

## **'No hint of bulging muscles': The surveillance of sportswomen's bodies in British print media.**

### **Abstract**

Since the inception of second wave feminism, feminists have placed female bodies at the centre of the equality discourse. The female body is a contested site for feminist scholars who have identified the under and mis-representation of sportswomen's bodies in the media. This paper investigates how surveillance techniques are employed in British Sunday newspapers as a function of hegemonic power to influence gendered notions of sport and the display of female bodies in line with normative femininity. Data stems from a semi-longitudinal study which analysed the quantitative and qualitative representation of sportswomen in British print media during January 2008-December 2009. Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon and Mulvey's concept of 'gaze' are used to interpret the data through the lens of surveillance. Findings demonstrate how the surveillance of female sporting bodies occurred in four distinct ways. The categories, which emerged from the data, include: the body as (1) trivialised, (2) secondary, (3) commercial, and (4) feminine.

### **Keywords**

Sportswomen, surveillance, bodies, gaze, newspapers, journalists

### **Introduction**

As the fast-growing surveillance studies literature demonstrates there are a number of different ways of understanding surveillance, however in this paper surveillance is defined in relation to gaze, and in particular top-down, male-to-female gaze (Webb et al., 2004). In order to understand gaze it is essential to consider first Beck's concept of 'risk society', which necessitated an exponential rise in discussion of surveillance techniques. Beck (1992) states that the rise of risk society occurs concurrently with the new electronic global economy. This concept is not disputed here, however, as Koskela (2000) quite rightly points out, when Bentham constructed the 'Panopticon' in the eighteenth century, and when Foucault subsequently analysed the Panopticon's social meanings, video-surveillance and other digital surveillance techniques - an integral mechanism of monitoring society and partly upholding Beck's 'risk society' - were not available in the same way they are now.

Indeed much surveillance scholarship of late has focused on technologies in the form of ‘the gaze without eyes’ (Koskela, 2000) in line with newer technologies and the digitisation of society. However, this paper addresses a different type of surveillance; surveillance as ‘physical watching’ by newspaper journalists of sportswomen. Sports reporting functions around detailed observations and reporting those observations (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). In this paper I will argue that the observing gaze of sports newspaper journalists can be seen from a surveillance studies perspective.

The principle of newspaper surveillance is quite distinct from newer surveillance techniques, but can nonetheless be seen in a somewhat similar vein to the Panopticon: those people who are reported on in print media (sportswomen in this case) are seen by those in power (journalists and editors) who have authority to depict others when and however they choose. The people represented in newspapers cannot always ‘see’ those doing the reporting, and often do not have any influence on *how* the reporting is depicted. A principle tenant of surveillance in newspapers then is gaze.

Gaze can be seen as a central function and consequence of surveillance. In 1943 Bentham designed the architecture of a prison called the Panopticon, in which there is a central tower from where a supervisor could gaze inside every cell and prisoners could be seen, but because of a lighting effect, they in turn could not see the supervisor. Moreover, prisoners knew when they were being observed. Foucault’s (1977) analysis of the Panopticon demonstrates both the powerful gaze of the inspector and the internalised gaze and regulation of one’s own behaviour (self-surveillance) as a consequence of the structure of the prison. Webb and Quennerstedt (2010: 790) state that ‘surveillance functions as a technique of power because it perpetuates, creates or prescribes behaviour according to dominant discourses within society’. The power of surveillance then invites people to regulate their behaviour towards a particular norm when they feel they are being watched. Rasmussen and Harwood (2003) argue that such consequences of power are enacted through language, the body and social order.

### *Sport, the body, and surveillance*

The surveillance of the body in sport and how it reacts to the power of surveillance has been analysed in a number of ways. Johns and Johns (2000) discuss the surveillance and self-

surveillance techniques regarding eating which athletes employ to discipline their bodies in order to conform to aesthetic norms relating to bodies and performance in sport. They did not, however, remark on any significant gender differences in how elite athletes react to surveillance of food and their bodies.

The focus on surveillance techniques in school sports and physical education in particular sheds light on the use of gaze in sports settings and how gender is ascribed to female bodies. Webb et al. (2004) investigated surveillance as a technique of power in physical education, focusing particularly on male gaze on female teachers' and students' bodies. They conclude that the body is 'an instrument for, and the focus of, surveillance (219) with teachers bodies both the tools and objects of surveillance in the form of gaze. Although Webb et al. are keen to challenge the idea of the monolithic male gaze they concede that surveillance 'continues to function in gendered ways in the physical education culture through the male sexual gaze' (219).

### *Feminism, gaze and the body*

Mulvey's (1975) paper on 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' was ground breaking as it gave feminist media scholars the language to articulate the way in which women are viewed in media, television and cinema. Berger (1972: 47) had previously proposed the idea that 'men act and women appear' in Western culture. Mulvey advanced this concept by arguing that in film, the male camera and audience watch male characters looking at female characters, who in turn watched themselves being viewed. Mulvey argued that the determining male gaze imposes its desires onto the female body which is styled accordingly. Despite its popularity Mulvey's 'Visual pleasure' paper was widely critiqued, not least by herself. She has since stated that the questions broached in 'Visual pleasure' were limited (Mulvey, 1989) and specific to a particular movement in a particular moment in history (Mulvey, 1987). Mulvey, while standing by some of her 1975 arguments, subsequently stated that 'Visual pleasure' was 'deeply influenced by binary modes of thought...which hinders the possibility of change...The polarisation only allows an 'either/or'' (1987: 6). She explains that such binaries (active/passive, masculine/feminine, voyeuristic/exhibitionist)

'remain dependent on each other for meaning...they cannot be shifted easily into a new phase or a new significance. There is no space in between or space outside such a pairing' (6).

While there is much debate about the situatedness of Mulvey's 1975 theory many scholars have used the concept to advance understanding of the gendered gaze. Young (1990) describes the effects of the anonymous male gaze:

the woman lives her body as object as well as subject...in sexist society women are frequently regarded by others as objects and mere bodies...part of the situation of being woman is that of living the ever-present possibility that one will be gazed upon as mere body, as shape and flesh...The source of this objectified bodily existence is in the attitudes of others regarding her, but the woman herself often actively takes up her body as a mere thing. She gazes upon it in the mirror, worries about how it looks to others, prunes it, shapes it, moulds and decorates it' (155).

Blackmore (1999) expands on Young's idea by suggesting that the male gaze on the female body is a subtle form of control, and the female body is objectified through the male sexual gaze. Feminist sports scholars widely agree that the female body is a contested site due in part to issues of control and autonomy (O'Reilly and Cahn, 2007). Since the inception of second wave feminism feminists have placed female bodies at the centre of the equality discourse. From campaigns for women's autonomous medical control over their bodies (Brace-Govan 2010) to debates about slimness and the 'ideal' female form (Bordo, 2003), the female body has been central to the feminist movement. Representation was a key aspect of Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) seminal text *Le Deuxième Sexe*. She argued that men are in control of how women are represented and therefore define what it is to be a woman, which limits women's access to certain parts of public life.

Fopp (2002) discusses the link between power and surveillance, arguing that groups or individuals in power or who have power also have the potency to conceal or camouflage it from others. In this way Mulvey's theory of gaze and surveillance studies can be approached together to understand how sportswomen are aware of media surveillance of their bodies

and thus adjust their behaviour. However, they may at times be unaware of the media's surveillance techniques in the reporting of their bodies due to the subtlety with which the media can function.

Bringing together concepts of surveillance, media reporting and gaze can culminate in theories of agenda setting as the overarching rationale for the surveillant gaze of female bodies in sports reporting. Hardin (2005) employs the term 'gatekeeping' for the decision-making process editors use to choose stories, which in turn shapes the social reality that readers 'view'. Hardin is sceptical of the debate that readers' interests influence sports editors. Most editors in her sample were male (97.5%) and white (96%). She found that editors determined the content of sports news based on their own sense of audience interest, which she argued was 'embedded in myth not reality' (72).

### *Female bodies in sport*

This investigation is situated in the context of the under-representation of sportswomen in textual and visual media coverage, which is widely acknowledged by sports media scholars (author removed). Qualitative investigations reveal the way in which female sporting bodies are treated differently from male sporting bodies and this paper will argue that this is in part due to the mostly male surveillant gaze of female bodies. I explore, thus, the monitoring of sportswomen's bodies through the lens of media reporting as a form of surveillance which produces a categorisation of female sporting bodies in print media.

### **Method**

This paper discusses how sportswomen are subject to surveillance techniques in their media representation by adopting the concept that women are reduced to the sum of their bodies as part of hegemonic patriarchal overtures in popular culture. A number of feminist scholars have discussed how women's bodies are fragmented in society. Grosz (1994: 3) informs that the human subject is a being 'made up of two dichotomously opposed characteristics: mind and body' where the mind is privileged and the body is the 'suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart'. Mulvey links bodies to oppression: 'mind/body opposition is characteristic of other oppositions of dominance...and in each case the oppressed are linked to nature (the body) and the dominant to culture (the mind)' (1987: 11). Grosz argues that

for feminists the body is not necessarily the weaker sibling of the mind having ‘the added bonus of inevitably raising the question of sexual difference in the way that the mind does not’ (1994: vii). However, she explains that the male/female opposition, ‘where man and mind, woman and body, become representationally aligned’ explains the centrality of the body in feminist literature.

A number of studies have discussed the media surveillance of female sporting bodies, however, none give a comprehensive account of the varied ways in which sportswomen’s bodies are ‘viewed’ in British print media. This investigation aims to create a categorisation of how female bodies are subject to surveillance techniques in sports news. The data set includes 25,954 articles and 22,717 photos over a 24-month period. The newspapers included in the sample are: *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, the *Mail on Sunday*, and the *Sunday Express*.

‘Numbers in the sense of quantities of coverage, are not the whole picture...how women are described also matters’ (Eastman and Billings, 2000: 196). Elsewhere I have analysed the quantitative data from this investigation which provide an understanding of how much, or rather how little, media coverage sportswomen receive compared to sportsmen, and how that coverage is organised in British middle-brow Sunday newspapers (author removed). Here I will argue that sportswomen’s bodies are viewed in terms of four specific categories, which emerged from the data. They include: the body as (1) trivialised, (2) secondary, (3) commercial, and (4) feminine.

The sexualised female body has an important place in the investigation of the surveillance of female bodies in sports media. It was the most common way in which sportswomen’s bodies were viewed in print media. However, its importance is such that it warrants its own space and analysis elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. To try to analyse the extensive material collected on the sexualised body would undermine the seriousness of the topic and the bearing it has on wider understandings of the ‘active woman’ (Choi, 2000). Moreover, aside from the depth of material of ‘sexualised bodies’ the complexity of data requires significant space. For example, my data suggests that ‘sexualised bodies’ as a category of analysis includes

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<sup>1</sup> For literature on the sexualisation of sportswomen’s bodies see Lenskyj, 1998; Harris and Clayton, 2002; Bettis and Adams, 2006; Sailors et al., 2012; Weber and Carini, 2012.

sportswomen and ‘other’ types of women’s bodies, such as WAGs, female fans, and glamour models. However, given the pervasive nature of sexualised coverage in sports reporting and its normative value, references to sexualised bodies are made in this paper, due to the sometimes multiple and overlapping surveillance techniques creating multiple and overlapping categories of female bodies.

## Findings

### *Trivialised Bodies*

Sportswomen’s bodies can be trivialised in a number of ways, which are: being dependent on men (particularly partners, husbands, or coaches), using task-irrelevant reporting (focusing on sexuality, clothes and activities outside of sport), relationship status and highlighting appearance and personality over sporting achievements.

The focus on female sexuality by newspapers often appears in conjunction with representations of women as dependent on men in the trivialisation of their bodies. *The Observer* reported that a Newmarket horse trainer, Gary Kellaway, was allegedly having an affair with an apprentice jockey: ‘She won the Ian Carnaby Selling Stakes with horse Avoca Dancer and was presented with a stick of Brighton Rock, “it’s the biggest I’ve had for a while” she jokes’ (September 7, 2008: 19). The female jockey’s achievement is trivialised by framing her as connected romantically to her male trainer and through the sexualisation of her body, the sexual innuendo, and the phallic form of the prize, a stick of Brighton rock. Part of the third wave feminist discourse centres on achieving equality with men through women’s ability to discuss their sex life freely and without judgement. However, there are two issues here: firstly it is only the woman who discusses her sex life, while men’s coverage in sports reporting is predominantly task-relevant. Secondly, the woman in the story is nameless and therefore lacks any agency. This invisibility is contrary to any debate about women’s ‘sexual liberation’. The female jockey is completely over-shadowed by her trainer, Gary Kellaway, and is only highlighted in reference to a sexual comment, thus viewing her in a purely sexualised way. There is another way to interpret this story and that is through Mulvey’s idea of the female subject of the male gaze as exhibitionist. However, considering Scholes’s 1982 essay ‘Uncoding Mama: The Female Body as Text’ we can see from this example of the female jockey and her phallic Brighton rock that the female body is still

subordinate to male desires, even if seen as exhibitionist, because the sexual code is phallic; Scholes argues that the phallic sexual code functions to privilege male pleasure in all representations of sexuality at the expense of and to the exclusion of female pleasure (Scholes, 1982).

Sportswomen's bodies are also trivialised by the media who focus on their appearance and personality. King (2007) states that in the 1980s, media coverage of sportswomen 'used language that could be construed as celebrating looks and style more than athletic performance' (2007: 196). Bernstein (2002) argues that this trend has continued into the 1990s and the new millennium. Data presented here supports this continuing trend. For example, in an article which detailed the ten contenders of the annual BBC Sport's Personality of the Year Award, the second 'contender' on the list, Jessica Ennis, was described as 'The planet's best all-round woman athlete who has the complete package of looks, personality and ability' (*Mail on Sunday*, December 13, 2009: 74). The male gaze in this news story privileges the aesthetic over the physical; in the description of why she constitutes a 'complete package' the last thing that is mentioned is her physical ability. This piece of reporting can be seen as a classic surveillant gaze in that the male journalist watches the male coach observe the body of a female athlete. Grosz (1990) advances Mulvey's theory of gaze by highlighting that the castration complex views female genitalia as not only different from male genitalia, but also as lacking. The male gaze consequently puts distance between themselves and femininity through the vehicle of voyeurism. Mulvey argues that fetishism averts male fear of the female body, 'the female star is turned into an ideal beauty...the camera endlessly lingers on the spectacle of female beauty, allowing the male spectator to disavow her physical "lack"' (Smelik, 2007: 181). In the example of Jess Ennis the reporter allows the reader to imagine the visual pleasure of this female 'complete package' while also recognising that her 'ability' is ultimately lacking in the male-dominated world of elite sport.

### *The Body as Secondary*

In *The Sunday Telegraph* an article titled 'New, Slim-Line Serena Hopes Loss Will Lead to Net Gains' (January 13, 2008: 9) discussed the successful female tennis player's weight:

The loss of nearly a stone since she was last here has done nothing to diminish the Australian press's fascination with the vital off-court statistics of Serena Williams - and everything to reinforce the respect of her rivals...

This type of reporting of female bodies as secondary can be interpreted by employing Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon whereby the inspector views the inmates who in turn feel this gaze, view themselves and adapt their behaviour accordingly. Williams in this example is gazed upon by the media, who regularly comment about her weight, and most frequently in derogatory ways. It can also be suggested that she is subject to lateral surveillance by her peers. Her body is viewed as secondary in two ways; firstly it is seen as 'weighing' her down – the social construction of the anxiety women face regarding their bodies (Bordo, 2003), and secondly her athletic body is secondary to her lived, embodied and 'weighty' body. Williams absorbs the media gaze and adjusts her behaviour, by losing weight, in reaction to media gaze. Duncan (1994) references Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon in relation to unrealistic female body shapes which are promoted by *Shape* magazine. She argues that textual mechanisms influence and invite a continuous self-monitoring behaviour in women.

In terms of the athletic female body O'Reilly and Cahn (2007) describe the female athlete as an oxymoron in the battle to overturn the concept of sport as innately masculine. Boyle and Haynes (2009: 123) state that sport is a 'sexual battleground' where women have to 'play the game' in order to participate. Media discourses mirror these gendered ideals in sports reporting leading to significant differences in the way that women and men are reported on and the surveillant male-to-female gaze enhances the practices which sports reporting initiates by sharpening the lens aimed at female bodies and simultaneously camouflaging the source.

The British media tend to represent sportswomen as secondary to men by framing them as outsiders to the national agenda. 'Brits - and Victoria - Look Good for Huge Haul of Gold Medals' (*Express on Sunday*, August 3, 2008: 109) referred to the British track cycling team and the national expectation that they would win several gold medals at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. Overall the GB track cycling team won 12 gold medals, two by women,

Victoria Pendleton and Rebecca Romero. However, in the 2008 Games there were seven races available for men and only three for women in track cycling. Overall 153 male indoor cyclists competed in the Beijing velodrome compared to 35 women (Beijing 2008 Olympics, 2008). Regardless of the impossibility of women winning as many gold medals as men, the article in the *Sunday Express* frames Victoria Pendleton as outside the GB team by saying ‘Brits - and Victoria’. Her status, and therefore self, is classed as secondary to the male cyclists who would seem to be the ‘real’ athletes representing Great Britain. Koivula (1999) confirms this by stating that on a national level ‘the performance of women athletes was less important and less interesting than the performance of their male counterparts’ (1999: 597).

Mulvey argues that the image of women’s bodies are ‘cut up’ and edited into fragmented, malleable pieces. This is particularly evident in digital surveillance studies. For example, Monahan (2009) discusses video surveillance, gender and social control. He suggests that video surveillance can produce distortion when some events are not captured in their entirety, and that surveillance techniques discriminate against female bodies resulting in the masculinisation of public space. Using Monahan’s conceptual category of discrimination by abstraction is useful to think about how the filtering of female bodies and stripping away social contexts can leave women’s bodies fragmented into body parts, the sum of which do not always make a whole. In this example of Pendleton she is cut out of the national agenda, fragmented and exiled to exist in a separate place away from the ‘real’ athletes.

Mulvey argued that in cultural products, and in this case newspaper stories and images, the principle way of deflecting male fear of the female body is through sadism, ‘the woman’s body has to be controlled and inserted into the social order’ (Smelik, 2007: 181). The media’s adoption of surveillance techniques have the purpose of watching over the gender hierarchy in sports reporting, maintaining it, and furthering its visibility. Lenskyj’s (2013) argument that women are on the sidelines of sport supports the idea that the pervasive policing of women’s bodies by the media ensures that readers understand women’s ‘proper place in sport’ - literally secondary to sportsmen.

### *Commercial Bodies*

The surveillance of women's bodies as commercial in sports media occurred only in *The Observer*. The relevant news items discuss sportswomen's commerciality in two opposing ways, as having commercial capital and as not being commercially viable. Sportswomen's sex appeal and conformity to femininity greatly impacts on their commerciality; news stories view sportswomen as more commercially valuable when they conform to certain 'feminine' beauty ideals in their appearance. The commerciality of the sportswomen here refers to the sale of the club's kit and by extension the interest in the women's football club. The ironically titled article, 'Women's Lib News' read,

Dutch women's side FC De Rakt say their new 'sexy kits' are 'no publicity stunt'. Skirts and tight tops promoted a rush of hits on the club's website. 'Many girls have wanted to play in skirts'. 83% of *Das Bild* readers say all women should wear skirts during games (*The Observer*, September 21, 2008: 5).

Although the sportswomen are represented as commercial, as in their ability to sell goods, and perhaps be 'goods' themselves, because there was 'a rush of hits on the club's website', it would seem that this new-found popularity of the women footballers was due to the 'sexy kits' which promoted a rise in sales and interest. A top-down male-to-female gaze is apparent here as women's bodies are seen as 'sexy' in 'skirts and tight tops', which contrasts with the usual football kit for men: loose shorts and t-shirts. A lateral surveillance is also evident in this example: 'many girls wanted to play in skirts' suggests a woman-to-woman gaze which transforms into self-surveillance (Andrejevic, 2005). Both gazes reinforce societal norms of normative femininity.

In the case of the Panopticon, the tower's lighting which created the illusion around the prison's cells of being watched was designed to control and prescribe particular modes of inmate behaviour. Similarly in newspapers it can be argued that journalists create an illusion whereby they ascribe gendered characteristics to sportswomen who in turn jointly alter their behaviour, or at least accept the representation or re-presentation assigned to them (Dyer 2002). Monahan (2009: 287) states that surveillance systems 'operate under the logics of disembodied control at a distance' which 'artificially abstract bodies' and 'aggravate gender' inequalities by distancing them from their social contexts. However, using Koskela's (2000) concept of the masculinisation of space and placing this in Beck's risk

society, Monahan argues that women ‘begrudgingly accept surveillance in exchange for the alleged promise of increased safety (2009: 289). However, in the case of sportswomen accepting the journalist’s surveillant gaze for perhaps better media exposure and therefore potential sponsorship opportunities, sportswomen are arguably in peril of losing their identity.

It could be argued that professional sportspeople are never far from a surveillant gaze given the proliferation of media gathering tools (eg iphones) and the intensification of media interest in the minutiae of the private and public lives of those in the spotlight (Jackson, 2013). This is mirrored by the commercial capital of elite athletes; during competitions, in some training sessions, in post-match interviews, and increasingly as athletes adopt the position of celebrities advertising a plethora of commercial products, it can be argued that the actuality of the gaze is constant. If so, the internalisation of the gaze and the self-regulation of behaviour is a never-ending process.

The surveillance of women’s bodies in this category also included female sports bodies as de-commercialised. These types of articles tended to report on typically ‘feminine-appropriate’ sports such as netball and hockey (Matteo, 1986). For example, *The Observer* published an article on netball denouncing the spectacle of this sport based on its commercial value: ‘After all girls played it in big knickers...what possible interest could there be?’ (February 22: 2009). This article views women netball players as having non-commercial bodies because they wear ‘big knickers’ as part of the netball uniform. It makes four assumptions about netball players: firstly, that the sport is not interesting because the women do not dress sexily and secondly, that the only interest in watching women play sport is related to their sex appeal. Thirdly, the author assumes that women’s interest in netball is irrelevant, and finally that netball is not a ‘proper’ sport. The surveillant gaze in this type of article is apparent and troubling; not only are women seen as lacking, or ‘other’ to men, but also they are not gazed at as sexual beings. The question then is how are they gazed upon? The male gaze here is critical and deconstructs the female body; it is neither athletic, nor sexual and therefore the athlete’s womanhood is questionable. This netball example also demonstrates how the surveillant gaze reduces women to mere body parts given that they wear ‘big knickers’. One of the principle reasons that the surveillant gaze in

sports reporting must be addressed is that surveillance techniques which deconstruct the female sporting body and remove its social capital reinforce and aggravate, in subtle ways, the gender stratification which sports reporting initiates.

By observing, through surveillance techniques, certain sportswomen's bodies as commercial or de-commercialised, sports media make judgements about the type of woman who is viewed. In this case, sportswomen willing to adopt normative femininity are gazed upon by the media and praised for their compliance to the gender order in sport.

### *Feminine Bodies*

The surveillance of sportswomen's bodies as feminine is the most common media mechanism. It is instrumental in framing female athletes in line with normative femininity. For example *The Sunday Telegraph* printed a photograph of Ana Ivanovic playing tennis. In the photo her dress is flying up showing her tight shorts underneath and the caption reads: 'Ivanovic sitting pretty for top spot' (May 18, 2008: 14). By framing Ivanovic as 'pretty' the focus on her athleticism is avoided.

In *The Observer* an article contrasted the physiques of Marion Jones and Alyson Felix, both have competed for USA track and field team in 100m and 200m. Duncan Mackay writes, 'Unlike Jones, Felix is slender with no hint of bulging muscles, one of the main characteristics of athletes who have bulked up on performance-enhancing drugs' (May 11, 2008: 11). Both athletes' bodies here are subject to a surveillant gaze. Felix's body is gazed upon in a way that reinforces Mulvey's idea of the female character as the object of the male sexualising gaze. Jones, on the other hand, is subject to a different gaze which references her recent revelation about taking performance-enhancing drug use. Despite this, it could be argued that the gaze felt by Jones is also about reinforcing the gender order in sport whereby 'bulging muscles' on sportswomen are regarded as unnatural, unfeminine and as such must indicate another agenda at play.

Also in *The Observer* Richard Evans wrote a story about women's tennis at Wimbledon, 'Jankovic's fingers may have attracted attention - her nail varnish was blue' (June 1, 2008: 16). This example demonstrates how Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990)

compliments Mulvey's theory of gaze, and in particular the idea of sportswomen enhancing their femininity by adorning it, maintaining it and shaping it according to societal norms and perceived expectations for women, and particularly sportswomen. The surveillant gaze in this sense could be said to reflect the sportswoman's attention to her aesthetic feminine ideal, mirroring her efforts, and to ensure adherence to these norms.

An article in the *Express on Sunday* stated: 'She had an astonishing elegance and beauty on court...muscle-bound limbs that go on forever' (June 29, 2008: 112). This story focused on Venus Williams, the seven-time Grand Slam tennis player, represented here as hyper-feminine, an object of beauty to be admired. The 'muscle-bound limbs' comment hardly intimates the athleticism and success of Williams. Harris and Clayton (2002) argue that such mechanisms 'drive the audience's attention away from Williams the athlete' (407). Stone and Horne (2008) demonstrate that descriptions such as 'astonishing beauty' diminish the athletic stature of sportswomen. They explain that these are 'media strategies used to marginalise females within the text' (2008: 103). However, surveillance techniques enhance the simple reporting of this story in that they ensure the reader understands that Williams is a woman. This also sends out a message to other women and particularly female athletes, to perform their gender, thus encouraging lateral surveillance.

There is a tendency for women in typically 'masculine' sports to actively seek a feminised media representation to balance their participation in 'female-inappropriate' sports. *The Observer* reported that,

Jaslyn Hewitt...one half of a celebrity couple...now into bodybuilding...doesn't want to bulk up like a 'she-man'...Jaslyn says breathlessly, 'I love my job and it's great hanging out with Rob (actor husband). We laugh all the time' (June 1, 2008).

Three recent studies on women in boxing, wrestling and body building (Mennesson, 2000; Sisjord and Kristiansen, 2009; Roussel et al., 2010) have argued that when women participate in typically masculine sports they more frequently engage in the use of feminine beauty practices in order to appear less masculine. Roussel et al. (2010) claim that female bodybuilders are generally discredited outside the subculture of bodybuilding. They contend that female bodybuilders have 'bodies widely discredited, arousing shock and disgust' (2010: 104). The female bodybuilder therefore has a dangerous body as it lingers between the

genders in terms of image. Hence Hewitt enhances her femininity, and her heterosexuality by saying, ‘it’s great hanging out with Rob’ and recognising the impact of her sport on women as she ‘doesn’t want to bulk up like a she-man’. The author of the article is complicit in framing Hewitt as feminine by saying that she talks ‘breathlessly’. In this way Hewitt’s self-presentation as ‘feminine’ is mirrored by the media coverage she receives.

Using the lens of surveillance it becomes apparent that sportswomen in typically ‘male’ sports adopt ‘feminine’ behaviour and styling not only because of trying to justify their place in ‘female-inappropriate’ sports, but also due to gaze. In this example Jaslyn Hewitt reacts to the journalist’s, male readers’ and her husband’s gaze. She consequently adjusts her behaviour in order to continue to entertain their gaze. This example helps to illustrate how using the lens of surveillance provides a better understanding of the multiple techniques which the media employ in their reporting of female athletes.

All of these examples of feminine bodies demonstrate the importance of gender performativity amongst female athletes, whether real, reported or imagined. It could be said that the surveillant gaze initiates the performance, reinforces this practice and monitors women’s compliance with gender roles in sport. This can be seen most clearly in the controversy which surrounded a young South African 800m runner. In the wake of the Caster Semenya scandal *The Sunday Telegraph* reported:

The world governing body of athletics has asked scientific experts to come up with a clear definition of what constitutes a woman to help it with future gender questions in the wake of the Caster Semenya controversy (October 11, 2009: 10)

This news story avoids the word ‘body’ and instead focuses on identity in the shape of sex. However, the questions about Caster Semenya’s sex revolved around her biological body, which was deemed to look and perform not as female. This story reports that the world governing body of athletics (of which there has never been a female president) asked scientists to decide what it is to be female. Sullivan (2011) shows how the distinct binary of male and female bodies in sport is reinforced by gender verification testing procedures which ensure that sex segregation is adhered to in sport. The Barr Sex Test was introduced to the 1968 Olympics after claims that certain women appeared too ‘manly’ with unattractive muscles (Brace-Govan, 2010). The case of Caster Semenya is a more recent

example of how the viewed female body sparks gender suspicion which is translated into biological testing. The power of the *visibly* female body is thus undeniable<sup>2</sup>.

The male surveillant gaze in this piece of reporting not only views female bodies as lacking, and in this specific case deviant, but it also demonstrates Webb and Quennerstedt's (2010) point about surveillance and power. In other words that surveillance is powerful because it perpetuates dominant societal discourses of acceptable femininity. The power Mulvey (1975) describes of the male gaze upon the female form further enhances the idea of surveillance as a form of power and control over women's bodies – women who have little or no control over this gaze.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has explored the way in which female sporting bodies are subject to media surveillance framed in the context of male 'gaze'. Female bodies are categorised in four distinct ways: (1) trivialised, (2) secondary, (3) commercial, and (4) feminine.

The mis-representation of sportswomen via media surveillance of their bodies relies on a male gaze. Ross and Carter (2011) support the argument that women continue to be marginalized, 'as journalists still privilege men's voices as the authoritative expert...the landscape of news has changed very little over the past decade' (1161). This authoritative male expert positions the female body as passive and powerless. My data reveals that the male gaze in sports media reporting monitors sportswomen's sexuality and ensures adherence to normative femininity in sport. Examples from the newspapers demonstrate how sportswomen's bodies are viewed as trivial and secondary to those of sportsmen. The policing of women's bodies in line with normative femininity calls into question their commerciality and usefulness by viewing them as products. The feminine body builds on the previous categories and demonstrates how the surveillant male gaze functions to obligate sportswomen comply with hegemonic conceptions of femininity. The four ways in which female bodies are viewed by sports media contribute to social sorting via surveillance techniques which aim to maintain the status quo of male hegemony in sport.

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<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that the case of Caster Semenya requires significant academic attention in terms of the mediation of the scandal and the implications for understandings about gender and sport, which is not in the scope of this paper. Initial analyses of the Caster Semenya case can be found in Nyong'o (2010), Cooky et al. (2012), and Cooky and Dworkin (2013).

Agenda-setting theory allows us to understand the reasoning behind such close observation and manipulation of the female body; dominant narratives of gender, like those produced by major media outlets, shape societal understandings of gender roles, and specifically in this case, in sport. The descriptors used to categorise sportswomen provide readers with a lens through which to interpret female bodies in sport. However, the media do not present a comprehensive picture of sportswomen; the surveillance of the female body through the lens of the male gaze renders the athletic female body invisible. This suggests that media surveillance can be used as a tool to exclude certain types of bodies and subsequently prevent subversion from the normalised feminine ideal.

Third wave feminist discourse challenges the idea of a monolithic male gaze in order to recognise and empower the female gaze, however it is widely agreed that the sports media room is male-dominated and often determined by hegemonic masculine ethos (Eastman and Billings, 2000; Hardin, 2005). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century ‘a salient media message has been the usefulness of sport as a social control mechanism, with two important complimentary functions: to shape young people’s behaviour in socially acceptable ways and to define and entrench hegemonic femininity and masculinity’ (Lenskyj, 2013: 146). The rapid increase in surveillance in all its formats (Marx, 2012) adds to the already precarious place for women in sports media by ‘viewing’ female bodies in particularly restricted ways. If the body is an entity onto which social values are imposed, then women are the victims of this practice in sports media. The creation of knowledge about women’s place in sport through media surveillance paradoxically marginalises them while placing them at the centre of the male gaze.

The surveillance of sportswomen, as discussed here, exemplifies the polarization of gender in sports media coverage. The status quo which has a propensity to promote the framing of women’s bodies in ways un-related to sport, misconstrues the role of sportswomen in order to generate sensational news and maintain hegemonic dominance in sport. Questions about who does the ‘viewing’ and why such surveillance exists remain unanswered. Smelik (2007) states that women are taking more active roles in the media and film, however, in the most physically ‘active’ space of newspapers – the sports sections – women are still often reduced

to the sum of their bodies, by the male, agenda-setting gaze, understood here within the framework of surveillance.

Media reporting is not synonymous with surveillance and vice versa. Although not all sports reporting is surveillance, surveillance is a process that is particularly relevant to sports reporting. For example, this paper demonstrates evidence of top-down, male-to-female gaze from journalist to female athlete, laterally between athletes, and when sportswomen enact self-surveillance and absorb the gaze from above, adjusting their behaviour accordingly. Despite this, the process of surveillance produces outcomes which problematize the concept and practice of surveillance. One of the issues is that surveillance is so ingrained in sports reporting; the symbiotic relationship between sports and surveillance techniques means that to extract one from another means that surveillance must also be separated from simply reporting. It could be suggested that this revisits Mulvey's critique of her 1975 'Visual pleasure' paper, in that envisaging a new sports reporting landscape devoid of surveillance techniques is made more complex when a dualistic relationship exists which is established and normalised.

One of Mulvey's greatest criticisms about her own work on gaze posited that the success of 'Visual pleasure' must be seen in the context of its time. In other words that the 1970s were a time period in which feminism was gaining momentum and the important political ground of debates about women's bodies were broached. Mulvey situates 'Visual pleasure' in this era, commenting that it can only be truly useful in the 1970s which were a period of significant change for the feminist movement. However, revisiting her arguments now might be useful if we consider that we are possibly entering a new era of feminism (a fourth or fifth wave?). In the post-London 2012 'gender games' cultural landscape where hopes of athletic legacy couched in discourses of social mobility and increased health are fading, small flickers of light appear; while the media continue to fixate on the female body an alternative voice can be heard, one which rejects the constant surveillant gaze on the female form, one which might sound somewhat similar to that of the 1970s. Mulvey claims that in 'Visual pleasure' she wanted to question 'so what next, then?' since change in the 1970s seemed imminent (1987: 6). Currently change does not seem to be imminent, however, there is 'noise', and when it reaches a certain pitch, change may follow.



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