

The Battle of the Sexes.

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Abstract: *Being a professional women's Tennis player myself, through this research paper, I will delve into and understand the economic, psychological as well as the science of the sociological experiences faced by female athletes, regarding labeling, the social construction of the so-called "reality" and the notion created around the discourse of the feminine identity. Through this paper, I intend on shedding light on various complex aspects such as stereotypes of gender, stereotypes made by society, athletes, etc; while simultaneously highlighting the unequal disparity which exists between male and female athletes in terms of awards, money, certificates, airing time on media, etc. Apart from that, this paper will also help zoom into the notion of appearance as the crucial factor which could make or break the career of a Tennis star, especially through its repercussions in media. This paper while delving into the core of two upcoming tennis tournaments will not only expose the behind the scenes of a tennis prep (preparation) match training session, but will also simultaneously illustrate the essence of the predominant male gaze and its long-standing impacts on society, especially on women in the form of the "dual identity paradox" as well as the conception of homosexuality in the field of Tennis.*

Keywords: *tennis, women, men, patriarchal gaze, gender disparity, stereotypes, appearance, media, homosexuality, heterosexuality, confidence, empowerment*

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I. Introduction

It has been more than 30 years since the Title IX legislation granted women equal playing time, but the male-dominated world of sports journalism has yet to catch up with the law. Coverage of women's sports lags far behind men's sports. It focuses on female athletes' femininity and sexuality over their successful hard-earned achievements on the court and field. Female athleticism challenges gender norms, and women athletes continue to be depicted in traditional roles that reaffirm their femininity - as wives and mothers or sex objects known for their hair, curves, and vagina. By comparison, male athletes are framed according to their alpha masculine, heroic masculine ideals that honor courage, strength, and endurance (Hanson, 2018; Hanson, 2012; Harris & Clayton, 2002).

Despite the Title IX legislation in the so-called elite sport of "tennis", 55-year-old Bobby Riggs, an American men's World number one Tennis Champion, spouted a sexist rhetoric like women belonged "in the bedroom and the kitchen," that they didn't have the "emotional stability" to be athletes, and that he planned to "set the women's liberation movement back about another 50 years" by beating 29-year-old Billie Jean King, the American woman's World number one professional Tennis player, in the Battle of the Sexes (Liston, 2005). Billie Jean beat Bobby Riggs in straight sets, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3, and earned the winner-take-all prize of \$100,000. At this point in time, tennis played a significant role in developing greater respect and recognition for women athletes. Billie Jean's victory, accompanied with the passage of Title IX, was often seen to have credited both an igniting boom in women's sports participation, as well an empowering feeling within women to advocate for equal pay in all sectors of the workforce.

In reality, in most tennis tournaments, women earn about 20% less than men (Liston, 2005). Equal pay is constantly opposed by male players and industry heavyweights, most recently by former Indian Wells CEO, Raymond Moore (Krane, 2004), who said that female tennis players "ride on the coattails of the men". Novak Djokovic, a Serbian professional tennis player said that men deserve higher prize money because their matches are more popular. This statement was immediately combated by Serena Williams in her 'open letter' wherein she opposed the ideologies of inequality and discrimination. She stressed that "One of the barriers that we women undoubtedly face is the way we are constantly reminded we are not men as if it is a flaw. People call me one of the 'world's greatest female athletes.' Do they say LeBron is one of the world's best male athletes? Is Tiger? Federer? Why not? They are certainly not female. We should never let this go unchallenged. We should always be judged by our achievements, not by our gender" (Eastaugh, 2016).

There has been a remarkable progress in the field of sports. Women athletes today have still looked at women sports stars from a gaze of being 'objects'. Thus, the efforts put in by women essentially after all the hours of rigorous training are treated as being redundant. This is portrayed through the display of traditional stereotypes rooted in the cultural historicity of ideologies and external pressures imposed by society to perform their expected personality even though athletes. This is the main reason which gave birth to the "female/athlete paradox" (Liston, 2005). This paradox has been the result of a clash of egos: the egos of masculinities and femininities in the sports field, wrapped around the ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, this sheds light on the crucial role of the male dominant hegemonic gaze. This gaze first creates opportunities through institutionalization, only to evaluate women in comparison to them, and then relishes the opportunity of calling them 'weaker', accusing them of their biological differences. This, in turn, creates what Derrida would call a binary in gender, which was used by the men to create a polarized vision of the discourse on women, to highlight the one-sided representation of women in sports issues and magazines as sexual icons rather than skilfully hardworking athletes.

Up until today, there is a binary between men and women that exist, based on their performance. The reason given for this by patriarchy is the essence of the biological discourse, wherein men will always be considered physically dominant and superior compared to their 'inferiorly' powered counterparts. However, in flipping the coin over and looking at it from an angle of women shaping sports according to their own values and experiences instead of men, then the woman's perspective in the creation of sports would be in the form of – for instance, the Olympic games per se: Balance, Flexibility and Endurance or Physical Excellence for Health and Humanity; instead of the resounding Citius, Altius, Fortius (faster, higher and stronger). It is thus important to shed light on the discourse of gender inequality, especially in the arena of sports.

A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Being an athlete myself, especially an athlete who has faced the effect of the 'gender binaries' moved and motivated me into exploring the different avenues and extent to which women have to tailor make suits for themselves to 'fit' in a male-dominated field and then adhere to the norms set by patriarchy. This drove me into choosing 'women in the field of sports' as a key element which I would like to delve further into through the discourse of this research paper. Through the course of this paper, I will also like to focus my attention into understanding the true disparity which is rooted in the binary creation of men and women and which has penetrated into the essence which has helped shape 'physically challenging' sports.

- Traditional stereotypes rooted in women sports because of the Gramscian hegemonic masculine discourse backed by the male patriarchal gaze.
- The portrayal of women as 'objects' rather than respect for them as athletes.
- The notions built around the fact that women need to fulfill the domestic roles that patriarchy has set for them instead of them exploring and delving into the sports found in the external public sphere.

B. ORGANISATION OF CHAPTERS IN THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

In **chapter one**, I will explore the creation of the gender stereotypes and how their stigmatic gaze has had powerful impacts especially on the iconography of women in the domain of the sporting culture as well as how this historicity has molded the 21st century today.

In **chapter two**, I will navigate my way into discovering and exploring the binaries created, which distinguish men and women in sports based on their sexuality, physicality, and body image, through the dominant hegemonic patriarchal gaze.

Lastly, in **chapter three**, I will paint a picture of the information drawn out by me in my quest to explore the pervasive patriarchal ideologies rooted in the construction of the 'gender divide' in the sporting culture.

Through this paper, I shall throw light on the notion that – for women to enter the sporting arena, they internalize that they are first going to be treated as inferior, as well as that they might bear verbal, mental or emotional abuse which furthers the belief that they are the weaker sex – which I would disprove using previous discourse from the field of 'Gender Studies'.

II. Literature Review

The discourse of gender studies is an encapsulating genre in sociology which helps encompass several crucially vital issues faced by women, thus this medium provides useful in helping me explore literature on numerous issues in women's sporting culture. The coverage of themes undertaken through the discourse of women's studies illustrates the tennis paradox on one hand and the socio-cultural paradigm aided with the economic politics dominating the sporting worlds.

2.1.1. Stereotyped!

Anthropologist Kathleen Gough, who was trained in the heyday of British structural functionalism, argued that during the hunting-gathering phase, work was segregated and allocated in such a way wherein men being the “stronger and more powerful species” took up the challenging work of hunting and bringing the “food” for the family (Gough, 2007). While on the other hand, the women since they were the “caretakers – the reproductive species” of the family, they were abstained from hunting for safety purposes but were allowed to gather insects, roots, bulbs, fruits, etc. Therefore the early history of sports often involved the preparation and training for skills in war or hunting (Liston, 2005). Hence there were sports and games that involved the throwing of stakes, spears, and rocks, and of course lots of play-fighting. During the late Mesolithic period, man began the process of cultivation and agriculture. Due to this, man had to settle in one place in order to reap the benefits of his hard labor. Since man was very used to an active and energetic life, he felt the innate desire to participate or watch warfare and fights especially for survival. Thus, Ancient Greece was the first to introduce formal sports, with the first Olympic Games in 776 BC, which included sports such as human and chariot races, wrestling, jumping, disk, and javelin throwing.

The use of the biological connotation that men use to tokenize the implication that they are more naturally dominant in the sports field has through the patriarchal gaze justified and normalized the fact that the disempowerment of women within the sporting culture is a sheer must. This was illustrated in the ‘Difference Theory’ argued by the developmental psychologist, Christine Howe (Howe, 2010). Society expects man and woman to adopt, believe in, and practice specific gender roles and stereotypes, which have been established since ages. From birth itself, individuals are bombarded with several gender stereotypes. Once a newborn baby’s sex is revealed, they are dressed in either blue or pink, given gifts of trucks and soldiers, or dolls and stuffed toys, and referred to as strong and alert, or soft and delicate (Malszecki and Cavar, 2005, p.161; Zimmerman and Reaville, 1998, p.41). In the occidental world, males are expected to be strong, independent, muscular and athletic, whereas females are expected to be silent, obedient, attractive, petite, delicate and loving. Society demands complete conformity to the enforced gender order.

According to the German Philosopher Friedrich Engels, when these pre-existing gender norms are violated, it is common for “labeling” to take place (such as lesbian), questions to be asked (“Are you sure that is not a boy in the net?”), and people to be ridiculed and mocked (“a girl playing football – what a butch”).

While “traditional” gender stereotypes have more or less remained constant over the past few centuries, they have also been challenged and confronted by many feminist and women activists today. One specific area of focus, in which traditional gender stereotypes have been evaluated and analyzed, is in sports and physical activities. Comparing traditional female gender stereotypes with those of the 21st-century women in sports, it is clear that today women are progressing in the field of sports, due to their sheer determination and steadfast confidence nurtured through their self-belief. Their ability to challenge sexist barriers and restrictive notions about women’s physical appearance, athletic ability, and participation in sports, is evident through their increased involvement in sports (Liston, 2010).

The sports paradox would shed light on the fact that the distribution of women in sports is hidden by an alarming dark truth of a lack of appreciation given to them. Their sacrifices, the hard work and several hours of practice are in vain. There is a traditional as well as a cultural historicity shaping the painfully harmful stereotypes and social pleasures of women in sports – to perform their duality of being delicate women to perform their gender role versus their role as fit and athletic athletes (Eastaugh, 2016). This deploys the role of the male gaze in the gender hierarchy triangular pyramid (Liston, 2005), wherein the tip can never be overthrown by the base of the pyramid; having the so-called super power of playing with the position of women in society through manipulation and mind games created in the sporting culture. This would not only dissuade women in sports but would also subordinate them by not purposely giving them their due credit.

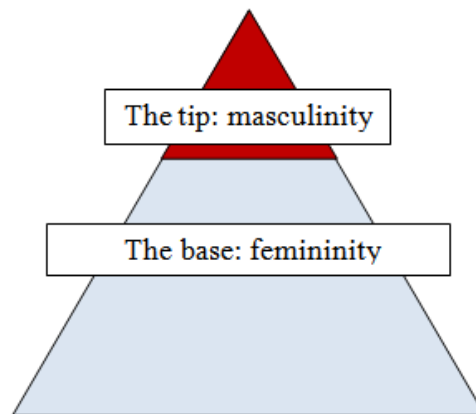


Fig: 2.1.1 Gender hierarchy illustrated through a triangular pyramid structure.

2.2.1. Self Image

The way in which people look at you in society shapes the image that one created about them. In other words, individuals develop their concept of 'self' by observing how they are perceived by others; and this concept of the 'looking-glass self' was developed by Cooley (Sparling, 2017). According to Mead, from childhood itself, through socialization, we interact with others who in turn through their interaction back with us shape the way in which we look at ourselves (Mead, 1999). This then in later stages of our lives leads us into having to enact certain performances that society has already predetermined for us. At this time the life that a woman especially has to enact in the domain of a sports field, is what Goffman would label as her backstage because this was an enactment of her sheer self-determination (Goffman, 2000). Sadly, men make women athletes using the sporting culture as a marker of themselves exhibit the front stage performance into a front stage performance that is a staged role she is performing for an audience to witness and objectify her for.

Pricilla Choi drew on the notion of self-image for both sexes to have a stark difference wherein society will not be willing to buy into the perspective of some genders kindling within them both crucial characteristics (Choi, 2002). The society finds it difficult and alarming to see women as strong and muscular, as they have been perceived as the weaker and disempowered sex, a sex to be dominated and exploited in the words of Walby (Walby, 2005). Pollert argues that women are criticized by society especially when they are in sports, as they are not perceived to be following the fixed gender – sex roles, in not performing their beauty norms or other roles that deem them as feminine, predominantly those roles imposed upon them by the patriarchy (Pollert, 2014). Women face a dilemma in the field of sports due to the societal pressures, such as peer pressure or the hegemonic male governmental pressures in the form of a lack of promising futures or benefits of any sort. These pressures manifest while playing singular, elite, non-team sports, which discourages and disempowers women from participating in sports, as well as robs them of their pride in being physically active.

According to the study carried out by Miller on the leading causes for the role conflict in gender, it has been investigated that the sporting culture all over the world has arranged special privileges only for men. This places women on the back burner, thus allowing only men to emerge triumphant (Miller, 2012). This historicity has created a myth around the fact that sports is instrumental in institutionalising certain dominant as well as superior ideals into men such as competitiveness and achievements thereby incorporating this and making it the most crucial aspect of their masculine role identity. Due to this prominent belief, many Marxist feminists would argue that women are considered to be the by-products' of men in an capitalist-dominated society, which exhibits the same characteristics as a Tennis sporting society (Liston, 2005). Thus, this shows that through the male gaze, the notion of women tennis players being the by-products of their more superior binaries, that is, the male tennis players will be deemed fair. This is a crucial element which leads to the dilemma that every woman athlete faces today, that is: should they follow their hearts and work on their body fitness regime or if they should give into the desire of society that women appear only as beautiful objects, over their choice to empower themselves.

According to Espnes, studies have always glorified boys as well as men as the sex which is more dominant and superior and thus powerful heroes (Espnes, 2000). The lens of patriarchy looks at its own achievements, culminating in the achievement of patriarchy, as well as the ways of strategizing the 'other exotic sex as being weaker that they fail to see the HER in HERoes, a label that they usually use to distinguish themselves'. In the words of Ellsworth, this notion has also penetrated the way in which children and adolescents behave and perceive each other (Ellsworth, 1990). This has institutionalized a drop in the self-confidence of girls empowering themselves in the sporting culture.

Sports sociology has for the longest time defined sports as something that helps people perceive themselves as stronger, more powerful, allows one to empower themselves as well as allows one to live the true essence of physical activities (Eastaugh, 2016). However, all the values that sports offer are reaped by male athletes. They do not see women as fit to indulge in the adrenaline rush that the sports field offers. The reason provided by patriarchy for denying females their right to live (i.e. live and survive in the sporting culture) draws back to the Bible, in Genesis, where it is mentioned that God first made man and from the flesh of man, the woman was created (Liston, 2005). This notion over centuries has percolated in the ideas and ideologies of man birthing the concept of gender inequality which we see today – which is ever so prominent in the sports world.

Playing a skilled sport of tennis is like a super power, because it not only allows one to connect with their body and demonstrate their physical powers, but it also allows one to illustrate mental strength. Women constantly face villainization of self-image and character through the lens of the media, shot by a male professional, with the attempt to dishonor her in the most scarring, painful way to objectify her.

This disparity from a positive angle sheds light on the fact that women athletes who choose to put themselves first, regardless of the societal pressures they have had to face, shows their strong willpower. This could be termed as being ‘hegemonic’ in the true Gramscian sense of the word, in enabling the weaponizing of their ideas through the power of their self-confidence (Gramsci, 1998). This encapsulates the notion that strength in the domain of sport, leaps beyond the notion of women being just physically fit; it adds psychological and physical strength, thereby empowering her well-being.

2.2.2. Are looks important?

Looks have different connotations to sports stars and to a lay man. To sports stars, the body of a woman is construed as attractive if they are well toned and have lean muscles, while on the other hand the lay man through the dominant male perspective, has constructed the notion that a woman to look good and appeal to their standards of attractiveness, has to be thin and skinny (Liston, 2010). The need to meet this standard of ‘thin and skinny’ and fit into the male ‘attention-seeking’ spectrum causes women take drastic steps to lose weight. These practices are seen among adolescent girls, in which they submit themselves into consuming extreme diets like the military ice diet, which deprives them of nutrients and proteins; making them physically vulnerable or weak (Daniel, 2012).

The implications of what women should actually look like are seen on the cover pages of several women’s magazines that are read across all cultures. These magazines throw light on the measurements of the ideal woman’s body (objectifying her on the bases of body built and height) as well as depicting her as having flawless fair skin with perfect lips, a mesmerizing hairstyle and without bodily hair (Harris, 1999). This has also created a culture of body shaming, which in Elias’s works would be termed as process of civilization, wherein people are shamed into believing that they do not fit into the structure and thus ‘civilise’ themselves (in this case, to look a certain way) according to the patriarchal gaze, to fit in.

When athletes are bulkier than the ‘ideal bodyline deemed required’, they are shamed. This shaming is not only done by men but is sometimes instigated by women. This draws on the notion that in society, the athletes in the field of sports face subjugation for being in a male-dominated sport as well as by women who shame other women on the bases of size. This goes back to the main argument that women are not acknowledged for their skill in the sport, but are nitpicked on the details that surround the core of the sport at which they excel.

Branding campaigns are carried out by top brands such as Wilson, Head, Yonex, Babolat, Nike, ProKennex, Skechers, etc., in their socio-cultural agenda endorsed through their campaigns of ‘being strong’, ‘never giving up’, ‘ACING the game with LOVE’; which have subtly sold the notion of ideal beauty standards through the representation of the women chosen in these advertisements, which abide with the beauty myth.

The beauty myth, used to evaluate all genders, illustrates that if women become too strong or are perceived as stronger than men, then they will have too much ‘power’ over men. This would extend to the domain of looks, in which the gender binary would not be able to maintain and preserve their stark difference, thus hampering the established status quo. Thus, the woman is discouraged from becoming more powerful, as a society will not be able to control her strength in the future. On the other hand, women are not allowed to seek satisfaction based on their body images, because this is the only way the leisure market is fuelling themselves – in first shaming the woman into believing something and secondly, in establishing a whole market around the selling of the ‘solution’ to the criteria which ridiculed her in the first place itself (Liston, 2010). This is seen mainly in the consumption of weight loss tablets, diet pills, nutrition supplements such as whey, ProteinX, etc.

An intake of supplementary diets or weight loss pills or even extreme diets all lead to a decrease in health, thus increasing the risk of severe or fatal injuries or even low-performance rates while training. It is crucial to eat well when offseason, that is while training, as most of the calories, are burnt off in the vigorous strenuous sessions that one puts themselves through, especially through the medium of the sport they have grown up playing, but on the other hand, if people choose not to eat well or opt for an ‘anorexic’ diet, (Fig.: 2.2.2) they

could be laid out in bed due to a fracture or a bad sprain or any other injury that would discourage them from playing an important match per se.

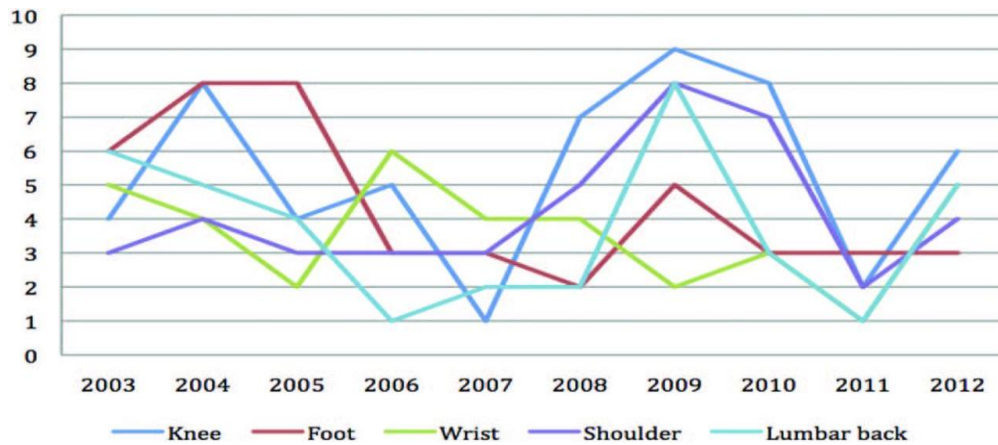


Fig.: 2.2.2.: Injuries jeopardizing health (Liston, 2005).

Therefore, the idea of being strong and fit physically is challenged by the beauty norms established through the dominant hegemonic male gaze. As a result, the chances of women or female athletes opting out or dropping out of the ‘Game’ increases drastically, like this for them challenges their existence as a woman or a muscular object that is eventually objectified through the male gaze.

2.2.3. Media and Sport

Nathalie Koivula, drawing from the discourse of socio-psychology, talks about gender stereotyping in the field of media, which occupies the minds of the spectators watching the match and conditions their thoughts about women (Liston, 2005). The sports media is also enlightening, in this regard. It provides us with an in-depth understanding of cultural norms and unwritten rules in the genre of tennis, which sheds light on the hierarchy of gender and the representation of the existing binaries percolating in the essence of the raw sporting culture, which is ever so slightly backed with the notion of caste outlining the hierarchy (Eastaugh, 2016). The sports media uses the tactic of exploration to portray the mainstream gender-appropriate behavior rested in the sporting culture. The present study examined samples of televised sports in Sweden during 1995/96 (1,470 minutes), with a follow-up examination in 1999 (528 minutes). The results indicated gender differences regarding quantity and type of coverage. For example, less than 10% of the total examined sports news time was covered by female athletes, and less than 2% of the time was used to cover women athletes in sports categorized as masculine (seen in fig.2.2.3.a.). It has been observed that televised media sports coverage reinforces the construction of divisions along lines of gender, which reproduces traditional expectations regarding femininity and masculinity. (Harris & Clayton, 2002)

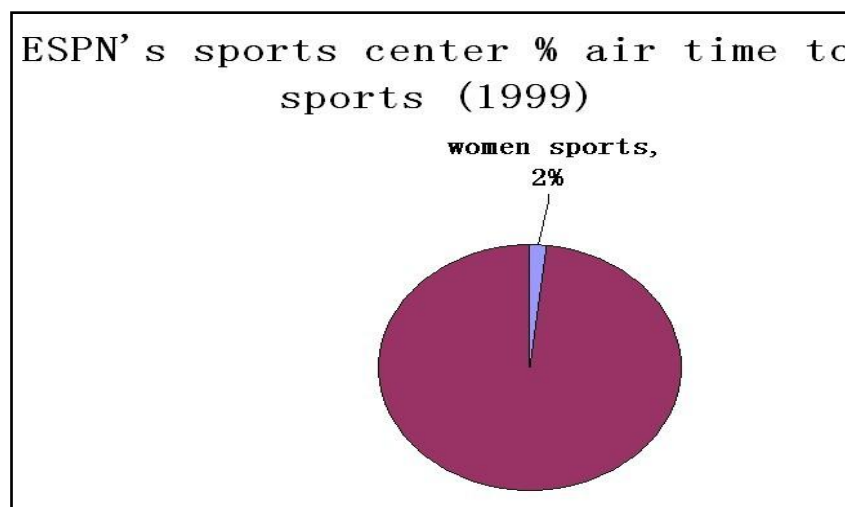


Fig.:2.2.3.: Coverage of female athletes in sports news (Liston, 2005).

The portrayal of women is done through the male gaze which is different from the portrayal of the male image. This can be understood by using the lens of the core and peripheral. The core, in this case, will be the men and the women athletes will be at the peripheral. The sport of tennis is perceived from the perspective of the core, which is the male gaze on any situation, which reaps the 'glamour' of the sports world while depriving the peripheral of the lavish treatment they could get. Women athletes are sometimes treated as erotic in the representations by the media, as objects meant to excite men. The media has enabled the sabotaging of the essence of sports by playing the biggest mind game through its manifestation, using its super power of hegemonic control (Harris & Clayton, 2002).

The media cashed in on the manufacturing of sports gear to create erotic images that would not only pay women off for their 'services' in the photo shoot but would also set a tone for their objectification to be legal (Liston, 2010). Lenskyj draws in the notion that the media survives and sustains itself through the strategic idea of selling sex to women as a way in which they can reclaim their femininity in the sporting culture (Lenskyj, 2000). This proves to some extent that patriarchy and the media go hand and glove in the subjugation of the women athletes. In this manner, the victory of only one of the two sexes in the match of power control is achieved, which self-validates a superior male identity at the cost of objectifying women and their sexuality.

The convincing argument of the male trait being the ideal trait has also manifested in the sport of tennis. The Sun, a news tabloid, portrayed world No. 1, Pete Sampras, in a breathtaking photograph depicting him in the motion of one of his best service shots ever. The tagline inscribed along with the photograph was 'Smasher . . . Sampras turns on his Centre Court power' (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Another action-shot of a male player, this time British No. 2 Greg Rusedski, states that 'Greg puts all his concentration in this volley', highlighting the sheer determination in his eyes along the focus and control applied in this nail-biting game, which his team eventually won. (Harris & Clayton, 2002)

Conversely, a tagline for a well-strategized picture of Anna Kournikova sitting at the side of the court, drinking from a water bottle was labeled as 'Sitting pretty . . . Kournikova takes a breather' (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Kournikova is thus used as a token image which is marketed as the epitome of a woman in the sport being weaker as compared to her male counterpart, who is portrayed as more successful than her through the lens of a camera. Five pictures were taken of this tennis star, of which only one was a representation of her in the match, which was printed without a caption. This draws attention to the fact that the phraseology is used to convey powerful socio-cultural messages that are used to jargonize and enliven a photo.

Bryson suggests that all cultural messages about sporting culture celebrates the dominant, but neglects the essence of the 'other' (Liston, 2005). Both the Sun and the Mirror are guilty of emphasizing sporting attributes, such as power, skill, and determination in male athletes while overlooking the same characteristics in female athletes. As a result, women athletes often fail to gain the recognition and regard afforded to their male counterparts due to the norms set by hegemonic patriarchy. (Harris & Clayton, 2002)

2.2.4. 'All about the GAME!'

The media has been observed as leaning towards patriarchy in highlighting the characteristics of masculinity, superiority, manliness, manhood, etc. in men through their journalism. On the other hand, women are depicted using an inferior undertone, wherein the woman is seen as being meek, subservient, fragile, sensual and above all heterosexual. I would argue that to some extent this has given rise to the establishment of 'hegemonic femininity' in the domain of the sporting culture (Harris & Clayton, 2002).

The English press has used the white washing perspective to bring in the notion of the creation of the gender binary in the sporting fields. Anna Kournikova, the former Russian Tennis player, was showcased in 27 articles/photographs as a model to define 'prettiness' rather than 'activeness' (Harris & Clayton, 2002). The Sun has admitted that her athletic achievements are outweighed by her looks and carnal appeal, in 'pun-like' text — 'Who cares if she can't play tennis . . . the blonde beauty . . . puts the phwoar into Wimbledon phwoartnight' (24 June) (Harris & Clayton, 2002). There appears to be a distinction between sports related and non-sports related articles on male sports stars (both in terms of actual content and their positioning within the newspaper) (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Almost all the articles on Kournikova (both inside and outside the sports pages) focus exclusively upon her sexuality. Given the amount of attention she receives within the fold of English tabloid press, we would suggest that women's sport is very much a rat race to achieve the title of 'the prettiest' (Harris & Clayton, 2002).

Thus the tabloid media has contributed to the element of fabrication, in determining the fixed role set established due to the creation of the gender hierarchy in sports (Harris & Clayton, 2002). The essence of the in-depth message illustrated by the Sun and the Mirror sing the glory of only the hegemonic alpha male thereby disregarding the existence of women from this entire notion of the sporting worlds (Harris & Clayton, 2002).

Margaret Mead would argue that the term gender came into being in the early 1970s only after the term sex-roles was derived (Mead, 1980). The notion of gender being a cultural construct and that of sex being a biological construct, exist even in the sporting arena. This illustration gets translated into understanding the physical experience of both, masculinity and femininity in the genre of sports.

2.3.1. Sport as a Male Preserve

Sports are indicators in the establishment of 'ideal' gender performances. Zimmerman would argue that masculinity and the way it is used as a tool for exploiting women came about as a strong super power only after the establishment of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Zimmerman, 2007). This would be understood better, by first understanding the concept of its binary emphasized femininity, wherein this form of femininity usually fuels and supports hegemonic masculinity and also portrays women as a sex to be weaker and thus demonstrates the ideals of hegemonic masculinity are just and something to be abided by (Harris & Clayton, 2002). They show respect to hegemonic masculinity by dressing to impress them, thus buying into the whole aspect of heterosexuality.

Today, sports are training women athletes to depict characteristics which are similar to the characteristics of emphasized femininity, because men in sports have been the hegemonic dominators. Thus the identity of a male athlete as well as his status (ascribed) is what actually dominates over and subordinates a woman in the sporting domain. This sheds light on the notion that society perceives women on the basis of their ascribed status (i.e. sex, gender, etc.) rather than her achieved status (achievements, goals, etc.) which should be taken into consideration at least in the 21st century (Dunning, 2003). This, according to Dunning could lead to a masculinity crisis in the 21st century.

The element of alpha masculinity comes into focus through the depiction of the myth of sports having the potential to make 'Boys into Men'. To prove this masculinity, men require to physically indulge in sports to help in the transitory phase.

Masculinity in the forms of alpha or hegemonic masculinity are rooted deeply in the heart of the dominant 'white, middle-class' gaze (Harris, 2009). This version of masculinity is usually the gaze that is shaped through the power dynamics of a certain class, caste, race, etc., which are vital characteristics in selling the notion of heterosexuality.

This throws light on the creation of the concept of a gender binary. The concept binary can be traced back to the work of Levi-Strauss, who borrowed it from the work of French structuralist linguist Saussure (Strauss, 1999). Today this concept is best understood through the works of Derrida who would argue that if the man was considered to be superior in the binary then the woman would be looked at as being inferior on the same binary spectrum (Derrida, 1970). The demonstration of masculine behavior excludes or tries to maintain a distance from the performance of characteristics perceived as being less manly or more feminine, which is a perfect illustration of the binary schema.

Apart from the binary ideology, men also eschew the concept of 'biology' to determine who is male and who is female. This leads to the use of these two connotations to determine who is stronger and who is weaker in nature. This physical analogy is traced and rooted in the creation of sports since in the beginning of time.

Thus, sports have had no place for women because they have not been welcome in this domain from the start. The male gaze assumed that they were secondary to men for the reason of exploitation, and were to remain secondary without crossing their limits. These enraged women because they were not only denied privileges in the sporting arena but were also denied representation to an extent (Liston, 2005). In order to reclaim their identity in the sporting world, they used a deviant strategy of appearing to identify themselves as lesbians and thus use the tennis court or any other athletic playing field to demonstrate their lesbianism. This was a strong indicator of a rejection of the dominant hegemonic idea of 'heterosexuality'.

2.3.2. Who would win the battle between 'Mannish', 'Manly' 'Amazons'?

In the midst of a male dominating sport, strong women athletes are always seen as a threat to the supreme masculinity powers, therefore, they are labeled as "Amazons" (Liston, 2005). The notion of the term 'Amazon' used in the sporting world implies a woman being deviant in her performance of male characteristics and ideals. In other words, this means a sports woman being portrayed as masculine in nature.

The lesbian paradigm revolutionized itself during the onset of the Radical Feminism movement, wherein the radical cultural feminist took on the initiative to draw in the notion of 'lesbianism'. The radical cultural feminist initially wanted to impose this form of feminism on all women in society but this idea was rejected by the radical libertarian feminist who said that the imposition of lesbianism by a woman would be similar to the imposition of heterosexuality by men – patriarchy (Liston, 2005). Therefore during the second wave of feminism, Tennis stars Martina Hingis and Lindsay Davenport took the tennis court to be their perfect platform for the representation of their lesbianism (Liston, 2010). Amelie Mauresmo, in the Australian Open, kissed her female partner on the tennis court after securing victory (Harris, 2012). For this strong deviant

behavior, the media controlled through the dominant patriarchy shunned her career and shamed her publically. However, years later in an interview, she said that even though her career was robbed from her due to her strong resistance to patriarchy, she was extremely happy that she had challenged the hegemonic male rule (Harris, 2012). Therefore, sports illustrate a very simple rule, that is, if a woman wants to take part and participate, then she needs to abide by the 'laws and rules' laid down by patriarchy to be successful.

The depiction of a woman athlete's behavior as being deviant would lead the athlete into facing negative consequences such as labeling them as being mannish, manly, etc. This highlights the notion that the manly nature of the woman is challenged, in addition to their sex. This generated the concept of 'masculine women' which was a regulation of patriarchal society to set certain norms such as religious practices, economic paradigms, socio-cultural perceptions (Liston, 2005), thus creating a revolution and taking the entire leisure element of the sporting culture by storm. This revolution came to life when the woman accepted and acknowledged that in being a lesbian in the field of sports, she had the full potential to abide by the manly characteristics imposed on her and also adopted a few more manly characteristics such as 'male desires' as lusting after women, thus in this way drawing in lesbianism as an unexpected 'game changer' and therefore throwing in a completely new challenge to patriarchy (Liston, 2010).

To weaken the noose tied around the neck of patriarchy by the strong lesbian movement, especially in the sporting arena, the dominant male hegemony decided to understand the complexities of both the sexes. It is crucial to draw attention to the degree of sexual and social conformity expected from women players. This leads a woman into making decisions between her powerful identity versus her choice of self-esteem in the form of self-expression or sexuality, which manifests in her self-empowerment.

III. Methodology

Keeping in mind the differences that are to be noted over the course of the research paper, a qualitative research design has been used. This is because a primary source provides direct or firsthand evidence about an object, person, event, or work of art compared to secondary sources that only describe, discuss, interpret, comment upon, analyze, evaluate, summarize, and process primary sources.

In this research paper, my quest is to understand more about tennis as a sport clustered around inequalities through the methodological discourse of primary sources such as an indebt interview in order to note individual opinions and study the differences that exist between tennis players at different positional and illusory levels in the sporting hierarchy.

Ethical concerns:

Most of the participant's expressed their fear towards answering questions in the primary data collection method. For their perspectives provided, they requested for a plausible deniability. In keeping with the research ethics, the contact details and the name of the participants have been treated as confidential in order to protect their identity. This elevated doubt over the data collection process, as there no verification of data possible nor was there any scope for clarifications. To circumvent this issue, along with detailed fieldnotes jotted down, only complete forms were taken into perspective for this research. This was done in order to complete the study as they fit all the requirements for the research.

In the questionnaire, a disclaimer was issued to participants that there was a possibility that their quotes would be used in the analysis. Thus, the collection of qualitative data helped in the analysis of data according to the research theme and research questions.

Participants

Data collection is an extremely challenging task. Being a tennis player, the most comfort I seek is in my 'home court' at Mandpeshwar Gymkhana, Borivali West; also known by the locals as Borivali Gymkhana. For the consolidation of data for my research project, I wanted to collect firsthand information from women who were actually focused and dedicated to the field of tennis. Thus, I began by drawing information from tennis athletes across two competitive tournaments: one was an Inter-club Tennis Tournament and the other was a Youth Tennis Championship.

Initially, when I began my fieldwork, I observed that the women tennis athletes I tried to interview were all refusing to answer my questions. This at first made me feel bad, but I realized that this might have happened because my interview location had been the Tennis court. I realized that although the location chosen by me to carry out this interview was right, the only way I would be able to get their consent to answer my questions would be by changing my approach (re-strategizing).

After mentally ideating a way to seek respondents, I felt that I could carry out the interviews without obstructing the 'playing atmosphere', by blending in. I did this by getting onto the field as this was the only way I would get interested respondents who were training intensely for their tournaments, and successfully not manipulating the data. The strategy I used for this data collection was: 'A set for an interview'. These interviews

were anonymous. This meant that obviously after taking their consent, I promised them that if I played a set (a number of minimum six games played to attain points) with them, they in return would fill up my questionnaire during their water break. Through the course of this 'playing' technique, I was able to conduct in-depth interviews with about 10 women athletes who were between the age group of 25-35, training for The Inter-club Tennis Tournament (ICTT) (N=10, aged 25-35 years). Through this same strategy, I was able to personally interview 15 tennis players between the age group of 18-25 who were training intensely for the Youth Tennis Championship (YTC) (N=15, aged 18-25 years).

The women Tennis players selected by me were chosen on purpose, keeping in mind key factors like age, gender, type of game (singles or doubles). I channeled my attention on a middle-aged set of physically active women. The women athletes I interviewed who were training for the Inter-club Tennis Tournament (ICTT) were completely different from the participants I interviewed who were training for the Youth Tennis Championship (YTC).

Although tennis maybe an elite sport in India, the funding in terms of the participants' investment physically as well as economically is tremendous. This is because one has to shell out a lot to buy the right gripped shoes depending on the type of court they are playing on, the right type of tennis racket as well as the grip bands for the racket in case of overuse. Apart from all the basic requirements, a tennis player has to have the economic capital to spend on good coaching. This was the information I received from a 25-year-old who had to take a break during her game (set) with me to fix the grip of her racket.

In a sport in which 'the brand determines the worth of a man', the few women who took part in the tennis tournaments all had a rich economic and cultural capital. It is sad, but true that those who don't belong to a certain class or status are cut off. If they manage to get fairly decent coaching, at the time of 'official paperwork', their career will end without taking into consideration their talent.

Among the women tennis stars who were training for the ICTT, almost half of them were training in this sport since the time they were kids. Some had taken interest in this sport after their 10th grade, while there were some who grew interested in the sport only due to the ICTT. Through the in-depth data collection, I was able to draw on the fact that two of the participants were engaged, three were recently married and three were single. Two of the married women had children between the ages of 5-7 years.

This study shed light on how key aspects of 'privilege' and 'exclusiveness' play a fundamental role in shaping and molding the behavioral characteristics of a woman tennis player. They have allocated a limited slot of time in a day which they dedicate to tennis in a day. These restrictions are mainly because they are studying, working or have to give in to the societal stereotyped responsibility of looking after the household chores. Most of them played tennis as a hobby, while some used it as a stress buster or as a leisure activity (Dionigi, 2001). Although most of them had their own financial resources to invest in the sport, they still witness a setback when it came down to traveling especially for tournaments to other states. This was either because of work, kids or even studies (their own or even their children's). While on the other hand the women participating in the YTC were still parasites in terms of economic aid as they were dependent on their families for the funding of their tennis equipment. With regards to the ICTT, the women within this age group in the field of tennis faced a dilemma between tennis as a means of 'sport' and their patriarchal 'domestic role'. This highlights the fact that within tennis played by women, a subculture is formed based on the intriguing or complex factors such as the relationship between gender and age dynamics as experienced by the participants.

Being a tennis player myself, I perceive this zone to be a space of cultural and personal practices. The understanding that each woman tennis player has is an expression of the influence of the socio-cultural norms that is demonstrated in the way in which they construct and reconstruct their identities in society. The 'power relations' prevalent in society is so detrimental especially for women that it draws in a dilemma between 'sport' and 'leisure'. However, I would argue that despite the setbacks and challenges that women, particularly of this age group in a sport like tennis, are put through, only makes them stronger and empowers them to stand up for themselves against Patriarchy. This was seen in the case of an empowered tennis icon Serena William's standing up to sexism (Eastaugh, 2016).

Data Collection

The accessibility I had to the tennis court was highly owed to my professional status I had in the field (Being the 'insider'). The rapport I was able to establish with the women tennis players was highly based on my competence in the sport. Had I not have been as established as I was, the responses from the respondents would have been even scarcer.

The 25 people that I interviewed on-site all participated in an approximately 10-15 minute interview which involved them filling up a questionnaire that I presented to them. Each of the participants was interviewed individually. Each interview was conducted only once as there was no 'retake' carried out. The interview was constructed in a way in which it had some MCQs and some open-ended questions. This allowed the questionnaire to be short and not time-consuming, while adopting a mixed methods approach to triangulate

the research results. When it came down to the open-ended questions, approximately half (about 11-13) of the tennis players I interviewed went on to relate their sporting background, for instance, their exercise history. They even narrated why they wanted to compete in tennis, how tennis has played a crucial role in their lives, the challenges they face on an everyday basis (e.g. in the field of tennis the challenge of sexism) as well as how they have benefited from tennis or what their future plans regarding the sport were.

The women tennis stars I approached were all on site i.e. on the tennis court. After observing and making constant trips to the tennis court, I realized that there was a predominant feature of 'timing and sense of territory' that was prevalent. I observed that the working men (35-45 years) began their day by dominating the tennis court from 6-8am in the morning. This was followed by the older men (45-80 years) who continued their fitness routine from 8-10am. Now since the spouse had already gone to work and the children well settled in school, the so-called housewife was left with some time to spare. Due to this a lot of the older women or a few young stay at home mothers were able to invest their leisure time in playing tennis. During the afternoons the tennis coaching is nil, therefore the children usually came to the courts in the evening after school from 4-6 pm. The teens both girls and boys took control of the tennis court from 6 pm onwards. On speaking with the different coaches, I verified my haphazardly typed field notes of the 'time-territory' sub-group formation.

I jotted down my fieldnotes onsite when I had the time. I used a lot of abbreviations and short forms to explain interactions, important dialogues, quotes as well as conversations etc. Thus my field notes aided as a perfect record of my findings to consolidate my data collection. Moreover, I felt that the experience that I had in the field drew me out as being an insider and thus contributed to me having a shared set of experiences with the participants I interviewed.

IV. The Method/Approach

This framework of study draws out an interpretive approach of analysis. It gave me access to understanding women tennis players within their own natural setting and above all in their own comfort zone. In this way, they were able to express their true experience of reality without any filters. Being a tennis player myself I was able to interpret their lived experience in the context of a broader discourse of societal framework.

Qualitative data collection is more of a non-numerical means of data collection. It refers to a more observatory form of data collection. For instance, it will take into consideration metaphors, symbols, description of things, meanings, etc. Thus, qualitative research recognizes that there is always another way to interpret the lives and stories of the people being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The observational and interview data were transcribed and analyzed using codes and the constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Although personally, I found it hectic in the beginning, I still started off by individually reading and coding each transcript and field note on my laptop. I did this in order to draw out themes under different banners which helped me sort out the true essence and meaning of 'tennis' participation in the lives of women (Dionigi, 2001). After this, the next step I resorted to was the comparison of the codes I had created with the interviews I had conducted or in other words the questionnaires filled by the women participating in the YTC and the ICTT respectively.

Since both the tournaments dealt with middle-aged women's participation, the raw data I extracted through the coding themes was more or less the same (Dionigi, 2001). This was a bit challenging because the findings among the sample participants were more or less similar. The only way in which I could cross this threshold was by refining concepts and developing a higher thematic discourse. This meant I was to combine similar themes and drop the irrelevant or repetitive themes. Despite the conscious effort taken by me to deconstruct and filter the themes, the data collected from the sample participants participating in the YTC and the ICTT reflected an obvious amount of similarities.

Therefore the only way I felt I could progress with this study was by combining my research findings from the YTC and the ICTT by creating 'common themes'. From all the data collected by me through my field notes as well as my interviews with 25 participants within the age group of 18-35, I was able to develop two main themes (Dionigi, 2001). One was: **Empowerment and Confidence**. This theme was laced with many sub-themes like engagement with the sport, body image, identity, sense of belonging. On the other hand, the second broad theme was: **Markers used for (Re)defining of one's own identity?** this theme encompasses a number of sub-themes like excitement perceived and enjoyed during the victory celebration in tennis, the way a tennis player accepts defeat, how a tennis player seeks (or avails of) room for improvement or betterment in their game as well as the snootiness exhibited by the players in the sport.

V. Finding And Discussion

Empowerment and confidence

Today's middle-aged women are in a transitional space wherein they have grown up watching women in the past who have not been allowed to invest their time and energy in sports. On the other hand, at the same time, they have grown up motivating the girl child to be more active and not bear the consequences of the past generation of women.

Therefore the middle-aged women in my study used their leisure arena as a platform to resist the mainstream stereotyping which were laced in a traditional ideology of sports, especially tennis being a game only for the pleasure of boys. Resistance is a trait that has the power to bring about a personal change or to even empower a person through the essence of confidence as it has the potential to work in intentional ways as well as in unintentional ways. The following data encompasses how the concepts of resistance and confidence were drawn out in this arena.

What am I made of?

Almost all the women participants in my study acknowledged the fact that their choice of sport had challenged their role as a 'woman' in terms of their age and profession. They demonstrated through their confidence an essence of pride and an essence of 'what they are' especially in a discussion based on a comparison between them and the 'other'. For example: "I love what I am doing in tennis...I feel rejuvenated each time I play a match, I'm able to meet a lot of other like-minded people here who especially have the same stance. Women are not weak and can play a sport and actually enjoy it...I wish there were more women encouraged into sports" (20-year-old training for the YTC.)"I feel it's about SELF MOTIVATION. Mera baccha goes to school and says "meri maa tennis khelti hai aur kaam bhi karti hai" and everyone else says, "oh meri maa housewife hai," you know, and that feels good and this makes me feel empowered (32-year-old mother training for the ICTT.) This finding revealed that resistance to the mainstream stereotyping about gender can according to Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1999) be interpreted as a form of empowering oneself. Through their talent of tennis, these women were able to display an energetic and actively fit persona of themselves which downright challenged the stereotypical passive, dependent and weak and disabled image of a middle-aged woman. This process was a period of self-discovery as the women began to recognize the fact that their quest of resisting gender expectations and norms proved them to be more confident than they thought they actually were. For instance in the case of a 29-year-old married tennis player, who narrated to me a small dialogue between her husband and her. She said that her husband had told her to enjoy herself and enroll in something that she liked as a hobby or leisure activity, instead of sitting at home all day.: "...I think he assumed that I would take up something girl-ish like a cookery class or perhaps even a tailoring class [smirks] but instead I joined tennis, a sport and my life has radically transformed ever since [smiles]." A 19-year-old teenage tennis player shared an explanation with me during our water break as she filled up my questionnaire. She said that tennis as a sport helped her combat and break away from the mainstream gender stereotyped roles she had to perform (Dionigi, 2001). : "I am always referred to or known as my father's daughter or my brother's sister but only tennis is a space wherein I feel as if I have my own identity", an identical understanding can be drawn from studies of women and their choice of Leisure. Shaw (Dionigi, 2001) argued that when leisure is interpreted "... as a situation of choice, control, and self-determination... women's participation in activities, especially non-traditional activities, can be seen to challenge restrictive social roles" (Dionigi, 2001). Thus in this way, resistance has the power to make a person feel truly self-confident and empowered.

Together-ness.

The friendships kindled and conceived out of the tennis practice sessions was a boost of confidence for a woman on the tennis field. A 35-year old tennis player expressed joy in the company of other women tennis players.... "I look forward to indulging in a game of tennis. It is not only a wonderful game ... it is a medium through which I can socialize and bond over some 'healthy' conversations ... it is a beautiful experience." Similarly another 21-year-old said: "To be honest, training is strenuous especially when you have to manage the academic pressures along with a sport you are truly dedicated to ... I feel at this time, friends play an important role as when we all train together ... we know that we encourage each other". These findings proved that these tennis players have created social and mental support for each other to undertake a physical activity.

Hocus Pocus is really all about the FOCUS

The realization that the tennis players in my study had stemmed from their effort and determination they channeled through their physical and mental conviction ability that they can achieve anything if they focus on it. One of the participants (18-year-old tennis player) had exclaimed, "I feel proud each time I am on the tennis court. I know that I am out here and that I can do this!" Another 25-year-old tennis player explained that "I always had to fight for everything I've ever got ... Each time I hold the racquet in my hand, I know what it means to me." Likewise, a 30-year-old woman tennis player stated, "I do this for myself. I do this because I am determined to prove all those wrong who said that I cannot. Who said I'm not fit." The 'will power' executed by these middle-aged tennis stars is phenomenal as they use their mind and body in such a powerful and mature

way, especially when the odds in the form of the patriarchal stereotyping is against them, thinking them unfit for a physical challenge. A key factor would be that many of my participants did face a huge challenge of 'time' in the sense that since there are only 24 hours in a day; most of the time was already used up on either fulfilling the patriarchal norms or on their own profession. It is important to note that none of the middle-aged participants in my study were retired. They were either professional or were studying or in some cases housewives. For instance, a 25-year-old tennis player said: ...“We all find our work stressful. I have channeled all my work pressure into energy which I use in tennis. Each time I take a shot, I think of all the things in the office tying me down”. Another working woman (29-year old) told me: “It all depends on an individual’s strength of character. Some are not determined so they quickly find excuses and give up. While some, on the other hand, have the strength and motivation to never give up.” This shows that the women in my study had resilience engraved in their identities and tried to attain success. These women seemed to have lived through constant challenges wherein they always needed to prove themselves. It could be assumed that they were always made to feel marginalized in the sporting world. However, it is important to note that in my study, in the case of the participants I interviewed, the element of leisure is something that a person can do rather than cannot do as this is something in their physical strength that they can achieve. This finally raised questions which lead me to creating the other main theme. Are the women tennis participants in my study actually living by a ‘predefined’ identity or are they breaking the patriarchal stereotypes and ‘redefining’ identities?

(Re)defining one’s own identity?

Since the beginning of time, it has very clearly been made known to us that competitive sport is a genre only for boys. These sports, when played by men, were not only considered as elite and professional but were also kindled with the models of egoism in the form of power and performance. Although today in recent times, there is a shift, and sports are being made available and to some level accessible to women, they have been conceived and framed in accordance to men and their physical and mental capacities as well as requirements. A subtle example would be the way in which both genders dress while playing a sport. Men, in tennis, will always wear a jersey (mostly with sleeves – to never draw too much attention to their biceps) and shorts (to show their perfectly carved legs). While on the other hand, women are made to dress skimpy as it is subconsciously told to her that if she doesn’t dress a particular patriarchal way, she won’t have an audience. Thus whether comfortable or not, a woman has to play according to the rules predetermined by society. She has to accept that fact that if she wants to attain success, she has to face ‘common’ objectification and whistling on the turf.

Hear me roar!

Nearly all of the women in my study said that when they are to play a tennis match, they are determined to WIN. This determination is not only because of the fact that they need to prove themselves in a male-dominated field but rather because they want to succeed for themselves. This sheds light on the fact that women too are competitive and wanted to attain their personal best just like men. For instance, this was seen in the case of a 20-year-old tennis player who said that “I am competitive when I play because I want to win. But this doesn’t mean that I will stoop down to any level; to attain victory”. Likewise, another 28-year-old tennis player stated that: “I like the taste of victory, but defeat shows me that there is still scope for me to be the best version of myself”. Many of the middle-aged women in my study showed off their achievement through their medal/trophy count. I was really pleased to see that women were proud of their own hard work and achievements and above all about the fact that tennis proved to be the outlet through which women were able to define their own identity and thus empowerment. For example, this was seen in the case of 22-year-old three-time consecutive gold medallist (YTC) who proudly said: “I love challenging myself. I love the game. Each time I play, I try to beat my own earlier best”. Similarly, a two-time winning 30-year-old tennis champion said: “Winning gives me a high, which makes me determined to push harder and train in the limited time I have.” This proves the point that the women in my study not only seek pleasure in the idea of ‘competitions’ but also take pleasure in the training sessions that go into the building of their identity on the tennis court. While at the same time they relish the joy of using their bodies physically in an athletic manner towards their goal or performance to test their capabilities and push themselves beyond their limits. In this, my analysis draws onto the fact that success for them means much more than actually winning or attaining victory. For example, the 23-year-old tennis player says: “I love tennis and I love to push myself towards victory ... but I love the fact that I have mastered a new skill.”

Through my understanding, this research draws on to my argument that women by pushing themselves have the ability to successfully survive in a male dominant sport. Although women were ones criticized on the basis of not having the ability, today women too are leaning towards fulfilling the criteria’s demanded by the physically value-laden ability and performance demanding model. Most of the women I talked to, told me about their rigorous practice sessions and intense training that they put themselves under to achieve their goals despite their simultaneous lifestyles. In my observations, I noticed that most of the women invested in state of the art

sporting technology. For instance, the women used training equipment and wore sporting apparel of various top brand clothing lines that would guarantee them better performance. Their choice of clothing not only helped to enhance their performance but it also helped them to train harder without them worrying about their clothes getting completely drenched in sweat.

Thus, my research built my analysis towards the notion that the discourses constituting performance and competitions were based on ideas and meaning the participants had, rather than it being a phenomenon based on age, gender or sexuality (Dionigi, 2001). This then threw light on an obvious dilemma that would rise. On one hand, the women middle-aged tennis players following in the footsteps of utilizing the state of the art sporting technology gave into the predefined dominant patriarchal norms of the game. While on the other hand, these women choose to create their own identity and break away from the grasp of patriarchy when it came down to them not following the aggressive egoism model of the dominant men's way of playing the game. This was seen in the form of the responses provided by my participants who showed that they did not have the win-at-all-costs mentality. Instead, they took pleasure in knowing the fact that they were not alone and were surrounded by like-minded women who too celebrated their physical bodily strength and will power more than their victory in a male dominating field. I feel that this trait of 'bonding' which was operationalized in the woman's performance was mainly because of the common mutual feeling of *communitas* that the women had developed especially when competing in a man's world. Turner too would have defined this as a case of women experiencing liminality together, that is, they are in a *betwixt*- a performance depicting a constant need to prove themselves while at the same time a performance portraying them as being independent. (Dionigi, 2001).

What's wrong in being selfish?

During the interview, some tennis stars shed light on the fact that life is stressful and that it is important to have some 'me time' for performing a leisure activity. A 29-year-old told me: "Variety is the spice of life. It is impossible to do the same monotonous role every day ... tennis is the banal activity I look forward to enjoying." Another 20-year-old tennis player said: "life is about balance and more importantly about multi-tasking." Therefore, I would argue that this research showed that in contemporary times, in order to redefine one's identity, some women felt that the only way they could do this was by being selfish and putting their 'needs' first. Another interesting fact I was able to conquer was today, the Western culture that we, Indian citizens (both men and women) have begun to imbibe has allowed us to actually stand up for ourselves and ask for our own 'me time'. Initially 'me time' was never a concept in traditional India instead it was all about the "we time". This to some extent not only shows a transition from old 'outdated traditions but it also throws light on the fact that India is taking a step forward towards the building up of the health discourse leading to the satisfaction of its people. However, it is important to note that this progressive change has risen brightly only over the developed *bourgie* part of the country as they not only have a cultural capital but also have the economic resources to afford this change. Despite this understanding, I reckon that more research would be required to delve into understanding the notion of 'selfishness' among women in a male-dominated sport like tennis.

This also led me to think about the fact that sometimes, women may not always have the access, ability or the will and desire to compete or invest in the sporting culture. A professional sport like tennis is perhaps only one of the many leisure activities that women can invest in. Therefore, in this way recognizing the lived experiences of middle-aged women who do not compete in the sporting environment as well as determining how they would play out their individual roles of portraying empowerment and resistance would be completely different. Using the argument of Durkheim in a postmodernist manner (with respect to a change in space and time), I would argue that this is probably because they would use a varying personal or cultural platform in the form of another leisure activity to put forth their redefined identity.

VI. Summary

According to Dorothy Smith, since the very beginning, the dominant discourse has predefined women as being the weaker and marginalised sex (Smith, 2004). Therefore the need for women to seek personal empowerment ranked the lowest on the pyramid of a woman's needs. However, the progress of women entering in the male-dominated sporting world was revolutionary as they not only showed off their physical and mental strength but also took home medals and trophies from a space which was previously inaccessible to them. Through the friendships, the like-minded people they encounter through their gaming journey; they were able to develop a sense of belonging and *communitas* (Turner, 2003) wherein they found comfort, safety and solace. The middle-aged women in my research expounded the fact that they had the opportunity to encounter a thrilling sense of joy, happiness, and pride in their achievements as well as simultaneously develop and maintain their newly defined identity, despite the odds in the form of the work pressure from their personal lives being against them (Dionigi, 2001).

At the same time, the other side to my research draws my attention to the fact that at some level these women are imbibing the dominant patriarchal influence in the sporting culture by following in the footsteps of their predetermined discourse (ideals of valuing winning, success, training, pushing themselves to their limits, practice sessions, strength, perseverance, determination, etc) and practices. Therefore to some extent, this research has raised a few questions in my mind regarding the phenomenon of middle-aged women in sports. For instance, are these women forced into absorbing the dominant discourses in order to participate in a predominantly masculine competitive sporting culture? Or are they able to break away from this pressure and redefine their own discourse wherein they can perform without any stereotyping? These questions could not have been answered within the limitations of this research paper.

VII. Evaluation/Reflection

Tennis is not all fair in 'Love' and War.

When I started playing Tennis, I was to an extent influenced by my own biases. When being reflexive, I realized that I failed to look at the picture as an outsider. However, at the time of the interviews, I was enlightened with different perspectives; some of them I was already aware of, while some of them were new. I was so fixated on the gender disparity between genders that I failed to recognize the 'women bullying women discourse' due to the caste and class-based hierarchy in tennis. That is, in other words, women of a higher caste/class bullying women from the lower caste/class.

How does one individual in tennis recognize another individual's caste and class?

The answer is simple. In sports (especially tennis) the best way of checking ones caste/class is through the official (government- based on the level at which one is playing) form filling; wherein one has to enter in their whole name and personal details, which in short determines an individual's (girl's) destiny in the sport of tennis. For instance, there was this case wherein a girl from a lower caste was subtly dissuaded from pursuing tennis only because the Brahman male coach in the tennis club felt that she was impure and was thus 'polluting'. In other words, that she was a disgrace to the sport (Dionigi, 2001). The reaction of other mothers on the training turf, to me, was appalling because instead of being women, especially mothers and supporting the girl they rather chose to back the coach in his casteist decision by arguing that, "these types of classless people lower the standards of this elitist sport".

Being a professional tennis player and witnessing this process myself, I would argue that the discourse of 'empowerment' and 'confidence', is limited only to a selected set of individuals who enjoy the benefits of not only an economic, cultural and social capital but also of self-funding (Dionigi, 2001). Building up further through my research, I would argue that it is only the 'privileged' woman who has the upper hand as 'she' herself has not only simultaneously excluded and eliminated all 'other' women from the narrative but at the same time has also exoticized her own capital.

Drawing from some of the research papers that I read on the origin of tennis as a sporting culture, I was able to comprehend that in India, a sport like tennis was brought into play by the white colonizers. Since its conceptions the Brahmins were mainly the only caste who had the luxury of interacting with the colonizers, they felt that only they had the privilege to acquire the status and capital to continue in the westerner's footsteps due to their superior hierarchical standing. Therefore, for the longest time, in India, Brahmins have dominated the sporting culture as they see themselves as the cream of the crowd with caste-based superior privileges. This was primarily because of the notion that Brahmins have enough of capital and social standing to sustain themselves and that they didn't need to work as hard as the lower caste or classes that worked or were employed by them.

Drawing from Foucault's arguments on the discourse of language as power, (Foucault, 1988) I would argue that the essence of the language used by women to interact with fellow women - in other words, interactions with human beings of their own sex is alarming. For the longest time, we are told that women need to stand up for women and support each other. This was perceived in the case of the #metoo movement (a movement that took social media by storm) which to an extent propagated the message that we need to live in sisterhood and stand up for one another by 'empowering through empathy'- resemblance to the radical feminist movement. When analyzing this in the discourse of women in the field of sports, Reges writing proves to perfectly tie up the caste/class based discourse. For instance, her writing talks about how the savarna feminists criticize the dalit (lower class/caste) women. (Kulkarni, 2014). This then goes to prove that it is not only men and patriarchy that looks down on women but also women who look down on fellow women, in India, especially in 'competitive' sports.

Would Tennis too need its own #metoo movement?

Due to tennis being an elitist sport, there is a strong presumption that there is no sexual abuse in tennis as it is a game - all fair and square. Even if there are instances of any abuse, it is usually the 'girl' who suffers as she not only has to keep it a hushed affair but also is convinced not to report about it as it will break her career.

This then, in some cases seems no different from the ‘casting couch’ discourse; wherein in this case (tennis) it will be termed as the ‘gaming couch’ discourse. This leads me to the question: Are women really empowered in sports? Drawing in the moral discourse- surely, their identities have been redefined in a negative light.

For instance, most of the times, for more or less every tournament, the dress code for women in tennis is a skirt with a jersey. The reason given for this is that the skirt perpetuates mobility. However, in actuality, the skirt is the most ‘uncomfortable’ element in tennis. “But if you want to play the sport then you need to dress accordingly” say the tennis coach at Borivali gymkhana. “How do you expect ‘people’ to come in and watch your game, if you don’t give them something to look forward to”, says one of the male tennis players. This one statement made so casually by a male tennis player sums up my entire dissertation as it shows that there is no value for a woman’s talent in sports. Therefore fighting for ‘equality’ is a far-shot, as a woman is not even respected but in terms of patriarchy “celebrated” (objectified) for her physique.

This sexualization is then carried forward in the commentary that is in the way the commentators describe the players; wherein they don’t talk about the ‘talent’ but only focus on the ‘vital’ physicality of a woman. Although there are a lot of sexual puns or provocative sexual statements made, the woman is expected to accept it as part and parcel of their decision of entering into a male-dominated society.

During one of the water break interviews I had conducted as part of my primary method of data collection, one of the tennis stars drew my attention to a case of sexual harassment that took place to her best friend a week before her National tournament. She added that the only way her friend was able to truly seek empowerment was by leaving the sport and thereby leaving her career in tennis, as she was warned and threatened against complaining.

In this way, to her, tennis was not only a sport that broke her confidence but also shattered her psychologically and emotionally. However, her decision of leaving the sport to seek her own empowerment was a way of silent protest. Her walking out of the nationals a week before the tournament did raise a few eyebrows, but was then treated with a pinch of salt after her coach’s press conference.

Similarly, there are many women in tennis who are given the threatening warning to not spill the beans. This mainly arises because women start off playing tennis at a young age. They spend most of their time with their coaches or tennis partners who are oftentimes older than them, and obey their instructions while looking up to them as their teachers. A few of the coaches treat this respect by way of pushing their students to submit to mental and in some cases, physical abuse. The female students submit in fear of tarnishing the relationship they have with the coach, and they feel that they have no way out. They have no one to talk to as well as in Elias’s words, (Elias, 1998) they have invested way too much cultural, social and economic capital into their careers that there is no way they can/want to withdraw. They convince themselves that the only way to make it ‘big’ is to silently give into the sexual politics of the sport.

VIII. Recommendation

However, the only way to terminate this form of inequality and allow the world to progress in sports is not only through encouraging more women’s participation but rather by creating an environment conducive for women’s participation. Only once this environment is created will women be able to speak up.

The conception of the #metoo movement in tennis will be possible if there is a ‘safe space’ created where players can go where they are assured that there will be someone to listen to them and they know that someone will take action; either physically or emotionally, at the most. This form of sharing atmosphere will help reduce the fear of being judged or slut-shamed, while at the same time will protect their career and reputation.

IX. Conclusion

"My coach says I run like a girl, and I said if he ran a little faster he could too" — Mia Hamm (an American sports icon)

I would argue that a discussion on the position of women in any sport is controversial. Women's sports are judged by many people as inferior. People are ignorant and believe that women's sports are not worth the time.

Women have to prove themselves in the limited opportunities they receive. They are under-appreciated in reality and are not regarded for their capabilities or skill, but are always talked about for their beauty while they cherish their achievements. Their looks are paid more attention to than the sport they are playing or their talent, which is discouraging. This objectification of their looks is not only limited to the men in the stadium watching them but is rather much broader. The athlete is also objectified by the commentators, coaches and support staff, deriding them at each opportunity they receive.

On the other hand, men are free from such objectification and attention is paid to their achievements. For instance, in a mixed doubles match in tennis, the male is generally interviewed, and during interviews where

both the players are on the panel, the reporters will ask questions directed at the male players, sidelining the woman athlete or by questioning her about how she feels about her tennis doubles partner who helped her reach success. The underlying tone of the question is that males are tantamount to success. Thus, women in the field of sports are not acknowledged for their achievements and success.

The resilience and strength that women in the sporting culture demonstrate are awe striking. Taking the case of American professional Tennis Star, Serena Williams, who won a tournament while pregnant, has been a beacon to all women to emphasize that women are liberated in this day and age. The ideals and morals of the sport could help us escape the notional normalcy created by the patriarchy. This episode has highlighted that women can multitask by being good mothers, as well as being professional and successful in each of their fields.

There are instances where women have tried to multitask and have tremendously failed. Studies have shown that this failure has devastating effects on them and affects the family, including their child's growth and development. There is an increasing amount of pressure on women to execute their role as being feminine and demonstrating the ideal, perfect, sexually appealing body. The actions performed in response affect the psyche of the next generation who see them as ideal role models.

Sports have helped kindle essential lessons in the minds of many young female and male athletes. Sports are meant to be a source of joy, bringing about pure happiness. Today, sports at the school and college levels are trying to bring back the essence of the raw sporting culture, especially in the lives of the women athletes. This will not only help boost them into taking up sports but will help in some extent to turn the tables around, in terms of the quest for raw talent over 'perfect looks', thereby allowing women to dream their dreams into reality through the abolishment of gender inequality.

As a woman athlete who has had to face the patriarchal lens and try to fit into the many folds of the dominating perspective created through hegemonic masculinity without manipulating it, thus abiding to the rules established by society, made me realize how important this Sociological research paper is to me as it has successfully made me explore and excavate into the core of the topic that is so dear to my heart.

Although my research paper looks at the disparities faced by women in the field of tennis, being as reflexive as possible as well as not wanting to camouflage a part of the narrative, it would be wrong on my part to manipulate the data I collected on this discourse. Since I want to show the whole picture, it would be wrong on my part to say that all the women tennis participants I interviewed matched the criteria of the hypothesis. There were some women who seemed pretty unfamiliar with the fact that there are disparities that exist in the sport. However, since we live in a culture where people pretend to have knowledge rather than admit that their knowledge is not really strong regarding a certain issue. Thus, to some extent I felt that the sample women participants I interviewed all did not completely agree to the argument I was putting forth but jumped on to the bandwagon of providing the 'perfect' answer out of social pressure or the fear of being 'othered'.

Questionnaire:

- Participation in which Tennis tournament?

ICTT/YTC

- Age group?

(18-25 years)/(25-35 years)

- Relationship Status?

Single/Married

- Do you have children?

Yes/No

- How many Children do you have? And what are their ages?
- What is your (full-time) profession?
- Are you financially able to support yourself especially while participating in Tennis? If not then who capitally supports your venture?
- How long are you training in this sport for?
- What are the challenges/struggles you face in this sport?
- Is it 'problematic' to be a woman in a male-dominated sport? If yes then why?
- What does defeat feel like or make you do?
- What does victory taste like or make you do?
- Anyone woman role model in Tennis? And why did you choose her in particular?

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The Racquet!

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