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# A Case Study of Junior Elite Tennis Players' and their Parent's Self-Talk

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## A Case Study of Junior Elite Tennis Players' and their Parent's Self-Talk

### Abstract

Automatic self-talk of elite athletes provides valuable insight into their emotional experience and self-regulation strategies in competition. To date, there is a shortage of research examining elite junior athletes' automatic self-talk in competition through a qualitative lens. Despite parents' key role in the well-being and performance of their child, there is no study about junior elite athletes' and their parents' self-talk during a competition. Hence, the aim of this study is to examine the content of elite junior tennis players' automatic self-talk as well as the content of their parents' self-talk regarding their emotions during important matches. In each of the two cases under investigation, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with a tennis player and his or her most dedicated parent. The results were analyzed using Yin's (2014) multiple-case study strategy and Polkinghorne's (1995) narration inquiry strategy. An analysis of automatic self-talk content was conducted individually for each case, followed by an intra-case and cross-case analysis. The results reveal that each player's and parent's automatic self-talk is related to their own subjective emotional experience during the matches. The findings highlight similarities in athletes' and parents' self-talk patterns, reflecting the potential influence of parents in athletes' performance pressure and their goal-directed self-talk strategies. The differences observed between the self-talk of players and their parents demonstrate the relevance of examining their profiles to better understand the origin of individual differences in self-talk.

### Keywords

elite athletes, parenting, qualitative research, competitive performance, emotions

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## A Case Study of Junior Elite Tennis Players' and their Parents' Self-Talk

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*Automatic self-talk of elite athletes provides valuable insight into their emotional experience and self-regulation strategies in competition. To date, there is a shortage of research examining elite junior athletes' automatic self-talk in competition through a qualitative lens. Despite parents' key role in the well-being and performance of their child, there is no study about junior elite athletes' and their parents' self-talk during a competition. Hence, the aim of this study is to examine the content of elite junior tennis players' automatic self-talk as well as the content of their parents' self-talk regarding their emotions during important matches. In each of the two cases under investigation, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with a tennis player and his or her most dedicated parent. The results were analyzed using Yin's (2014) multiple-case study strategy and Polkinghorne's (1995) narration inquiry strategy. An analysis of automatic self-talk content was conducted individually for each case, followed by an intra-case and cross-case analysis. The results reveal that each player's and parent's automatic self-talk is related to their own subjective emotional experience during the matches. The findings highlight similarities in athletes' and parents' self-talk patterns, reflecting the potential influence of parents in athletes' performance pressure and their goal-directed self-talk strategies. The differences observed between the self-talk of players and their parents demonstrate the relevance of examining their profiles to better understand the origin of individual differences in self-talk. Keywords: Elite Athletes, Parenting, Qualitative Research, Competitive Performance, Emotions*

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Adolescence is a critical period for elite athletes' development (Vealy, 2007). Junior athletes are compared with one another on the basis of their athletic performance and are exposed to external pressure to achieve high performance standards (Ommundsen, Klasson-Heggebø, & Anderssen, 2006). Additionally, with the increase in investment required in their sport, young athletes often face particular social, family and academic challenges to meet the demands of competitive sport and achieve the expected performance. Thus, junior athletes must learn to manage their emotions to deal with the pressure (Lauer, Zakrajsek, & Lauer, 2017). Since sports competition is especially demanding for adolescent athletes (Nicholls, Hemmings, & Clough, 2010), it is important to continue research about competitive athletes' experience and further promote their well-being and performance.

One way of investigating the experience of competitive athletes is by examining their automatic self-talk during performance. Automatic self-talk is characterized by previously unplanned thoughts that athletes address to themselves during a sport performance (Latinjak, Zourbanos, López-Ros, & Hatzigeorgiadis, 2014; Theodorakis, Hatzigeorgiadis, & Zourbanos, 2012). Latinjak and colleagues (2014, 2017) distinguish two forms of automatic self-talk.

While spontaneous self-talk is described as the “unintended, nonworking, non-instrumental statements that come to mind unbidden and effortless but, nevertheless, linked to the task or activity at hand and relevant contextual stimuli,” goal-directed self-talk refers to “statements deliberately employed toward solving a problem or making progress on a task” (Latinjak, Hatzigeorgiadis, & Zourbanos, 2017, p. 151). Thus, by focusing on automatic self-talk, it is possible to gain access to athletes’ internal experience as well as their autonomous strategy to manage their thoughts, emotions and behaviors.

To date, most studies conducted in the competition setting have employed self-report written questionnaires (Hardy, 2006; Van Raalte, Morrey, Cornelius, & Brewer, 2015). Overall, results of these studies suggest that self-talk content can be positive or negative and that it has an instructional or motivational function for athletes. Furthermore, self-talk can be influenced by personal factors (e.g., the athlete’s level), social factors (e.g., the attitude of people in the athlete’s circle), and environmental factors (e.g., competition circumstances) (Van Raalte et al., 2015; Zourbanos et al., 2011). For example, studies have shown that self-talk content depends on the competition circumstances, self-talk being positive in positive circumstances (e.g., “Good job!”), and negative in negative circumstances (e.g., “You didn’t do what you were supposed to!”) (Van Dyke, Van Raalte, Mullin, & Brewer, 2018; Zourbanos et al., 2015). However, the results also indicated that negative self-talk is not necessarily perceived as harmful by athletes (Hardy, Hall, & Gammage, 2001; Van Dyke et al., 2018). These findings highlight the importance of athletes’ interpretation of their self-talk. Moreover, differences observed between studies regarding automatic self-talk content could be partly attributed to the contextual particularities of the study, such as the sport or the athlete’s level (Van Raalte et al., 2015). These results reflect the idiosyncratic aspect of self-talk and the importance of deep interest in the competition setting, taking into account the particularities of that setting and the characteristics of the athletes under study.

To our knowledge, only a few studies have focused on automatic self-talk of competing junior athletes (Thibodeaux & Winsler, 2018; Van Raalte, Brewer, Rivera, & Petitpas, 1994; Zourbanos et al., 2015). Although these studies have highlighted the influence of the matches’ circumstances on the verbalizations of junior tennis players, they have focused on observable verbalizations of the players, which represent a small proportion of athletes’ automatic self-talk (Dickens, VanRaalte, & Hurlburt, 2017). In addition, Thibodeaux and Winsler (2018) compared observable and self-reported self-talk and found no correlation between the two measures, suggesting that athletes’ internal experiences may differ from an external evaluator’s interpretation. To this end, these authors emphasized the relevance of conducting qualitative studies on self-talk to better understand the nuances inherent to each athlete’s individual experience. Given the demands of high-level competition for junior athletes, it is important to pursue studies on automatic self-talk to better understand these athletes’ emotional experiences and thereby gain further understanding of the factors contributing to their performance and well-being.

Studies show that while young athletes have increased their investment in sport, their parents’ investment has also grown with regards to their interest, time and financial commitment (Côté, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Parents are also known to provide more emotional support at this time, as performance becomes more important (Côté, 1999; Durand-Bush, Salmela, & Thompson 2004). The sporting context can foster the relationship, by providing the opportunity for close contacts and open communication between parents and athletes (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009; Knight & Holt, 2014). In particular, the moments when athletes and their parents are together in the car and share their emotional experience of a competition can help strengthen the bonds of the relationship (Clarke, Harwood, & Cushion, 2016; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). In return, the sporting context can lead parents to adopt harmful behaviors for their children’s fulfilment in their sport. For

example, parents report experiencing different stressors (e.g., organizational demands) as part of their children's competitions that would affect their emotional experience (Harwood & Knight, 2009). Parents' difficulty in dealing with these different stressors and the emotions experienced can result in behaviors that put pressure on their child, which could negatively affect the parent-child relationship (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2009). Moreover, Knight, Dorsch, Osai, Haderlie, and Sellars (2016) showed that parents' expectations of their children in sport influence their attitudes and behaviors towards their children. Depending on these expectations, parents would take on different roles, such as coach or supporter. These roles may interfere with their behaviors towards their children and positively or negatively influence the athletes' pressure to perform well.

The parents' role could be even more important in sports such as tennis, in which the increased involvement of parents is crucial in the investment of players. As stated by Lauer, Gould, Roman, and Pierce (2010a) "In tennis, it is a commonly accepted belief that a child will only become elite if one of the parents is highly involved" (p. 70). To this end, the results of studies conducted in tennis contexts reflect the extent of some parents' emotional investment in their children's competitions. Results of studies on parents' experiences in the tennis setting have indicated that attending their child's competitions can be emotionally challenging for parents (Harwood & Knight, 2015). In particular, tennis players' parents reported feeling embarrassed when their children underperformed (Harwood & Knight, 2009; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). On the other hand, researchers interested in the players' perspective showed that the presence of parents in the competition affects the players' emotional experience (Lauer, Gould, Roman, & Pierce, 2010b). For example, some players reported that the nervousness of their parent during a competition exasperated them during tennis matches (Lauer et al., 2010b). Lauer and his colleagues (2010b) suggested that parents may unintentionally display a negative attitude toward their child. In support of this interpretation, Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, and Pennisi (2008) reported that some players admitted to feeling pressure from their parent, even if they did not manifest them directly. In summary, the complexity of the dynamics between athletes and parents in the competitive context invites researchers to investigate the experience of athletes competing alongside their parents.

To our knowledge, no study has focused on the athletes' and their parents' self-talk. Automatic self-talk represents a promising gateway to better understand the emotional experience of athletes and parents. Knowing that the parents' experience in competition influences the quality of their parental support (Harwood & Knight, 2015), a study on their self-talk during a competition is likely to help us better understand this experience and provide further insight into their potential influence. Considering all the points previously mentioned, the aim of this study is to examine the content of both elite junior tennis players' and their parents' automatic self-talk regarding the emotions felt during important matches.

## **Method**

### **Epistemological Position and Research Strategy**

This study is based on a constructivist qualitative approach according to which all individuals' reality is socially constructed and relies on their subjective experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, in this study, the interest is in the meaning that individuals give to their experience and the focus is on automatic self-talk from the players' and parents' perspectives. To this end, a multiple-case study (Yin, 2014) combined with a narrative inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1995) was adopted as a unique strategy designed specifically for this study. The combination of a multiple-case study and a narrative inquiry was chosen to study in depth the self-talk of two cases, each comprising one junior elite tennis player and his parent, using the

retelling of “their story” during tournament matches. Building on Bruner’s (1985) distinction of paradigmatic and narrative cognitions, Polkinghorne makes a distinction between two types of narrative inquiry: (a) the paradigmatic-type, which consists of analyzing the participant’s narrative to identify and describe meaningful categories and (b) the narrative-type, which aimed to understand a phenomenon through the presentation of storied experiences of individual cases. Because the interest is to portray self-talk through the descriptive narrative of each participant’s story of their unique experience during matches, a narrative-type inquiry was selected for the purpose of this study. The combination of the multiple-case study and the narrative inquiry is particularly suitable in allowing us to explore the convergences and the divergences between the two cases, and to capture the specificities of each player and each parent. In addition, to be able to grasp each individual’s experience, the unique profile of each case is considered.

## Participants

The participants are two junior-level elite tennis players, each with the parent that is most involved in their tennis career. A case is represented by one athlete and his or her parent. The players were selected according to the following inclusion criteria: (a) being part of the provincial team, (b) being ranked among the top 10 tennis players in the provincial 18 and under ranking (U16 and U18), (c) being between the ages of 14 and 18 years old, and (d) having his or her most involved parent agree to participate in the study. It should be noted that this study is part of a larger research project about tennis players’ self-talk in a competition setting.

Before the study began, the University’s ethics committee approved the project. The research team selected participants through the “snowball” technique proposed by Seidman (1998). Thus, a “key informant” with good knowledge of the provincial tennis team’s ranking criteria (i.e., team coordinator) provided researchers with a list of approximately 12 tennis players corresponding to the selection criteria for the study. Then, with their parents’ consent, the first author met with these potential players at a training camp. During this meeting, the first author informed the players about the project and asked them about their interest in participating in the study. Six players agreed to participate in the larger research project about tennis players’ and their parents’ self-talk in a competition setting. Among these six players, two were selected for this multiple-case study to conduct a detailed analysis of their automatic self-talk for three matches played within a tournament. The research team chose these two cases based on their contrasting profiles (descriptive characteristics that differ between the cases), depicting two distinct pictures of self-talk in a similar context (Yin, 2014). The first author then contacted these two candidates individually to explain the procedure, confirm their agreement to participate, and set an appointment for data collection. With the players’ agreement, the first author conducted a telephone conversation with their most involved parent to explain the study and obtain his or her verbal consent for his or her participation and the child’s.

## Data Collection

For each case, the data were collected during a major tennis tournament (i.e., a provincial and national championship). First, tennis is a suitable sport to study self-talk, as it is an individual sport that involves several breaks during the performance, thus offering many opportunities for the athletes to think (Weinberg, 2013). Second, it is a sport where players can experience wins and losses in a short time lapse. This succession of victories and losses is likely to influence the player’s and parent’s emotional experience and self-talk. Third, being a sport where one parent is often very involved (Lauer et al. 2010a), tennis is conducive to the study

of parents' self-talk. Fourth, a tennis tournament is seen as a life event occurring in a specific time setting (usually two to five days) with distinguishable phases (at least two matches played with sets). Consequently, links can be made between self-talk and the events deemed important as experienced by the participants, and self-talk can be studied ecologically for more than one competitive event.

The same procedure was used for both cases: (a) an individual meeting with the player and his or her parent before the first match, (b) filling in of a self-assessment grid of self-talk and emotions related to the events experienced by the player and his or her parent for the three matches played, and (c) a semi-structured interview conducted first with the player and then with the parent after the third match. The first author of the study made herself available for the duration of the tournaments, to follow the players and their parents throughout the process, answer their questions, and be ready to carry out the semi-structured interviews. A pilot study was conducted with a player and his parent who were not part of the study. This player was on the provincial tennis team, was between 14 and 17 years old, but was not ranked among the top 10 players in his category. Following the pilot interview, the procedure was found to meet the aim of the study. No changes were made to the interview guide. The details of the whole procedure are provided in the following paragraphs.

First, before the first match of the tournament, the participants (i.e., players and parents) were met individually on the tournament site to have the process explained and to sign the consent form. During this meeting, they were given three copies of the self-assessment grid of self-talk and emotions to be completed within 15 minutes after each of the three matches. Second, throughout their respective tournaments, the athletes played their matches and completed the grid after each one. The parents were invited to complete it in real time or immediately after the match, at their convenience. This grid was used to achieve two goals. One was to promote recall of the self-talk and related emotions for events considered important by the player and his or her parent during the match. The other was to allow the participants time to reflect before the interviews. The grid was designed for the participants to indicate for each match: (a) the events deemed important, (b) their self-talk, and (c) the emotions linked to the self-talk. Its structure follows the important phases of the tournament: before each match, during each match (1<sup>st</sup> set, 2<sup>nd</sup> set, 3<sup>rd</sup> set), and after each match. Third, to conduct the semi-structured interview, athletes were met individually in a distraction-free room within 30 minutes following the end of their third match. The delay was chosen to allow the players time to execute their post-match routine. The parents were interviewed immediately after their child's interview. The interviews were conducted to question the participants in depth about their self-talk, following the logical sequence of each match played. With the participants' agreement, the interviews were recorded for transcription purposes.

At the beginning of the interview, the athletes and parents were first asked to describe themselves (i.e., as a person, athlete, parent) and to talk about their tennis experience to detail their profile. Then, before the athletes were asked about each of their matches, imagery was used to help them mentally and emotionally remember their experience as accurately as possible (Williams, Zinsser, & Bunker, 2014). To this effect, the athletes were first led to review their self-assessment grid to remember their self-talk for important events of their matches. They were then asked to close their eyes and relax with deep breaths. Then, guided by the interviewer, involving the five senses, they were invited to recall their experience of each of their matches, focusing on the self-talk held and the emotions felt for important events. This procedure, lasting about three minutes, was conducted three times during the interview, before the athletes were questioned for each of the three matches played. Due to a lack of time, imagery was not used with the parents. It was a priority to use this technique with the athletes, because they were the key participants in this study. In addition, the parents mentioned having

completed the self-assessment grid in real time during the matches, while the athletes were able to complete it only after their match.

Then, the participants were encouraged, while referring to the grid, to talk freely about their self-talk content and the emotions associated with each important moment, before, during, and after each match. To do so, following a semi-structured interview guide, the interviewer asked the participants the following questions: (a) “Using the grid you have completed, can you tell me about the important events of this match?”; (b) “For this important event, what did you say to yourself?”; and (c) “How did you feel at that moment?” Once the participant was interviewed for each important match event, the interview ended with a summary of the discussion, allowing the participant to add or correct information as needed. The duration of the interview (on average 90 minutes) was intended to allow the participants to elaborate enough on their self-talk for the three matches played.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of six stages involving Yin’s multiple-case study strategy (2014) and the narrative-type narrative inquiry (narrative analysis of eventful data) (Polkinghorne, 1995). First, the interviews for each of the cases were transcribed verbatim by a research assistant and were re-read several times by the researchers to familiarize themselves with their content. Second, once the data were transcribed, the main author and a research assistant coded them independently according to the aim of the study. Thus, during this stage, an analysis was made of all interview passages that included information about self-talk and an emotion related to an event considered important by the participant. The *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology* (Colman, 2015) was used to code some of the passages representing an emotion. For the self-talk coding, Hardy and Zourbanos’ (2016) definition was used, because it is, to our knowledge, the most complete and recent operational definition. These authors define self-talk as:

... statements, phrases or cue words addressed to the self that can be said automatically or very strategically, either out loud or silently, phrased positively or negatively, having an instructional or motivational purpose, an element of interpretation, and incorporating some of the same grammatical features associated with everyday speech. (p. 450)

Third, we analyzed the self-talk content related to emotions experienced match by match for each participant. To do so, we used the self-assessment self-talk grid as a coding grid. The structure of the coding grid was the same as the one completed by the participants. Thus, combined with the analysis of the participants’ narratives, the structure of the grid allowed for a rich analysis of the participants’ self-talk in relation to important events of the matches played. Fourth, a synthesis taking the form of a story for each case was made, tracing the content of their self-talk in relation to the emotions experienced, match by match. Fifth, the similarities and differences in the self-talk content of each player and his or her parent were analyzed (intra-case analysis). Sixth, and last, the similarities and differences between the cases were analyzed; in other words, comparisons were made between the players and then between the parents (cross-case analysis).

## Researchers’ Backgrounds

The first author of the study was an advanced Ph.D. student in sport psychology at the time of the study. Her experiences as an athlete and coach have made her aware of the



importance of evaluating self-talk of athletes in competition. It was also deemed important to evaluate the parents' experience and their own reality and challenges in their role as parents, while still being sensitive to their influence on the quality of the sport experience of the young athletes. Given the epistemological position of the authors and the objectives of the study, the first author was personally involved in the various stages of the study. For instance, during data collection, being present at the tournament venue allowed the author to immerse herself in the setting. It especially enabled her to observe matches and social interactions and thus gain a better understanding of the players' and parents' reality within this study. She also spoke with various key agents in the tournament (e.g., referees, organizers, coaches, parents, various players), which helped her further understand the context. The author's experiences in counseling also helped her connect with and query participants in order to help them develop self-reflection skills and reveal the content of their self-talk and their emotions.

The second and third authors of the study, who were the first author's research supervisors at the time of the study, helped sustain critical reflections throughout the study. The second author, a professor in sport psychology, holds expertise in both qualitative research and applied sport psychology which helped contribute to the development of this study's innovative research strategy. Her extensive experience in intervention and research in the tennis context was also very helpful to adapt to the context of elite tennis in Quebec. The third author is a professor and psychologist who is specialized in cognitive-behavioural therapy. His personal experience as an amateur athlete as well as his expertise in cognition have encouraged the study of self-talk by taking into account lived experiences and emotions.

### **Study Quality**

Some measures were taken to maximize study quality (Smith & McGannon, 2017). The first author conducted all of the interviews and worked to establish a climate of trust, so the participants felt comfortable expressing themselves openly and in complete confidentiality. Her personal experiences during data collection contributed to a detailed analysis and a nuanced interpretation of the results. To encourage reflection in the analysis process, the first author and a research assistant independently coded and interpreted the data. Regular discussions between the coders and the second author, who also has expertise in the field of elite junior tennis, were conducted to establish a critical dialogue process (Smith & McGannon, 2017). This process fueled reflections on the data interpretation and raised possible alternative interpretations.

### **Results**

The results are presented in three sections to remain faithful to the multiple-case study strategy (Yin, 2014) and the narrative inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1995). In the first section, the two cases are presented separately, the one of Anna and her father first, followed by the one of Tom and his mother. For each case, the player's and parent's profiles are first described. Next comes a narrative synthesis of the self-talk reported by each player and his or her parent for the first match, following the events deemed important in connection with the emotions experienced. This narrative synthesis follows the important phases of the first match: before the match, during the match (1<sup>st</sup> set, 2<sup>nd</sup> set, and 3<sup>rd</sup> set), and after the match. A complete overview of the self-talk of each case for the three matches played is presented in tables following the narrative synthesis. Anna's case is presented in Table 1 and Tom's, in Table 2. In the second section, the similarities and distinctions between the self-talk content of each player and of his or her parent are presented (intra-case analysis). In the third section, the two cases are compared (cross-case

analysis) to illustrate the similarities and distinctions according to two types of comparisons: (a) between the athletes and (b) between the parents.

### **Anna and her Father's Case**

#### **Anna's and her father's profiles.**

At the time of the study, Anna was 14 years old. She had five years of tennis competition experience and trained approximately 15 hours per week. She was in a period where she was performing better, following a more difficult period. Anna described herself as an anxious person, sensitive to the judgment of others, and extroverted. She added being a perfectionist athlete, who takes defeat harshly. Finally, Anna described herself as a straight and honest person. She mentioned that it is important for her to win the first match of a tournament to avoid being in the consolation draw, because she feared it would disappoint the people in her circle.

Anna's father described himself as a very demanding perfectionist. He added that he asks a lot of himself and of his daughter and that he's a stubborn person. He also mentioned being a very generous person and enjoying the good things in life. He said it was important for him to be there and to support his daughter in her tennis career. He would organize his work schedule, so he could follow her in tournaments.

#### **Narrative summary of Anna's self-talk during her first match.**

**Before the first match.** Whereas Anna reported being concerned by her opponent's reputation, her father did not mention any particular event before the first match but felt that his daughter was confident. Anna's self-talk took the form of worries, because she was afraid that her opponent might cheat: "I'm afraid she's going to cheat on a ball." Her reaction was to revert to a goal-directed self-talk taking the form of encouragements to gain confidence: "I know I can win." Her father stated that his self-talk was linked to the fact that he could see his daughter's confidence: "Yes, we'll have a good match!" The emotions reported by Anna were both confidence in her chances of winning, motivation about playing her match, and anxiety linked to the fear of her opponent cheating. Her father indicated feeling confident because he felt his daughter was confident.

**1<sup>st</sup> set.** In terms of important events, Anna mentioned being affected by the points scored by her opponent while her father perceived his daughter as being ahead and in control. Anna's self-talk oscillated between worries when her opponent got ahead ("I will lose if this continues"; "I have to stop missing!") and encouragement when she won the point ("Let's go, Anna, you just have two games left to win!"). Her father's self-talk was related mainly to his perception that his daughter was playing a good match: "Yes! She will beat her, no problem!" After winning the set, Anna's self-talk was positive: "It's going to be easy!" Anna's emotions were confidence and anxiety, depending on whether the score was in her or her opponent's favor. Anna also mentioned using goal-directed self-talk in the form of encouragement to build confidence. Her father reported feeling confident and encouraging his daughter in his mind. He mentioned an important event that was not mentioned by his daughter: the fact that the opponent went to the bathroom between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> sets. He said he was affected by this event, that he felt angry. His self-talk was negative: "Anna will lose her concentration. It should be forbidden!"

**2<sup>nd</sup> set.** The main important event reported by Anna during the second set was her opponent cheating (i.e., perception that her opponent voluntarily lied about the ball call) while her father did not mention this event. For his part, the father indicated perceiving his daughter as destabilized, not very confident, and eager to finish the match. Anna's self-talk was negative, and she mentioned being concerned about the outcome of the match: "It's not fair! I was going to win the match!" She also reported using goal-directed self-talk to motivate and recover: "Go Anna! It is not serious"; "I do not want her to win." Her father's self-talk was tinged mainly with negative thoughts about his daughter's game: "You cannot win your match if you do not win your serves"; "She is too eager to finish." The emotions reported by Anna were anxiety, anger, and determination whereas her father mentioned feeling irritated and trying to make eye contact with his daughter to tell her to be more active.

**3<sup>rd</sup> set.** While Anna mentioned being a victim of cheating a second time during the match; the father did not report a particular event. Anna's self-talk concerned mainly her discouragement about being a victim of cheating: "I can't believe she cheated again!" She added remembering previous similar events in tournaments where she might have lost in these situations. Her father reported self-talk related to his daughter's bad game choices: "She makes too many unforced errors"; "She lacks experience." Anna's emotions were anxiety and discouragement while her father first felt irritated and then disconnected from the match.

**After the first match.** Anna and her father were both affected by Anna's loss. The self-talk narrated by Anna was tinted mainly with self-criticism: "Ah you are so stupid! You could have won that game. You should quit tennis!" She also reported being concerned that her parents were angry at her for losing the match and that they were disappointed because of their financial investment in her tennis: "I disappointed my parents." She added being concerned that her peers would judge her: "What are they going to think of me at school?" She felt disappointed, sad, and discouraged, and she isolated herself in the bathroom to cry. She added that she felt particularly disappointed because she expected to win. Her father reported that he would have liked to go over the match with his daughter but said it was not a good time: "It's not a good time to be tough on her."

Table 1. *Content of Anna's and her father's self-talk and emotions during important events.*

Match	Anna				Her father		
	Moment	Event	Self-talk	Emotion	Event	Self-talk	Emotion
1	Before	Opponent's reputation	"I'm afraid she's going to cheat on a ball"	Anxious	Perception of his daughter	"Yes, we'll have a good match!"	Confident
			"I know I can win"	Confident, motivated	-	-	-
	1 <sup>st</sup> set	The opponent gets ahead	"I will lose if it continues" "I have to stop missing!"	Anxious	Perception of his daughter	"Let's go Anna, you're able to beat her!"	Confident
		Wins points	"Let's go Anna, you only have two games left to win!"	Confident	Anna leads in the set	"Yes! She will beat her, no problem!"	Confident
	Wins the set	"It's going to be easy"	Confident	Anna's opponent goes to the bathroom	"Anna will lose her concentration."	Angry	

					It should be forbidden!"	
2 <sup>nd</sup> set	Opponent cheating	"It's not fair!" "I was going to win the match." "Go Anna! It is not serious." "I do not want her to win."	Anxious Angry Determined	Perceives his daughter is in a hurry to finish	"You cannot win your match if you do not win your serves." "She is too eager to finish."	Angry
3 <sup>rd</sup> set	Opponent cheating	"I can't believe she cheated again!"	Anxious Discouraged	Bad game decision by his daughter	"She makes too many unforced errors." "She lacks experience."	Irritated
After	Anna's loss	"Ah you are so stupid! You could have won that game. You should quit tennis!" "I disappointed my parents." "What are they going to think of me in school?"	Disappointed Sad Discouraged	Anna's loss	"It's not a good time to be tough on her."	Disappointed
2	Before	-	Anxious	-	"She went to bed late, I feel her nervous"	Anxious
	1 <sup>st</sup> set	Loses the 1 <sup>st</sup> game	Anxious	Loses the 1 <sup>st</sup> game	"If she loses, it's going to be hell in the car." "No, you cannot lose against this player!"	Anxious Angry
		Wins the 1 <sup>st</sup> set	Confident Happy	Wins the first set	"Go Anna, you can beat her"	Confident
	2 <sup>nd</sup> set	Mistakes in the middle of the second set	Anxious	Anna makes mistakes	"She hits all wrong" "She's going to lose if it goes on like that"	Irritated
		-	-	Anna made a victory gesture	"You can't lose against this girl!"	Confident Determined
	After	Wins the match	Proud Relieved	Wins the match	"If she'd lost it would have	Relieved

			match I had to win!"			been a nightmare"	
3	Before	Presence of her coach	"I'm afraid I'll play bad"; "I don't want to disappoint my coach"		Anna asks for tips on how to beat her opponent	"She is tall, she has to hit hard"	Anxious
	1 <sup>st</sup> set	Anna wins points	"I have chances of winning"	Focused Confident	Perception of Anna on the court	"She looks more in control, less panicked"	Confident
	2 <sup>e</sup> set	Loses and wins	"Oh no, I'm tired, I don't want to play a third set"  "Ok, let's go !"	Anxious Angry	Perceives his daughter is not playing well	"She's not hitting well; she has trouble staying focused" "Now relax, you can't allow yourself to lose"	Irritated Anxious
	After	Wins the match	"Everyone will be happy" "I played really well"	Proud		"It's good! She fought, she didn't give up!"	Proud Relieved

## Tom and his Mother's Case

### Tom's and his mother's profiles.

Tom was 15 years old. He had seven years of competitive tennis experience and trained approximately 20 hours a week. Tom was having a very good tennis season and was second seed for this championship. Tom described himself above all as a competitive and serious boy. He added that he does not get distracted easily and is focused on his goals. He immediately mentioned being a good competitor and being technically talented. Tom also described himself as a person always seeking to improve and open to criticism. He added that he is an introvert who is in control of his emotions.

Tom's mother described herself as extroverted and expressive. She added that she is an altruistic person who likes to take care of others. Tom's mother also reported being sensitive and a good listener. She mentioned offering support by providing his food and managing his transportation.

### Narrative summary of Tom's self-talk during his first match.

**Before the first match.** Tom did not report any important event in particular. His mother said she was affected by the fact that she got lost on the way to the tournament and that her son was playing on the court farthest from the stands. The self-talk reported by Tom concerned his playing strategy: "Play his backhand"; "I have to break often." His mother's self-talk was about the impacts of taking the wrong way there on her son's stress levels ("I didn't have to give him that stress") and concern over having brought enough food. In connection with the second event, she mentioned irritation at the idea of sitting far from her son: "I will not see anything of the match, I will faze out." Tom mentioned feeling calm and confident. His mother reported feeling anxious and febrile.

**1<sup>st</sup> set.** Tom indicated that in this first set, he was affected by his many attempts to break his opponent's serve which was an important event for him. For her part, his mother mentioned

being disturbed by the fact that Tom lost the first point and feeling upset by the attitude of the parents sitting next to her. Tom's self-talk was primarily goal-directed, focused on his game strategy or encouragement to remain intense and focused: "Let's go" "Come on!" His mother reported self-talk centered mainly on advice that she was giving her son in her mind ("Just put your ball in play, do not make easy mistakes") as well as attempts to calm her own anxiety: ("Stay calm. I'm not responsible for his game"). She also mentioned thoughts related to the presence of the opponent's parents: "They disturb me, I feel their anxiety."

**2<sup>nd</sup> set.** The opponent's emotional reaction was an important event related by Tom and his mother. However, Tom and his mother experienced different self-talk and emotions in connection with this same important event. Tom reported feeling confident to see his opponent destabilized and gave himself instructions to maintain his concentration: "Don't be distracted, stay focused." His mother mentioned feeling frustrated that the referee did not intervene and worrying that her son was losing his concentration: "He's going to make him lose his focus." Tom's mother indicated a second important event when her son looked at her with a gesture of victory, a moment not mentioned by Tom. Tom's mother reported feeling very confident and encouraging her son with the same gesture in return. She encouraged her son in her mind ("Good job, keep going!") and at the same time, she said that the game was not won yet ("We never shout victory before the end").

**After the first match.** Tom did not report any particularly important event. He said he was happy and proud to have won the first match. He went on to talk about goal-directed self-talk to focus on his next game: "You have to keep playing well." Tom's mother mentioned the desire to hug her son and worried that he would push her away: "Will he reject me?" She said she was proud her son won his first match, but she felt worried that he might push her away.

Table 2. Content of Tom's and his mother's self-talk during important events.

Match	Moment	Tom			His mother		
		Event	Self-talk	Emotion	Event	Self-talk	Emotion
1	Before	Gets ready	"Play his backhand" "I have to break often"	Confident	Took the wrong way to the tournament	"I didn't have to give him that stress"	Anxious
		-	-	-	Sitting far away from her son	"I will not see anything of the match, I will faze out"	Anxious
1 <sup>st</sup> set	Tries to break the opponent	Tries to break the opponent	"Let's go, come on!"	Confident Focused	Perception of her son fighting on the court	"Just put your ball in play, do not make easy mistakes" "Stay calm. I'm not responsible for his game."	Anxious
2 <sup>nd</sup> set	Opponent's disturbing behavior	Opponent's disturbing behavior	"Don't be distracted, stay focused"	Confident Focused	Opponent's disturbing behavior	"He's going to make him lose his focus"	Anxious

	-	-	-	Tom looks at his mom and makes a victory gesture	“Good job! Keep going!” “We never shout victory before the end”	Confident Anxious	
	After	Wins the match	“You have to keep playing well”	Proud Focused	Worries that her son will push her away	“Will he reject me?”	Proud Anxious
2		Delay before the start of the match	“It's long, I'm going to lose my activation’ ‘It's long! It will hinder his activation”	Irritated	Delay before the start of the match	“It will hinder his activation” “He has to get away from his friends.” “Should I intervene?”	Anxious
	1 <sup>st</sup> set	Tom got his serve broken	“You didn't do what you were supposed to! You missed your chance!” “It's not over, I still have chances to win!”	Angry	Tom gets his serve broken	“Don't go down that road, don't open that door!” “I have to relax, like if I were underwater”	Anxious
	2 <sup>nd</sup> set	Tom got his serve broken	“I served poorly!” “It's the beginning of the set, I still have chances.”	Angry	Tom's opponent broke his serve	“Go back up the hill! You slipped into the mud, it's okay, get back!”	Sad
		-	-	-	Tom is having difficulties on the court	“I see him fight and it flips me upside down” “I need to control my heartbeat to convey my composure”	Anxious
	After	Loss	“I could have had him, but I didn't take advantage of my chances”	Disappointed	Loss	“He's disappointed” “I don't know what to say for comfort him”	Sad
3	Before	Gets ready	“I have to play offense if I want to have chances to win”	Determined	Perceives that her son is nervous	“He looks tired, he puts pressure on himself” “Tom, stay calm”	Anxious
	1 <sup>st</sup> set	The opponent is ahead	“I can impose my strategy” “Stay focused”	Anxious	Perceives her son as being angry	“Oh no! He's very angry”	Anxious
		Picks up game level	“Come on, go get that game !”	Focused	Rivalry with the	“It bothers me. I do not want to	Anxious

					opponent's mom	feel rivalry with this mother"	
2 <sup>nd</sup> set	Tight score	"Keep a good score and break his serve at the right moment"	Focused		Tight score	"My god my heart is beating in all directions" "Stay calm"	Anxious
3 <sup>rd</sup> set	Opponent receives a warning and the match is interrupted	"Stay focused in your bubble"	Confident Focused			"Stay calm" "Let yourself float, like in the Dead Sea. Watch the match like you would watch anyone's match"	Anxious Confident
After	Wins the match	"I played well"	Proud			"He must be tired"	Proud

### Similarities and Distinctions between Each of the Players and their Respective Parent (Intra-Case)

#### Anna and her father's case.

Some similarities were found between Anna's and her father's self-talk. More precisely, their self-talk was mainly about Anna's match scores, highlighting the importance they both attach to winning (e.g., Anna: "I know I can win"; Father: "Go Anna, you can beat her"). This emphasis on results are reflected in the self-talk and emotions reported by Anna and by her father for similar events concerning Anna's victories and losses during these matches. On these occasions, both of them had positive self-talk and emotions when the score was in Anna's favor ("I played really well"; "It's good! She fought!") and negative ones when the score was against Anna ("I will lose if it continues"). There were also differences between Anna's and her father's self-talk. First, unlike her father, Anna had concerns about the judgment of others. Indeed, Anna's self-talk was focused mainly on the consequences of losing ("If I lose, everyone will judge me") or winning the match ("Everyone will be happy"). Regarding emotions, Anna experienced a great deal of anxiety during her matches, while her father's self-talk involved mostly criticism of his daughter's performance ("She hits all wrong") and the impact of the quality of her game on her performance ("She's going to lose if it goes on like that"). His emotions also seemed to be influenced by the quality of his daughter's play, which made him feel proud and confident when she played well and angry when she did not perform according to his expectations.

Thus, even though both mentioned similar important loss-related events, Anna's self-talk on these occasions was mainly worries and anxiety ("You will find yourself in the B draw"), while her father's self-talk contained mostly criticism and anger ("You can't lose against this girl!"). During common events related to success, Anna's self-talk was mainly encouragement and came with confidence and pride ("I played really well!") while her father's self-talk consisted of positive remarks about the quality of her playing and was often mixed with feelings of relief ("It's good! She fought, she didn't give up!"). Finally, some events deemed important by Anna were not reported by her father, such as her opponent cheating ("It's not fair! I was going to win the match"). For his part, Anna's father mentioned having self-talk related to the fact that Anna's opponent left for several minutes to go to the bathroom between two sets ("Anna will lose her concentration. It should be forbidden!"), an event not



mentioned by Anna. In addition, Anna's father once again worried about her daughter's reaction in case of a loss ("If she'd lost it would have been a nightmare").

### **Tom and his mother's case.**

Regarding the similarities between Tom and his mother, we noted that they both used self-talk to manage their own emotions during important events of the matches. For example, Tom frequently used self-talk to self-regulate ("Don't be distracted, stay focused"). Similarly, Tom's mother used self-talk to manage her own emotions ("Stay calm"; "Let yourself float, like in the Dead Sea. Watch the match like you would watch anyone's match"). Tom and his mother also used self-talk in the form of encouragement ("Let's go!"). The frequent use of self-talk to self-regulate by Tom and his mother seemed to reflect the importance they both place on regulating internal states, such as emotions and activation. The importance attached to regulating internal states was reflected in the self-talk they both reported at the same important events. For example, both mentioned the same important event that had an impact on Tom's activation (i.e., a long delay between two rounds). In this circumstance, Tom and his mother were both concerned about the impact of this event on Tom's activation ("It's long, I'm going to lose my activation"; "It's long! It will hinder his activation").

Although some similarities were observed between Tom and his mother concerning their self-talk, certain distinctions were also noted. First, Tom's self-talk was mostly about the quality of his playing, while his mother was focused more on her perceptions of her son's emotional state on the court. For example, self-talk reported by Tom pertained primarily to his play strategy ("Play his backhand") or positive or negative comments related to his game ("I served poorly!"). Tom's emotions during his match were related mainly to the quality of his game, because he was mainly focused and activated. Moreover, contrary to his mother, Tom seemed less distracted by his surroundings ("Stay focused, stay in your bubble").

Meanwhile, his mother's self-talk concerned mainly her son's reactions on the court ("He's very angry"), messages that she addressed to her son in her head ("Tom, stay calm"), and her own emotions ("I see him fight and it flips me upside down"). The emotions reported by Tom's mother were related mainly to the way she perceived her son. In addition, she spoke a lot to her son in her mind through her self-talk ("Go back up the hill! You slipped into the mud, it's okay, get back!"). She also seemed to be trying to influence him by managing her own emotions ("I need to control my heartbeat to convey my composure"). She also reported concerns about her son's reactions to her ("Will he reject me?") and how she should react ("I don't know what to say for comfort him"). Furthermore, Tom's mother's self-talk reflected a perception that her son was under pressure and having difficult emotions during these games ("He looks tired, he puts pressure on himself"). These perceptions, however, were not reflected in the self-talk and emotions reported by Tom, who mentioned staying focused most of the time, no matter what happened ("It's the beginning of the set, I still have chances").

Moreover, even though Tom and his mother reported some similar important events, their reactions sometimes differed. For example, when Tom lost his second match, he had a critical self-talk about his performance ("I could have had it, but I did not take advantage of my chances") and felt disappointed. For her part, his mother worried about her son's condition and how to react ("He is disappointed"; "I don't know what to say to comfort him").

Finally, some events reported by Tom's mother were related to her own experience as an observer in the stands and were not reported by Tom. For example, Tom's mother mentioned being disturbed by the attitude of the parents sitting next to her. Thus, she seemed to be influenced by her emotions and her surroundings ("It bothers me, I do not want to feel rivalry with this mother"), while Tom seemed to have less difficulty managing distractions.

### **Similarities and Distinctions between the Players and the Parents (Cross-Case)**

First, regarding similarities between the two athletes' self-talk, we see that it could be spontaneous or goal-directed. Indeed, the self-talk reported by the athletes could be manifested in the form of spontaneous self-talk to express an emotion or directed towards self-regulation. Spontaneous self-talk occurred mostly in response to an event deemed important by the athlete, and the content was related to the related emotion (e.g., worries so anxiety). Meanwhile, goal-directed self-talk was often used by the athletes as a result of spontaneous self-talk. For example, in the first set of his second match, Tom said he encouraged himself immediately after experiencing frustration when his opponent had just broken his serve. Similarly, Anna mentioned encouraging herself to manage her self-talk and her emotions when her opponent cheated ("Go Anna! It is not serious"). Thus, it seems that goal-directed self-talk was used by athletes to manage their spontaneous self-talk and emotions.

When examining the similarities between the parents, we notice that their self-talk sometimes took the place of thoughts they were addressing to their children. These thoughts were encouragements, advice, or critiques aimed towards their children. For example, at a time when she felt anxious, the self-talk reported by Tom's mother concerned encouragement she wanted to convey to her son ("Tom, stay calm"). For his part, Anna's father sometimes mentioned criticizing his daughter in his mind, especially when he felt angry ("You cannot win your match if you do not win your serves"). Second, the self-talk reported by the parents was often related to their perceptions of their child's condition ("I feel her nervous"). Third, parents reported having concerns about their child's reactions ("If she loses, it's going to be hell in the car"). Finally, both parents' self-talk in this study showed that they sometimes reflected on the intention to adapt their reactions to their child. For example, following the defeat of Anna's first match, her father believed that although he wished to comment on her match, it was not a good time to do so: "It's not a good time to be tough on her." For her part, Tom's mother repeatedly mentioned concerns about how she should behave with her son: "Should I intervene?"

When looking specifically at the differences between the athletes, we notice that Anna's self-talk was strongly influenced by her emotional experience, her concerns about the judgment of others, and the score. Thus, as mentioned above, the content of her self-talk was related mainly to the consequences of losing or winning the match, the fear of disappointing those around her, and being judged. Similarly, the emotions experienced by Anna that complemented her self-talk were generally negative when the event was perceived negatively (e.g., loss, cheating) and positive when the event was perceived positively (e.g., victory). Separately, Tom's reported self-talk seemed less influenced by the consequences of losing or winning the match and depended instead on the evaluation of the quality of his game (e.g., his good moves, his poorer shots). Thus, Tom's self-talk was mainly goal-directed and concerned his technique, tactics, and concentration.

Finally, regarding the differences between the parents, we notice that Anna's father's self-talk was centered mainly around his daughter's game and her opponent, Anna's good plays, and her mistakes. Thus, during his daughter's matches, it seemed that Anna's father focused primarily on analyzing his daughter's game and performance. For her part, Tom's mother's self-talk pertained mainly to her perceptions of her son's emotional state. She also reported concerns about how to interact with her son. Thus, as opposed to Anna's father, Tom's mother's self-talk seemed more influenced by her emotions and her son's well-being than by his performance. In addition, contrary to Anna's father, Tom's mother reported using goal-directed self-talk to calm down or manage her own anxiety.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the content of elite junior tennis players' automatic self-talk as well as of their parents' self-talk regarding the emotions felt during important matches. The players' and parents' automatic self-talk was related to their own experience in important events. The fact that this experience was subjective and was linked to the emotions experienced during matches shows the close link between self-talk and emotions. These observations reflect the idiosyncratic aspect of automatic self-talk (Hardy, 2006) and testify to the relevance of examining the topic from the players' and parents' perspectives while taking into account emotions.

The present study revealed similarities observed between the self-talk of each athlete and of his or her parent. Indeed, similarities were observed in the importance attached to winning the match in the self-talk of the player and the parent of the first case. Additionally, there was a stronger tendency of the player and the parent in the second case to use goal-directed self-talk. Although the findings of the present study do not address the reason for these similarities, previous empirical findings about parental influence on athletes may provide possible interpretation to these findings. First, studies have shown the influence parents can have on the value athletes place on winning. For example, children whose parents place a high value on outcomes would be more likely to feel pressure to perform well (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Thus, it is possible to argue that one athlete's self-talk can be a reflection of his parent's expectations. To this day, research evidence suggests that parental pressure has a negative impact on the athlete, increasing performance anxiety (e.g., Gould et al., 2008). However, the process by which parental pressure can negatively influence their child in competition is less well known. The findings of the present study suggest that athletes may integrate their parents' expectations and impact their self-talk. Following this logic, these results reiterate the importance of examining parental expectations when seeking to understand the emotional experience and self-talk of competing athletes.

Second, the similarity observed regarding the use of self-talk to self-regulate within the second case of the present study raises the question of the influence parents can have on athletes' propensity to manage their emotions and their self-talk in a competition setting. Indeed, parents are recognised as important agents in their children's development of emotional regulation strategies (Zimmerman, 2000). Notably, research findings indicate that children learn to manage their emotions by observing their parents' reactions to emotions (e.g., Denham, Mitchell-Copeland, Strandberg, Auerbach, & Blair, 1997). Besides this implicit learning, parents have been shown to intentionally teach their children emotion management strategies (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007). Thus, it is again possible to consider that athletes internalize their parent's emotional management skills reflecting, yet again, the importance of parental influence on the athlete's self-talk and emotions. So far, previous research had only linked the content of the athletes' self-talk on the coach (e.g., Hardy, Oliver, & Tod, 2009; Zourbanos, Hatzigeorgiadis, & Theodorakis, 2007). The present study suggests that parents should be considered among the factors influencing an athlete's self-talk.

Besides these similarities, some differences were observed in the content of the self-talk of each athlete and of his or her parent. More specifically, the differences in the self-talk content reported by the players and their parent for the same important event reflect different concerns related to their respective roles. For example, while Tom's self-talk revealed that he was concerned by the quality of his game following a loss, his mother's self-talk for the same event reflected concerns about her son's well-being and her way of interacting with him. These results indicate that parents and players can experience events differently during matches. In addition, the parents mentioned self-talk related to certain important events that were unique to their own experience as observers in the stands. For example, Tom's mother reported self-

talk about the discomfort of being near the parents of her son's opponents. These results suggest that parents face demands specific to their involvement as a parent, which has been previously observed by some authors (e.g., Harwood & Knight, 2009). Given the parents' central role in the quality of their children's sporting experience (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004), these observations reflect the importance of engaging in players' experiences and supporting them in managing challenges, a recommendation previously issued by researchers (e.g., Knight & Holt, 2013; 2014).

The cross-case analysis revealed the presence of similarities and differences between the players and between the parents. First, regarding the similarities between the players, the results of this study indicate that the content of their self-talk could be spontaneous or goal-directed. Indeed, the two players in this study sometimes reported self-talk representing the expression of the emotion experienced during their match (i.e., spontaneous self-talk). On other occasions, players reported using self-talk to focus, activate, or manage an emotion (i.e., goal-directed self-talk). These results support previous authors' observations (e.g., Dickens et al., 2017; Latinjak, 2018; Latinjak et al., 2017; Van Dyke et al., 2018) and reveal that spontaneous self-talk is a good indicator of the athlete's internal state while goal-directed self-talk informs on the athlete's own cognitive self-regulation strategies.

Although the two players in the study reported using both types of self-talk (spontaneous and goal-directed), the results revealed differences in the manifestation of these types of self-talk. The differences observed in the self-talk of the two players in this study can be understood in light of their respective profiles. Indeed, the self-talk of Anna, who described herself as sensitive to the judgment of others, seemed to be influenced by the importance attached to the consequences of losing the match. By contrast, Tom, who described himself as serious and in control of his emotions, had a greater tendency to use goal-directed self-talk. The importance of considering individual differences was also raised by Thibodeaux and Winsler (2018), who observed differences between tennis players in the expression of self-talk (overt vs. covert speech) and content (positive and negative). Although the importance of individual factors is considered in the conceptual self-talk models (Hardy et al., 2009; Van Raalte, Vincent, & Brewer, 2016), they have received little attention so far in self-talk research. The results of this study suggest that looking at the characteristics of each athlete's profile provides a better understanding of individual differences in self-talk.

Moreover, concerning the similarities observed between the parents, their self-talk was mainly in the form of thoughts they were addressing to their children. These messages to their child seemed to be influenced by the way they perceived their child on the court and took the form of encouragement and advice. These observations indicate that parents feel very concerned about their child's experience in competition, which supports other researchers' results (e.g., Harwood & Knight, 2015; Knight & Holt, 2013) indicating that the emotions experienced by parents in competition are influenced by their child's reactions on the court. The results of this study suggest that asking parents about their self-talk in relation to experienced emotions provides information about their interests and concerns during their child's competition, offering some insights to understand their reactions and further help them appropriately support their child.

Concerning the differences observed in the self-talk of the two parents in this study, they can, like those between the athletes, be understood in the light of the parents' respective profiles. More specifically, the self-talk of Anna's father, who described himself as critical and demanding, concerned mainly the analysis of his daughter's performance on the court. Meanwhile, the self-talk of Tom's mother, who described herself as altruistic and sensitive, concerned mainly her son's well-being and their relationship. Considering that parents' expectations influence their attitudes and behaviors towards their children (Knight et al., 2016), the results of this study suggest that considering parents' self-talk in relation with their

descriptive characteristics is a potential research avenue to better understand the importance they place on adolescent athletes' performance and well-being.

In summary, similarities among athletes' and parents' self-talk suggest the latter may affect the athletes' self-talk through the internalization of parental expectations of performance and the use of self-regulation strategies. In addition, it seems that each athlete's and each parent's profile impact their inner speech and their emotions during a tennis match. The present study has significant implications for the field, suggesting that self-talk may be a gateway to better understanding the emotional experience of parents in competition and supporting their parenting role. Furthermore, the results reflect the idiosyncrasy of individual factors by suggesting that self-talk depends on the complex interaction between personal and socio-contextual factors specific to each person's subjective experience. These findings invite researchers to pursue studies of automatic self-talk by looking at it from an individual angle according to each athlete's personal profile and experience, to better appreciate the idiosyncratic nature of self-talk.

Although this study makes relevant contributions to knowledge and practice, some limitations must be considered. First, it is possible that the participants' account of their self-talk was influenced by a social desirability bias, i.e., that their remarks were biased by the image they wanted to convey of themselves in the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A second limitation concerns the delay between matches and the time of the interview. Despite the interviews being conducted quickly after the last match and a self-assessment grid of self-talk being used during the tournament, the self-talk reported by the participants was possibly affected by recall.

In conclusion, the innovative research strategy employed in this multiple-case study made it possible to better understand the content of the self-talk of elite junior tennis players and their parents by highlighting their unique and subjective experience. The emphasis on descriptive characteristics highlighted the fact that there are individual differences in the content of athletes and parents' self-talk. The observed link between descriptive characteristics and automatic self-talk illustrates the idiosyncratic aspect of self-talk (Hardy & Zourbanos, 2016) and demonstrates the relevance within studies to focus on personal characteristics. Moreover, this study is the first to address parents' self-talk in parallel with that of the players during the matches of a major tennis tournament. The implications discussed above indicate that parents' automatic self-talk is a promising research avenue to better understand their reactions and the influence they exert on their child. In addition, given the similarities observed between the athletes and their parent, self-talk and subsequent parental behaviors would benefit from being considered among the factors that influence athletes' automatic self-talk to improve our conceptual understanding of the phenomenon.

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