

Two Stars and Two Superstars?
Analysing Gendered Narratives in Rio 2016 Olympics'
Tennis and Equestrianism Coverage

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<p>Tutkielma tarkastelee Rion olympialaisten 2016 urheilu-uutisointia evaluaation näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on selvittää, millaista evaluaatiota eli arviointia urheilu-uutisissa esiintyy: millä tavoin mies- ja naisurheilijoihin suhtaudutaan mediassa, miten heitä ja heidän suorituksiaan kuvaillaan ja arvioidaan, ja millaisten verbien kanssa sukupuolet esiintyvät subjektin paikalla. Analyysi keskittyy erityisesti kahteen yksilöurheilulajiin, tennikseen ja ratsastukseen, jotta on mahdollista vertailla, onko uutisissa käytetty kieli ja urheilijoiden kuvaukset erilaisia lajissa, jossa mies- ja naisurheilijoilla on omat sarjansa, verrattuna lajiin, jossa he kilpailevat yhdessä toisiaan vastaan. Sukupuolittunut kielenkäyttö ja naisurheilijoita trivialisoiivat narratiivit ovat olleet keskeinen teema urheilusosiologiassa 2000-luvun alusta lähtien, ja aihe on edelleen ajankohtainen tasa-arvon puhututtaessa yhteiskunnan eri kentillä. Kielitieteen piirissä se on kuitenkin saanut huomattavasti vähemmän huomiota, joten tämä tutkielma pyrkii tuomaan aiheeseen erilaista näkökulmaa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen teoreettinen tausta nojaa genreanalyysiin sekä sukupuolta ja kieltä tutkiviin teorioihin. Genreanalyysin käsitteiden kautta pyrin muodostamaan kuvan urheilu-uutisista genrenä sekä tarkastelemaan tennis- ja ratsastusuutisointia osana tätä laajempaa genreä. Sukupuolen ja kielen teorioita hyödynnän tutkiessani naisurheilijoiden mediarepresentaatioita ja urheilu-uutisoinnissa vallitsevia sukupuolittuneita käytäntöjä. Sovellan tutkimuksessa systeemis-funktionaalisen kieliteorian pohjalta kehitettyä suhtautumisen teoriaa (Martin ja White, Appraisal theory) painottaen erityisesti sen asennoitumisen ja asteittaisuuden kategorioita. Näiden työkalujen avulla tarkastelen, onko median suhtautumisessa mies- ja naisurheilijoihin selkeitä eroja, ja esitetäänkö naisurheilija miesurheilijaa useammin negatiivissävyyteisesti.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen materiaali koostuu 40:stä tennis- ja ratsastusuutisesta, jotka on julkaistu <i>The Guardian</i>- ja <i>Daily Mail</i> -lehtien urheilu- ja uutisiosioissa Rion olympialaisten 2016 aikana. Analysoitavat artikkelit valittiin 219 hakutuloksen joukosta ositetulla otannalla niin, että molemmista lehdistä analyysiin valikoitui 10 tennisuutista ja 10 ratsastusuutista. Analyysi on kaksiosainen: ensimmäinen osa keskittyy analysoimaan tennis- ja ratsastusuutisointia osana urheilu-uutisgenreä, ja toinen syventyy tutkimaan sukupuolten representaatioita urheilumediassa. Analyysissä yhdistyvät määrällinen ja laadullinen menetelmä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen perusteella voidaan todeta, että tennis- ja ratsastusuutisoinnissa esiintyvän evaluaation tyyli ja määrä heijastelevat sekä uutisgenreille ominaista toistoa että urheilu-uutisille tyypillistä värikästä kielenkäyttöä ja korostettuja ilmauksia. Yllättävänä voidaan pitää adjektiivien verrattain vähäistä määrää urheilijoiden kuvailussa verrattuna substantiiveihin, mutta aineiston perusteella substantiivikin voi toimia suhtautumisen paljastavana kuvainnollisena määritteenä. Tutkimustulokset mies- ja naisurheilijoiden kuvailun tyylistä ja sävystä viittaavat positiiviseen muutokseen urheilumedian asenteissa naisurheilijoita kohtaan. Kuvaukset olivat samankaltaisia molemmissa lajeissa ja asettivat mies- ja naisurheilijat samanarvoiseen asemaan. Verbien käyttö vahvisti osaltaan vaikutelmaa sukupuolten tasapuolistuneesta kohtelusta mediassa. Jatkotutkimusta tarvitaan selvittämään, onko tämänkaltaisen kehityksen havaittavissa urheilumediassa laajemminkin, vai vallitsevatko sukupuolittuneet narratiivit edelleen tietyissä lajeissa ja maissa.</p>			
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2.1 Approaches to News Discourse and Genre	6
2.1.1 Sports News.....	9
2.2 Appraisal	9
2.3 Language, Gender and Sports	14
2.3.1 Women in Tennis	15
2.3.2 Women in Equestrianism	16
3. Materials and methods	18
3.1 Data Collection.....	18
3.2 Method of Analysis	22
3.2.1 Appraisal as an Analysing Tool	22
4. Analysis and Discussion.....	24
4.1 Tennis and Equestrianism in Sports News Genre – Observations on Evaluation.....	24
4.1.1 Judgment and Appreciation.....	30
4.2 Genders in Tennis and Equestrianism	33
4.2.1 How Genders Are Described.....	34
4.2.2 Descriptions in Tennis.....	34
4.2.3 Descriptions in Equestrianism.....	41
4.2.4 The Position of Genders in the Discourse.....	45
4.2.5 Verbs in Tennis	45
4.2.6 Verbs in Equestrianism	47
4.2.7 Genders in Sports – Have the Narratives Changed?	49
5. Conclusion.....	51
References	53
Appendix	57

1. Introduction

Wife, girl, sexy, just a pretty face. These are just a few examples of words and expressions used to describe female athletes in the media. Sports has traditionally been seen as male territory and even though a lot has changed since the 1900s, old values and ingrained attitudes still affect the way female athletes are portrayed and what type of attention they receive in the media. Today's mass media is one of the most influential social forces, shaping our thoughts and ideas through the text we read and the images we see (Fink 2014) and thus the coverage, its amount, quality and content, has the power to reinforce and maintain these attitudes and representations.

Gender differences, female athletes' media portrayals, biased coverage and sports feminism have been topics of interest in research, especially in recent years. Fink (2014) has studied issues such as gender marking, framing and infantilising, while Ponterotto (2014) has focused on media's discursive frame that tends to trivialise female athletes. Objectification, sexualisation and underrepresentation are also highly relevant in the context of sports, and have been discussed by e.g. Trolan (2013). Sherry, Osborne and Nicholson (2016) have extended the research to include print media images and their role in the construction of attitudes and perceptions of female athletes.

As is evident, this topic has been widely researched in Social Sciences; however, in linguistic research it has received less attention. Yet the ways in which language is used and the implicit and explicit meanings it conveys are important to consider, because we as readers and humans make connections in the mental and semantic field in our minds (Wright, 2017, p.1). Hearing the word *pretty*, or on the other hand, *powerful*, immediately conjures certain images – a sign that these words have become gendered – and this is what evaluation is all about. While Bednarek (2006) and Bednarek and Caple (2012) have studied news writing in general and its evaluative tendencies, evaluative language of sports news specifically is an under researched area. Using Appraisal Theory as the evaluative framework, this paper aims to fill this gap by examining what kind, and how much evaluation sports news writing contains. In addition, my research questions include: how male and female athletes are described in the news and how genders are positioned in the discourse. When approaching the questions, a particular interest is in the adjectives and nouns used to describe athletes to find out if female and male athletes

are referred to differently and if yes, how. This is because according to Wright (2017, p.4), adjectives are one of the most important avenues for descriptive variation. Moreover, nouns can carry meanings as well because whether an athlete is referred to as a superstar or just by their name tells something about how those athletes are seen. My analysis considers also verbs as they have the ability to express how genders are positioned in the discourse. In other words, does the language reinforce the opposition of masculine behaviour and feminine appearance, and, moreover, which words appear with men in the subject position and which with women.

The material of this study consist of 40 sports news articles gathered from the online sites of two U.K. newspapers, *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail*, during the 2016 Rio Olympics. These two newspapers were chosen because they represent different ends of the news field and vary in terms of political leaning (YouGov, 2017). To narrow down the scope of the material and for the results to be more comparable, the focus is on individual sports. More particularly, my interest is in tennis and equestrianism to see whether the language and descriptions are different in a sport where women and men compete against each other versus a sport where both genders have their own series. I utilise mixed methods in the analysis: close reading to examine and name evaluative words and expressions and and how they differ between genders, as well as quantitative method to compare the evaluative language in general between the two sports and two newspapers. My main theories include genre, evaluation and language and gender.

The study is divided into five chapters. In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical background in more detail, providing an introduction to sports news genre and Appraisal Theory. Gender in the sports context will also be explored with special attention being paid to women in tennis and equestrianism. Chapter 3 explains how the data collection was conducted and introduces the methodology I have utilised in my study. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the material, first focusing on evaluation in tennis and equestrianism news on a general level and then discussing the possible gendered differences detected. The findings are also discussed in relation to previous research. In the final chapter I conclude the study and provide suggestions for further research.

2. Background

Gendered language and different media treatment between athletes is a wide topic and discussed across disciplines. To examine the issue further, one needs to understand the context where it occurs: what types of institutions sports and media are and particularly, what is meant when we talk about sports news as a genre. Fink (2014, p.337) states how sports is an institution where sexism is deeply entrenched but is rarely perceived consciously, and Scraton and Flintoff (2002, p.81) add to this by naming media as an “example of a powerful patriarchal institution that is largely owned and controlled by men.” Indeed, patriarchy is one of the most central hegemonic structures influencing the contemporary media environment and affecting the ways of communicating (Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg, 2020). Whether this reflects in the evaluation present in the news is examined in Chapter 4. Before that, this chapter introduces the main theories used in this study, genre and appraisal, to provide a conceptual framework needed to better understand the purpose and methods of this study. In addition, theories on language and gender are explored with a special attention paid to women in tennis and equestrianism contexts.

2.1 Approaches to News Discourse and Genre

From the early studies, genre theorists have emphasised functionality and conceptualised genre as goal-directed and purposive, something that is achieved by using language (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, p.121). In other words, genre in general is understood as a class of social and communicative events and is defined by characteristics such as content, intended audience and most importantly, communicative purpose (Swales, 1990, p.10). Indeed, the communicative purpose is often named the key characteristic of a genre, constituting its rationale (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, p.122). Thus what we try to express and accomplish in a specific context directly affects the way text is structured and what type of rhetorical strategies are utilised. This interdependency is the essence of genres and recognised in Swalesian genre model that introduces three constituents: *communicative purpose*, *move structure* and *rhetorical strategies* (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, p.122).

The first of the three, as briefly discussed above, refers to the purposeful nature of genres – the primary goal and shared intentions of those involved in communication in a given

situation. It cannot be established solely by looking at the text itself, but rather the context, i.e. the discourse community where the particular text is produced and used has to be considered (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, p.122). In addition to the communicative purpose, genres are often highly conventionalised and structured, representing a specific way to accomplish the desired goal, the communicative purpose (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, p.122). Language is systematically used to perform the communicative event, drawing from one part to another and staging the structure by which the particular genre unfolds, hence the *move structure* (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, p.122). Despite the predetermined sequence being typical for genres, rhetorical variation occurs, and thus the notion of moves fits best for displaying generic conventions of text organisation (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, pp.122-123). Lastly, *rhetorical strategies* are used to realise the intended goal, meaning that the content and style of the text too are influenced by the communicative purpose (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, p.123). Since the texts belonging to a specific genre often deploy similar rhetorical features, these verbal and visual regularities are how we are able to intuitively presume something to be e.g. news article or a recipe (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, p.123). This is not to say that the expressions are always the same, rather there are various possibilities for saying the same thing, i.e. realising the same move (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, p.123).

Genres differ and what is interesting is that these differences can emerge in several ways: in their complexity, in terms of their medium and mode and also how prepared they are (Swales, 1990, p.61). The topic of this study, news discourse, is discourse we encounter on television, radio and in newspapers, both offline and online (Bednarek and Caple 2012, p.1). It is a linguistic form of communication that uses semiotic resources – words, images and sometimes sounds (Bednarek and Caple 2012, p. 2). The choices in the language used and images and layout utilised have meanings lying behind them, meanings that make news a powerful tool for shaping our ideas and beliefs.

Fairclough (2003, p.26) relates genre to discourse but distinguishes between the ways in which they figure in social practice. Whereas genre offers a flexible way of acting, discourse provides various ways for representation (Fairclough, 2003, p.26). In other words, purpose oriented genre guides the form and content, and discourse is the written or spoken product that mirrors and influences the social and cultural contexts it is developed in. Because of always existing in relation to the wider social world, texts are meaningful in contributing changes in beliefs and attitudes of both individuals and society as a whole (Fairclough, 2003,

p.8). As every individual is different, diverse and overlapping interpretations of texts is often expected. This is addressed in more detail later in this chapter when I discuss evaluation and appraisal theory.

The communicative context of news refers to the relations between news discourse, its producers and its audience(s) (Bednarek and Caple 2012, p 20). At this point it is good to note that the news process is a rather complex one, influenced by various factors such as corresponding deadlines, hierarchies and practices, and involving actors from authors to editors and animators (Bednarek and Caple 2012, pp.20-22). Moreover, as Cotter (2010, p.54) notes, the process of writing is not completely straightforward either: the story often starts from news tips and is followed by interviews, the writing itself, editing and story replacement (Bednarek and Caple 2012, p.21). Much of what is published in the news is also second-hand, i.e. it is based on agency copies, press releases or other input sources such as social media, documents and press conferences, as well as being syndicated (Bednarek and Caple 2012, pp.21). Nevertheless, whatever the source or the process is behind the news story, the information in it is socially situated and shaped according to the context in which the text occurs (Drid, 2018, p.702).

News discourse is guided by *news values*, the prime criteria employed in the writing to produce pertinent news (Drid, 2018, p.702). These qualities of what makes something newsworthy are embedded and reinforced in the text and shape and govern the story design and its organisation (Cotter, 2010, p.67). Thus, the story must possess certain elements to be constituted as newsworthy: relevant, important, timely and about a change or conflict of sorts (Cotter, 2010, p. 68). The news values are first and foremost heuristic in their function, and their most important purpose is to determine *who* or *what* gets covered and *how* they are covered (Cotter, 2010, p.74). In addition, news values are invoked to answer other journalistic questions relevant to the story construction: *when* and *where* something happened, *why* that happened and *what* are the consequences (Cotter, 2010, p.75). Put simply, the values guide the author to emphasise certain things to guarantee the fulfilment of the newsworthiness criteria. Once the content is determined, it is organised by *superstructure* schema designating the conventional form of specific discourse, in this case news writing (Shie, 2012, pp.663-664). Within the superstructure are the headline and the lead, two categories that constitutes what Van Dijk (1988) calls summary, and the rest of the report containing relevant background information is referred to as story (Shie, 2012, p.664). This type of news model is

also known as the inverted pyramid, an objective writing system that represents the most important information at the beginning and leaves the less important information at end of the narrow tip (Shie, 2012, p.663).

2.1.1 Sports News

Sports news fall under the news discourse genre, but with a different focus and communicative features as well as different keywords (Bednarek and Caple, 2012, p.95). As with general news topics, the main communicative purpose of sports news is to inform the reader. However, the content of this information is where the differences are: sports news report sporting events, current “hot” topics in the world of sports, reviews of matches, transfer rumours and so forth (Fest, 2017, p.190). As can be seen from this list, sports news genre is very wide and thus an exhaustive definition is actually hard to agree on. However, while the content of sports news articles varies a lot, their structure remains more or less the same. That is, sports news often adopt the typical news report structure, the inverted pyramid including headline, lead, intro and body (Bednarek and Caple, 2012, p.96).

2.2 Appraisal

When we talk about linguistic evaluation, we generally refer to three main functions: expressing feelings and opinions; building and maintaining relations; and organising discourse (Hunston and Thompson, 2000). This area has gathered a lot of attention in research and been studied in different ways and from several viewpoints. It is a complex phenomenon and due to multiple genres, registers and text types with their own specifics and characteristics, an all-encompassing framework that would cover all possible aspects of evaluation cannot be constructed. In addition, we as people and observers constantly interpret what we see, hear or read and filter them through our own views, values and opinions, which means that we all evaluate things in different ways.

So far, scholars have studied evaluation only in hard news, meaning politics, crime stories and international affairs. Bednarek (2006) identified two types of evaluative parameters, core and peripheral, and utilised them in analysing 100 hard news stories from British tabloids and broadsheets. Even though there were differences between the newspapers, the main findings showed how surprisingly common evaluative expressions and stance taking are in news

writing. Likewise, Martin and White (2005) had similar results when they examined hard news using Appraisal Theory. Within the sports context, appraisal has been applied, but it has yet to extend to sports news writing. Lewis and Weaver (2015) have looked into the ways sports media frames athletes, especially in terms of their personal attributes, and how this affects the associations and evaluations made by the audience. Closest to sports news reporting has maybe gotten Caldwell (2009), who analysed the language used by AFL (Australian Football League) players and ABC (Australian Broadcast Corporation) journalists in the post-match interviews. He found that both parties use attitudinal expressions, as well as employ graduation and engagement to reduce authorial endorsement (Caldwell, 2009).

For the purposes of this study, I utilise Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory as previous studies suggest that the model is applicable for analysing news discourse particularly. Moreover, compared to some other evaluation theories (see e.g. Bednarek, 2006), the appraisal model allows us to better identify both direct and indirect coding, i.e. evaluation that is either clearly presented or implied and assumed (The Appraisal Website, 2015). The framework draws on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) but extends to map out the resources used to create meaning in a text and the different ways people position themselves in relation to others (Martin and White, 2005, p.1):

The kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned (Martin and Rose, 2003, p.22).

Due to this interpersonal and multi perspective nature, the appraisal system allows us to examine different aspects in discourse such as assumptions, attitudes and communicative strategies – both explicit and implicit ones (The Appraisal Website, 2015). All of the above-mentioned aspects occur in news discourse because despite emphasising objectivity, news writing shows also assumptions and evaluation (Bednarek, 2006). Sports reporting is no exception; in fact, Mastro, Blecha and Atwell Seate (2011, p.526) name it the most prevalent journalistic frame alongside crime stories. The ways in which events are first of all interpreted and observed and then reported, is always at least partly conditioned by the perspective and social background of journalists, editors and also management, and even the most factual report is the product of value judgments (Iedema, Feez and White, 1994). This directly relates

to the news values discussed above as the *who*, *what* and *why* questions are all affected by these factors.

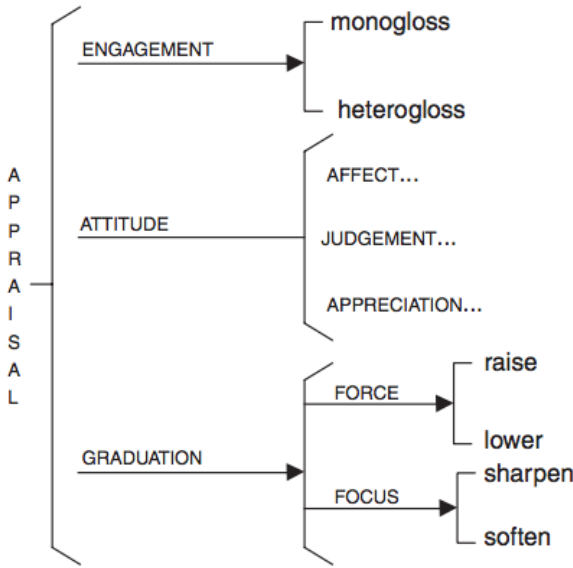


Figure 1. An Overview of Appraisal Model (Martin and White, 2005, p.38)

There are three interacting domains in Appraisal Theory: *attitude*, *engagement* and *graduation* (Martin and White, 2005, p.35). Attitude is taken as the focal point, while engagement and graduation are distinguished as distinct resources used for adopting positions and scaling intensity respectively (Martin and White, 2005, p.39). Within the framework, the concept of attitude moves beyond mere emotions to comprehensively include three areas of feelings: affect, judgment and appreciation (Martin and White, 2005, pp.35-40). Affect is a tool for exploring emotional reactions and registering whether these feelings are positive or negative (Martin and White, p.35, p.42). Judgment, then, is concerned with attitudes toward behaviour, meaning the ways people assess others and the judgments they pass on them and their utterances (Martin and White, 2005, p.42). Lastly, appreciation looks at how value is construed and how we evaluate things, performances and phenomena (Martin and White, 2005, p.56). Both judgment and appreciation thus rework feelings, but while the former concerns people, the latter is about objects and quantities, i.e. not people. Still, they can appear also together, as judging someone’s actions may contain appreciation of their performance.

The second resource of appraisal, graduation, attends to evaluating and grading phenomena and objects whereby categories are blurred and feelings amplified (Martin and White, 2005, p.35). It operates across two different axes of scalability, *force* and *focus* that realise up-scaling/down-scaling (Martin and White, 2005, pp.136-137). Force is a resource for quantification and intensification, and focus helps to adjust boundaries though both do this by modulating the degree of meaning (Martin and White, 2005, p. 40). Covering assessments of amount, quantification provides resources for measuring of numbers and e.g. the size or proximity and extent of time and space (Martin and White, 2005, p.141). Intensification then is employed to refer to the scaling of processes and qualities (Martin and White, 2005, p. 140). This type of graduation has to do with attitude first and foremost, as it can adjust the evaluation on how weak of strong the feeling is (Martin and White, 2005, p. 37). Typically expressed through adverbs and adjectives that somehow indicate high value of intensity, this mode is widely found in the media (The Appraisal Website, 2015). Moving on to focus, it differs from force in terms of the context: it is used with non-scalable resources to adjust the boundaries between different categories (Martin and White, 2005, p. 37, 137).

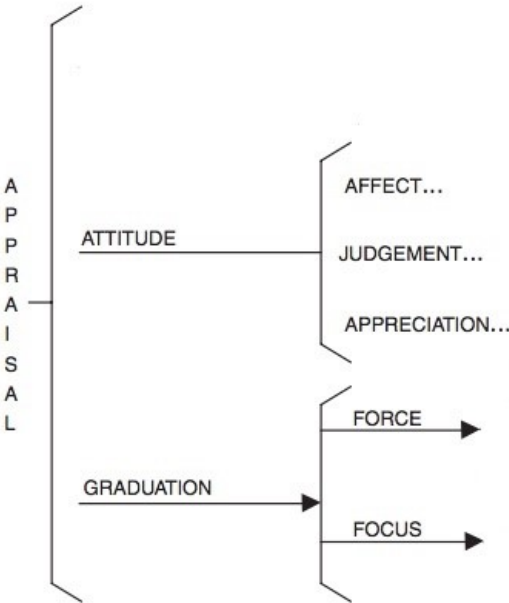


Figure 2. Appraisal resources used in this study
 (adapted from Martin and White, 2005, p.38)

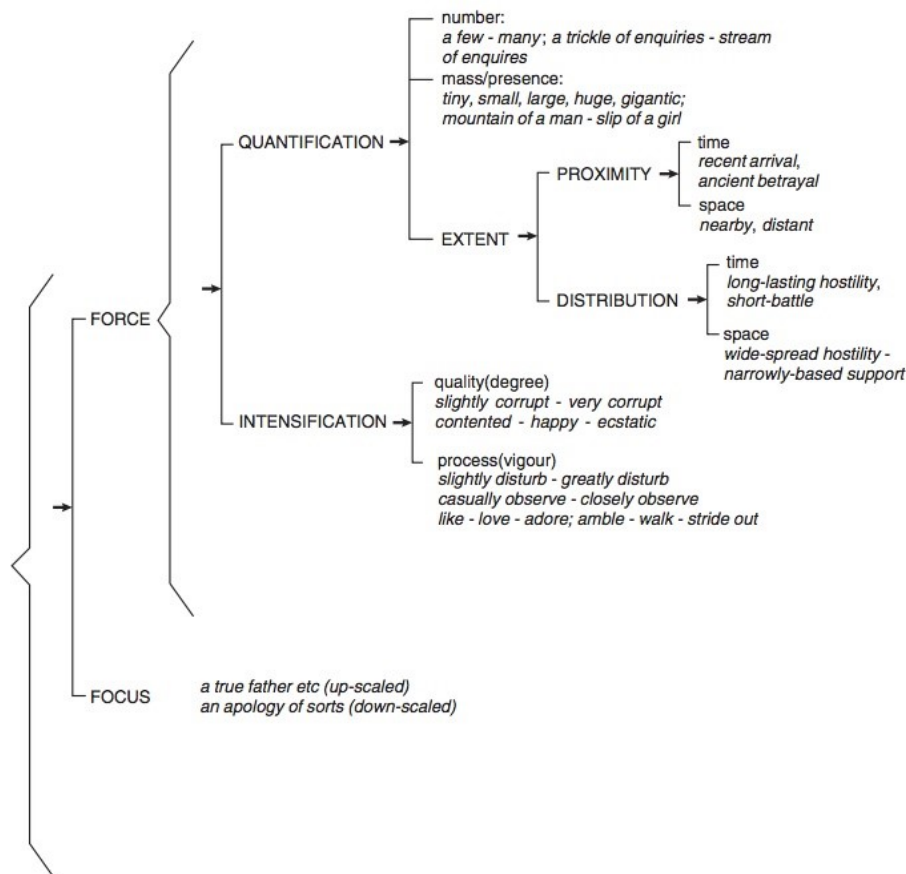


Figure 3. Graduation resources extended
(adapted from Martin and White, 2005, p.154)

The third domain in the theory, engagement, deals with the embedding and positioning of different voices in discourse (Martin and White, 2005 p.35), but since I am not focusing on engagement in my analysis, it will not be expanded on here. This is not to say that engagement is somehow secondary in news reporting; in fact, multiple voices embedded is a rather central attribute of news discourse, but in this study it was deemed not as important as my research questions aim to find out how athletes are described in the media and the ways these words and expressions may vary between genders. Thus, my focus is on attitude, and the articles are discussed in terms of affect, judgment and appreciation and the tone of these. Further, graduation is included to the extent described previously, separating in terms of quantification and intensification.

In the context of journalistic discourse, hard news reporting is considered a regime that operates under an assumption of the writer remaining apart from alignment or disalignment (Martin and White, 2005, p.115). Even still, there are manners in which texts may indicate

what the writer is opposed to or supports, allowing the readers to interpret how people, events and things are evaluated (Martin and White, 2005, p.115). As discussed in section 2.1, sports news reporting is in many ways similar to that of hard news, but the language may be more colourful and evaluations more explicit. Thinking in appraisal terms, it might show in the judgments made of sporting heroes, as well as involve appreciation of their performances (Martin and White, 2005, p.30).

2.3 Language, Gender and Sports

Intersections between language and gender are a diverse and multidisciplinary topic that involves not only linguistics but also feminist media studies, cultural research and gender studies (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Recently there has been a lot of discussion about equality, and societal movements are contributing to the fight against inequality, both between genders and races. Hence it is expected at least to some extent that the differences in the language used to refer to men and women in the coverage may not be as noticeable and distinct as they have been in the past. However, ongoing discussion tells that the topic remains current, and continued study is necessary to detect changes across sports and countries. The media's role in the process cannot be overlooked, because as said earlier, it is a powerful institution and affects the way we see and understand the world around us. On one hand, the media is capable of reinforcing certain values but on the other hand, it can help to change the dominant beliefs and norms present in a society (Trolan, 2013).

Studies on women's sports and their media coverage are multiple, but so far most of them have been conducted in the field of Social Sciences. Toni Bruce (2016), leading scholar in Sports Sociology, has identified 15 'rules' that represent both historical and current trends in women's media representation. These include, for example, gender marking, comparison to men, infantilisation, sexualisation, ambivalence and appropriate femininity (Bruce, 2016). In more detail, these issues have been studied by various scholars. Sherry, Osborne and Nicholson (2016) studied the images in print media and their role in construing perceptions of female athlete. They noted that the imagery together with gendering narrative and language continue to affect women's representation in sports (Sherry, Osborne and Nicholson, 2016). Biased coverage and underrepresentation have also been noted by Godoy-Pressland (2014), who examined sportswomen in British newspapers over a two-year period, and Crolley and Teso (2007), who discussed both quantitative and qualitative differences in the reporting of

female and male athletes in Spanish print media. They found that there is not only clear imbalance in the coverage, but that it employs gendered narratives and discursive strategies (Crolley and Teso, 2007). Moreover, George, Hartley and Paris (2001) identified similar patterns in their study of newspaper and TV coverage in the U.K., especially noting the focus on physical appearance instead of achievement.

The content of the news articles, the language used and commentary included, have also been discussed when examining the gendered differences between female and male athletes' media portrayals. Ponterotto (2014) has studied trivialisation, discursive framing and stereotyped language of sports reports of Maria Sharapova in the English and Italian press, suggesting that the motivations behind this type of representation are related to the ideal of male hegemony. In her study, Trolan (2013) raises awareness on these same issues and discusses the emphasised masculinity within sports, and how the themes of objectification and sexualisation are still prominent. Trolan particularly notes tennis in this context as an example of a sport whose language and commentary tend to devalue women's performance. Fink (2014) has explored many of these same problems, including framing and infantilising, but in addition, she has discussed one of the most visible forms of the differential treatment: gender marking. This refers to one of the most common practices appearing in sports writing and event advertising: the verbal and visual presentation of men's sport and male athletes as the norm and women's as *the other* (Fink, 2014, p.333). Good example are the titles of championships that are almost always gender marked, e.g. Women's World Cup. For men, the same events never include the gender moniker. When Andy Murray won the men's Wimbledon in 2013, headlines read he was the first British to do so since 1936, even though Virginia Wade won in 1977 (Chase, 2013). But because she is a woman, media treated the achievement differently.

2.3.1 Women in Tennis

Tennis as a sport has a long history, and so have female players as they have been part of professional tennis since the early years. At the Olympic level, tennis is in fact one of the five sports women athletes have competed in since the first Games in Paris in 1900 (Olympic.org, 2020). In many regards, tennis is considered gender neutral, or even gender equal, because even though women and men play different sets (best-of-three/best-of-five), it is one of the few sports where the prize money for all Grand Slams is equal – thanks to the pioneering work of Billie Jean King and Venus Williams (WTA Tour, 2020). Still, various scholars have

questioned whether this equality extends and actually shows in the female players' media treatment.

Vincent, et al. (2007) examined female tennis players' media coverage in the 2000 Wimbledon by analysing 152 newspaper articles from the U.K and the U.S. Their qualitative analysis indicated that there are recurring themes in the news discourse, and that these narratives tend to devalue and trivialise female tennis players (Vincent et al., 2007). Crossman, Vincent and Speed (2007) conducted a similar, though more quantitative, study on the 2004 Wimbledon Championships, comparing the coverage between female and male tennis players on broadsheet newspapers in the U.K., the U.S. and Canada. Their findings further highlighted the different media representation between genders (Crossman, Vincent and Speed, 2007). In his analysis of the ESPN and Australian Open 2015 coverage, Yip (2018) showed that these gender stereotypes and patterns have not completely changed in 10 years. Examination of 357 articles revealed that female players tended to be more negatively portrayed and their non-competitive roles were mentioned more often – however, there were also descriptors possibly indicating more gender neutral language in the future (Yip, 2018).

2.3.2 Women in Equestrianism

Equestrianism has its roots in the military, and during the first years it was dominated by officers (men) (Dashper, 2013 p.41). From the turn of the twentieth century onwards, it evolved into a sports discipline of its own with civilian competitors (Dashper, 2013, p.41). Much like tennis, equestrianism too was among the first five sports women got to compete in the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris (Olympic.org, 2020). However, equestrianism as we know it nowadays, encompassing show jumping, dressage and eventing, permitted women to compete only from 1952 (dressage), show jumping and eventing following in 1956 and 1964 respectively (FEI, 2020; Dashper, 2013, p.41). What has not changed is the slight stigma of elitism around equestrianism, largely explained by equestrianism being among the most expensive sports in the world.

Compared to tennis, which has typically been regarded as a somewhat gendered sport, at least in terms of media coverage, equestrianism is a different example, mainly because since the beginning it has been an arena where women and men compete head-to-head against each other in the same competitions. At the Olympic level, equestrian is actually the only sport

where the binary gender division does not exist (Dashper, 2013, p.37). Still, it is notable that there are interesting differences between the three disciplines comprising equestrianism, both in the Olympics and in general: while dressage continues to be dominated by female riders, show jumping presents the opposite with men occupying the top rankings (FEI, 2021). Eventing then seems to be more in the middle ground with both female and male riders appearing in the top standings (FEI, 2021).

Whether this gender equality then makes a notable difference in the news coverage is another question. In her study of the 2012 London Olympics, Hedenborg (2013) noted that equestrianism is among the five most covered sports for both female and male athletes in Swedish print media. Likewise, Hellborg and Hedenborg (2015) examined the London Games' media coverage, but particularly focused on equestrianism to see if the mediated gender constructions are dissolved or at least less visible in this seemingly equal sport. They identified four gender narratives demonstrating complex and sometimes contradicting gender order: many of them did not challenge the stereotypes, seeing men riders as more competent and women less in control, but some were also seen as more norm-breaking (Hellborg and Hedenborg, 2015).

In this chapter, I have explored the sports news genre, identifying communicative purpose and news values as the main criteria guiding the writing. I have also introduced the evaluative framework utilised in this study, the appraisal system, and discussed the ways in which attitudes and assumptions are constructed, performances evaluated and phenomena graded in the text. Finally, I have looked into the gendered narratives and stereotypes employed in sports media, and considered these issues in tennis and equestrianism contexts. Based on previous studies, I expect to find clear differences in the ways male and female athletes are described. Thinking of the two sports, tennis and equestrianism, I expect the gender constructions to be more visible in tennis as it is a sport where the binary gender division exists. Another expectation is that even though I am looking at both adjectives and nouns as descriptors, the former will be a more prevalent category when analysing the expressions used to describe the athletes.

3. Materials and methods

In this chapter I discuss my material in more detail, explaining how the data was collected and how the articles to be included in the analysis were chosen. In addition, the analytical methods used in the study are presented and described.

3.1 Data Collection

This study aims to find out what type of evaluative language appears in the sports news writing genre, particularly focusing on adjectives, nouns and genders' position in the discourse. Because of the exploratory nature and the limited scope of this study, the news outlets included are from one country only, the U.K. The reasoning behind this choice was also to reduce the possible variabilities occurring between the news reporting and standards in different countries. Thus, the data consists of various sports news articles gathered from two different newspapers, *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail*. These two were chosen because they are situated at the different ends of news field and represent different political leanings, *The Guardian* being clearly more left wing and *Daily Mail* more right leaning (YouGov, 2017).

The first of the two is a broadsheet, and *Daily Mail's* description falls somewhere between a traditional broadsheet and a tabloid. *The Guardian* is part of the Guardian Media Group and owned by The Scott Trust Limited (The Guardian, 2017). This text-led newspaper has been ranked as one the most trusted and most-read quality newspapers in the U.K. (Tobitt, 2018). It covers a wide range of topics from local and international news to sports, lifestyle and culture. The middle-market *Daily Mail* is owned by Jonathan Harmsworth's (Viscount Rothermere formally) Daily Mail and General Trust (Forbes, 2016). When it comes to popularity, *Daily Mail* is the second most read newspaper in the U.K after *The Sun* according to Pamco (Tobitt, 2018). It has faced criticism for being sensationalist and inaccurate in some of its content, but the expectation is that the sports section is a more neutral domain and thus more reliable. However, the language may be more colourful and the style more informal and simple than that of the traditional broadsheet articles. This does not weaken the accuracy of the research but creates an interesting comparison, something that has to be noted since the study analyses evaluation. Despite the possible differences in writing styles, both newspapers must follow the Editor's Code of Practice (ipso, 2021).

All of the material is accessible online at the respective newspapers' websites and does not require a subscription. The data is free for everyone to use and analysing it does not require any kind of permission. Because of this, the data gathering itself was not problematic; however, always when we talk about media and news writing, the ethical issue of subjectivity versus objectivity has to be considered. Moreover, since the research centres on gendered differences, the authorship of the articles, i.e. whether they have been written by women or men, may be important to note.

As established earlier, this study focuses on individual sports as opposed to team sports such as football or ice hockey, because within the individual sports' coverage the differences between genders were expected to be more visible. Two sports particularly, tennis and equestrianism, were chosen for the analysis. The choice was made based on the the interest in finding out whether the language used in the news reporting is significantly different in a sport where women and men compete against each other versus a sport where women and men have their own series. Secondly, the two sports in question have vastly different histories and narratives when it comes to attitudes towards female athletes and women's participation. Finally, there is already existing research on gender constructions on both tennis and equestrian (see e.g. Hedenborg 2013; Hellborg and Hedenborg 2015; Vincent et al. 2007; Yip, 2018), which helps to situate this study and offers relevant background information.

Because of the on going global Covid situation, many sporting events were cancelled or postponed in 2020, and this was naturally reflected into the news coverage as well. Data from 2020 exist but the provided coverage is not as vast and diverse as it usually is, especially on equestrianism. Thus the articles chosen for the purposes of this study are from both 2019 and 2020. The next step was deciding the time frame for gathering the articles, a task that was not quite straightforward as tennis and equestrianism seasons do not overlap. This affects the data collection because most of the news coverage is provided at the time of the events: if there are no events, there is not much coverage on the sport in question. Even though the tennis year extends from January to the late autumn, the most important and central dates are the grand slam events in June, July, August and September, with only one in January. Similarly to tennis, equestrianism events too are at least partly seasoned, the busiest time focusing on the World Cup season that takes place between October and February each year. Of course, there are other FEI (International Federation for Equestrian Sports) coordinated events throughout the year, but the Western European League that attracts the most media attention here in

Europe takes place in the above-mentioned time. Therefore, determining a time frame that matches both sports is challenging. As a result, the articles for the analysis were collected as followed: tennis articles were gathered from June, July and August 2019, and equestrian articles from November, December and January 2019-2020.

However, the preliminary analysis showed problems with the data, the biggest being a lack of coverage on equestrianism. Whereas the search of tennis articles produced 202 hits from *The Guardian* and over 400 from *Daily Mail*, the amount was less than 10 for equestrianism, including both newspapers. As this was not enough to execute the planned analysis, a new plan for the data collection was formed. The new plan ultimately meant a new time frame for collecting the data. To be consistent, this time frame had to work with both sports, and thus the Olympic Games were chosen for the analysis. As the world's leading multi-sport event, the Olympics offer an interesting opportunity to examine gender constructions in the media, something that has been noted by various scholars in the past. Because of Tokyo 2020 Games being postponed until 2021 due to Covid, the data was collected from the coverage provided from the 31st Summer Olympic Games held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2016.

This study is based on 40 articles, published between 5 August and 21 August 2016, i.e. the two-week period of the Olympics. The data collection was conducted by a search on the two newspapers' online sites, using both the news archives that allow the search of articles by year, month and ultimately, a day, as well as keywords that help to filter the searched results to match the event in question. In this case, these keywords included 'Olympic Games' 'Rio 2016', 'Olympics', 'equestrianism', 'dressage', 'show jumping', 'eventing' and 'tennis'. For *The Guardian*, this search produced a total of 21 articles on tennis and 11 on equestrianism. For *Daily Mail*, the coverage was more plentiful, with 122 articles on tennis and 65 on equestrianism. The next step was narrowing down the articles to a manageable number for the analysis, as the scope of this study is limited and the method of analysis is close reading.

Table 1 shows the total of 20 articles on tennis in the two newspapers that were chosen for analysis. The starting point for choosing which articles to include in the study was that they were published in the sport or news sections (instead of e.g. comments). This is because sometimes during the big events newspapers publish sport news also in the news section. From *The Guardian*'s 21 articles all fit to this criteria. From these 21, 10 were included using random selection. From *Daily Mail*, 78 of the 122 articles were from the 'wires' section in the

newspaper and were thus excluded as the focus was the articles published in the sports or news sections. This left 44 articles to further narrow down, 10 of which were excluded straightaway as they were releases that only stated results and contained no descriptions or evaluations. The rest of the 34 articles were from the sport or news section and from these 10 were chosen for analysis, the selection being made again randomly to avoid preconceived ideas and favourable results.

	Number of Articles	Highest word account	Lowest word account	Average word account	Total word account
Tennis articles	20	1194	174	662	13255
<i>The Guardian</i>	10	889	260	648	6487
<i>The Daily Mail</i>	10	900	291	676	6768

Table 1. *The word counts of tennis articles*

Table 2 shows the equestrianism articles included in the analysis. Compared to tennis, the data from equestrian is more limited and thus not as many articles were left out from the analysis. Otherwise the selection followed the same criteria. From *The Guardian*, 10 articles were included using random selection. The selection from *Daily Mail* was conducted similarly to tennis, first excluding the articles from the wires' section, 38 altogether. Furthermore, 14 articles were solely a list of results and were thus excluded. This left a total of 13 articles from which 10 were included in the analysis using random selection.

	Number of Articles	Highest word account	Lowest word account	Average word account	Total word account
Equestrian articles	20	1194	174	657	13155
<i>The Guardian</i>	10	1194	509	773	7731
<i>The Daily Mail</i>	10	1068	174	541	5424

Table 2. *The word counts of equestrianism articles*

The length of the tennis articles range from 290 to 900 words and equestrianism from 174 to 1194 words. The combined word count for all the material is 26 410 words, which is apparent

from the tables. For annotation purposes, all the articles chosen for analysis were copied to four Word documents, one per sport and newspaper. Links to the articles analysed in this study are listed in the appendix.

3.2 Method of Analysis

This study is a mix of quantitative and qualitative investigations. The 40 articles were analysed through close reading, and thus no corpus methods were used. The aim was to recognise and analyse the meanings and messages conveyed in the sports news writing. To do this, I utilised appraisal framework in examining and identifying evaluative words and expressions. A comparison between the two sports and two newspapers was conducted based on the results discovered during close reading. This comparison examined tennis and equestrianism coverage on a general level and analysed them as a part of the sports news genre. After this, the second part of the analysis focused on discovering and interpreting gendered differences occurring in the articles. In addition to discussing evaluation in sports news more generally, the analysis intends to answer the following: how are female and male athletes referred to in the news, what type of adjectives and nouns are used to describe them, and how are genders positioned in the discourse.

3.2.1 Appraisal as an Analysing Tool

Appraisal expands Halliday's interpersonal meaning in language, situated at the level of discourse semantics (Martin and White, 2005, pp.7-9). This level concerns various aspects in the discourse, especially emphasising the fact that there is meaning beyond the word or a clause (Martin and White, 2005, p.9). The central focus of appraisal, identified by Martin and White (2005) and functioning as the guiding principle of this study, is thus the meanings language conveys and the components constructing these meanings. As Martin and White (2005, p.10) note, the metafunctions of language can overlap, be found across the discourse, regardless the grammatical boundaries, and be realised across multiple grammatical categories.

As appraisal framework is a very complex and extensive theory, only parts of the framework were included in the analysis. Engagement, being not as central for examining the descriptive language of sports news writing, was excluded from the analysis, and similarly, the further

detailed categorisations of affect, judgment and appreciation were not included. As was established earlier, news reporting is rather simple by nature, and thus the main categories of attitude and graduation were considered as the most central and important for the analysis.

Figure 4 illustrates the analysing process and method executed in Word. The first part of the analysis consisted of marking the instances of appraisal and categorising them into three categories: affect, judgment and appreciation. Some of the instances were double coded as they could be considered to exemplify two categories. This was the case for judgment and appreciation, because judging an athlete's actions may have also included appreciation for their performance. After this, it was determined whether the marked expressions were positive, negative or neutral. Instances of graduation, force and focus, were also identified, and, in addition, the expansions of force resources, quantification (for example, "each", "three-phased", "many") and intensification (for example, "only", "the most", "very"), were marked. All the annotated instances were interpreted and analysed to detect, first of all, what type of evaluation appears in tennis and equestrianism news and how these are situated in the sports news genre. The interest was finding out whether the amount and type of evaluation fit to what sports news reporting is expected to be. Secondly, the analysis considered what kind of narratives and gender constructions emerge, and whether the two sports differ in terms of the content and representation of genders. Finally, these findings were explained and discussed in relation to previous studies presented above.

For Dujardin the result is the culmination of **four** years (graduation: force: quantification) of **transformative** (judgment, positive; appreciation, positive) dressage during which she has **raised the bar** (judgment, positive) for the sport and **confirmed her status** (judgment, positive) as its **great innovator** (judgment, positive) and current **all-round** (graduation: force: intensification) **superstar** (judgment, positive). Valegro will now retire, severing a **career-long** (graduation: force: quantification) partnership.

"I've been riding him since he was five years old," Dujardin said. "He's literally unbeatable and won everything there is to win. I want people to remember him as the most amazing horse that he is."

Figure 4. Close reading and analysis method (for the whole article, see appendix article 17)

This chapter introduced the data used in this study and explained how the 40 articles included in the analysis were chosen from *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail*. In addition, I presented the appraisal framework and demonstrated how the analysing process proceeded. In the next chapter, I discuss the results and how they relate to previous research.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This chapter provides an analysis of the material and the evaluations detected in close reading as described in Chapter 3. First I discuss tennis and equestrianism news on a general level as a part of the sports news genre and discourse, giving an overview of the evaluation the articles contain and the possible reasons explaining these results. I explore the evaluation category by category, providing examples on each of them. Judgment and appreciation are discussed in their own subsection because the two categories can be considered the most interesting when investigating newspapers, a genre typically thought as neutral. After discussing the general tendencies, the focus moves to examining the evaluations passed on female and male athletes in more detail. Section 4.2 considers how genders are described and on the other hand, positioned in the discourse. Real examples from the material will also be included to better demonstrate the aspects discussed.

4.1 Tennis and Equestrianism in Sports News Genre – Observations on Evaluation

The majority of the articles published in the two newspapers during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games were regular type of sports news; reports stating who won, how the competition / match proceeded, how other athletes or teams placed, what the result was and overall the most interesting and central events. Naturally, this also means that most of the articles analysed here represent this type of reporting. However, it is worth noting that there were also a couple of longer feature articles focusing on an athlete and their story in more depth. These had a more discussive and story-like writing tone and were overall more descriptive. All instances of these type of articles appeared in *The Guardian*, in the equestrianism reporting specifically, whereas *Daily Mail* articles were simpler, both in the language and structure. This is not completely surprising as such because middle-market newspapers and tabloids tend to have shorter paragraphs and sentences, employing rather basic vocabulary. Broadsheets like *The Guardian* on the other hand often use more advanced vocabulary while also having more complicated sentence structure.

Thinking of what constitutes the sports news genre, the deciding factor is not these differences in content or writing style because as Fest (2017, p.190) noted, sport related topics are multiple and various and none of them are any less part of the genre. There are, however,

differences regarding which, or how many, of the core genre characteristics the different type of sports articles employ. As said, most of the articles included in this study followed what could be considered as a standard example of sports news, the information unfolding in a predetermined structure. The feature articles showed more liberties in the text organisation, but even with slightly varying rhetorical strategies, the communicative purpose (Askehave and Nielsen, 2005, p.122) was similar in all the articles. As an international mega event, the Olympics is widely and keenly followed and thus news outlets aim to inform and keep the readers up to date on what is happening, not only in different sports but also with different athletes.

This directly relates to news values that Cotter (2010, p.67) named as guiding principles in writing a news story in a way that guarantees its newsworthiness. Indeed, the elements of relevance, importance and timeliness (Cotter, 2010, p.68) were clearly present in all the articles analysed here. Of course, given that both newspapers used in this study are British, the questions on *who* and *what* is covered clearly emphasised British athletes. One could question whether this affects the relevance of the coverage since it is expected to inform about the athletes and their performances notwithstanding what country they represent. In this case, Britain had top contenders in both tennis and equestrianism so that value was fulfilled even with the coverage emphasising Brits.

Next this section considers how these genre conventions and news values affect evaluation and whether the findings from the sample articles correspond to the above presented idea of sports news genre. As a reminder, the appraisal model constitutes of three categories of evaluation: *attitude*, *engagement* and *graduation*. Attitude includes affect, judgment and appreciation; evaluating emotional reactions, attitudes towards behaviour and the value of things. Engagement considers the embedding of different voices in the discourse, and graduation modulates the degree of meaning. As established earlier, my analysis focuses on attitude and graduation. I start with two figures that provide an overview of these basic categories of appraisal that appear in the tennis and equestrianism articles analysed in this study. Figures 5 and 6 show how the evaluations divided percentually between the different subcategories of attitude and graduation: affect, judgment, appreciation, force and focus. In addition to demonstrating what type of evaluation occurs the most in the sports news genre, Figures 5 and 6 highlight the differences between *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail*.

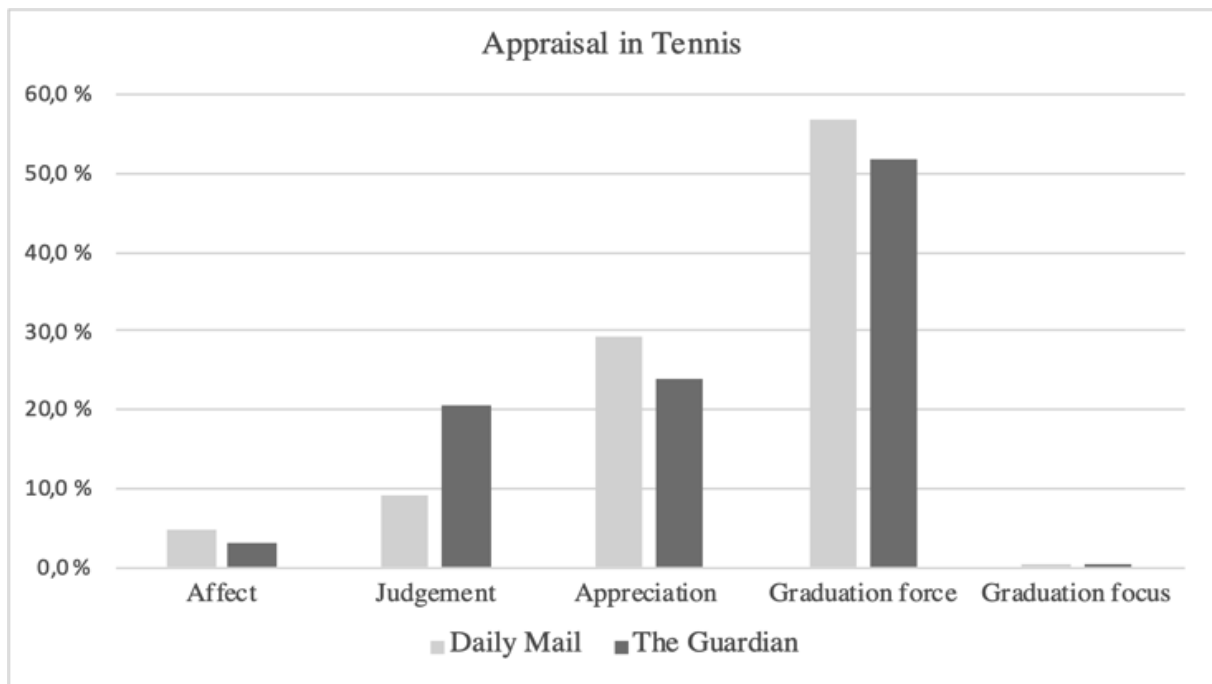


Figure 5. *Evaluation in Tennis*

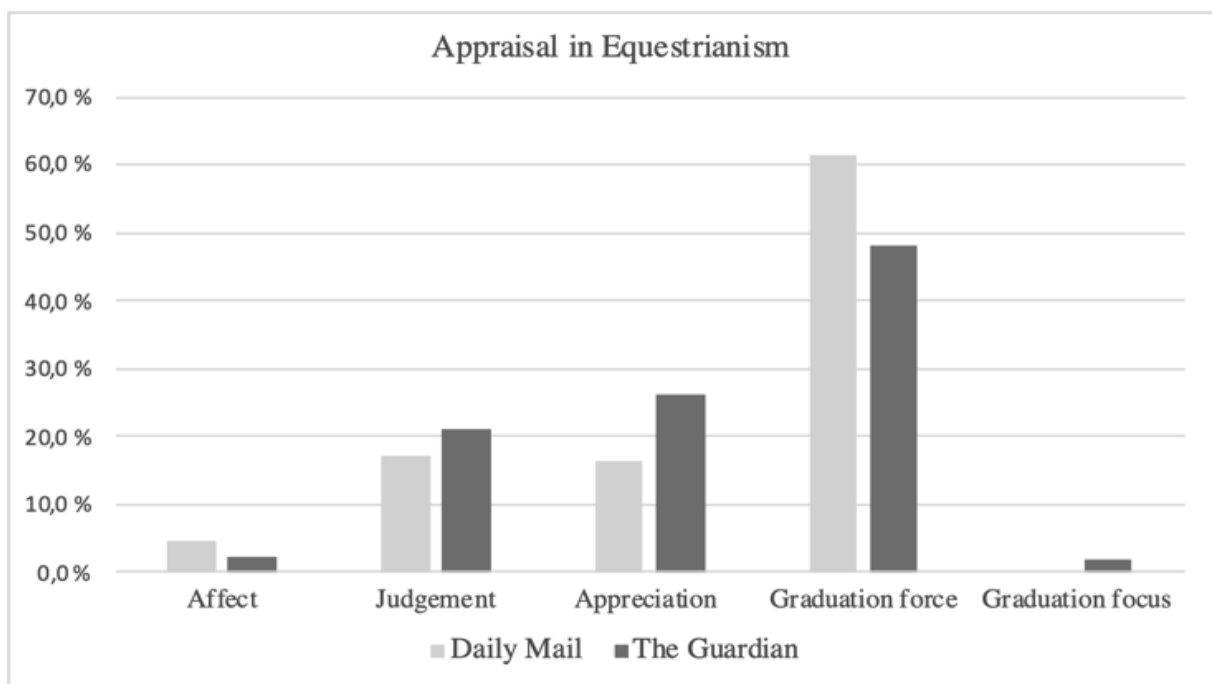


Figure 6. *Evaluation in Equestrianism*

The first observation that can be made from Figures 5 and 6 is the clear prevalence of graduation, specifically the force category, in both sports and both newspapers. The amount may seem a lot at first but is explained by a couple of factors. First of all, sports news writing contains a lot of repetition. As pointed out by Bednarek and Caple (2012, p.96) sports news

reports tend to adopt the typical news report structure, the inverted pyramid. Words and expressions that were stated in the headline are often repeated in the lead, and sometimes even in the intro (Cotter, 2010, pp.26-27; Shie, 2012, p.664). This of course means that the same evaluative instances are included more than once, reflecting in the overall amount. As mentioned above, most of the articles included in this analysis indeed are these type of reports, and thus also follow the inverted structure.

Secondly, sports news reporting contains a lot of numbers and expressions of proximity and extent in time. Results and scores are stated, the duration of a match is mentioned, athletes' past performances are discussed, and a size or amount of something, e.g. crowd is commented on. Many of these quantification expressions answer to the basic reporting questions that sports news writing is expected to address, such as when, how long, how recent or how much (Cotter, 2010, pp.74-75). Thus the frequency of quantification reflects both the structure and content of sports news genre. The most typical instances of this type of graduation are demonstrated in examples 1 (number), 2 (mass) and 3 (extent in time) below.

- (1) **many** players (see appendix article 28)
- (2) **enormous** recesses (see appendix article 21)
- (3) **in recent weeks** (see appendix article 2)

When we consider the force category, it is worth noting that it includes also intensification in addition to quantification, as explained above. Still, out of the two categories quantification remains more prevalent in sports news writing with intensification forming less than half of all graduation force expressions found in the material. This was the case in both tennis and equestrianism articles, as well as both newspapers (see Figure 7 for clarification). In the occasions when intensification occurred, its function was to emphasise or intensify either the amount or duration of something (so combined with quantification), or the evaluation passed on athlete and their performance (so together with judgment and/or appreciation). These three various types of intensification are demonstrated in examples 4, 5 and 6.

- (4) **only** three riders (see appendix article 13)
- (5) is **so** worn (see appendix article 39)
- (6) the **ultimate** humiliation (see appendix article 7)

Related to the previous discussion of graduation, the following Figure 7 demonstrates how the subcategories of force, quantification and intensification, divided percentually.

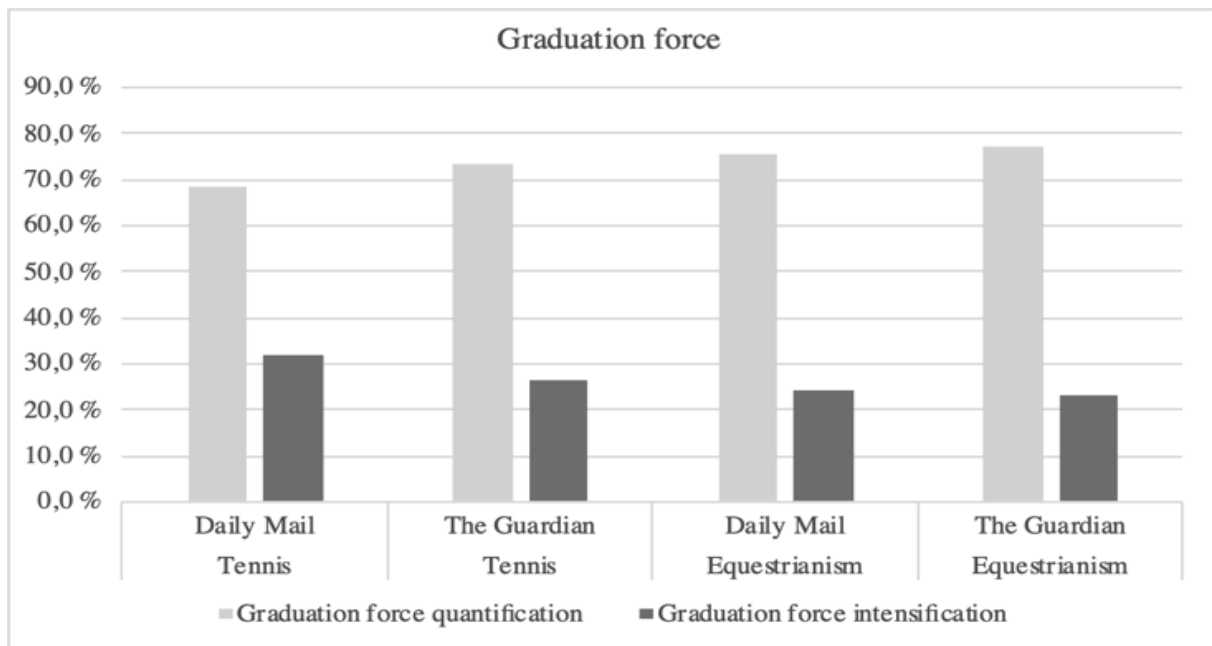


Figure 7. Graduation force division

As can be seen from Figure 7, the force category is parallel across the newspapers and both sports. Moreover, quantification is very equal in all four.

If we continue to consider the previous Figures 5 and 6, the second notable thing is the lack of affect and focus in the articles analysed. Both occurred in few occasions but compared to the other categories of evaluation the difference is considerable. To be consistent, let us first examine focus as it completes the graduation category. In the tennis articles particularly, focus was very rare and even in equestrianism it was only present in *The Guardian*. Of course, this is not to say that this same trend applies to all sports reporting in general, however, the question of prototypicality is not completely straightforward in the sports context. Each sport is different in terms of general expectations, rules and measures of what is considered normal or standard. The next two examples highlight the complexity of adjusting boundaries and defining core instances of something.

(7) a **genuine** sporting phenomenon (see appendix article 15)

(8) and the **real** competition begins (see appendix article 19)

As can be seen from examples 7 and 8, there is a certain amount of ambiguity in them. What does it mean if someone is a genuine phenomenon? What defines it? Example 8 is maybe easier, at least when familiar with the context. ‘Real’ competition in showjumping is often thought to be the jump-off round because it decides the winner, while the first round functions as a qualification even if it is not called that. Yet for someone not knowing the rules and format this expression does appear ambiguous. Indeed, focus of this type invites various interpretations so instances of it are often considered as somewhat vague language (Martin and White, 2005, p.138). This in turn does not completely correspond to the general expectation of news writing, sports or other kind, being informative and easily understandable, a feature noted by Cotter (2010). From the genre point of view, the lack of focus thus fits to the general guidelines regarding news language.

As the next category, affect, deals mostly with feelings and emotional reactions (Martin and White, 2005, p.35), its absence from sports reporting in general cannot be considered a complete surprise. Of course, the sports news genre includes a wide range of topics, also comments and discussions (see Fest, 2017), so other type of articles than those analysed here may contain examples of affect. Here, the cases in which affect appeared were primarily before the interview parts (see example 9) or as an observation made of the athletes’ and their feelings and included in the intro or headline to draw the readers’ attention (see example 10). These were either negative or positive depending on how they had performed. This applied to both sports but was slightly more common in *Daily Mail*, explained by the simple fact that *Daily Mail* articles contained more quotes and the quotes were longer compared to *The Guardian* where the main focus was the text reporting and describing the events, performances and the general atmosphere. Only one instance showed the writers’ own affect, demonstrated in example 11.

(9) Keach was **devastated** (see appendix article 36)

(10) Scot **delighted** to avoid (see appendix article 8)

(11) not to feel **pleased** (see appendix article 23)

The above findings and observations on graduation and affect fit to and support the characteristics of the sports news genre. Next the attention moves to the two other attitude categories in more detail. Of all the possible categories, judgment, and appreciation are looked at closer because they have the possibility to express how the writer actually views the

athletes and their performances. From the genre point of view, this *how* question (Cotter, 2010, p.74) is a central one, but the interesting aspect in it is the type of evaluations passed when doing the assessing.

4.1.1 Judgment and Appreciation

News reporting is typically not expected to pass judgments on people and things, at least not explicitly, and judgment and appreciation evaluating exactly these therefore form the most interesting categories. Their presence in sports news specifically cannot be considered a surprise, because while emphasising hard news reporting as a neutral domain, Martin and White (2005, p.115) noted that appraisal in the sports context often involves judgments of athletes and their performances. Indeed, this was very common in the sample articles analysed here as well. In practice, this may be expressed through praising verbs with otherwise neutral language, or with word choices of which the eventual purpose is to animate the text and create variability. How we as readers then interpret expressions of judgment and appreciation is another question because as Fairclough (2003, p.8) said, individuals are different and overlapping may occur. Before demonstrating this, the next two figures show how the expressions of judgment and appreciation divided percentually between positive, negative and neutral. Moreover, the differences between the two newspapers and two sports are illustrated.

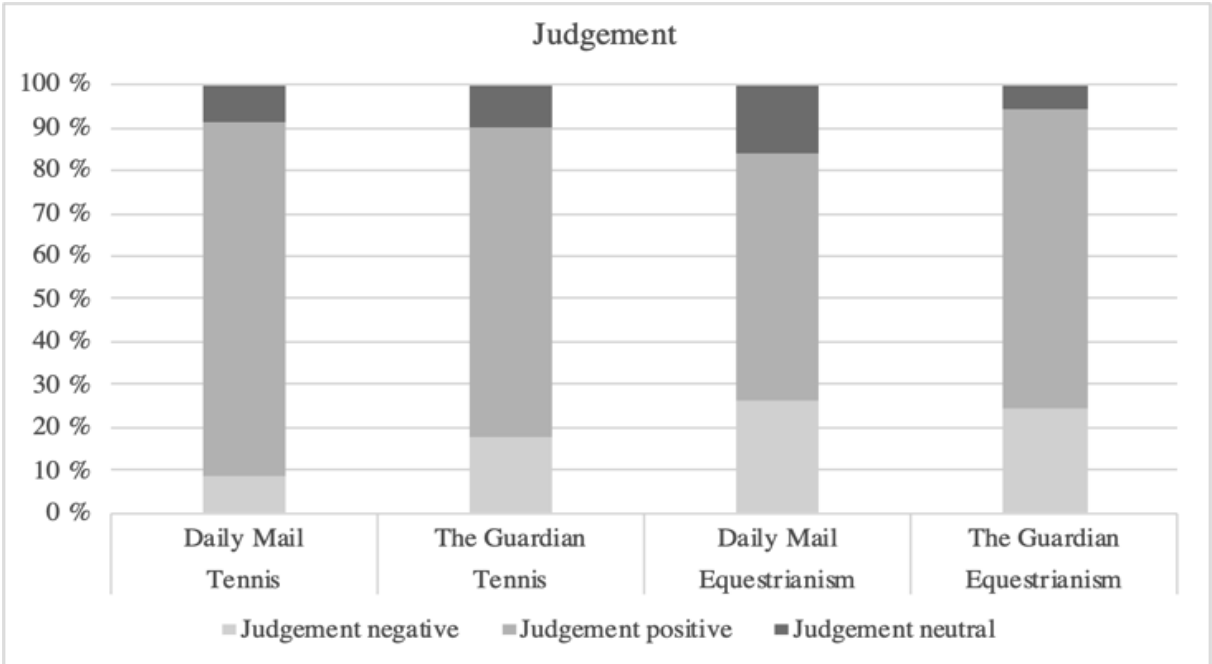


Figure 8. Judgment

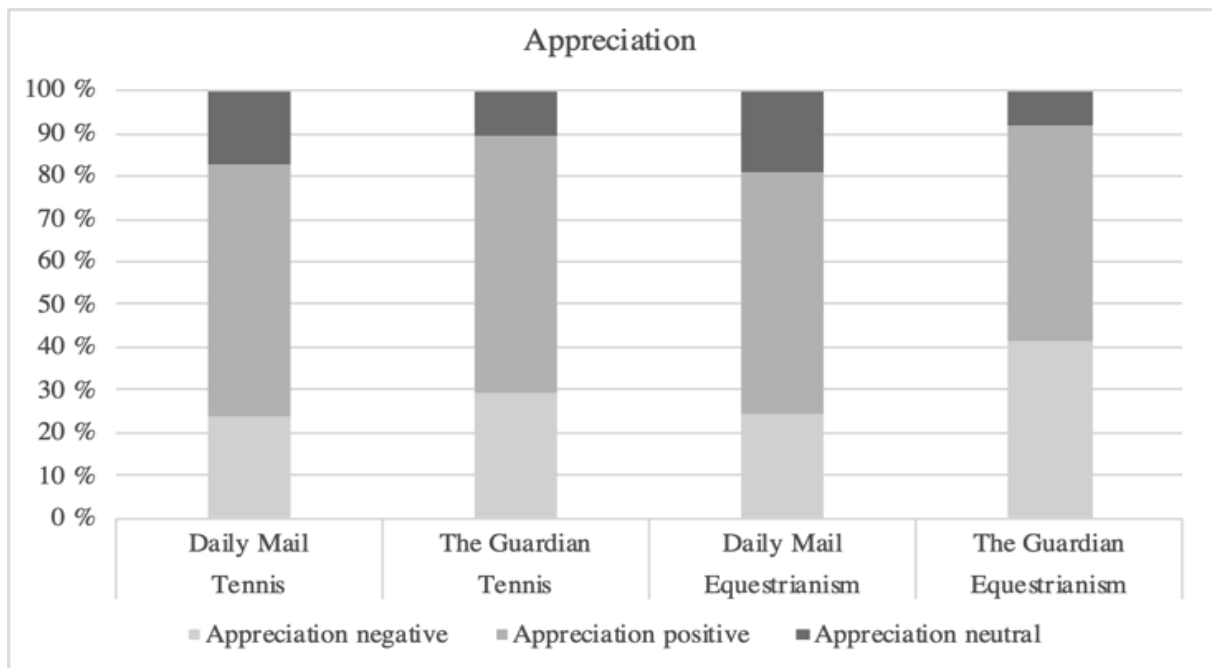


Figure 9. *Appreciation*

As can be seen from Figures 8 and 9, positive judgment and appreciation occurred the most in both sports and newspapers. However, when comparing the two categories, appreciation includes more neutral and negative expressions as well, whereas in judgment the differences in tone are slightly less pronounced. Some differences between tennis and equestrianism and the newspapers can also be seen, and those are discussed next in more detail.

Starting with judgment, the finding that stands out is that it appears more in the equestrianism coverage than in tennis. One aspect explaining the difference is that tennis articles tended to emphasise performances whereas equestrianism coverage evaluated the athletes more. In addition, the evaluations on tennis were more varying: some articles contained a lot of evaluation while others only had a few instances that showed judgment. When it comes to the differences between newspapers, simple conclusions on why *The Guardian* contained more judgment are difficult to agree on. In equestrianism, the articles in *The Guardian* were consistently longer, opening up a way for more evaluation to be possibly included. Another factor that is good to note is that the language in *The Guardian* was overall more complicated and descriptive and thus also evaluation more consistent. Thirdly, as was mentioned previously, *Daily Mail* had more quotes. Since those were not analysed here, this left less space for the actual text that shows evaluation.

The tone of the judgments was mainly positive in both sports and newspapers, though negative evaluations occurred as well. The athletes were praised for their success but also their failures were commented on. Now, it is important to consider the difference between positive/negative evaluations and a neutral writing style that does not show alignment to one direction or the other. In the articles analysed here, the writers did not side with any athlete particularly even though they evaluated their actions and their performances. A person familiar with the sports news genre recognises this as its characteristic feature: the expressions may be colourful and the athletes and their work is assessed, but that applies to everyone and the general style is neutral. The following examples 12 (positive) and 13 (negative) demonstrate this in more detail.

(12) Andy Murray **was strolling** in the afternoon sun towards what was shaping up as one of his easiest victories (see appendix article 4)

(13) British riders **stumble** and **scupper** bid to retain showjumping team title (see appendix article 18)

There were, however, a couple of exceptions to this general tendency. Few instances clearly showed the writer's opinion on the matter, passing judgment in a negative way. They were all in an equestrianism context, quite aptly highlighting the elitist reputation the sport, especially dressage, still has. This is illustrated in examples 14 and 15.

(14) The minuscule **European elite** that has the time and money to entwine its life around this sport (see appendix article 15)

(15) against the **entitled bufton-tuftons** of the **old Euro horse set** (see appendix article 15)

Some instances were also marked neutral as the same expression can be interpreted to be both negative and positive, depending on which player's point of view it is considered. Examples 16 and 17 show this type of situation.

(16) the world No 54 who **upset** the Belgian David Goffin 7-6, 6-4 in a **struggle** that lasted just under two hours (see appendix article 4)

(17) **had** Konta **on the ropes** (see appendix article 3)

Whereas judgment assessed athletes, appreciation evaluates things and phenomena. This is another typical feature of sports news as they often include descriptions of the competition itself, the crowd, and the surroundings in which the event took place. Examples 18 and 19 demonstrate this; however, there is also different, more athlete focused appreciation which is discussed next.

(18) this had turned into a **marvellous fight** (see appendix article 7)

(19) **bizarrely undulating** match (see appendix article 24)

Lastly, let us consider judgment and appreciation together. The reason I showed the Figures 8 and 9 together is that they overlap quite often in the sport news context. Hence the amounts of judgment and appreciation separately are not the ultimate truths; the same expressions are actually included in both of the categories. Designating the double coded instances to only one category is difficult, because they evaluate two type of things at the same time, the athlete's actions and their skills and performance. Another interesting factor that applies to the equestrianism context specifically is that in riding there are in a sense two athletes: the horses are respected and recognised as a part of the performance alongside their riders. As they are not people, the horses are evaluated through appreciation.

(20) He found a **killer forehand** and they were level (see appendix article 7)

(21) Dujardin and Valegro put in another **stunning** performance (see appendix article 33)

The next section continues from this in more detail, delving into the judgment and appreciation expressions to detect how female and male athletes are referred to, with what type of verbs they are associated, and whether these significantly differ between genders.

4.2 Genders in Tennis and Equestrianism

The previous sections discussed the general evaluative tendencies occurring in news writing and considered tennis and equestrianism news as a part of the sports news genre. In this section the focus moves to examining the gender constructions and narratives detected from the news articles. In light of previous research, it was expected that the coverage on both sports contain gendered differences in the language, but within the material analysed in this

study, the differences were not quite as notable and pronounced. The sample articles included positive evaluations on both female and male athletes in both tennis and equestrianism. Another important aspect to note is that the gender of the authors did not seem to make a difference in one direction or the other. Writers who were men described female athletes as positively as did women writers.

In the first part of this section, I address the second research question by analysing how genders are described and referred to in the tennis and equestrianism context. The second part then concentrates on answering the third research question about the genders' positions in the discourse. In other words, the interest is in the verbs used and whether they differ between genders.

4.2.1 How Genders Are Described

The starting point for analysing genders in tennis and equestrianism is quite different because whereas tennis has separate events for women and men, in equestrianism countries can send their best riders for each discipline irrespective of their gender. Of course, Olympics tennis has the mixed doubles' event but the binary gender division still exists in the sport. I discuss the two sports separately to better detect the possible differences, starting with tennis.

An interesting notion from the material analysed is that nouns were used more frequently as descriptors than adjectives. Moreover, some of the adjectives were used as nouns or a part of the noun phrase. Since we are examining the ways athletes are described, this is an interesting finding. Wright (2017, p.4) mentioned adjectives as one of the most important tools for descriptive variation, but based on my findings nouns have a possibility to carry clear descriptions as well. This is apparent at least in a sports context and shows that there are different ways to tell the reader how the athletes in question are viewed and evaluated. The nouns and noun phrases analysed here can be considered as describing attributes: they describe the subject but are figurative, i.e. their meaning is defined by the context they occur.

4.2.2 Descriptions in Tennis

I have grouped the words and expressions detected in close reading into four groups depending on what type of descriptions they are. These groups are: *titles*, *performance*

praising, specialty emphasis and characteristics. Expressions from both *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail* are presented in the same tables because there was not a notable difference in the descriptions used in them. As we saw earlier in Figure 8, the category that includes assessments of people, judgment, was clearly positive in both newspapers. Table 3 lists the words and expressions categorised to the first group that were used to describe the athletes in the tennis articles.

Tennis	
MALE	FEMALE
Titles	Titles
A fixture in the world's top ten	Australian open champion
Defending champion	British No 1
Falling champion	Four-time gold medallist
Former world No1	French Open champion
Gold medal favourite	German grand slam winner
The 2008 gold medallist	The female British No 1
The 2012 champion	The mixed doubles champion
The game's leading players	The ultra consistent world No 2
The improving world No 22	Wimbledon finalist
The world No 2	Wimbledon mixed champion
The world's best player	
World No1	

Table 3. Descriptions group 1 (the descriptions are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

A common theme in sports news writing is to refer to the athletes by titles, bringing up their past achievements. These can also be considered to include accomplishments that are not literal titles but similar in the way they highlight the athlete's success. Now, titles as descriptions are quite general rather than detailed, but when a player is referred to as "world No 2" or "a defending champion", it is a compliment that shows more evaluation than just stating their name would. Having acquired a title or being regarded as the top of one's sport is a testament of greatness, because winning a major tournament or keeping one's place in the rankings is anything but easy. These descriptions also contribute to constructing a certain type of image in readers' minds of the hierarchy in tennis: who is on top and who is not.

Gender wise, there was not much difference in how male and female athletes were treated in the articles. As can be seen in Table 3, the amount and the type of title descriptions are very

similar. Both male and female players are referred to through their earlier achievements and there is no sign of females' accomplishments being thought as less than their male counterparts. The only difference is that for females the emphasis seems to be on grand slams whereas male players' past performances in Olympics is mentioned. This is probably because many players that attended the women's singles in London 2012 and Beijing 2008 were not competing in Rio 2016.

Tennis	
MALE	FEMALE
Performance praising	Performance praising
A surprise survivor	Two of the game's biggest improvers
One of the best defensive players	Surprise finalist
One of the game's most insouciant practitioners	The excellent Indian pairing
One of the hardest workers	The renowned Indian doubles experts
The renowned Indian doubles experts	
Veteran double specialist	

Table 4. Descriptions group 2 (the descriptions are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

The expressions in the second group (see Table 4) are good examples of how adjectives are used together with nouns in a sports context, adding more value and intensity to the descriptions. To convey the meaning, though, these adjectives require the nouns as well or otherwise the description is incomplete. *Performance praising* descriptions are, as can be told from the name, centred on players' performances but at the same they evaluate the athlete in question. These are used to comment on the athletes' work ethics, skills and game related qualities.

As is evident from Table 3, the descriptions of both male and female players are very much alike. One of the expressions is in fact the exact same for both genders: "renowned Indian doubles experts". The pair in question plays mixed doubles and this type of description puts both the male and the female player on the same line in terms of appreciation and their skills, calling them experts. Another similar expression used for both is "surprise finalist"/"survivor", evaluation that is more neutral than assessing as it simply means that what happened was unexpected and hints towards some other player maybe under performing. Thinking of differences between genders, the most interesting pair of expressions is maybe "hardest worker" (male) and "biggest improver" (female). At first it seems that only

the male athletes are emphasised as hard workers, but actually, the word *improver* kind of contains the notion of work as well because becoming better does not happen by chance; a player has to put in the hard work.

Tennis	
MALE	FEMALE
Specialty emphasis	Specialty emphasis
A heavyweight contender	A fierce last-ball competitor
A wonderful ball striker	The clean hitting
Abundant natural talent	The tennis star
Acknowledged members of the Big Four	The underdog with the big game
Brit ace	and keen tennis brain
Britain's most outstanding international athlete	With the cool demeanour
Minor genius	
Star	
The formidable final four	
The Italian Enigma	
The Prince of Perversity	
What a force	

Table 5. Descriptions group 3 (the descriptions are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

Compared to the other two groups, this next is clearly more evaluative, praising the star or special qualities of the players. These expressions are related to the players’ performances, which is natural because an athlete and their way of playing form an inseparable package, but instead of staying on a general level of work and skills they go deeper to the athlete’s excellence. Both male and female players are referred to with these type of emphasised praises, but as can be seen from Table 5, they occurred more with regard to males. The descriptions themselves are quite similar between genders, so it cannot be said that female players are trivialised or downplayed. It is true that a couple of the descriptions raise attention to the male players’ physical features (“heavyweight contender”, “what a force”) while similar mentions have not been made of the females, but one could question whether this is because they are not seen as strong in general or if the articles analysed here did not just contain those references. Strength is, after all, about more than just physical characteristics; mental toughness is very important in sport as well. Actually, if we consider strength from this aspect, the description of female player as someone with “keen tennis brain” can be

considered to present a different kind of strength. From the male's side, "minor genius" can be considered such an expression as well.

A couple of pairs with a similar description of both genders can be formed. "A fierce last-ball competitor" and "a wonderful ball striker" both positively highlight the players' qualities, appreciating female and male equally. Both genders are also referred to as "stars". Thinking of differences, a person not familiar with tennis could question why there is not "the Big Four" in women's tennis and whether that means that the top female players are not as recognised and acknowledged. The difference is not because of lack of respect but rather due to the women's top being much wider and more variable with only a couple of fixtures while men's singles were largely dominated by Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray for over a decade.

There are also a few very praising descriptions made of male athletes that are not made of female in the same way. However, as the phrases "natural talent", "Brit ace", and "most outstanding international athlete" are used to describe the same male British player, it is worth considering whether these tell about how male players in general are viewed or are they more about a British newspaper praising a national hero. The celebration of Andy Murray shows also in example 23, however, the example reveals a first real difference in the genders' treatment as well.

(23) after becoming the **first player in the history of tennis at the Olympics to win back-to-back gold medals** (see appendix article 10)

This is very much the same phenomenon as mentioned in an earlier chapter about Murray being the first Brit to win Wimbledon since 1936, even though a woman had done it before him (Chase 2013). In example 23, Andy Murray is stated to be the first player to win back-to-back gold medals in Olympics tennis' history, although the Williams' sisters have done the same in doubles (in 2008 Beijing and 2012 London). Of course, these are two separate events, but the information could have been included in the article because, as is, it undermines the level of the Williams sisters' accomplishment. In *Daily Mail's* version (see appendix article 21), it was specified that Murray was indeed the first player to win consecutive singles medals instead of just saying the first to win consecutive. These seemingly little things matter when we talk about equal media treatment between genders.

Tennis	
MALE	FEMALE
Characteristics	Characteristics
Adrenaline-fulled	Assured
Always dangerous	Controlled
As imperious as ever	Favourites
Completely in control	Hardly at her best
Desperate	Illustrious rival
Determined but bamboozed	Like a dagger through silk
Drained	Strongly fancied opponent
Efficient rather than spectacular	The excellent
Even wilder Italian	Tough
Experienced	Uber-steady
Flat and nervous	Unheralded
Fresh and dangerous	Up
Good enough	Whose tennis collapsed
Illustrious opponent	
Not convincing	
One-paced but determined	
Relaxed	
Spent and stranded	
Sustained	
Talented but unpredictable	
The excellent	
The exciting	
The great	
The poor man	
The silky-moving giant	
The stubborn Frenchman	
The towering Argentinian	
Volatile Italian	

Table 6. Descriptions group 4 (the descriptions are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

Lastly, group four contains descriptions of players as people and the type of players they are. These are mainly adjectives, embodying maybe the most typical form of describing something or someone. As stated earlier, this category is what could have been expected to be

the most prevalent in sports news writing, but it is actually just one category alongside the three others discussed previously. If we compare the genders, the *characteristics* group seem to follow a pattern similar to *specialty emphasis*. The descriptions of males are clearly more multiple, but content wise there are many similarities between the genders. Traditional gender narratives have often seen male as more competent and controlled, but here control seems an attribute that both genders have: “completely in control”/”controlled”. Both male and female players are referred to as “excellent”, emphasising how good players they are, they are called “illustrious”, hinting towards recognition and greatness, and thirdly, they are described as “tough”/”determined”, both terms that show resilience of some kind. Another interesting similarity can be seen in expressions of “dangerous” (male) and “like a dagger through silk” (female). While not the exact same wording, ultimately both evaluate the player to be a hard opponent when at their best.

In the past, female players’ failures were often commented on more than those of males, but in the articles analysed here, the treatment seemed very alike. “Not convincing” (male) and “whose tennis collapsed” (female) show negative judgments on both genders’ performances. In addition to all these similarities, there was also one pair of expressions that showed an interesting difference between a positive assessment and a negative one specifically so that the female was described positively and the male negatively. “Uber-steady” and “volatile” show the female player as the consistent competitor and the male as inconsistent. Of course, this is just one case and cannot be said to reflect the whole gender narrative in these articles but it is an interesting observation.

Next I move on to consider equestrianism where both genders compete together and against each other. The descriptions in the articles largely followed the same patterns than those in tennis discussed above. I have again grouped the words and expressions to four categories based on how they describe the athletes. Three of these groups are the same as in tennis: *titles*, *specialty emphasis* and *characteristics*. The fourth group is called *neutral assessment* because the expressions grouped under it are not directly about performance but not describing specialty or characteristic either. I address the groups in the same order as I did with tennis, starting with the titles (see Table 7).

4.2.3 Descriptions in Equestrianism

Equestrianism	
MALE	FEMALE
Titles	Titles
Britain's record-breaking Olympian	Gold medal champ
Defending champions	Britain's most decorated female Olympian
Double Olympic champion	Britain's most successful female Olympian
Former world No 1	Defending champions
Gold-medal winning	European champion
London 2012 individual gold medallist	Formidable six-times Olympic gold medallist
Multiple major championships medallist	Olympic champion
Reigning Olympic champion	World champion
Reigning Olympic individual champion	World No 1
The 2008 Olympic champion	World-record holder
The London 2012 gold medal winner	
The three-time Olympic medallist	
World No 1	

Table 7. Descriptions group 1 (the descriptions are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

Equestrianism is very similar to tennis with the use of titles as a reference, though for both genders the descriptions of past achievements are clearly more focused on specifically on the Olympics. Nonetheless, mentions of the accomplishments are a way to highlight the riders' excellence and prove their relevance in the eyes of the writer. Titles are general in the sense that there is not much variation in the content that could show differences between genders, but the central question is whether they are used or not. If an athlete is referred to with a title, it includes a positive evaluation unlike their name alone would. Looking at Table 7, genders in equestrianism articles are very equal in terms of the titles used. Some of the descriptions also include an adjective or other type of intensification to emphasise the achievement, apparent for both male and female rider: "record-breaking"/"formidable".

Equestrianism	
MALE	FEMALE
Neutral assessment	Neutral assessment
The surprise winner	Olympic debutant
Veteran	Olympic newcomer

Table 8. Descriptions group 2, (the descriptions are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

This second group, *neutral assessment*, is similar to tennis' *performance praising* but is more neutral in the tone of evaluation and instead of the performance the focus is on the rider. As can be seen, the list is very short and the expressions do not emphasise one gender more than the other. Yet there is an interesting pair of “veteran” (male) and “debutant” (female). The first is typically associated with experience while the second alludes to youth and inexperience, something that can easily be seen as an opposition that underlines certain gender expectations. While the two expressions could also be considered neutral in a sports context, referring to an athlete with a long career and, on the other hand, to someone who makes their first appearance in a competition, it is not often one encounters “veteran” as a reference to a female athlete, or “debutant” to a male.

Equestrianism	
MALE	FEMALE
Specialty emphasis	Specialty emphasis
Britain's brightest hope	A great champion
Elite crew	All-around superstar
Equestrian great	Britain's brightest hope
Equine success	Britain's own queen
Mainstay	Dressage's superstar
Powerhouse	Elite athlete
Spearhead	Game-changing performer
Stuff of showjumping folklore	Genuine sporting phenomenon
Superstar	Great innovator
The four strong	Horse-dancing game changer
The showjumping legend	Overnight sensation
	Powerhouse
	Star
	The big gun
	The Fosbury flop
	The four strong
	The rare breakout star
	The West Indies pace attack
	Total football
	Usain Bolt of dressage

Table 9. Descriptions group 3 (the descriptions are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

Out of the four groups, this next is the most interesting and also the most evaluative. Many of the descriptions are very colourful in the way they praise a rider or emphasise their exceptionalism. Both male and female riders are referred to with similar types of expressions but as can be seen from Table 9, they are used more with females. This is a clear difference compared to tennis where it was the other way around. A relevant question at this point is whether this is because female players are seen to have less star quality than female riders or because there are more women in equestrianism. Dressage, especially, is dominated by female riders (see FEI, 2021) and it is also the discipline with the most colourful and panegyrical descriptions, at least in the sample articles. For this reason, any simple conclusions on equestrian reporting being more positive towards females cannot be made.

Content wise, the descriptions are quite similar between genders. There are two extremely successful “superstars”, and both male and female riders are considered as “elite” in their sport. Now, we discussed earlier about the negative stigma over equestrianism as elitist sport, but here the expression is used in a positive way, emphasising the riders as best in their sport. In addition, the description pair “legend” (male) and “phenomenon” (female) can be considered to highlight similar qualities, success and renown. Compared to tennis, female riders are also more often included in describing collectives that indicate strength of those referred such way. Of course, this is possible because genders are competing together, but similar descriptions were not used in mixed doubles in tennis. Examples 24 and 25 demonstrate this.

(24) followed by the German **powerhouses** Ingrid Klimke and Michael Jung
(see appendix article 12)

(25) the **four-strong** group of Fox-Pitt, Kitty King, Pippa Funnell and Gemma Tattersall (see appendix article 31)

Alongside all the similarities, this group reveals a couple interesting narratives that praise female athletes in an exceptional way. It is not everyday that sports media presents women as ground-breaking, meriting them with revolutionising their sport. The articles analysed here, however, contained these descriptions more than once. 26 below is an example of this.

(26) a horse-dancing **game-changer**: she is the West Indies pace attack, Total Football, the Fosbury flop. (see appendix article 15)

Another example that is worth analysing in more detail is the following:

(27) the **Usain Bolt of dressage** (see appendix article 17)

This is interesting because while it seems very positive, it can be considered negative as well. Comparing a female champion to a male has typically been seen as one way to trivialise their performances. Usain Bolt is undeniably one of the greatest of his time, so being compared to him is a compliment, but one could also question why a female equivalent of Bolt was not mentioned. After all, female athletes are stars on their own, and the example would come across differently if instead of Bolt the writer had mentioned for example Allyson Felix or Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce.

Equestrianism	
MALE	FEMALE
Characteristics	Characteristics
Oldest Briton to win Olympic gold	Impressive
Controlled, precise and flowing	Silver stunner
Emotional	The young lady
Fast	Transformatively good
Fully in control	
Good	
Magnificent	
Near perfect	
Not so rusty	
Shakey	
Upright	

Table 10. Descriptions group 4 (the descriptions are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

If dressage is dominated by female riders, male riders rule the showjumping rankings (see FEI, 2021). As the descriptions of riders in showjumping were more often adjectives, this explains why the descriptions in the group four are more multiple on the males’ side. Looking at the descriptions themselves, there are not many pairs that could be formed from similar expressions on both genders but all the same, the tone of the judgments is positive for both male and female riders. “Good”/”transformatively good” and “magnificent”/”impressive” highlight almost the same qualities even if they are not literal synonyms. While female riders

are not referred to as “controlled” it does not automatically mean they are not seen that way. Control in riding can be expressed in different ways. For example, in Table 9 there was a description of a female rider as “horse-dancing”, and to be able to do that the rider needs to know how to command the horse. “Emotional” in the male’s side might represent the complete opposite of what is typically thought of as masculinity, but within sports, being emotional after a successful performance is very common regardless of gender.

4.2.4 The Position of Genders in the Discourse

This section focuses on analysing genders’ positions in the discourse through the verbs male and female athletes appear in the subject position with. Similar to the previous section, I discuss tennis and equestrianism separately. To follow the same order, tennis is examined first. I have grouped the verbs into two groups depending on whether they are more about reporting the competition or about assessing performance. These groups are *narrating competition* and *evaluating performance*, and I start by considering the first. Verbs from both *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail* are presented in the same tables because there was not a clear difference in the ways the two newspapers used verbs.

4.2.5 Verbs in Tennis

Tennis			
MALE		FEMALE	
Narrating competition		Narrating competition	
Beat	Go down	Beat	Force
Bow out	Hang in	Bow out	Go down
Claim	Manage to negate	Claim	Have luck
Cut off	Overcome	Crash out	Lose
Defeat	Retain	Edge close	Put out
Dismiss	Seize	Fail to	Race to
Down	Survive	Fall	Shock
Fare	Take advantage	Fare	Surrender
Fight	Upset		

Table 11. Verbs group 1, tennis (the verbs are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

The verbs in the first category are quite standard verbs in the tennis context, and they are used in sports news writing to narrate the match and its result. Nonetheless, the choice of verbs shows evaluation of a certain kind. In the past, female athletes have often been reported using words such as *strive* or *compete* whereas the male have been associated with verbs such as *beat* or *battle*. Here such patterns are not visible. Both genders “beat” and “claim”, but both also “bow out” and “go down”. While female player “puts out” her opponent, the male “downs” his. Both are also referred to with forceful verb “fight” (male) and “force” (female).

Tennis			
MALE		FEMALE	
Evaluating performance		Evaluating performance	
Champion	Keep foot on someone's throat	Come through	Keep nerve
Bark	Play delicious dropshot	Demolish	Keep shape
Blitz	Prevail	Ease	Make history
Breeze past	Reinvigorate	Have on the ropes	Serve big
Clinch	Rise to the occasion	Hit an irresistible rhythm	Stamp authority
Close out	Scramble	Hit big	Steady nerves
Controll	Shine	Hold with	Struggle
Cruise into	Show	Hunt down	Tear through
Dominate	Stroll	Keep composure	Waste
Drag	Struggle		
Ease	Tame		
Flirt with	To prove form and fitness		
Grind out	Toy with		
Hand the win	Trash		
Hit with intent			
Inconvenience			

Table 12. Verbs group 2, tennis (the verbs are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

Compared to the verbs in Table 11, those in Table 12 more clearly evaluate and focus on the players’ performances. A positive tone in the verbs used is clearly prevalent for both males and females. Again, there are many semantic equivalents, indicating that male and female players appear in subject position with similar type of verbs. “Ease”/”ease”, “breeze past”/”tear through” and “blitz”/”demolish” are examples of such equivalents, highlighting the skills and mastery of both. Moreover, “keep foot on someone’s throat”/”have on the ropes” shows equal dominance on court. Speaking of dominance, “dominate” as a verb is

often associated with males in sport and in my material too it occurred with male players only. However, “stamp authority” can be seen to express dominance as well but it is just worded differently. Thinking of differences, there were verbs that indicated the game being easier for male players, such as “flirt with”, “cruise into” and “stroll”, while at the same females’ composure and nerves were mentioned, but whether this is a generally prevalent narrative in tennis needs more research.

4.2.6 Verbs in Equestrianism

Moving on to consider equestrianism, the groups of verbs are divided similarly to tennis and both newspapers are included in the same tables.

Equestrianism			
MALE		FEMALE	
Narrating competition		Narrating competition	
Complete a hat-trick	Mess up	Complete a hat-trick	Make a mistake
Beat	Miss out	Beat	Produce
Coax	Post	Deliver	Put in
Could not repeat	Produce	Fail to	Recover
Deliver	Put in	Fall short	Retain
Fail to	Secure	Had to settle	Slip to
Fall short	Slip to	Haul	Top
Had to settle	Unable to secure	Help	Win
Haul	Win	Improve	Wrest back
Improve	Wrest back	Lift	
Jumped clear			

Table 13. Verbs group 1, equestrianism (the verbs are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

Verbs in the equestrianism context are of course different, but they too narrate the competition. In general it can be said that a lot of the same verbs, showing both positive and negative judgments, appear with both genders, even more so than in tennis. Again, we see that both male and female riders “beat” their opponents, they “wrest back” a title, and “haul” their team to the podium. “Help” and “lift” are only used with with females, largely crediting the result to them, but this does not tell as much about which gender is better as it is about who is

the star rider in that particular team. Many of the verbs on the list are also rather neutral, just a way to report the kind of performance the riders delivered: “coax”, “deliver”, “put in”, and “produce”.

Equestrianism			
MALE		FEMALE	
Evaluating performance		Evaluating performance	
Amass	Meet his doom	Better	Relish
Blow it	Nail it	Confirm status	Sashay
Carry	Regain	Impress	Scupper
Crack	Scupper	Lead	Set
Crash out	Set up	Leapfrog	Snatch
Gobble up	Stumble	Leave nothing out	Stumble
Head down under	Throw through	Left nothing to chance	Torch
Impress	Torch	Let down	Trot out
Jump aggressively	Write	Raise the bar	
Lose his cool			

Table 14. Verbs group 2, equestrianism (the verbs are collected from articles 1-40, see appendix)

These verbs in Table 14 show a bit more evaluation compared to the first group but they are still quite typical when reporting equestrian events. Both genders are judged positively and negatively and pairs of similar verbs can again be found. Both male and female riders are perceived to “stumble” and “scupper”, but they are also said to “impress” and have the capability to “carry”/“lead” their teams to victory. In addition, record books are “torched” by both male and female riders, which emphasises their excellence equally. Besides all the similarities, the list includes one interesting pair of verbs that kind of underlines the traditional idea of masculine behaviour and feminine appearance: “jump aggressively” (male) and “sashay” (female). Out of context this indeed presents male as determined and female as a feminine object of gaze, but when said about dressage rider, it can be interpreted to mean a graceful performance. Still, it is worth considering whether another, less feminine, verb could have been used instead.

4.2.7 Genders in Sports – Have the Narratives Changed?

As the analysed material has been selected by using qualitative methods, it represents only a small part of the tennis and equestrianism news published in *The Guardian* and *Daily Mail*. Altogether 219 articles on the two sports were published during the Olympics, and from these 40 were analysed here, so the data does not offer a complete insight into the language and its gendered differences occurring in the two newspapers overall. Nonetheless, some conclusions can be drawn, and the results discussed in relation to previous research.

Reflecting all the explorations above, my results do not conform to the previous findings about female athletes' trivialisation. If we consider the ways of trivialising – downplaying female athletes and their performances, emphasising their failures, comparing them to males and commenting on their appearance – none of these arose as a significant theme in my study. However, even if a frequent trivialisation did not occur in my results, a couple of cases where it was in fact visible were noted. One of these was downplaying Williams' achievement in tennis by emphasising Andy Murray as the first player to win consecutive Olympic gold. While not necessarily intentional, this type of reporting strengthens the idea of male's event as more important and standard. Another, though not as blatant form of appreciating male athletes higher than women, was when a female rider was named the Usain Bolt of dressage. As discussed above, it can be seen as a compliment, yet it makes the reader question why the comparison could not have been to a female as well. It would have been a stronger statement of female athletes' recognition as stars.

Despite these few issues, the general picture was positive. The results were largely similar in both tennis and equestrianism, hinting that there is not necessarily a clear difference between a sport where gender separation exists and a sport where the genders compete together. Vincent et al. (2007) found recurring narratives that trivialised female tennis players, and Crossman, Vincent and Speed, (2007) had similar results. Yip's (2018) study is more recent but revealed not much change in the ways female players were portrayed. He did note though, that there were indicators of things possibly changing, and at least my findings agree to this. Similarly to Yip (2018), Hellborg and Hedenborg (2015) identified a few narratives in equestrianism reporting that challenged the gender stereotypes, even though they also found many opposite examples. Thus my study seems to show the example of positive change also in equestrianism context. Moreover, Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg (2020) named

hegemonic masculinity as a central structure in the contemporary media environment, but as evident from my analysis, its influence did not seem prevalent in the treatment of genders: the coverage did not marginalise female athletes, nor did it reinforce the power and importance of the males.

It is important to consider whether the treatment of gender has fundamentally changed or if it is a matter of which sports and how many of them are examined. Would the result have been different if the research had included swimming and gymnastics, sports typically considered more feminine? Moreover, this study included only articles from two newspapers, and thus any generalisations across sports news genre cannot be made. Another interesting aspect is to consider whether the data, being from the Olympics, is an influencing factor. As an event that is largely seen as connective, uniting nations and fighting together against issues from terrorism to gender equality it is maybe more neutral territory. Olympics are written about around the world so it may be that the authors weigh more carefully what and how they write. To this day, Rio 2016 is also the most gender balanced summer Olympics in history, and this may affect the background when the media coverage is considered.

5. Conclusion

In this study, I have analysed tennis and equestrian reporting as a part of the sports news genre, discussing their evaluative tendencies and how these fit into what the genre is expected to be. Using Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory as the analytical framework, I have identified graduation to be a prevalent category in sports news writing due to the frequent use of numbers and other quantitative attributes. I have also noted the presence of judgment and appreciation in sports news writing and how their use reflects the traditional news structure, the inverted pyramid. The language of sports news writing is usually very colourful and full of figures of speech and emphasised praises because many of the more neutral and normal expressions are not interesting enough. This reflects in the evaluation as well, because the more neutral the tone, the less the text contains examples of appraisal.

In addition to examining the sports news genre on a general level, I have analysed the gendered constructions of sports news writing. More particularly, my focus was on the descriptions used to refer to the athletes in tennis and equestrianism contexts, as well as how the genders were positioned in news discourse. Thinking of the descriptions in general, an interesting finding was the more frequent use of nouns as descriptors compared to adjectives. Considering how adjectives are typically seen as the most important expressions when describing something or someone, this can be regarded as a surprise. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, also nouns can function as describing attributes. This appears very common at least in the sports context analysed here.

In my analysis, I identified four descriptive categories in each sport, and apart from one category, they were the same in both: *titles*, *specialty emphasis characteristics* and *performance praising/neutral assessment* in tennis and equestrian, respectively. In both tennis and equestrianism, the descriptions of each group largely followed a pattern where I was able to form a pair of semantically equal descriptors that applied to both genders. This same pattern was evident when examining the verbs male and female athletes' were positioned with as a subject. Verbs were also grouped into categories, *narrating competition* and *evaluating performance*, and these further highlighted the similar treatment of genders in the sports media examined. My findings thus indicate that the media representations of male and female athletes are largely similar in both a sport where genders compete separately and a sport

where gender division does not exist. Another interesting finding that emerged from the analysis was that the gender of the authors did not seem to affect the evaluation and the treatment of male and female athletes. Articles written by men described female athletes as positively as did those written by women. Still, detailed conclusions of these cannot be made based solely on the two sports and the two newspapers analysed here. Thinking of my results in general, one more aspect is important to note here. As a researcher who knows these competitions and understands the language that goes along with the background of the sports, I have a different perspective from other researchers and this has also affected my analysis. If investigated by another researcher, someone who is not familiar with the sports news genre and tennis and equestrianism contexts particularly, the results of this study may have been different.

My findings overall reflect a more positive attitudes towards female athletes' as athletes first, but whether they indicate a larger change in the treatment of genders in sports media requires further research. Gender equality in sport is an important cross-disciplinary topic, and I hope that this study has encouraged to continue this work in linguistics as well. Appraisal proved a promising framework for analysing gender narratives in sports news writing, but it is essential to consider other possible pathways as well and extend the research for example into critical discourse analysis and sociolinguistics. Crucial for future research is also the inclusion of more sports and news outlets' from different countries. Only this way the dominant structures in societies and the narratives in the media can be examined, challenged and hopefully renewed completely. Moreover, media includes much more than just newspapers, so investigations on outlets such as sports commentary or interviews are equally important in determining the prevailing gender narratives, and how to change them. Although this study is an example of positive change, research not-too-distant past show that male and female athletes' different media treatment is still very much an issue. Fink's (2014, p.331) question of "have we really come a long way, baby" from seven years ago could be asked today as well. And as long as we have to ask this, we have to talk about it and research it.

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