with his shoulder problem being a focal point of one story. Finally, Rafael Nadal was again questioned about his wrist, back and removal of his appendix and was described as suffering a 'setback' 'doing it tough' after a loss in a tournament in Qatar before the Australian Open.

These stories were generally focused on the players' performances on court and how injuries were causing potential issues with their preparation. Despite this, the stories were framed in a way to suggest that the players were tough and would still be able to rise to the occasion once the tournament started. As previously mentioned, at times they were described as 'battlers' and doing it tough' and, interestingly, the stories were about men. This sets an inadvertent message to viewers that these male players, despite all physical obstacles presented to them, could still perform and display bravery and courage in doing so with a mental capacity to continue. There were also descriptors of their personality and how the public have come to know them intertwined within these stories, such as Federer being described as the 'nice guy of tennis' and Hewitt, the great Aussie battler facing retirement. These stories again pigeonholed these players into what they have been framed by the wider media. Given the press develop these stories and subsequently interview players with a focal point in mind, it can be

suggested that these individuals and how the media portray them are constructed primarily by the media.

The point about framing will be further maintained in the analysis of female players and what types of stories were broadcast about them. Firstly, the difficulty that Sam Stosur has when playing in Australia was the focal point of the press for many years. She has continually performed poorly when playing on home soil and the audience is continually reminded of this. Prior to the Australian Open, there were a number of stories that aired about Stosur and her 2015 Australian Open campaign.

The initial report on Stosur revolved around wheelchair tennis champion Dylan Alcott and how he was raising funds for the Starlight Foundation. Stosur is interviewed briefly about the foundation and is seen hitting with Alcott. The next story focused on her age and that she was 'not getting any younger'. During this interview she stated that she was using her age to her advantage, drawing on experience. There was then another lighter story about Stosur and her retraining her skills as a ball kid. The stories then became more results-focused. Prior to her first round at the Brisbane International, Stosur's match was mentioned in the sports report. The next night, after the match, a more comprehensive story aired. Stosur lost to a player whom she 'should have' beaten and it was said that she 'choked' while trying to close out the match. The title of this story was 'No Choke' and went on to air Stosur's thoughts on the match, who claimed that she didn't choke. Interestingly, the reporter stated that it was "the latest fade-out on home soil" and that "we've seen it all before but it doesn't get any easier". She was again reminded of her tendency to 'choke' after her first-round win at the Sydney

International, where the commentator said 'the Brisbane meltdown is over' and her 'relief was clear' after she closed her third set to win.

The perception of Stosur is clear. Most people associate her with poor mental capacity in tight situations. The press consistently brings these issues to the fore, which would likely be something that Stosur does not want to relive and defend each time she is interviewed. Her wins are celebrated but, as demonstrated in her first-round win at the Sydney International, they are marred by previous poor performances, most notably when under pressure. This in turn forms a persona whereby she is perceived as flakey and mentally weak. The way in which the media continuously play on this could be detrimental to Stosur's endorsement opportunities and general popularity, a construction that was again arguably developed by the media. Another issue that needs to be considered with this construction is the 'weakness' often stereotypically associated with women. During the story that focused on her Sydney International win, the headline was 'Stosur Bounces Back'. This was one instance where the report said that Stosur 'battled' through a set but then lost in the second round. This, while positive, did not have the same effect as the stories that perceive male players as wounded gladiators who keep battling through adversity.

The general types of female stories and the language used to describe the players is quite interesting and overtly reinforces gender stereotypes. They are types of stories that were broadcast about the female players who were centered predominantly around other activities. When discussing Maria Sharapova and her arrival in Australia with her then boyfriend, tennis player Gregor Dimitrov, she was described as a 'glamour girl'. She was given this label again in a story that focused on her petting and cuddling up to

a koala. In a story that aired about the finals that she was playing in at the Brisbane International against Ana Ivanovic, the match was described as a 'glamour match-up'. Another significantly longer story focused on Australian Formula One driver Mark Webber driving Sharapova around Melbourne in a red Porsche. The title of this story was 'Hot Wheels'. In this story there was also a segment on Sharapova trying her hand at DJing, which was then followed by the reporter asking Sharapova if she "had been out late". Sharapova replied, "I'm not that kind of girl". For a player who at the time was ranked second in the world, the types of stories are centered more so around other facets of her life rather than her tennis specifically. Further, the language used to describe the player clearly is referring to her appearance and is more sexual in nature. The stories that were telecast about her actual playing ability seemed secondary. On occasion, the language used again reinforced gender stereotypes. One reporter said that Sharapova looked "in good touch". This is not a phrase that is ordinarily used for male tennis players.

This was also the case for Eugenie Bouchard who, during the 2014 Australian Open, reached the semi-finals with a huge media following. The types of stories that aired about her, while fewer, were also more focused on her appearance. There was a brief segment on Bouchard's arrival, with the player seen in casual dress while walking along the beach and then showing her in a photo shoot. She was then described as having a 'cult following', being 'one of the most marketable athletes in the world', having 'cover girl looks' and 'looking more like a rock star than a tennis player'.

There was yet another quite baffling story that aired to discuss the results of the ASB Classic held in New Zealand prior to the Australian Open. A lighter news piece, it

showed Svetlana Kuznetsova and Venus Williams hitting while the balls were being retrieved by dogs. The reporter said that the dogs had a “love for collecting balls”, that a combined “cuteness factor” and “slobber factor” may have slowed down the balls and, when finished, they could “return to being cheeky dogs”. The question that needs to be raised here is if this story would have been aired with male players and if the ‘cute’ dogs collecting balls would have had the same effect with male players. Arguably, the answer to these questions would be no. The reason for this is that stories such as these would be considered derogatory and playing down the seriousness of the players involved. It inadvertently tells us that watching these dogs run around collecting balls for the players is a more interesting story than, for example, a female player involved in a tough match.

Serena Williams was arguably the most targeted by this approach. The title of one story which aired about the player was ‘Hands Off’. It focused on Serena Williams attempting to hold a koala. The reporter said that “The most intimidating woman in tennis [is] scared stiff of meeting the locals”. This story is interesting as it focused on a weakness by a player who is well known for her strength and is not typically sexualised, and rather often ridiculed by the media. It almost suggests an air of male superiority by trying to make the player seem weak in that she is unable to take on a ‘cuddly’ and ‘unassuming’ koala.

Of course, male players were subject to stories that weren’t centrally focused on their tennis. For example, Andy Murray posted a picture of him wearing a rather daggy knitted jumper at Christmas, Novak Djokovic promoting UniQlo clothing and Nadal having starred in an X-Men like commercial. While this is evident, the types of stories are more focused on their play rather than other activities that they are involved in. They

are also not described as glamorous. One story that aired was called 'Men at Work', which discussed how the male players were training hard prior to the Australian Open, unlike the females, who were riding around in Porsches and cuddling koalas. This reinforces the fact that women are trivialised in their playing abilities, while their male counterparts are seen as more 'serious' athletes.

A final point that needs to be addressed is how the media introduces and conveys to the viewer that players have arrived in Australia. Many of the stories mentioned this by saying that the 'big guns of tennis have been arriving' or 'big names rolling in'. Many of these stories were accompanied by interviews with the players at the airport. This type of reportage mimics that of a Hollywood movie premiere, or the Oscars. Players are photographed and interviewed on arrival, giving them some sort of 'star' or 'celebrity' treatment. This behaviour is driven by the media and would surely impact on how one behaves in relation to this. Players, many of whom have been on long-haul flights, are required to perform immediately for the cameras to ensure that they are well received from the outset.

Summary

As demonstrated, the construction of persona rests heavily on the shoulders of the media who, both overtly and inadvertently construct personas of their own liking and then section out elements of players' personas that are of benefit to them. It is then up to the player to either accept or reject these, however the media have the power to continually reinforce and reaffirm their agenda, irrespective of the players' desires. This also aligns with the points raised in Chapter Three, and the power of institutions in

forming the persona of female athletes. Another question that needs to be raised is why players such as Sharapova and Bouchard continue to accept this sexualised reportage of themselves.

This would be an interesting avenue for further research and analysing the reasons as to why these female athletes continue to use this representation of themselves.

Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the media are able to shape players in a way that becomes newsworthy and attractive to a wider audience. To further investigate this, the following chapter will discuss how a highly mediated event can influence the development of persona through my analysis of the grounds at the 2015 Australian Open.

Through textual and semiotic analysis, this chapter has demonstrated that the news reporting of a highly mediated event can highlight certain aspects of players, whether or not they want those aspects to be promoted. Channel Seven has the capacity to put forward stories that they deemed 'worthy' of disseminating to a wider audience and infused within this reporting are social norms as they relate to gender, race, advertising and sporting culture in general. This highlights the signs and symbols that we as the audience draw meaning from. To further complicate this, the players then have to decide whether they accept this type of representation. If they reject it, then how would they go about it, thus reevaluating their self-construction and presentation of the self to either fit into this representation or change its course. The difficulty though in rejecting these norms is played out in Chapter Three, whereby the dandy and Serena Williams are known for this, but the way in which society deals with their 'otherness' becomes problematic for the individual and acceptance of this change is not easily accomplished.

Not only is the construction of the female tennis players persona deeply influenced by society and the institutions they are involved in, but as this chapter has demonstrated, heavily impacted by the way that news reporting frames them and the types of stories that are generated by media outlets. The female tennis player needs to account for all of these different forces when trying to develop her persona. Arguably, these influences are out of the control of the players, making it all the more challenging to develop an authentic sense of self and reinforcing the fact that these external 'machines' are primarily focused on churning out personas to suit their own needs. Another extension of this chapter is the work completed in Chapter Six. Here I look at the grounds and make observations about how persona is influenced by a highly mediated tournament and how these representations can impact on persona development.

Chapter Six: Observations – Grounds at the 2015 Australian Open

This chapter explores the wider context of the 2015 Australian Open. As part of my research design, observations were made throughout the two-week event and were focused on three different aspects. Firstly, observations made on the grounds of the tournament were conducted to analyse how the media portray players and promotes an event that is driven by revenue. Secondly, women's singles matches were observed. This was conducted to analyse the on-court personas of female tennis players and note demeanour, dress and on-court routines along with differences and similarities amongst these players. Lastly, press conferences were attended. This took place to observe the interactions between players and the media in addition to how players handled questions and behaved during these interviews.

The use of observations in research is valuable as it deals with direct behaviour rather than behaviour that is alleged or reported on (Hammond and Wellington, 2013). These observations are investigated using semiotic analysis. This research method assists in understanding the meanings and interpretations of different texts with the differing denotations and connotations of signs and symbols (Walliman, 2011, pp. 142-143). It is important to acknowledge that the access I was granted to these areas was possible due to my involvement in tennis as a player, but also as a previous employee of Tennis Australia in the coach education department. Having access to these areas to conduct research is not commonplace and, as such, must be noted as a point of difference to other similar studies.

To complement this, the other research approach used in the chapter is autoethnographical. I have reflected on my personal experience to write this chapter and gain insight based on these external observations, along with my personal experiences of the event. During this chapter I have looked closely at people, place and activity during the observation process. That is, I observe the people participating in the event, the grounds and the activities that take place there. This chapter is fundamentally different from other analyses in terms of research insofar that I have experienced the tournament as player, employee and spectator. This allows me to provide the insider/outsider perspective in my analysis of the observations, which makes this research so valuable and uniquely developed.

In terms of theory, Erving Goffman (1959) and the work he completes in his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* marries nicely in terms of how this chapter was approached. Goffman (1959) claims that we as individuals are always in a state of performance and will shift performances dependent on where we are situated. Goffman (1959) says that;

When an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be. In line with this, there is the popular view that the individual offers his performance and puts on his show "for the benefit of other people". (Goffman, 1959, pp. 46-47).

The tennis players observed are essentially performing “for the benefit of other people” insofar that audiences watch this performance take place through actual matches and press obligations. Despite this performance, for the players there is an element of seriousness in terms of their image as they are in fact professional athletes. However, Goffman’s idea here does not consider how the media can shift and shape this impression and that is what is central to this entire thesis, that the control on the image is determined by someone other than the self.

This chapter is important in understanding the complex nature of persona development as it provides insight into what players experience at a major event that is highly publicised. It further highlights a complicated fusion between competitive sport and a mediatised event, where players need to be able to navigate both spaces. It is important to note that the tournament serves as both the competitive event for athletes to showcase their skills and a spectacle for viewers, but is also a haven for advertisers, publicists and institutions to showcase their products, events and the players who are affiliated with them. This again highlights the complication involved in female players developing their personas in and among the hype of a highly public event.

Grounds

The grounds during the 2015 Australian Open were observed to investigate the way in which the media use athletes to promote the event. The grounds were observed from three major vantage points: Garden Square (in front of Margaret Court Arena), outside of Hisense Arena and at Grand Slam Oval.

Not unexpectedly, each of the three locations were littered with advertising. Major sponsors and partners such as Channel 7, Kia, Mount Franklin, Woolworths, Emirates, Wilson and ANZ were displayed in multiple locations. This is not surprising considering that the event is driven heavily by revenue. That is, Tennis Australia would have aligned with various sponsors to fund the event as do the ITF and WTA Tour. There is a clear observational link here between the blurring of professional sport, institutions and advertising whereby they all seem to intersect into this one event that is driven by profit.

Advertising was not just displayed on billboards and placards around the venue. Large screen monitors for broadcasting were strategically placed in all major sections of the venue (Garden Square and Grand Slam Oval both at the Heineken Bar and in front of Hisense Arena). I say strategically placed, because this is where most of the socialising takes place, so it serves as a way to keep people interested in staying at the location with the assumption that they are likely to consume the food and drink on offer, which again boils down to money and profit. Commercials were streamed at every opportunity, in between games, sets and matches. Most of these commercials were to advertise and promote coming Channel 7 programs. Again, these locations are where most people gather, therefore increasing the chances that the advertisements will be seen by a wider audience. As Lindsay et al. (2013) states, commercial sponsorships at elite sporting events are highly prominent and lucrative today. The authors claim that the sponsorships create a valuable and secure relationship. Advertisers are then able to use sporting events to align their products or brands with activities that are deemed affirming and healthy, which in turn creates positive brand or product affiliation. This seems to be the case for the Australian Open, where exceptionally fit athletes compete

in a highly lucrative sport that is attended by thousands and televised globally. Arguably, this arena is a lucrative one for advertisers that provides an opportunity for these companies to gain an international exposure.

While the prominence of advertising at the event is not unusual, there were other interesting observations made during the event. Firstly, the limited images of players around the grounds was noted. Given the enormity of the event, it was surprising to see such a sparse number of images of players around the venue. Only four images of players were observed: one of Nick Kyrgios in Garden Square, one of Rafael Nadal in Grand Slam Oval and both Li Na and Stanislas Wawrinka holding the winning trophies from the previous year's event. This is possibly due to contractual arrangements between players and the tournament. Players are under various contractual obligations from different companies and even institutions, as discussed in Chapter Four.

While it is unclear as to the regulations of the Australian Open with regard to marketing and the use of players' images to endorse products, there have been other occasions where athletes have been banned from endorsing personal sponsors at large events. This occurred during the 2012 Olympic Games, where athletes were not permitted to acknowledge or endorse personal sponsors publicly, which included social media (Saraceno, 2012).

Another possible reason for the event to minimise the use of players' images could be to ensure that they are able to maximise advertising opportunities. It can be argued that simply using a player's image (when they are not endorsing a specific product) uses up valuable advertising space. Images of players are streamed across the world while they

are playing their matches on a backdrop of advertising banners that adorn the court. Essentially, players are automatically endorsing the tournament by their participation and are therefore not required to have their images further displayed around the venue. Conversely though, it could be a case of the organisation trying to maximise exposure of their own brand, in this case the Australian Open and allied sponsors. As Wakefield et al. (2007, pp. 61-74) states, “the more we are exposed to a given stimulus – sponsorship signage at a sporting event, for example – the more likely we are to remember it, and even like it”. So, in this instance, having fewer athlete images in the surrounds and more event and sponsor logos may increase brand awareness and induce positive associations.

It can also be speculated that players (or, more so, managers) want to avoid ‘over exposure’. With many players already endorsing brands and having already filmed advertisements that are repeated time and again before and during the Australian Open, the lack of images used around the ground could be a way in which to moderate the amount of player images, given their heightened presence in other media and sources. For example and as detailed in Chapter Five, Novak Djokovic appeared in ANZ advertisements that featured heavily on Channel 7 during the 2015 Australian Open, as did Nick Kyrgios in relation to his endorsement of Malaysian Airlines.

To determine if the brand is effectively endorsed, consumers want to see an appropriateness of brand/celebrity affiliation and essentially determine how well both fit together. If the brand fits well with the celebrity, the endorsement becomes more believable, insofar that the celebrity is affiliated with the product due to its superior

performance rather than simply for financial gain (Lake *et al.* 2010). Arguably then, in the case of Djokovic and ANZ, if there were an 'over-exposure' of Djokovic's image on the grounds endorsing ANZ, spectators may find the athlete's intentions for endorsing the product as purely financial, which could then impact negatively on the player and brand. In terms of persona, we can use the same example of Djokovic and ANZ. If audiences were to notice a large increase in images of the player endorsing the brand (such as on the grounds of the event), fans could see him as being disingenuous. Further, there is an element of self-branding here, which is designed to be both idolised and alluring (Marshall & Morreale, 2018). This is why careful strategies are employed to market the players both in product and volume, while maintaining a captivating image of the self.

The other interesting thing to note is the way in which the spectators, staff and players moved around the grounds. Players are separated from the public access areas. They are free to move around the grounds as they see fit, however they generally spend most time indoors underneath Rod Laver Arena. While players are able to access the majority of areas within the grounds, staff and supporters are given restricted access to various parts of the venue. Access is determined by the needs of each staff member and their accessibility requirements or the type of ticket purchased. Staff and players (including player guests, coaches and others) are given accreditation which is colour-coded. This provides varying accessibility, which is dependent on the requirements of the individual. Symbols are also added to these passes to provide different access levels.

People during this event seem to move about quite happily with an acceptance of this type of segregation. The 'us' and 'them' mentality seems to be almost endorsed with accredited check points staffed by security to ensure that the lay person doesn't mix with the accredited few. Of course, this division takes place primarily for security reasons as a way in which to protect the celebrities who are housed within the confines of the building; however, the most intriguing aspect in this observation is how normalised this is with fans seemingly happily moving around the grounds keeping to their enclosed space. In fact, as Murphy and Bauman (2007, p. 193) state, large scale events are often perceived to create a sense of 'community euphoria'. Perhaps the sheer enjoyment and jubilation of attending the event makes fans move around the venue in a blissful state that restrictions on access do not even come into play.

For players, this may have some bearing on their persona as they are being protected or hidden from the crowds until they are ushered to their stage to perform and, after their performance, they are able to retreat to their 'backstage'. Although, the perceived 'backstage' is arguably no more than just that, a perception.

Interestingly, the idea that players can retreat to a safe haven is quite common. In fact, when trying to acquire accreditation from Tennis Australia to observe players in this environment the reply was an initial rejection. A staff member said that underneath the arena was a safe space for players to be themselves, therefore access was not available for research to be conducted. Another person eventually granted access. Despite this, the idea about 'safe space' or a place where players can relax and be

themselves out of prying eyes is quite likely shared by the majority of players and staff. However, this research rejects the idea for many reasons.

Firstly, the space is shared by many accredited staff, many of whom own phones. Although staff are technically not allowed to take photographs of players, there is always the potential for this to occur. Secondly, the building is laden with security cameras prying on every move that these players make. Thirdly, and arguably the most interesting and bizarre aspect, is that the media share this space with players.

Admittedly, there are some sections of the venue that the media are not permitted, but they are housed underneath Rod Laver Arena, with players often crossing paths with journalists. With this in mind, we can argue that this perceived notion of privacy is fraudulent; rather, players are still essentially on show even when they enter their 'private space'.

This idea then of 'private' is actually not accurate. Players, in essence, are not in a 'private' space at all. As Duncan (1994, p. 49) states:

Private describes the taken-for-granted assumption that each of us is an individual self, with particular, personal qualities that differentiate us from everyone else. Private emphasizes our separateness and splits us off from the public, which is shaped by shared social and cultural influences. (Duncan, 1994, p. 49)

It could also be claimed that these players are performing in a fishbowl-like structure where they are on show and watched at all times when at the venue. This could have a

significant bearing on the players' personas when making their way around the grounds during the event.

This is similar to Jeremy Bentham's initial idea of the panopticon in 1785 and then further developed by Michel Foucault's notion of the panopticon, which was discussed in Chapter Three.

Foucault (1979) explored the notion in a more contemporary society and discussed how power is developed through surveillance and serves as means of knowledge and control. In modern society, we are constantly being surveilled via our modern communication systems and CCTV that is commonly located in most public spaces.

This notion can be linked to the experience of tennis players and would arguably affect their personas during the tournament. During matches they are aware that they are being watched, but would not have an awareness of how much spectators are paying attention to them or their match. When they are not playing, they are in this alleged 'private' space but they would surely have an awareness of the security cameras, other staff and the media who comment and report on them. This would then result in a continual surveillance of the self and potentially a projected façade that is not in line with their 'true' self.

The atmosphere around the grounds during the women's and men's singles finals was also observed with some notable differences. Both finals were observed from Garden Square and the Heineken Bar, which are common locations for spectators to gather to watch the finals. Interestingly, the numbers attending both finals were not drastically different. According to Austadiums, 21,293 people attended the men's final with 19,236

people recorded as attending the women's final. Although not significantly fewer in terms of patrons, the atmosphere in the women's final was observed as being more animated than the men's final.

In the women's final, two of the most prominent players were competing in the finals; Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova. Given the celebrity of both players, it was assumed that the grounds would be abuzz with activity for the event. However, quite the contrary was observed. Sitting at Garden Square, facing the big screen television, it was observed that the crowd was at no more than half its capacity. As players began the match, the crowd at this venue was quiet and seemed disengaged with the match and the event itself. People were seated at chairs and tables and the atmosphere seemed quiet and reserved with minimal applause after points.

At the Heineken Bar, again facing the big screen television, the atmosphere seemed even quieter. It appeared that this usually popular section of the venue to watch the tennis from was at approximately 10 per cent capacity. There was little or no crowd involvement in the match, with most people talking among themselves, paying little or no attention to the screen, seemingly more interested in socialising as opposed to watching the match in front of them.

Conversely, the men's final seemed to garner a different atmosphere entirely. At Garden Square, fans dressed up as their favourite player, wore colours and flags in support of their favourite player's country. The crowd was almost at full capacity and spectators cheered as the players walked onto the court and continued this vocal support throughout the match.

At the Heineken Bar, the venue was almost at full capacity. There was substantial crowd involvement during the match with quite a jovial atmosphere among spectators with the crowd transfixed to the screen as they watched the match. This offers some valuable insight into the social perception and divide between genders. Perhaps the substantial differences in terms of crowd demeanour and, to some extent, attendance reinforces the gender divide. The question that must be raised here is why significantly fewer people were engaged during the women's final versus the men's final. This is baffling considering the celebrity status and notoriety of both Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams. It must be noted here that the weather was quite cold with intermittent rain during the women's finals. This could have potentially deterred some spectators from viewing the event at these outdoor venues. However, the weather was also cool with drizzle during the men's final, which didn't seem to affect the attendance.

Here, we could also question the perception of women's versus men's sport in general. This reinforces the notion that female athletes are seen as inferior and perhaps not as 'entertaining' as their male counterparts. An inquiry conducted by the Parliament of Australia in 2006 emphasised this point and stated that women continued to be sexualised during coverage, which in turn undermined their performances (Parliament of Australia, 2006).

Matches

Ten women's singles matches were observed in various locations and at differing stages of the event. Matches from both outside and stadium courts were analysed, as were the actions and demeanour of both higher and lower-ranked players to see if the

persona of the female tennis players is influenced by the stage that they perform on or their status. These observations provided some interesting insights into the persona of the female tennis players.

Attire

As Whannel (2002) states, athletes are now big business with each trying to create and increase wealth. It is with no surprise then that many female tennis players adorn show-stopping outfits that promote sponsors with visible logos. Unless you are new to the circuit or you are an up-and-coming player, you are generally sponsored by clothing and/or racquet companies. Interestingly, in all observations logos of players were clearly visible on apparel and racquets.

When watching these matches or indeed any matches that are played on the tennis circuit, an observation can be made. Lower-ranked players are usually seen wearing the same outfits. These outfits are often part of large sporting companies' newest range, designed to entice people to buy these outfits modelled by the athletes themselves. Higher-ranked athletes or those who have larger media profiles often do not wear the same outfits though. These athletes will either wear entirely different outfits or similar attire but have their articles of clothing or equipment customised. It is important to note here that this is evident on both the ATP and WTA tours.

While this may not be surprising to many, it does raise some questions about the construction and development of persona. Arguably, the lower-ranked players are in the process of trying to differentiate themselves and create a persona that will have them 'stand out' from the rest of the players and achieve the status of those players who are

able to have their outfits customised. This performance is akin to that of a stage performance where the higher-ranked players dress to stand out from the 'extras', as they are the stars of the show.

Interestingly, the desire to stand out really resonates with the top players. This idea was also explored in Chapter Four. For example, Andy Murray recently created his own logo that is stitched onto his attire. The logo is a combination of Murray's initials and 77. The 77 is significant as Fred Perry was previously the last British man to win the men's singles championship at Wimbledon, 77 years before Andy Murray won it in 2013. The customisation of one's attire and the creation of a personalised logo is undoubtedly a symbol of status and, for Andy Murray this highlighted his prominence (Rumsby, 2015).

The question that needs to be raised here is who drives this phenomenon and how much power the player has in this. It can be argued that the player has very little agency when it comes to their attire. Yes, they can potentially pick the brand; however, for those who are not ranked highly, they are essentially to wear what they are given. Higher-ranked players often have input in the customisation of their attire, such as Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams, who both work closely with Nike. Surely then, we could see a shift in these players' personas. They may feel a greater level of status and with that, they may become more guarded in the public space as they are managed by more external people/companies which restrict their 'true' self from coming to the fore.

Performance

The performance of these athletes during matches was also closely observed. Players were generally predictable and would often present the same types of behaviours when

presented with similar situations. For example, it was observed that many players who won a point would yell 'c'mon' and fist pump or, if down, would look at their support team, who would respond with either verbal encouragement or use supportive gestures such as clapping or fist pumping.²

When watching these players, on-court routines were also observed. Again, these were quite similar. Players tended to bounce the ball numerous times before serving, look at and fix their strings at the completion of points, and shuffle their feet before return of serve. None of the players observed wavered from these 'in-between point' routines. There have been players who have been noticed by the media for differing on-court routines. For example, the way in which Maria Sharapova places her hair behind her ears prior to serving has received significant media commentary, as has Rafael Nadal's underwear adjustment before each serve.

Interestingly, in relation to Nadal, his underwear adjustment may have been influential in him becoming the face of Tommy Hilfiger and launching the brand's latest underwear line in 2015. This is a prime example of the media using a performance that sits outside the 'norm' of tennis performance to mould a person to suit their own agenda and, as a result, agents take this idea to arguably exploit the player for commercial gain.

Another interesting performance which was observed and is common among these athletes is the players' acknowledgement of the crowd (or lack thereof). In the matches

² Although not observed here, it is not common to see a few players differentiate themselves (whether this be consciously or subconsciously) through their performance both on and off the court. For example, Lleyton Hewitt became known for his famous 'vicht' salute (which was allegedly taken from another player) and his passionate 'c'mon's'. In fact, in 2010, Hewitt joined with Inferno Sports to create the 'Cmon' Brand (Malinowski, 2013). This reinforces and strengthens the interrelationship between the celebrity, sports and capital.

observed on outside courts, players were not introduced but rather walked onto court after being accompanied by security. On the larger stadium courts, players were introduced and then proceeded to walk onto their stage. The commonality between all players, irrespective of the court that they were playing on, was the minimal amount in which players acknowledged the crowd. During observations, some players completely ignored the crowd as they entered the court, while others would provide the crowd with a simple gesture such as a wave or smile. Players would be fully cognisant of the crowd's presence, however they ignore them. This is not the case for all players. Some engage with the crowd during play. For example, when Nick Kyrgios was in the midst of the fifth set against Andreas Seppi of Italy in the fourth round of the 2015 Australian Open, he yelled out 'Oi, where are you going?' to three spectators who were about to walk out of the stadium. While interaction between player and crowd does occur, it can be argued that the vast majority of players will only minimally engage with the crowd or completely ignore spectators during matches.

Although most crowd spectators would be ignored, some spectators for some athletes play a crucial role in the players' performance. These spectators are the coaches and support team. During observations, many of these players looked to their support team at various stages during a match. This was evident during the first-round women's match for Storm Sanders of Australia, who received a wild card for the event and was playing in her first Grand Slam. Playing experienced Czech Republic opponent Klara Koukalova, who was ranked 46 in the world, Sanders understandably may have been feeling nervous given the enormity of the occasion. By the first game she was looking to her support team, who were providing the player with reaffirming nods and 'cmon's'.

This behaviour extends to many players on tour who often look to their support team in times of need during matches and seems to occur as tunnel-type vision where other spectators are ignored and only those who are known to the player are engaged.

These observations are all typical of what is seen at tennis tournaments. A few players will use or work the crowd but the majority will keep to themselves, look at their support team on occasion and acknowledge the crowd at the completion of their matches. As a result of these observations, what we now need to consider here is how this affects players' personas. As Jung (1992, p. 158) states, persona is a mask and a compromise between the individual and the societal understanding of what a person should appear to be. This typical performance resonates with Jung's concept of persona. These athletes are essentially following on from what the expectation is in this environment. It is those who step out of this and, for example acknowledge the crowd or behave in a way that brings attention to themselves, whether this be negatively or positively, that is noticed.

We then need to consider what ramifications this 'noticing' has on players. Firstly, the more reportage and media coverage they have, the more their status as a celebrity increases. For example, Nick Kyrgios who was ranked 50 in singles during the 2015 Australian Open, displayed flamboyance and attitude on-court and involved the crowd during his matches. In fact, after this tournament, Kyrgios was involved in a scandalous on-court exchange with another player where he told his opponent that a fellow Australian player was having sex with his girlfriend. At the change of ends Kyrgios was

heard saying “Kokkinakis banged your girlfriend” to Stan Wawrinka during their match at the 2015 Rogers Cup in Montreal (Hytner, 2015).

Although this reportage was not favourable, and nor were many of his antics during the 2015 Australian Open, Kyrgios became a household name as the ‘bad boy’ of Australian tennis. This type of performance arguably would have had the media salivating over a scandalous story and promoters and agents working hard to firstly execute some damage control and then spin the athlete around by using his flamboyance and exuberant personality to take advantage of the situation. As Whannel (2002, p. 43) states, agents are continually looking for captivating and alluring athletes to create ‘walking money’, thus making Kyrgios an agent’s dream. Arguably then, athletes who are not as well known to the public and take part in media saturated events such as the Australian Open, open themselves up to being noticed. However, as Cashmore (2010, p. 49) states, the public often take notice of sporting prowess first, but they then draw attention for aspects that relate to other factors such as their looks, attire or performance.

It can be claimed that players, particularly those who have not yet reached the status and celebrity of some of the top players, must negotiate this terrain with skill and many conscious and subconscious decisions are to be made. For example, as stated previously, some of these players are required contractually to wear particular outfits. What would happen if the athlete were to be given an outfit that would be different to the ‘norm’? They would probably be noticed and when one becomes noticed by spectators the media notice and then mould them to suit their own needs. This would also occur if

a player were to behave differently to what is expected, for example, by interacting with the crowd. Or in terms of gender, a female may upset the norms of society by having a perceived masculine appearance. If any of the above were to occur, we would see the beginnings of a relationship between media and player where it is almost certain that the media would be the driving force in the development of their public persona.

Press Conferences

Post-match press conferences play a vital role in any sporting event. At the Australian Open, players are required by the ATP and WTA to field questions by the media. These press conferences are supposedly used to gain insight into the players' inner thoughts and feelings about their performance, but also are used as a way to get to know the players with non-tennis related questions.

At the Australian Open there is one main press room where players who are either highly ranked or have played on a main stadium court are interviewed. The player sits at the bottom of a staged area with the press raised significantly higher. There are other smaller-sized press rooms that are for lower-ranked players and are much more intimate and offer a closer look at the players. The main press room appears like a stage where the player is performing for the press (see image below). The layout of this room raises an interesting point regarding the construction of players' personas. Their performances are being analysed by the media who, at any point, can find a way in which to frame a player, which in turn constructs persona.



This photo shows the layout of the Australian Open media room (Pam Shriver, 2016).

Two full days of women's press-conferences were observed at the 2015 Australian Open. Unsurprisingly, many of the responses seemed to come from the standard stock of answers that athletes provide after most of their matches. However, there was an incident during the two weeks that sparked considerable commentary on social media. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Generally, similar questions were asked of the players by the press. These included questions relating to how they played during their match, their next opponent, how they feel their game is progressing, how they are feeling mentally and physically, previous years' performances and more. These questions often garner similar responses, such as a player saying that they felt good during their match, praising their opponent and then making statements about how difficult their next round will be.

An example of this is when Romanian Simona Halep was asked about her performance against Australian Jarmila Gajdosova in the second round. Reporters asked her about

her performance, to which she responded with “I played much better than first round tonight, so I am happy with this. I am more aggressive and I served very well tonight”. She was then asked about her next round opponent, American Bethanie Mattek-Sands. She responded by saying, “I played her once in the French Open (a) few years ago. I expect (a) tough match. She’s playing well. She’s fighting until the end”.

These responses seem scripted and arguably provide little or no insight into what the player is actually thinking. This is a prime example of a staged performance and a mask that players are required to wear during their meetings with the press. It is a fusion of what Goffman (1990) terms the ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’. In this case, the learnt behaviours and responses are the ‘front stage’, while the ‘back stage’ is the way that the person behaves when they are not in front of an audience.

Other questions that are typically asked of female tennis players relate to their attire and opinions on what other tennis players are wearing. These resemble the questions asked of actors as they walk the red carpet at the Oscars, which further propagates the notion of the athlete as a celebrity. For example, in her press conference after her second-round win, Russia’s Maria Sharapova was asked about her thoughts on the outfits that were being worn:

Reporter (to Sharapova): “Who do you think is dressing the best on court this year?”

Sharapova (to reporter): “I quite like my outfit, so...”

Reporter: “But others?”

Sharapova: “I haven’t seen all the outfits yet. Maybe I’ll check on Getty, yeah.”

Interestingly, this press conference took place after a match that Sharapova almost lost. She won the match 6-1, 4-6, 7-5 after saving match points against her. Although the press did ask her questions related to the match, it is worth noting that the question of fashion and dress was still deemed necessary to raise by the press and, looking closely at Sharapova's responses, one could argue some cynicism and sarcasm in her answers.

Sharapova was not the only player to be asked about dress during the press conference observations, with both Serena Williams and Eugenie Bouchard asked similar questions. After her second-round win, Williams had this exchange:

Reporter (to Williams): "Maria Sharapova said she loves her own outfit yesterday. She didn't say much about the others. Just wondering, do you like her design for her outfit? I'm sure you love yours, but how about hers?"

Williams (to reporter): "Yeah, I think it's great. I think it's kind of cool we're both wearing a little cut out in the back. It's amazing. It's cool. I think the on the whole, Nike did a wonderful job making the bright colours. All the Nike athletes look unified. I really love that about it. Everyone looks great in their outfits. It's amazing. So, I think it's the first time all Nike athletes can take one big picture together and all look really great".

It was a similar experience for Bouchard:

Reporter (to Bouchard): "Serena was telling us this year, it's the year of the back in terms of dresses. Are you going to get on that bandwagon?"

Bouchard (to reporter): "Maybe I should. I mean, she must know what's coming

up in fashion and stuff. Maybe I should cut a hole in my top tonight and show off my back like Serena.”

Another issue that took place at the 2015 Australian Open was a post-match question on court directed to both Eugenie Bouchard and Serena Williams. After Williams won her first-round match and Bouchard won her second-round match, Channel 7 commentator Ian Cohen asked both women to do a twirl and model their outfits. Both athletes were uncomfortable when asked to do this, with Williams stating that she “wouldn’t ask Rafa or Roger to twirl”, and then added “I didn’t really want to twirl because I was just like, you know, I don’t need all the extra attention”. After the incident, Bouchard said the request was “very unexpected” and then added, “I don’t know, an old guy asking you to twirl. It was funny” (Withnall, 2015).

These types of questions reinforce the trivialisation and sexualisation of female athletes and, as previously mentioned, promotes a notion that women are seen as less serious than their male counterparts. It is also important to note the behaviour and demeanour of the athletes. Again, these observations were all fairly similar, reinforcing this scripted behaviour that we expect to see from these players. The players tended to answer questions in a ‘matter-of-fact’ manner and display little emotion during their interviews. This is not surprising given the amount of media training that tennis players are given. I recall doing this training during my time as a tennis player, learning how to deflect and ensure that I was only dealing with questions that I wanted to answer.

During these observations it seemed as though some players seemed disinterested in engaging with the press after their matches. This was particularly evident among some

of the more senior and established players on tour. For example, during Maria Sharapova's press conference after her second-round win, it was observed that Sharapova made little eye contact with the journalists when answering questions. She also seemed aggravated by a question that a journalist made regarding her fist pumping. While she answered the question, her tone seemed condescending. Serena Williams also looked down a lot when answering questions after her second-round win. She appeared to be bored throughout and answered most questions without much differentiation in her tone. Williams also ended the press conference by putting her hands in the air and saying "I think that was the last question" and proceeded to grab her phone and walk out of the media room.

This lack of interest in talking to the media (particularly by the more established players) may be as a result of numerous factors. One possibility could be the sheer volume of press and media that these athletes are required to undertake and thus the press conference becomes normalised and just another task. I think it is important to note here that when a player finishes a match there is often a significant release of emotion and physical expenditure. This, coupled with the requirements of cooling down or sometimes having to take drug tests, is often a lengthy process. So, by the time a player reaches the media, the player is likely to be even more exhausted emotionally and physically, making the task of talking to the media less enjoyable. The consuming process that players have to follow can then impact on their personas given they may appear disinterested, which can lead to negative press and therefore create and unfavourable persona for the athlete.

Interestingly, each player who is interviewed by the press in the media rooms always has a moderator present. In the main media room, a representative of the WTA generally acts as the moderator. This can be seen as a way to 'protect' both the players and WTA Tour in case something is said that may be detrimental to either the player or tour. Surely this moderation would impact on how players respond to the media and is not dissimilar to Foucault's panopticon, as previously mentioned.

Summary

Overall the observations as presented here show a very controlled environment where it is, for the most part, a predictable and normalised state of being. Top players adorn personalised outfits and those trying to make 'a mark' of sorts form part of a wider group who are looking to differentiate from the pack. Media interactions with players are quite heavily moderated and many reinforce gender stereotypes. Arguably, this predictability impacts on persona. Players travel an expected course, not to disrupt the norm that has been previously established. However, when one does, it becomes noted and perhaps changes the path taken – this could be in a negative or positive manner, thus further substantiating the complex road that players must travel in creating and then negotiating their personas. The next chapter will further analyse this continual adjustment through direct discussions with Australian female tennis players, both past and present, and a WTA Tour coach.

Although this chapter has only dealt with one event and the observations garnered during the event and on location, it has further developed an understanding into how female tennis players' personas are constructed and can be influenced by other driving

factors. Press conferences and media rooms are highly structured and controlled by the institutions that run them, the grounds are carefully manipulated to ensure maximum exposure for advertisers and players are highly stylised through their attire and branding that they are affiliated with. With this in mind, the agency that female tennis players have in creating a persona that is completely their own, is questioned. These events are driven by profit and, as such, it is germane to probe just how much the mainstream ideas and values are projected to ensure widespread appeal, and the same would go in terms of how players are represented. This further highlights the complicated maneuvering that female tennis players need to undertake when constructing their personas.

Chapter Seven: Interviews

This chapter explores the perspective of those who are directly associated with the women's tennis circuit and their perception of the persona of female tennis players. This chapter provides important insight into understanding how the persona of female tennis players develops in a sport that is highly mediated and the impact that it has on players from those who are immersed within the sport. The interviewees were asked a range of questions that related to their own opinion with regard to how they feel their persona has developed over time and how they see other more senior and famous players on tour develop their personas. They were also asked questions in relation to their opinions on how the media shape the personas of female tennis players.

The research approach used in this chapter is a fusion between IPA and autoethnography. That is, I use the IPA approach to compassionately interpret and comprehend the experiences of the interview subjects while at the same time use autoethnography as a way to use my own personal background in the sport to explore and understand the experiences of the interviewees. The other important aspect to note here in terms of my method is that the line of questioning also reflects my understanding of tennis, and that the research respondents who I interview also have a shared and lived experience with me. This additional autoethnographical layer allowed me to move the interviews into spaces that may not have been able to be reached by other researchers who have not experienced what I have in tennis. This is a valuable aspect to my research as it is a method that has not been used before in investigating the construction of the persona of female tennis players.

A total of four interviews were conducted from December 2014 to February 2015. Three of them were conducted with female tennis players and one was with a male coach who works with WTA players. All of the people involved in the interviews are Australian. It is important to note that as the interviewer I was able to gain access to these players given my past experience as a female tennis player on the ITF and WTA circuit. Further, my previous work at Tennis Australia has given me insight into the world of professional tennis. It is important to note that the participants involved in this chapter either knew me or knew of me prior to conducting these interviews. I raise this as a point because, not dissimilar to the access gained to the grounds at the Australian Open, the access I was given to these players and coach was likely made possible due to my involvement in the sport. As previously mentioned, there is real value to these interviews through the use of IPA as an interview method and the ability for me as the interviewee to interpret the experience of the subjects. This was also combined with my lived experience that enabled me to more completely analyse and interpret the information acquired from the interviews.

One of the central ideas that comes into play in this chapter can be linked to self-branding. The tennis players interviewed were asked to reflect on their own identities and those of other formidable identities on the tennis circuit. As has been already established in previous chapters, many top athletes are now considered to be celebrities (Jackson, 2005) and in terms of self-branding, athletes of today are considered to be brands for consumption O'Reilly and Braedley (2008). Marshall and Morreale (2017) say that;

Celebrities work very hard on producing a public version of themselves, a portrait and story that is marketable and valuable in popular culture. It is individualised as it goes well beyond a film, book, or song and transforms into a discourse about the desirability of the self. (Marshall and Morreale, 2018, p. 179).

The two female tennis players starting out, Storm Sanders and Player A, discussed ideas about this image making or self-branding in terms of projecting into the future and how they want to manage this space, whereas retired tennis player Nicole Pratt was more reflective on her own image throughout her interview, given she had recently retired. Simon Rea shared his own thoughts on how the players he worked with managed the self-branding process. All four interviewees also discussed the way in which other more notable tennis players present and market themselves to a wider public.

As mentioned in the Methods Chapter, the process of semi-structured interviews was followed during the interview process. There were some slight changes to core questions when interviewing the two beginner players, retired player and coach. The Methods Chapter provides a list of these questions. It is important to note that given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, these questions served as a guide only. Depending on the response of the subject, the discussion moved into different avenues that were essentially guided by the respondent.

The following individuals have participated in this research. Firstly, an emerging young player who wished to remain anonymous was interviewed. At the time of the interview she was ranked within the top 600 in the world in singles. She discussed how she sees

her persona presently and how she foresees this changing as she creates a greater media profile. She also discussed her perception of the personas of more senior players on the WTA Tour. For the remainder of this chapter, this player will be referred to as Player A. Another emerging tennis player, Storm Sanders, was also interviewed. At the time of interview, Sanders was ranked 323 in the world and was preparing to play in the singles main draw of the 2015 Australian Open, and still continues to play in 2021, predominantly as a doubles player and also represented Australia at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics. The questions presented to Sanders were similar to those asked of Player A and focused on projecting how she sees her persona developing in the future. Retired tennis player Nicole Pratt was the third person to be interviewed. Pratt, a former singles player who reached the world ranking of 35, discussed the development of her persona retrospectively and how this changed in retirement. She also provides insight into how she sees the development of persona change with the development of technological advances. Finally, Simon Rea was interviewed. At the time of interview, he was the coach of Sam Stosur, who reached a career-high singles tennis ranking of number four in the world. Rea spoke from a coach's perspective in how he sees the development of his players' personas over time.

Player A

Interviewed on 19 December 2014

Player A was introduced to the sport of tennis by her parents, who wanted her to participate in an outdoor activity. As Player A's aunt played tennis, it seemed a logical sport to take up. As a youngster, Player A idolised Swiss player Martina Hingis for her

ability to outsmart players on the court. In more recent times, Player A enjoyed watching Li Na from China and admires the way in which she conducts herself both on and off the court. I can certainly relate to what Player A has said here, insofar that I remember idolising players and then almost mimicking some of their on-court behaviours when I played, making a link between their actions and then forming my own. This also constructs part of the persona development and that connection between using other players' behaviours and idiosyncrasies to then form your own.

When asked about the drug scandal that saw Hingis ultimately retire from tennis in 2007, Player A commented that this did not impact the way in which she viewed Hingis. The Swiss tennis player tested positive to cocaine after a routine drug test during Wimbledon in 2007 (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2007). Although she acknowledged that this was not admirable behaviour, it wasn't something that made a difference to how she saw Hingis as a player she looked up to. This is an interesting case in point given the impact that the media has on how female tennis players are represented. Perhaps this suggests that those who have experience in the sport, such as Player A, are more inclined to focus on the significance of the player and how they compete on court rather than any of the external representations. In addition to Hingis, Russian tennis player Maria Sharapova was also embroiled in a significant drug scandal that garnered much media attention. Sharapova tested positive for meldonium, a drug known for increasing blood flow and exercise capacity, during the 2016 Australian Open and served a two-year suspension (*Guardian Sport*, 2016). Despite this, Sharapova retained the majority of her sponsors and continued to be one of the most marketable female athletes until her retirement in

2020. According to Rossingh (2017), Sharapova's decision to go public with the results worked in her favour from a public relations perspective and showed an honourable side to her character. This is a stark contrast to Hingis, who maintained her innocence and then subsequently retired from the sport after the allegations, only to return to the sport in 2013 as a doubles specialist. This is not to say that Sharapova's drug scandal helped her career and the way she was represented. However, it hasn't appeared to hinder it and is thus unlike Hingis who has had a more tumultuous career and has been on the receiving end of media criticism, particularly after her drug scandal.

Player A was asked about who she admires in terms of their media presence and their ability to connect with people online. She favoured Belarusian tennis player Victoria Azarenka , saying "I hear about her all the time and like she's tweeting all the time and Instagram posts and stuff like that" and "she seems very outgoing and likes to share things and wants to be involved with her fans". This act of constantly updating fans with what players are up to certainly impacts on their level of fame. As Player A says, "I think now with this generation and they're all connected with the internet, phones", which helps bring one's name to the fore.

In terms of her own use of social media and promotional platforms online, Player A stated that she uses these to also lift her media profile, much like the players she looks up to. As a junior, Player A's cousin, who was employed in IT, helped the athlete set up a website to promote herself and keep her fans abreast of what she was doing. However, given that at the time Facebook was beginning to become the main player in

social media, they opted for a fan page on that forum. While her Facebook page is updated frequently, she ensures that there is a clear separation between her public and private self. Player A says;

Well I try and keep my personal life and my public life separate. Yeah so like on my personal Facebook I don't really post anything, like I don't post tennis photos and things like that.

Personally, I remember feeling quite similar in terms of what I chose to disclose online. I remember having vast media training and being told to ensure that one should maintain a separation between the public and the private. However, it must be noted though that at the time I was playing, social media was nowhere near as prevalent as it is now. Perhaps then at this time there was more fear surrounding having an online profile and what could happen if private information was disseminated to a wider audience. In essence, that has stayed with me since my retirement from the sport.

The online climate is clearly an area that needs to be skilfully managed. There is careful interplay that needs to occur to keep fans entertained and involved in a player's life but also an area by which a player would want to maintain some level of privacy and subsequently control over their own persona. People who are not public figures also need to negotiate this space, however, the stakes are not necessarily as high. That is, the cost of poor handling of the public self is not likely to involve the loss of sponsorship, endorsements and wider public perception. As Ramelb (2016) states, "technology has influenced how we represent our thoughts and personalities to society. With the

advancement of technology comes the ability to create a new self, a new image, a new representation, which is ultimately a new identity". This is exactly what is able to occur here for players, they can create an entirely new identity that interacts with the outside world that they can mould for their own purpose.

Player A had some interesting insights regarding representational media and how this type of media can affect the persona of individuals. Player A admitted that she tends to read about and watch more of the men's game as she finds the media don't take the women's game seriously. She stated that when she reads about women's tennis, "most of it's just like crap about what they're wearing, and how they look and if they've put on weight or you know, stuff like that". However, in the men's game, "they actually talk about the game and how they play", whereas:

You hear about Serena and her personal life like all the time and Maria Sharapova, yet they don't really talk about their tennis very much compared to the men, anyway, that's what I find.

The non-sport based reporting mentioned above is precisely what Kane and Greendorfer (1994, pp. 28-45) outline in their work on the trivialisation and sexualisation of female athletes and the way in which this facilitates patriarchal oppression. Further, we can also see connections between Player A's thoughts and how female tennis players have had to field questions that perhaps would not be asked of male athletes. For example, it is worth relating this to the controversial question that Canadian tennis player Eugenie Bouchard was asked after her quarter-final win at the 2014 Australian

Open. The post-match interviewer, Sam Smith, asked who she would like to go on a date with, to which Bouchard responded “Justin Bieber”. This type of question reinforces what Player A asserts about the perception that female tennis players are considered “less serious” to their male counterparts.

Player A also discussed the other avenues that some of these female tennis players take in an effort to heighten their status and wealth. She stated that the players who have other side businesses, such as Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams with their fashion labels, helps attract other people to the sport. Player A believes that this is positive, however still detracts from their actual playing ability. As for her view in relation to how she would navigate this, Player A stated that she would tend to favour a profile that updates her matches and on-court presence rather than what she gets involved in off-court. Arguably, given the minimal attention that Player A has had, it can be suggested that with an influx of media attention this view may change. Given the high profile of the sport, it would be difficult to keep the media interested only in what happens on-court. This, it can be suggested, underlines the vulnerability of emerging players. Further, it also reinforces the idea that at an early career stage, these players are still able to control their persona and how they wish to be represented.

In terms of her own understanding of how she would like to be portrayed to the wider public, Player A stated that this would need to be navigated in a careful and skillful manner. She claimed that she would envisage having a clear distinction between her private and public self. As such she stated that she would,

Try and be like happy and outgoing and just really friendly to everyone and just talk about whatever, you know rubbish really, whatever is happening [when in public].

In private however, Player A would like to discuss “normal issues like what’s happening in my life”. She draws attention to the fact that those who have a mediated self-need to be careful about what they choose to disclose in public,

You do have to be careful in your public self with what you say because then it can go around and then it can be twisted and just completely destroy everything.

This is an interesting observation by the player as she clearly draws a distinction between her private and public self, or noting this from the lens of Goffman (1990), the front and back stage.

To further add to the idea of mediating one’s self, Player A discussed how throughout her short career she had already trained in how to address the media. Player A says that,

If there is something that you don’t want to talk about you just refer, you just talk about what you’re there to actually talk about.

For example,

If they ask you something personal about your life you just try to divert it to your match that you just played or you don’t actually answer the questions, you answer it in a different way.

She continued by saying that,

It's quite funny cause when you actually know it and then you listen to other like interviews and stuff, you're like 'oh they didn't actually answer that question'.

I too recall having this same experience and being taught how to deflect questions that you may not necessarily want to be answered. This was quite a complex idea for a teenager to grasp, so it is unsurprising that sometimes younger players slip up from time to time. We were always also taught to follow a particular script that had to include some commendation of our opponent, irrespective of our personal opinion of them so as to create an image of fair and decent sportsmanship.

By virtue of this training, athletes are told to conceal things about themselves, creating a barrier between themselves and the public. This barrier clearly creates a distinction between the private and public self and with the aid of this training, a mediated persona has been created that has been influenced by external factors. For example, in this instance, it is created in conjunction with those who upskill athletes in addressing the media.

Storm Sanders

Interviewed on 19 December 2014

Much like Player A, Storm Sanders, who at the time of the interview was 20 years old, was starting her professional tennis career and was scheduled to play in the main draw of the Australian Open in the following month. Not dissimilar to Player A, Sanders was introduced to tennis by her parents when young. She enjoyed watching Venus and

Serena Williams at a young age as she liked how they dominated the game with their power. Much like Player A, Sanders spent more time watching men's tennis, "when I was younger I watched a lot of guys play rather than girls". It is interesting to note that two aspiring female players are idolising male players and enjoy watching men's tennis over the women's game. However, the media has a role to play in this, from the way in which players are represented, such as how women are often feminised and sexualised when represented in magazines, as opposed to men who are often portrayed as strong and heroic (Lamoureux, 2012), to the airtime given to men's matches compared to women's matches. Player A states that,

The ABC cut broadcasting women's sport. So that's like a huge, I read it on social media, but like yeah that's a huge blow because we struggle enough as it is for women in sport to get exposure let alone, so now the ABC's cutting that, it's really quite sad.

Player A is referring to is the ABC's decision to axe free-to-air coverage of the women's basketball and soccer leagues (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2014). This decision surely impacts on the way in which the wider community views women's sport and the athletes that participate in them.

Both Sanders and Player A were asked about branding and the brands that they feel would best match their personality. Player A seemed more in favour of brands that she felt would enhance her performance. For example, when asked what brands she would like to be sponsored by, she suggested ASICS as she has had foot problems in the past and feels that the shoes would best help her with this issue. Interestingly, Sanders has

a different perspective. Sanders would like to gain sponsorship from Australian label Lorna Jane as,

She's Australian and she's not a big brand like Adidas or Nike who you're just like another person to them, I feel like with Lorna, because I wear a lot of their clothes cause I really like their stuff, and I feel like I'm different to everyone else. And just because it's Australian and I'm from Queensland and she's from Queensland, I just have this little connection I guess.

Effectively Sanders is saying that she would like to be affiliated with a brand but would like to still have a point of difference from other players so as to stand out a little bit from the crowd. This is not dissimilar to players who wear big name brands with a slight difference to their outfits or have their names embroidered on their shoes. It is important to note though that these clothing decisions by top athletes are long and carefully planned processes to ensure maximum marketing potential. For example, Nike, who has had a longstanding relationship with Tiger Woods, will put together a wardrobe design for the major events he is to play in over a year in advance, carefully and methodically selecting items that the athlete will enjoy wearing but will also have the best sales potential (Pennington, 2009).

Sanders also discussed her perception of players that are sponsored by larger companies. Sanders said that sponsors have the ability to shape the way in which players are viewed by the public, saying;

Obviously the bigger sponsors have bigger networks and people, just the general public look up to the people who are being sponsored. For example, Adidas who are massive. If you're with them, people just automatically think you must be really good at what you do and depending how they portray you as well, then it can influence what the public think of you and if they do something really powerful, like with an advertisement where you're hitting a tennis ball and it's powerful people will be like, 'oh I really want go watch her play' and think that she's going to be amazing and she's strong.

The above statement from Sanders is a clear example of how the media and large companies can shape the profile of athletes through advertising and the types of exposure that players receive. According to Sanders, athletes inspire others and businesses are acutely aware of this, which makes the reasoning behind the business and athlete relationship clearer.

Like Player A, Sanders also uses social media to promote herself. Despite being a relatively unknown player, Sanders has two separate Facebook accounts, one personal account and one to promote her tennis. Her reasoning behind having the two accounts is mainly to let people know where she is and what tournaments she is playing in so that they are able to follow her progress. Sanders says that she is “trying to put myself out there so that people can keep up to date with how everything's going and people who just want to follow me as a tennis player, who I don't know personally but are just interested in how I'm going. I can post schedules, and stuff up there”. This appears to be a logical thing to do, however the necessity to have more than one account (one

private and one public account) seems a little curious, especially given that, at the time of writing, Sanders was not particularly well known. This shows a clear distinction between what she wants the public to see and how she wants to be viewed by her friends or people she knows.

Despite her own views on how she chooses to handle her social media profiles, Sanders makes some interesting points in relation to other more senior players' social media profiles. Sanders says that she enjoys following players like Eugenie Bouchard and Czech tennis player Tomas Berdych. Sanders says that;

Berdych is pretty funny actually. He just posts some sarcastic things on there and they're quite humorous and there are some, I can't remember who, but there are some players who just post like just purely tennis stuff and it kind of gets a bit just boring, and you're not really interested in what they're going to say or they post too much and Berdych is just kind of like, he'll say something and it will be quite funny.

In relation to Bouchard, Sanders says that;

Bouchard has a pretty good online presence. She doesn't post a lot but she is a very pretty girl so she posts like photos that make her look, you know, really nice and stuff, and she is actually quite, not funny but she's just, she doesn't talk about tennis, she talks about just other stuff outside tennis which I think is good to read. I think she does a very good job.

Despite Sanders wanting to avoid divulging too much personal information, the players who she follows do exactly that. This outlines how complicated this process is: if players want to keep the public engaged in what they are doing, providing insights into their lives is an essential element. Thus, Sanders' notion of keeping her private and public life completely separate may not be possible as she becomes more well-known.

Sanders discussed the difficulty for highly mediated athletes to discern and maintain clear boundaries between their private and public self. She states that,

It's kind of like an actor, you'd have your like your job when you're acting and then yourself, sometimes it would be hard to differentiate between the two.

The point about acting is precisely what Erving Goffman (1959) suggests about the various performances one undertakes in different situations and where actors 'put on their mask' at the front of stage and then unmask backstage. This is relevant in terms of social media whereby the public persona is the masked version of the self and the private profile is arguably the 'real' self. However, we can argue that when these two areas intersect or if, for example, the private profile is leaked to the public, the consequences of the athlete could be disastrous, particularly if something unfavourable has been said by the athlete. Data breaches are not a new phenomenon and are occurring more frequently as people become more tech savvy. For example, in 2013 there was a Facebook leak of six million users' data (Guarini, 2013). The possibility of any data breaches in terms of social media can lead to the public finding out about things that players may not necessarily want to share, or that may lead to embarrassment. The issue relating to data breaches further outlines how quickly and

easily a major tennis player's data and profiles, both public and private, could potentially be accessed. Given this issue, it can be argued that players now need to really think about what things they divulge on any social media platform, whether this be for private or public consumption and with this comes an even greater argument that supports mediated players' personas being shaped by external forces.

Nicole Pratt

Interviewed on 19 December 2014

In looking retrospectively at the shaping of her persona, retired tennis player Nicole Pratt was interviewed. Pratt reached a career-high singles ranking of 35 and retired from the sport in 2008. At the time of the interview Pratt was coaching some of Australia's up and coming tennis players. As a young player, Pratt idolised Martina Navratilova but, much like Player A and Storm Sanders, loves the physical nature of the men's game and finds it entertaining: she even looked up to Boris Becker and Stefan Edberg. In relation to more contemporary players, Pratt enjoys watching Li Na from China as,

She has just endeared the world with her personality and she is not afraid to wear everything on her sleeve and give herself to the public and it's very natural, it's not pre-programmed, it's not rehearsed, it's really organic.

She further adds that the way in which she addresses the media is how she is in private, Pratt says,

You know when I speak to her in the locker room, that's how she speaks to the worldwide public.

Again, Pratt's statements echo Sanders' sentiments about following players who offer a bit more insight into their lives outside of tennis and are perceived to be more 'genuine' and perhaps more like their 'private' selves.

Pratt, much like Player A and Sanders, uses social media platforms Twitter and Facebook. However, Pratt maintains that the reason she subscribes to these accounts is to keep in touch with people rather than promote herself. Not dissimilar to both Player A and Sanders, Pratt enjoys following players who are fairly active on social media and don't necessarily stick to just tennis as a topic. Pratt likes to follow Danish tennis player Caroline Wozniacki as "I find that she is quite active and I think it's interesting to see her promoting herself and how she goes about it". Pratt adds that Wozniacki;

Connects with her fans. Like you know, she posts a lot of pictures, she comments on certain situations where she might be at a tournament and what's happening, and she does things that are outside of tennis that are interesting, like particularly recently with her marathon running and her charities. And because she is well liked by her peers, she often retweets other players as well, so you know you are sort of following the other players at the same time.

This connection with fans is another example of the enhancing of parasocial bonds through the sharing of personal photos or information. It gives the illusion off to fans that they know the 'real person' which enables them to form deeper connections with the celebrity, thus resulting in a more 'trustworthy' celebrity that has fan buy in, which is important for longevity and notoriety (Usher, 2020, p. 183).

She also admires Wozniacki's ability to change her persona depending on the situation she is in, "I think she is able to morph into different situations and that's her appeal I think" and "she can be the glamour girl, but she can also be the absolute down to earth you know, fun-loving, loves every minute of every day, like most people", Pratt says. Again, these observations reinforce Goffman's (1959) notion of the front and backstage persona and that the public want to break down the public self and get an insight into what goes on backstage. Arguably, the mediated success of the athlete is dependent on how well these two areas are managed.

Pratt also discussed the way in which the media has changed from when she played.

She states that;

I think now players have the opportunity to really build their own brand whereas in the past, like we relied on the media. Like as much as we try and I guess manipulate as many interviews as possible, ultimately you would sort of be at the discretion of the journalist whereas now you can take complete control of your own brand, messages, key messages. That's the difference.

There is no doubt that with the advent of social media, players are able to post what they like, however if agents are running their 'public' profiles, they are still at the hands of the agent. Further, as previously mentioned, if they do take control of their own profiles, they run the risk of posting unfavourable remarks, which can lead to issues when trying to uphold a particular persona. Arguably then there is still minimal control held by these players and they are still at the peril of the wider media audience when establishing and maintaining a particular persona.

Pratt also discussed another point in relation to the rise of social media and technology generally. When asked how she feels social media would have changed her career, Pratt states that;

I guess I would have had a larger following of people that probably knew me better and I was able to let them know, because when you don't know the questions you're getting, that's why you become guarded, you don't know what's coming. But if you're in a position to put out there what you want people to know, then you are more open to those type of things being asked about you, because you put it out there. I think, yeah our players have become more global, I think they were at times confined to their own domestic market now a lot of them are absolute global superstars.

Given the global reach of athletes, it can be maintained that there is more pressure for players to compete and uphold a profile, as failure to do so may see them lost among the thousands of other players. This also adds pressure to the information that they disclose. As stated by each of the interviewees, people want to read about the 'real' player who discusses 'real' life topics, rather than just purely focus on their sport. Such pressure could lead to players feeling obliged to reveal more information about themselves than they see comfortable. This again reinforces the external factors that shape and mould the persona of a player.

Simon Rea

Interviewed on 20 February 2015

Finally, an interview with Simon Rea provides insight into how he sees a persona constructed on the tennis tour. Rea, who at the time of interview, was the coach of Sam Stosur and had previously worked with Nick Kyrgios. Rea has had significant experience working with both up and coming and established tennis players from Australia throughout his coaching career, working for both the Australian Institute of Sport and Tennis Australia since 2008.

Rea initially spoke about the change that he would see in some of the younger players that he worked with as they started to gain more media attention at the beginning of their careers. Rea suggested that this increase in media attention had a mostly positive impact on the players that he worked with. Rea states;

There is an importance to it and almost start to look at it through a lens of 'okay, this is actually ... starting to be some sort of big deal here, this is starting to head down a semi-professional avenue'. So it highlights the importance of it all, it heightens the reality of the journey that those kids are on at that time.

This is an interesting insight into how the media can bolster the way in which a person can perceive themselves. That is, the more media attention one gets, the more someone's tyres are pumped up effectively. The attention then leads to feelings of self-efficacy in players and provides them with an ego boost. The media interest in and of itself can cause a shift in persona. Players may think that they need to divulge more of themselves to maintain media interest and, in partnership with this, the media will likely want to know more about the players. While I personally didn't experience this to the extent of the higher ranked players, I do recall being asked for interviews and had some

media attention after some good results in larger tournaments and enjoying the fact the someone was interested in what I had to say. I don't know what would have happened if I had continued to have success, but I could certainly see that I would have to really try hard to monitor what I were to disclose given this somewhat alluring situation of being 'wanted' and interesting enough to be reported on.

Rea also shared some insight into the obligations that the top athletes have off the tennis court and the rigours associated with balancing both on and off-court life. He discussed Sam Stosur's obligations prior to the 2015 Australian Open. He states that Stosur had numerous sponsorship obligations to attend to, which included ASICS, Oakley, Babolat and fundraising events. He asserts that this type of pressure can take its toll on athletes, however Stosur has always prioritised her on-court activities. Despite this though, Rea did claim that the off-court obligations took up more of Stosur's time than her on-court work. This simply reinforces the importance of the tennis player as a business commodity and that these external factors, like sponsors, play a key role in developing a consumable athlete. As Saunders (n.d.) states, "businesses sponsor athletes to enhance their marketing activities. This marketing itself is designed to assist with company objectives such as market growth, brand awareness, and customer engagement, and ultimately, profitability".

Rea also discussed the difficulty he has with players in relation to social media. He recalls a conversation that he had while working with Nick Kyrgios;

I did have a conversation with Nick. Nick is someone who has an enormous social media presence, and there was a period of time where he was engaging in, I guess, for want of a better term, you know trolls coming back and he was engaging in that banter. So I did have a conversation with him around the best way to try and work through that. In terms of that stuff is obviously exhausting enough as it is, let alone getting involved in engaging back and forth with some of these people who have no other agenda other than to be destructive.

Rea also continues by problematising the use of social media by young athletes. He says that “literally every spare minute of the day, we could be sitting at lunch or dinner, and there is social media, they just love it, they really do love it”. According to Cowling (2015), it was calculated that during September 2015, Facebook recorded 14,000,000 steady Australian users and Twitter accounted for approximately 2,800,000 active Australian users.

The nature of play and competition among female tennis players was also discussed and the role that coaches play while their athletes are competing. Rea likened this to a form of gladiatorial boxing. He states;

Tennis is essentially gladiatorial, you know, one on one, it's boxing basically, I like the analogy that it's boxing without the physical contact so ultimately you walk through that door, through that entrance way onto the court and down the stairs and you've got to figure it out, so it's a really bloody lonely place out there sometimes so essentially at that stage it's up to the individual.

Rea then continues by saying that the crowd and support box can play a pivotal role in a player's on-court duel and that the main role of the support box is to calm and reassure players throughout their matches. This is quite interesting insofar that tennis players, from an early age, are taught skills that help block out external factors like the crowd when competing. I know this because when I was in the Australian Institute of Sport I participated in such training. Yet at moments in a match, external factors can influence the result of a game, particularly when the match might be close. This is also apparent in terms of the media representation of athletes. Rea states that the media plays a role in adding pressure to an athlete's performance and places greater importance on the coaches' ability to help keep an athlete on track and focused on their on-court performance.

Rea also discussed the need for players to be authentic both on and off the court. He states that it is human nature to want to know what goes on behind the scenes of highly mediated events and for people to want to know what their idols are like off camera. He believes that the WTA's push for on-camera and on-court coaching is trying to address this. In some WTA tournaments, coaches are allowed to address their players during a match and these insights are televised. This is a stark contrast to the usual format where no coaching is allowed at all during matches. Rea says that this insight allows "the public to see and actually have a real insight into what a player and a coach might be talking about at a set all with a lot of pressure on and you know with around 20,000 people in the stadium and deep in a big tournament". Rea says this helps with seeing

the real player and gaining just that little bit of insight into what is happening while they are playing.

Finally, having worked on both the WTA and ATP tours, Rea spoke about the differences between the interactions of players. Rea believes that there are greater support networks around the female as opposed to male players and that men are more inclined to associate with each other, whereas this is not commonplace on the WTA Tour. Rea believes that this is due to perhaps females being a bit more vulnerable, especially in terms of losing. He believes that females tend to retreat and just associate with their close-knit team, whereas the men tend to be more extroverted and open when faced with adversity. He does say though, that overall, tennis is a lonely sport and that, irrespective of gender, players are all vulnerable at some level and need to fend for themselves due to the individual nature of the sport.

Summary

The interviews conducted all provided interesting insights into how persona is constructed. For athletes starting out, there seems to be a push to have their name out in the public, however, perhaps in this current climate, players are becoming more discerning with what they divulge given the amount of media technologies that they have grown up with. Despite this, it still seems as though representational media and even sponsors still have a valuable role to play in how the wider public views athletes. There seems to be a careful interplay between how athletes choose to present themselves and how those marketing them want to portray them. It must be difficult for

athletes to want to be seen in a particular way and at the same time fulfil the needs of sponsors and those who are working around them. Therefore, it seems difficult to believe that persona derives from the person only, one must consider other external factors in creating a portrayal of the self.

There are some interesting questions that need to be raised in terms of the authenticity of a persona and how this can align with the development of persona. Both Player A and Storm Sanders discussed this issue and raised some key points in relation to the negotiation of their own personas. They both state that they want to be as 'real' or authentic as they can be and also idolise other players who convey that same approach to developing their personas. On the other hand though, both players discuss the media training they received in helping them navigate press conferences and media interviews and strategies that can help deflect questions that they do not want to answer.

Additionally, Sanders takes this further and discusses how she sees tennis players as actors that perform to an audience. This seems to be in direct opposition to creating an 'authentic' persona given the stylised approach to interviews, which further highlights how complicated generating a persona that truly encapsulates a person's 'real' self.

Pratt provided some strong insights into how the media can influence persona development. In particular, she provided some interesting commentary into how a highly mediated sporting world has catapulted some athletes into the realm of celebrity and stardom. She expresses the different climate that female athletes now find themselves in as opposed to when she played on tour and how they are now subject to a far-

reaching global audience. Arguably then they are open to greater scrutiny if their personas do not align with the dominant ideologies within society, making it less likely for them to present a 'true' representation of themselves.

Rea was an important source because he has coached both male and female athletes. He not only offered a rich comparison but was able to provide useful details in terms of how sponsors and social media can impact on how persona is developed. He discussed the difficulty that the players he worked with have in attending to all sponsorship obligations while competing at a high level. He also problematised the players' involvement in social media and the implications that this can have on players engaging in banter that may not put them in a favourable light. These issues highlight how complicated it is for female tennis players to maneuver their own ideas and thought through social media but, at the same time, ensure that they conform with the image that sponsors want conveyed to a wider public.

These interviews have again highlighted the complex road that female tennis players need to take in order to create and develop as they move through their careers. Not only are there issues relating to sponsorship, the media and interactions with various media outlets, there are also deeply ingrained societal views that have been highlighted. Player A and Sanders both claim that they enjoyed watching male players when they were growing up and stated that they seem to have more of a focus on their playing prowess rather than anything else. In fact, both players also spoke about how women were asked more questions relating to their off-court ventures than their male

counterparts. This again brings to the fore the idea that female tennis players are deemed 'less serious' than male tennis players and, unfortunately, this continues the cycle that society had spawned with female tennis players seemingly having little control over.

One such method that might counter this way of viewing female tennis players is through social media. In the following chapter, I look at how players portray themselves on social media through an analysis of female tennis players' Twitter pages and whether or not the discussion in this chapter aligns with these observations.

Chapter Eight: Twitter

This chapter will explore how female tennis players use Twitter as a platform by which they communicate and, for many, promote themselves to a global audience. This chapter serves as an important aspect to this study as it reveals how players themselves are able to develop their own personas and at some level choose how they want to be perceived. This chapter links closely with Chapter Seven, insofar that it is a direct discussion about how female tennis players create and manipulate their public personas. Chapter Seven provided insight into how these tennis players view the development of a public persona through lived experience and this chapter is a demonstration of how they convey and shape their personas through their own hand.

The methodological approach used in the chapter is textual analysis. Through the analysis of player self-representation, I have been able to explore how female tennis players respond to larger societal ideals and make meaning for themselves through their own self-projection. The textual analysis has also allowed me to further explore the interaction between player, the utilisation of a media platform and how they express their own ideas through the use of their 'tweets'.

Marshall (2014) discusses the way in which the public sphere has changed through the advent of new technologies and online social media sites. Marshall (2014) says that "in our contemporary world, the instantaneity of celebrity images and the ubiquity of our 'search' culture means that celebrities inhabit a social space closer to us than ever before" (Marshall, 2014, p. 13). Further, Marshall says that;

We have become a culture that accepts what I call a new public intimacy.

Celebrity is a very public form of discourse about the dimensions of what is public and what is private and, ultimately, what is intimate. The level of exposure – the capacity of our technologies to record and to transmit images, text, and sound – and an online culture that has new expectations of exposure have helped expand our comfort with public intimacy. (Marshall, 2014, p. 13).

Tennis players are not immune to this new public intimacy, many have various social media accounts that act as a way to communicate with a wider public and the issues related with this are discussed further in this chapter.

According to Raphael, Lam and Weber (2018) authenticity is important in terms of celebrity portrayal and brand representation. The authors say that “a celebrity must create the perception of interaction and include a personal aspect to their posts via both the tone and voice used and the imagery released” (Raphael, Lam and Weber, 2018, p. 152). Raphael, Lam and Weber (2018) continue by saying that “authenticity is based on the celebrity being seen as credible by the public and can impact on their longevity and posthumous image” (Raphael, Lam and Weber, 2018, p. 153). Interestingly, the need for authenticity was also raised by Simon Rea in Chapter Seven when he stated that players need to be considered as authentic both on and off the court and that it is human nature for people to want to know what goes on behind the scenes. The careful interplay between creating an authentic self and one that can be disseminated to a public audience is what is discussed in this chapter through the analysis of female tennis players Twitter feeds.

Twitter is an online communication platform that allows users to discuss “what’s happening in the world and what people are talking about right now” (Twitter, 2019). According to Twitter, the application allows users to see what people are talking about and facilitate global conversations. This service allows its users to post short messages (280 characters in length, but in 2014 and 2015 at the time of this study it was limited to 140 characters), videos and pictures. Twitter allows people to follow any other user with a public profile and, as such, enables users to interact with celebrities who regularly post on the social media site in the form of ‘tweets’ (Statista, 2019). Twitter is currently one of the most popular social networking sites, with approximately 326 million monthly active users registered with a Twitter account at the end of 2018 (Statista, 2019). Twitter currently shares its social media network with other well-known platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, with each of these sites providing consumers with different modes of networking capabilities (Kellogg, 2020). Twitter is also closely linked to news sites and the Australian Open will often use Twitter as a means of communication during the live coverage of the event and retweeting players comments.

Lebel and Danylchuk (2012) studied tweets from tennis players during the time of the 2011 US Open. The tweets were analysed using Goffman’s 1959 work on self-presentation as a guide to understanding the way in which they present themselves online. Interestingly, the study found that both male and female image construction was generally similar, but males tended to be more closely linked to the role of a sports fan and females were more akin to a brand manager. Arguably, this could be because

females need to spend more time breaking down gender stereotypes and need to push their image more, whereas males may not need to and can focus on the sport side of their persona.

Coche (2012) conducted a study on how athletes frame themselves on social media by analysing their Twitter accounts. Coche (2012) reiterated the way in which the media is often criticised in their varied representations of female and male athletes and that now with the popularity of social media, athletes are able to have some control over their own narrative. Interestingly, the study revealed that female athletes tended to be slightly paradoxical insofar that in their biographies they highlighted their athletic careers but their images were often professionally shot rather than of them in play. The exact opposite was the case for male athletes. I wonder if there is an element of sub-conscious conformity that is prevalent here. Perhaps the expectation of what it is to be female from society is too prevalent for females to buck this trend and they succumb to these expectations, highly stylised and free of imperfections.

With such a far-reaching audience, it is clear as to why so many celebrities use this platform as a way to connect and interact with their fans. This form of presentational media allows its users to produce content and self-expression that is a stark contrast from traditional representational media (Marshall 2014, p. 161). Arguably, it allows the user some form of agency in the production of their persona and how they wish to be presented to a worldwide audience. This is also relevant to tennis players who, as already discussed, are often seen as celebrities in their own right. These athletes are

able to connect with their fans and arguably have the power to portray themselves in a light that is more favourable to them. It also allows players, who perhaps are less prominent on a global scale, to showcase their personality to a wider audience, thus providing more opportunities for potential sponsorship deals.

The remainder of this chapter will analyse Tweets from four Australian female tennis players who, during the 2015 Australian Open, were at different career stages. The tweets by Anastasia Rodionova, Olivia Rogowska, Storm Sanders and Casey Dellacqua were recorded from December 13, 2014 to February 14, 2015. This timeframe was considered to be the best allocation to retrieve tweets that may be used for player promotion and the construction of their online personas as it was around the time of the 2015 Australian Open. It was hypothesised that during this time players may be more inclined to make comments about themselves as it is a global event played on their home turf.

Below is a chart of the Tweets that were analysed during the specified time frame of December 13, 2014 to February 14, 2015. As discussed in Chapter Two, TrISMA was used as means of data collection, which a tracking platform that enables researchers to access and track public communication by subscribing to major social media data sources (QUT Digital Media Research Centre, 2022). This information was publicly accessible, and the tennis players are regarded as public figures providing commentary on an online forum. TrISMA was used to sort and collect the information from the specified timeframe.

Player	Total Tweets	Re-tweets
Casey Dellacqua <i>(39.5K Followers / 309 Following)</i>	88	43
Anastasia Rodionova <i>(42.1K Followers / 123 Following)</i>	61	17
Olivia Rogowska <i>(15.6K Followers / 170 Following)</i>	17	10
Storm Sanders <i>(5262 Followers / 451 Following)</i>	50	19

The 'tweets' from each player provide a range of personal references, specific tennis references and professional Tweets (i.e. references to sponsors etc).

Firstly, Anastasia Rodionova's Tweets will be analysed. In 2015, Rodionova was ranked 228 in singles and 47 in doubles in the WTA rankings. During the 2015 Australian Open, Rodionova lost in the second round of qualifying in singles and second round of the

doubles. Rodionova, originally from Russia, also has a sister, Arina, who is a professional tennis player and whom she partnered in doubles during the 2015 Australian Open. Her Twitter activity from this time period doesn't appear to reveal much about herself, however, there are a few interesting mentions that might shed some light on how she presents herself to a wider audience.

Rodionova posted a mixture of comments that related to her everyday life and her tennis career. In December, she made many general comments about life outside of tennis. She makes mention of Christmas and her sister Arina, announcing that the pair will compete in the Australian Open doubles together. Generally speaking however, Rodionova appears to be leading a fairly 'normal' life and makes comments, for example, about enjoying a glass of wine in front of the television.

Although speculative, it can be assumed that Rodionova is attempting to appear as 'normal' as possible to those following her. This may be a way in which to relate to those following her on Twitter. By choosing to discuss activities such as shopping, studying or watching television, she can appeal to a broader audience and find commonalities that may then spark further conversations about these activities, thus creating a dialogue with those following her. As Marwick and Boyd (2011) state, the notion of celebrity involves ongoing maintenance of performed intimacy and access which is precisely what Rodionova is doing.

Just before the Australian Open, Rodionova's Tweets decrease but are more targeted towards her tennis. She made reference to the Brisbane International, where she played prior to the Australian Open qualifying and even thanked Pure Sport (a sports nutrition product company) for recent packages that they sent her. This display of gratitude by Rodionova to a company that may have been sponsoring her further cements the claim that social media sites are now able to act as more of a commercial platform for companies to advertise their products and affiliation with athletes (Colapinto & Benecchi, 2014).

Post-Australian Open, Rodionova again provides a range of Tweets that make mention of both her professional and private life. This Tweet was surrounded by later Tweets of her commenting on a tournament in which she was participating in Thailand. Rodionova provided a brief window into what life was like as a professional tennis player. She made mention of being away from home for extended periods of time, using ice baths to recover from matches and the perils of packing for life on the road. All of these comments allow those following her more intimate access to the player. However, it is also important to note that Rodionova, while having some fans following her, is not as well-known as many of her counterparts on tour. Thus, her commentary may be different if she were to increase her following: she may become more guarded with some of her comments or, conversely, post more as a way to bolster her image.

Unlike Rodionova, Olivia Rogowska does not frequently Tweet. Rogowska was ranked 274 in singles and 272 in doubles in 2015. She did not play singles but received a

doubles wild card into the main draw of the 2015 Australian Open and reached the second round. During the time frame analysed, Rogowska only Tweeted 17 times, with 10 of these serving as re-tweets (reposting tweets from other people).

Most of Rogowska's Tweets were tennis-related, with very little information shared relating to her personal life. Many of her Tweets related to her involvement in the Federation Cup team just after the Australian Open. It is interesting that a player who is possibly trying to secure sponsorship deals and gain publicity, chose not to be very active on the social media site. However, this could be because she wanted to create a separation between her public and private self to ensure some privacy should she become more famous. Whatever her reasons behind her lack of posting, Rogowska's persona is only minimally on display with little insight into her as a person. This is not necessarily good or bad, however arguably would be beneficial for potential sponsors who would possibly be able to work with a 'clean slate' and mould her public persona into someone who would be positive for their brand.

Conversely, Storm Sanders frequently uses Twitter to discuss a wide range of topics. Sanders, who in 2015 was ranked 371 in singles and 242 in doubles, received a wildcard into the main draw singles and doubles of the 2015 Australian Open; however, she lost in the first round in both events. Despite this, Sanders' Tweets regularly seemed upbeat and positive, portraying her in the same affirming light.

In her Tweets, Sanders regularly makes comments of support for other Australian tennis players. She congratulates them after their performances and has many interactions with them. Again, this provided followers with a window into her life as a tennis player and who she relates to on tour. There is often friendly banter with some of the other players, which tends to give the perception that you are with her as she talks to these players. For example, in a series of Tweets directed to fellow tennis player Daria Gavrilova, she posted a Tweet on January 5 saying “Wooooo good job @Daria_gav”, on January 11 she said “Woooooop good girl @Daria_gav”, followed by a Tweet on January 14 saying “@Daria_gav @KateSheahan1 hey! I have seen a photo of you wearing white shoes!!!!!!”.

Further, Sanders tends to promote herself more and alert people to where she is and what she is doing. She often urges people to come and watch her matches. For example, when Sanders was playing the Hobart International just prior to the Australian Open she Tweeted, “Attention all Hobartians!!! Make sure you head out to the Hobart International tomorrow at 11am”. She also let those following her know when she was playing in her first-round Australian Open match by saying “First up at 11am on Court 7, hope to see you all out there cheering me on! #AusOpen @TennisAustralia @AustralianOpen”. This again provides some level of intimacy insofar that it is assumed that she would like people to come, watch and support her. Overall, it gives a more friendly and open persona that may or may not be intentional, which can be linked to Goffman’s (1959) notion which suggests that, as humans, we take on specific roles in accordance with our social setting (or in our case the online/public setting).

Through her Tweets, Sanders is clearly comfortable in using the online platform to communicate with her audience. It is also in line with her comments previously mentioned in the interview that was conducted with her about using social media to “put herself out there”. Arguably then Sanders’ continual posting is a way for her to be seen within the public realm and have people take notice of her. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Sanders has both public and private accounts; thus, it can be claimed that this public self she portrays has been moulded and shaped to suit a public image that she wants to project.

Much like Storm Sanders, Casey Dellacqua provides regular updates on her Twitter account. The athlete was ranked 112 in singles and 5 in doubles in 2015 and lost in the second round of both the singles and doubles at the 2015 Australian Open. Dellacqua is the most accomplished of the athletes analysed, having been as high as 30 in the singles rankings in the previous year.

During this time frame, Dellacqua spent time promoting causes she is affiliated with.

The following are a list of examples:

- Retweeting a message from Cure4 MND alerting people of her involvement in an upcoming campaign;
- Acknowledging sponsors, “@BlaykehDayvesh haha thanks for asking I wear @lululemonAUSNZ their stuff is awesome!!!!”;

- Retweeting posts from Channel Seven that mention her name, “RT @nathantemp7: Nothing is too much trouble for the lovely @caseydellacqua. Never says no to an autograph or photo, what a champ”; and
- Retweeting messages from her management group, “RT @EmageoGroup: A win for @tennis_jarkag & @caseydellacqua plays role of interviewer postmatch. #7TWO @toddwoodbridge @rennaestubbs”.

Arguably, through the retweeting of these messages, Dellacqua is drawing further links to her own connections to self through the messages that she re-posts and gives the public a greater understanding of her through her affiliations, which allows the public to perceive her in a particular way based on these connections.

As Dellacqua has been in the public eye for far longer than the other three players, it is with no surprise that she uses social media in this way. She also posted events that she was going to be attending like various meet and greets and answering questions on Tennis Australia’s Twitter account. Despite this, the athlete still made mention of some of her personal life. For example, she discussed her birthday with followers and showed off her son’s birthday gift to her. Again, this is a controlled way of providing a glimpse into her personal life by giving small amounts of information about her life outside of tennis alongside her professional self.

However, it is somewhat surprising that more personal information was not provided by Dellacqua. She has always been seen as personable and ‘down to earth’: this has been mentioned many times throughout her career. For example, in 2008 Dellacqua shared

her joy with the media after she reached the fourth round of the Australian Open. In a press conference she said that she loved cars and shopping at Target to score a bargain, which then resulted in the company sponsoring her (Rogers, 2020).

However, her Twitter presence does not feel as though it is portraying her in a way that coincides with this notion. It is not that her Tweets are unfriendly or unkind, they just seem manufactured to say 'the right thing'. This could be due to her longevity in the sport and is perhaps trained to ensure that what she says on Twitter is not too personal or controversial, unlike Sanders, who would have less of a following and would be less likely to have her Tweets picked up by the media. Dellacqua's Tweets do however coincide with the sentiments echoed by Lebel and Danylchuk (2012), stating that women were more inclined to put effort into the management of their brand. Dellacqua's posts during this time frame seem to be carefully selected and managed and perhaps this is because more people are likely to follow her during the Australian season of tennis.

The use of Twitter by female tennis players allows them to have some power and agency in the construction of their identities. It is not an external person reporting on their perception of the player. Rather, the players have the capacity to choose what they disclose and how they want to be seen on a global scale, thus giving them more control over their identities. However, when players are affiliated with people, brands or sponsors, there appears to be an expectation that these players will make mention of them, creating a 'cash for comment' style perception.

The highest-ranked player from the Tweets analysed was Casey Dellacqua, who had the highest amount of Tweets (88 in total) and re-Tweets (43 in total). Arguably this is so that she can maintain dialogue with her followers to ensure that the way in which she wishes to portray herself is maintained and that she has agency in this process. By increasing the volume of Tweets, she is able to put forward her thoughts before anyone else gets an opportunity to. Further, by re-Tweeting so many tweets she is also able to convey to people what messages she supports and wants others to hear, all of which aid in the construction and management of her persona.

Summary

Overall, it appears as though Twitter does not seem to be the main forum that the female tennis players in this study use in developing and managing their persona. There was not a significant amount of personal information within these Tweets to feel as though the reader really 'got to know' the players on a personal level. In fact, they were fairly unimaginative and quite business-like with a smattering of the occasional reference to their lives outside of their profession. This is not to say that this is construed as negative; rather, it simply highlights that these players perhaps use this form of social media as a way in which to promote themselves purely as serious athletes.

This chapter allowed for a closer exploration into how the athletes themselves want to be portrayed to a wider public. Rather than relying on representational media for this,

Twitter clearly serves as a means to portray an image that they want to convey and therefore have more agency in this management of their personas. It did seem that the Twitter posts analysed here were targeted as a more professional platform, rather than a way in which to allow the public insight into the personal side of players. Further, it would have been interesting to have a closer look at more of the top-tier female athletes and their 'tweets' to draw comparisons with them and those analysed here. This is something that could be further investigated at another time. Although not possible within the limitations of this research, it would be interesting to conduct further investigations into the self-presentation of these athletes across a wider variety of social media platforms and to analyse patterns in how they represent themselves, which would be valuable in generating further understanding of the construction of mediated personas.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

This thesis has examined the complicated manner in which the persona of female tennis players is formed. The key research outcome that has been achieved here is that the personas of female tennis players are developed closely in conjunction with external forces that can often override the way in which the player wants to be represented.

There is a complex interrelationship between these external entities, each with differing agendas that then work sometimes together and sometimes in opposition that then churn out the persona of a female tennis player. This notion is why I have coined this thesis an identity factory: personas go in, they are created, developed and manipulated to suit the need of each individual stakeholder; players, institutions, coaches, media outlets and sponsors. They are then sold to a public audience that consume their personas and all the while the players have little agency in how this plays out.

As I have argued throughout this research, there is not one entity that has control over how a persona is formed, changed or maintained. It is a complex set of relationships that rely on each other to form the person we see in public, which is often vastly different to the person we would see in private. The female tennis players' persona is a mixture of external forces that have their own agendas, such as the media, PR agents, the WTA Tour and the person themselves, which all fuses together and – sometimes at odds with one another – to make the public commoditised 'person' and package this identity. Then an additional layer of complication is added through player use of presentational online media and, in the case here, Twitter.

The understanding that the creation of public personas is not a new idea or concept (Jung, 1992), as has been discussed relating to the dandy. And despite the calibre of player, whether its Serena Williams or Storm Sanders, they are all still a product of this persona making machine. Added to these elements are the complications and issues surrounding class and gender that further compound the messiness in the formation of persona. There is a complexity and fluidity in the influence that external factors have over the construction and development of female tennis players' personas as developed in previous chapters.

Further, the historical underpinning of how persona is created and that the idea that public presentation is not a new notion adds an additional layer in trying to decode how persona is in fact created and affected by external pressures. Augmenting this complicated structuring of identity are issues surrounding race and gender that further adds to the messiness in the formation of persona. This has been addressed in Chapter Three when discussing Serena Williams and how gender and race have resulted in multiple meanings in her persona construction (Coleman-Bell, 2006, pp. 195-207).

Institutions play a significant role in the formation and continual development of a player's persona. They are able to manipulate and negotiate players' persona through rigid contractual arrangements that provide them with the power to use their image as a promotional tool, leaving the players with little agency in negotiating their own sense of self and control in their public image. Players must continually align with the views and ideologies of these institutions, and if they do not, they face scrutiny (Police & Hambrick,

2020). This impacts directly on how persona is formed, developed and maintained as institutions have this overarching power over the players that participate in the sport.

Tennis players are performers. The dandy was one of the early public performers in the last two hundred years - often described as modernity in terms of cultures. Through highly-stylised attire and flamboyant nature that often rebuked norms within society, the dandy was able to flourish and modify himself to almost chameleon-like qualities that fit the situation and performance using the fluid nature of persona to his benefit. As evidenced in Chapter Three, Serena Williams is not dissimilar to the 19th-century dandy, coming from a family that would not necessarily fit the 'norms' that are associated with tennis folk, Williams made a name for herself as an incredible athlete but also enjoys the glamour that goes with the sport, donning many dazzling and glamorous outfits while she competes. Further, like the dandy, Williams has been able to sculpt her persona as she moves through her career and, with her newfound motherhood, her persona has also seen a drastic change. This chapter also served as a way to view the formation of persona from a historical perspective and highlight the fact the persona formation is not a new idea, but able to inform reading on contemporary notions of public presentation.

Mediated sport is filled with images, ideas and values (Boyle and Haynes 2009, p. 107). So, when a large-scale, highly mediated event takes place, there is a huge amount of media saturation in the lead-up to and during the event. Media saturation was certainly evident in the lead-up to, and during the 2015 Australian Open on Channel 7, that had the broadcasting rights to the Australian Open and the lead-up events, that they called

“The Summer of Tennis”. The analysis of the Channel 7 news in the lead-up to the 2015 Australian Open provided an overview as to how tennis players who participate in a highly mediated event are portrayed. Investigating this, problematises how persona is forged, given that the reportage of female athletes and their representation is governed by the tournament or media outlets. These external stakeholders can represent them in a way that they can manipulate to serve their own purpose, taking away player control in the construction of their own self-identity.

This analysis reinforces the power that representational media has in pushing its own agenda and framing players the way that they wish to represent them, and likely to create a more newsworthy or attractive representation in order to entice more viewers. This is difficult terrain for female tennis players to navigate, particularly in the case of unfavourable reporting, almost rendering the player powerless given the far-reaching nature of this type of media. This further highlights the complexity in forming and maintaining a persona that they are content with given the extensive input of outliers.

The participant observation of female tennis players is key to understanding how personas are constructed, particularly during a highly mediated event such as the Australian Open. It enables us to view behaviour directly as opposed to what is reported on (Hammond and Wellington, 2013), making it far more valuable in terms of drawing conclusions. It is certainly not a suggestion that female tennis players are like animals. Rather, the similarity lies in the practice of observing, and female tennis players train to play, which is exactly what happens at a tournament, perhaps making it a more ‘natural’ environment. The observations garnered at these sites demonstrated the way in which

highly mediated events can push social norms and have the power to pick and choose players that they wish to essentially 'display' through advertising and careful positions of televised matches throughout the arena. This research has found that female tennis players are often at the mercy of the people who run these events, giving them little agency in how they want to portray themselves and where.

Observing the mixture of representational and presentational media enabled a deeper semiotic analysis of the signs and symbols associated with the persona of female tennis players. In one tournament there is a complex and interwoven system that exists for players both on and off the court. They must perform to an audience while they compete on court and then attend to media off-court while, at the same time, paying careful attention to how they present themselves. It is a tiring dance that often results in slip-ups, that then must be managed to enable the cycle of presentation and performance to continue. It is a controlled environment that observes many of the norms that are so common in society, like representation of gender. A tournament, such as the Australian Open, is a juxtaposition between a safe haven for female athletes where there is some level of normality, and a lion's den where the media and fans just want a piece of you, no matter what it is, which seems to be a curious mix that again complicates the self-management of players.

Speaking to players directly and those involved in the tennis industry is essential when trying to understand how the persona of female tennis players is formed and then managed. The interviews conducted in this thesis provided an opportunity to more fully comprehend the construction of persona. It provided insight into the various stages of

persona development through the phases of career progression and outlines the difference in the wants and needs of how a player's persona is shaped depending on where they are in their career. The insights gathered here reinforced the notion of a complex arrangement of stakeholders in the creation of a female tennis player's persona and that the player alone has little control in this process, let alone full control.

Again, this chapter outlined the difficulty that players have in creating a persona that they are content with and what those around them, such as sponsors and management teams, expect and want them to portray. A common thread throughout these interviews however does seem to be an understanding, or at the very least an acknowledgment, that a carefully constructed persona is important, but so too is a genuine persona that, while it is a representation of their public self, also infuses some element of the private self.

Female tennis players are able to take some control over their persona via social media. One such platform is Twitter, which is currently one of the most popular social media sites (Statista, 2019). This platform allows players to interact with the public directly without an intermediary. However, while this is true to some extent, players must still be mindful of their posts and how this may affect their persona, essentially having to moderate what they choose to divulge to a wider public. As mentioned previously, this chapter didn't completely reveal how Twitter enables female tennis players to be fully responsible for their own self representation. Although it did highlight that the female tennis players who were involved in this study use Twitter as more of a 'business' type forum, suggesting that this is how they want to be portrayed, as serious athletes.

This section of the study focused on the 'Tweets' of four Australian female tennis players at around the time of the 2015 Australian Open. The 'Tweets' that these four athletes shared were focused on their tennis and rarely strayed away from this focus. Arguably, given that they are not as high-profile as some of the other female players on tour, these players may have wanted to highlight their playing ability in order to garner more exposure. However, more established players do not necessarily need to do this, given the representational media do this for them. They then can create more opportunities to focus on other aspects of their lives in an effort for fans to 'get to know them'. Further exploration into this area, using more established players as examples, would enable a more indicative report into how female tennis players use Twitter to shape their personas.

More specifically, regarding the research questions, the findings and knowledge acquired from this research include:

1. What ideas, values and texts shape and legitimise the construction of a female tennis player's mediated persona?

This thesis has identified and discussed the complicated nature of persona construction, particularly when a person becomes mediated. Persona is a form of self-presentation that is influenced heavily by complicated media systems and put into practice by individuals with varying degrees of agency (Marshall, 2013, pp. 370-371). I have argued that this level of agency is minimal as compared with the external stakeholders that

claim an interest in female tennis players and their self-presentation, which includes social norms and conventions, the media, institutions and sponsors.

Athletes today are now considered to be celebrities (Jackson, 2005) and celebrities can also be interpreted as a text or sign (Marshall, 2014). This means that the celebrity turns into a representation that is formed by cultural meanings (Marshall, 2014). So, through this process, the celebrities, or in our case, tennis players, can be lumped into a representation of the self as negotiated by cultural and social norms.

It has been made apparent that female tennis players are required to negotiate the space between an online persona, where they can represent themselves (to an extent) and a mediated persona which is dominated by the influence of the personal, corporate and institutional forces (Moore et al. 2017). This is a difficult and complex arrangement that can go horribly wrong if not handled effectively.

Gender also plays a significant role in how the persona of female tennis players is constructed. Butler (2006) argues that gender is not biological, rather it is socially constructed and is always performative. Butler (1990) says that the constructions of gender are complex and not always constructed logically or with any form of consistency. This thesis has relied heavily on this idea of gender as a social construct, insofar that females are typecast in a certain way that conforms to what is socially acceptable and expected. The constant reinforcement of popular gender norms pigeonholes female tennis players into being something that they are 'expected' to be

rather than what they may 'want' to be, further adding to the complex layering of constructing a persona.

The presentation of the self is also addressed here. Erving Goffman (1959) highlighted the different performances people undertake that are dependent on their surroundings and that people play various roles in accordance with their social situation. Performance and self-presentation have been consistently addressed throughout this thesis. Female tennis players are in a constant state of performance, whether this be during a tournament on-court, during a press conference or presenting themselves to an online audience. This performance is further complicated given their gender. That is, female tennis players are performing in a social space that reinforces stereotypical notions of gender, while at the same time attempting to play professional sport and negotiate their own sense of self. The constant shift in performances makes for a highly complex arrangement.

2. What is the inter-relationship between sports and media organisations and female tennis players (that works to construct and harness female tennis players' persona) at various stages of their career?

As Boyle and Haynes (2009) state, mediated sport is filled with an array of idea, values and images that have the power to construct, assimilate and even challenge popular thought. Smart (2005) asserts that sport is a complex product that is developed by myriad stakeholders, such as players, fans, organisations, sponsors and broadcasters. The same complex arrangement can be linked to the development of the persona of

female tennis players. As I have discussed in Chapter Four, Chapter Five, Chapter Six and Chapter Eight, the interrelationship between female players and the vast array of stakeholders that they are required to be accountable to makes their journey towards creating a truly authentic self difficult, given the needs of each interested party being so varied.

Chapter Seven charted the career projection and reflection of female tennis players in how they have seen their persona develop and shift over time. It was evident from this chapter that authenticity was a common thread in terms of the importance of this attribute in constructing a desirable persona and, as Simon Rea pointed out, “it is important for players to be authentic on and off the court”. The importance of creating an authentic self is also evident when a player presents themselves to an online audience, as was discussed in Chapter Eight. As Marwick and Boyd (2010) state, authenticity helps to create a more consumable persona. The thing that female tennis players may have over other types of celebrities is that their authenticity is partially based on performance, which is what sets them apart (Andrews and Jackson, 2001). However, the issue is that some players may wish to be more guarded than others and so the ‘authentic’ self may not be as easy to deliver, further complicating a desirable self-projection that is consumable but also align with how the player wishes to portray themselves.

3. What power (agency) do female tennis players have in shaping or challenging their public persona and what are the implications of this?

This research question has been the central driver of this thesis. Based on the research conducted, I argue that female tennis players have little agency in the construction of their persona as external factors are too strong to allow for any meaningful and authentic creation of a self that truly signifies how a female tennis player wishes to be portrayed. In fact, based on the research acquired, I argue that the female tennis players who are part of this phenomenon are not even entirely aware that the creation of their personas are so heavily reliant on external forces. My reasoning for this is two-fold; having been part of this process I can only comprehend this retrospectively and being out of the system long enough to have some perspective, and secondly through the research that I have conducted and the observations that I have made.

The external environment impact on the creation of persona almost immediately from birth. As Butler (2006) identifies, gender is constructed socially rather than biologically, so as soon as someone is born, they start adhering to social norms and conventions as related to their gender. Further, as evidenced in Chapter Three, 19th-century dandies have played with gender long before Serena Williams was born. As Goffman (1959) argues, people perform depending on their social situation. So, for female tennis players, by virtue of being female already forces a particular lens on them.

Institutions are another consideration when looking at the construction of the female tennis players' persona. As Goffman (1959) states, institutions are regulated, surveilled and regimented. Female tennis players are constantly confined to institutions throughout their careers, with tournaments being run by both the ITF and WTA. For Australian tennis players, many will have interactions with the AIS and play tournaments

run by Tennis Australia. Each institution upholds particular values and has an agenda in terms of how they want to present players, which again further constricts the way in which a female tennis player can present herself.

Despite this external control, it has been argued that online media platforms have enabled sports stars to renegotiate this control and power of their own image, especially when it comes to negating unfavourable press. For example, Hambrick et al (2013) state that athletes use Twitter to challenge negative media narratives. However, there is still an element of external pressure, such as the pressure to be authentic. As Raphael, Lam and Weber (2018) say, authenticity is based heavily on credibility. Further, as Marshall (2014) states, with new social media technologies comes a more heightened public intimacy. So for female tennis players, this means a complicated decision-making process that requires them to consider authenticity, credibility and then the degree to which they let the public in on their life outside of tennis, further adding to the intricate nature of persona creation.

This study is not without its limitations. As previously mentioned, the choice to use Australian female tennis players in the Twitter and interview analysis was made to narrow the focus of the study, given the breadth of this topic. However, in doing so, this study cannot say it is representative of all female tennis players and how they construct their personas. Despite this, it does allow for a discussion into patterns that have emerged from the interaction that takes place between external forces and the person when creating a persona, particularly one that becomes public and mediated.

The study has also been able to identify how persona can change and is fluid. By using Australian examples, who do not quite reach the celebrity status of some of the more prominent players, and then using players who are more notable in the media, the changing nature of persona depending on stage of development can be seen. For example, there is more of a projection into how the Australian players interviewed would like to see their persona develop, then we were able to see how persona changes when players become highly mediated, as has been discussed in this chapter with Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams. However, to complete this analysis, we were able to look at persona from a historical perspective, using the dandy and then again mirror this with the observations in relation to Serena Williams. This thesis required all of these elements in order to make a more complete analysis of how persona is formed and the complexity involved in this creation and, suffice to say, the research could not have been conducted without the above considerations given the multi-faceted elements involved in persona construction.

At the beginning of this thesis I discussed my reasons for wanting to investigate how the persona of female tennis players is developed. Through this research, I have come to realise how little control players have over their own self-presentation. It is apparent that persona is created and changed regularly based on so many variables, from how institutions want their players to be represented to societal and cultural norms. It really makes me question how any player can forge their own path in how they want to project themselves to a wider public, despite online platforms such as Twitter that at some level can provide that opportunity. I did say that I hoped this would be a cathartic experience for me, which it has been and I can start to understand how experiencing tennis as a

female has shaped who I am. However, I am still amazed at how creating a persona that, on the surface, can appear as though the individual has complete control over, can be so complicated and really be uncontrollable.

The observations and findings from this study can serve as a springboard into future analysis within this field. The construction of a persona is so complex and multi-faceted that there are so many avenues that research into this area can take. For example, the construction of personas from people involved in various industries can be investigated and challenges they face when creating their persona. However, in the meantime, what has been established here is that for a female playing a highly mediated sport such as tennis, persona is not constructed in isolation. Rather, it is a complicated web of different elements that come together to see the person before us, that are all churned out from the persona factory.

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Appendix 1: HAE Approval Letter



Human Ethics Advisory Group

Faculty of Arts and Education
Geelong Waurn Ponds Campus
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Geelong 3220, Victoria, Australia
Telephone: 03 5227 2368
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Memorandum:

To: Prof David Marshall &
A/Prof Kristin Demetrious
School of Communication & Creative ArtsB

cc: Ms Adriana Christina Szili

From: Faculty of Arts & Education Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG)

Date: 10 November, 2014

Subject: HAE-14-102

The Identity Factory: Tennis Personas in Production

Please quote this project number in all future communications

The application for this project has been considered by the Faculty HEAG under the terms of Deakin University's Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC).

Approval has been given for Ms Adriana Christina Szili, under the supervision of Prof David Marshall and A/profKristin Demetrious, School of Communication & Creative Arts, to undertake this project from 10/11/2014 to 10/11/2018.

The approval given by the Faculty HEAG is given only for the project and for the period as stated in the approval. It is your responsibility to contact the Faculty HEAG immediately should any of the following occur:

- Serious or unexpected adverse effects on the participants
- Any proposed changes in the protocol, including extensions of time.
- Any events which might affect the continuing ethical acceptability of the project.
- The project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
- Modifications are requested by other HRECs.

In addition you will be required to report on the progress of your project at least once every year and at the conclusion of the project. Failure to report as required will result in suspension of your approval to proceed with the project.

The Faculty HEAG and/or DUHREC may need to audit this project as part of the requirements for monitoring set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Kylie Koukoudinas
HEAG Secretariat
Faculty of Arts and Education