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***Hot Shot*: gendered signifiers and the depiction of women in a Taiwanese sport idol television drama**

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This article explores the depiction of female characters and the gendered signifiers that are presented in *Hot Shot*, a sports-themed television drama featuring a cast of popular Taiwanese idols or icons whose stories centre on basketball and the connections between sport, dreams, love and friendship. In order to understand the function and value of female characters in *Hot Shot*, Chatman's (1978) narrative structure was deployed as the analytical framework to deconstruct plots and settings. In addition, an adapted version of Propp's (1968) classification of the actions of characters was used. The findings revealed that the plots of *Hot Shot* were focused on competition, training and success, and the settings were mostly basketball courts and tournaments. Although female characters involved in these settings were associated with competition and training, they were marginalized in supportive roles. Moreover, strategies of representing women in *Hot Shot*, including disparagement of athletic ability to emphasize femininity and feminine body image, highlighted the female characters' subordinate roles. Finally, in relation to gender-appropriateness, stereotypes drawn from male sport were pervasive in *Hot Shot*, resulting in a gendered discourse permeating the text.

Keywords: sport; TV drama; narrative analysis; masculinity; gender roles; gender ideology

Introduction

Initially, idol dramas on Taiwanese television channels were imported from Japan through copyright purchases, as part of a more general trend which began in the 1970s. The first locally produced idol dramas did not appear until 2001. Subsequently, numerous Taiwanese idol dramas have been produced, thereby fundamentally altering the ecology of such dramas in Taiwan (Liu, 2006). Idol dramas consist of relatively few episodes, fast-paced narratives, plots that closely resemble real-life situations and cultural trends and roles played by young idols or famous icons. When it arrived in Taiwan, this genre of drama instantly became a broadcast priority for Taiwanese TV channels (Chen, 2008). Idol dramas are considered to closely resemble real life, and their romantic love stories cause viewers to develop expectations and imaginings in relation to their own lives. In addition, the intense plot developments in the shows frequently resonate with the audience's own life experiences (Liu, 2006).

Taiwanese idol dramas are similar to North American soap operas, in which plot developments typically revolve around the characters' relationships. Furthermore, these dramas emphasize realist theatrical performances or expressive techniques and use protagonists' narrative processes to convince viewers and listeners that the plots are realistic. These dramas, past examples of which include *Dallas* and *Dynasty* are frequently

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set in family contexts and focus on the portrayal of private emotions and relationships amongst the characters (Abercrombie, 1996; Fiske & Hartley, 1978). However, differences in dramatic themes and categories result in other differences, such as in narrative content and setting or context design. For example, *ER* was filmed primarily in a hospital setting, whereas *Friends* was based on daily events that were developed into various plots. Furthermore, the methods of representation used in various types of dramas vary depending on changes in time and social environments (Abercrombie, 1996). The primary difference between idol dramas and soap operas is that idol dramas comprise fewer episodes. The majority of Taiwanese idol dramas conclude after approximately 20 episodes (Liu, 2006). Additionally, the chief target group for idol dramas is teenagers, whereas the audience for soap operas, which are typically shown during the day and on weekdays, primarily consists of housewives (Brown, 2009).

In 2002, Taiwanese TV channels first incorporated basketball, a popular sport in Taiwan, into a TV drama. *My MVP Valentine* featured national basketball team players in leading roles and members of an idol pop group playing other characters. In 2007, another street basketball-themed idol drama, *Hooping Dulcinea*, was aired, featuring various theatrical and dramatic elements, such as basketball itself, but also gang rivalry and love affairs. Subsequently, TV dramas, idol dramas and sports have become closely interwoven. In addition to basketball, other sports, including billiards, dancing and baseball, have been themes of idol dramas. In the summer of 2008, the sports-themed idol drama *Hot Shot* was produced, featuring a cast of popular Taiwanese idols or icons whose stories evolved around a basketball theme and the integration of sports, dreams, loves and friendships.

Idol dramas offer platforms for establishing imaginings regarding social reality and practicing social relationships. However, differing from other sports TV dramas and films, which had focused on men, *Hot Shot* featured women in central roles, even though the storyline was centred on men's basketball. For example, the coach of the team, who led and trained the players, was portrayed by a woman. Additionally, the show contained scenes in which female basketball players' performances were commended. There was also a mysterious female street basketball player with incredible talent. This representational approach departed from previous sports media's emphasis on male roles and thus offered viewers a novel experience in watching a sport-related TV drama.

Sports media and images of female athletes

Narratives fundamentally entail storytelling, and involve performances and speech acts that describe a series of events that have happened or are happening (Jensen, 2002; Stokes, 2003). According to narratology, all stories should comprise a set/group of structures that support the formation and narration of the story. Texts that possess narrative forms or modes allow viewers and listeners to comprehend the places presented in the narrative, and narrative structure and narrative discourse are the two main dimensions of narrative study (Jensen, 2003; Stokes, 2003). Analytical methods that are based on narrative theory facilitate researchers' elucidation of the structures of texts/works, and allow them to adopt objective critical perspectives for analysing and understanding the ideology constituted by texts during the process of narrative deconstruction (Stokes, 2003). Chatman (1990) proposed that a narrative consists of two components: discourse and story. Story refers to a chain of events, and discourse refers to the approaches by which the story content is expressed and transmitted. These two dimensions are sub-categorized as follows: (1) story is categorized as consisting of plot, setting and characters and describes the people, events,

time and space or location of the story, and (2) discourse is categorized as comprising process and stasis statements. Process statements emphasize that specific characters and actions constitute the key elements of a story structure. Stasis statements tend to narrate the development and presentation of a story through elements that vary as the characters change, such as sound effects and asides. These two forms of representation explicate and locate the deeper meanings underlying the narratives and trends in narrative development (Chatman, 1978, 1990).

All film and TV scripts and texts contain narrative structures. Abercrombie (1996) indicated that TV texts, similar to novels and films, feature specific narrative structures that are presented on screen through the integration of discourse and story. These comprise plot narratives and screen narratives that undergo selective shooting and editing and become shows that have specific meanings/objectives (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). In TV dramas, narrative theory is used as the framework for presenting dramatic content and ideology, including sociocultural contexts and is incorporated into the detailed dynamic and static statements, plots, characters and scenes or settings. Propp (1968) analysed folktales and proposed a sequence of 32 functions in narrative structures and seven character types as the basic framework for understanding narrative content. In particular, narrative structure comprises preparation, trouble, transfer, struggle, return and ending, and character types or functions include hero, villain, provider, dispatcher, false hero, helper and sought-for-person. Furthermore, the majority of stories adopt the narrative model wherein hero fights villain, adventure or conquest occurs, and mission is accomplished (Allen, 1992; Chen, 2007; Chao, 2010; Propp, 1968). During the narrative process, a character develops a unique narrative style that becomes his or her trademark and exhibits specific characteristics. Subsequently, the character interacts with others, constituting story and narrative development (Harriss, 2008). Therefore, understanding the narrative structure of TV texts by conducting narrative analysis can facilitate researchers in systematically identifying the various narrative elements in texts and the correlations between various elements. In addition, the narrative structures of TV dramas imply support for particular types of social order. By creating texts that closely resemble the life experiences of audiences, the ideologies that texts hope to convey are established (Abercrombie, 1996).

Idol dramas are also known as 'trendy dramas' (Liu, 2006), in which women are typically portrayed as tender and graceful, whereas men are masculine and aggressive. These depictions directly or indirectly shape audiences' gender ideologies (Chao, 2005, 2006; Chen, 2008). The female characters in idol dramas are frequently portrayed as subjects of voyeurism and fantasy on the part of males (Chao, 2005). Additionally, during role creation, female characters are usually dependent and passive, whereas men frequently play dominant roles. These are the ways in which these dramas emphasize traditional gender stereotypes of masculine men and feminine women.

A typical drama script features women as the victims of patriarchal oppression. In most idol dramas, women commonly play characters who suffer various forms of oppression and unjust treatment and ultimately use this to gain the love of the male lead and the audience's sympathy. Drama texts dictate the differences between men and women through costumes, behaviours and language. This demonstrates the constant gender specifications or criteria maintained between male and female characters. Furthermore, the conclusions of these dramas emphasize the hetero-normative roles associated with traditional societies and cultures (Chen, 2008). However, Wang (2009) examined female archetypes in Taiwanese TV dramas and found that, although stereotypes are present, female characterization has begun to depart from roles in which women are simply accessories belonging to men. The

clearer and more exact positioning of character portrayals and settings indicates that gender equality on TV and in the media has, to a degree, reflected real life. Chen (2008) and Wang (2009) both propose the possibility of female characters in TV dramas diverging from traditional ideological images. We argue in this paper that perceptions of female characters in TV dramas and the receptivity of audiences have changed. In particular, when a female character seeks to enact her own identity and follow her desires in a manner that does not comply with social norms and traditional gender roles, this constitutes an opportunity to develop a new female image and to explore and expand upon the diversity and possibilities of the presentation of female images.

However, when athletes' gendered attitudes or dispositions are exhibited through sports media, the gender roles and relationships in sports are consistently emphasized. Studies regarding gender typing and differentiation in sports have indicated that when females and males participate in sports that do not correspond with their gender, they experience gender-role conflicts (Koivula, 1999; Mastro, Seate, Blecha, & Gallegos, 2012). This phenomenon is an example of gender-role conflicts constituting obstacles to female athletes' sports participation; it also demonstrates the severe absence of female athletes in masculine sports venues. By reinforcing the values of masculine culture and competition, sports venues and media have shaped discriminatory and biased gender ideologies (Constantinou, Manson, & Silverman, 2009). Opportunities for women's sports achievements to be seen and recognized are minimized to consolidate masculine hegemony and androcentrism in sports culture.

According to discourses in the sociology of sport regarding gender issues, as a result of social gender inequality - which is itself an extension of physiological gender differences - and the influence of social values and ideologies on modern sport, sporting values have been positioned in relation to masculinity, manhood and displays of power - qualities traditionally associated with men. Furthermore, the institutionalized and systematic influence of sports participation consolidates masculine hegemony in sports (Coakley, 2009; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). Thus, over an extended period of time, sport has been a male-centred and male-dominated venue for physical activity, emphasizing physical performance as a confirmation of masculinity (Coakley, 2009). The gender dispositions demonstrated in most sports affect public perceptions. Sports that require more physical contact, greater physical strength and higher speeds are regarded as masculine activities, whereas sports featuring graceful bodies and elegant postures are commonly seen to be feminine (Atkins, Morse, & Zweigenhaft, 1978). When women enter a sporting space, they are influenced by social expectations and gender norms and are imperceptibly compelled to pursue socially approved sports (Pirinen, 2002).

The media use various audio-visual means to broadcast sports events and deliver information regarding athletes and other relevant products to their audiences, usually also conveying various ideas about sports culture (Cheng, 2001; Cuneen, Spencer, Ross, & Apostolopoulou, 2007). The public has embraced stereotypes regarding the gender dispositions that athletes should demonstrate, as well as stereotypical notions of 'gender-appropriate' sports in which men and women should participate. These perceptions have consolidated men's status as legitimate sports competitors. Meanwhile, female athletes' sex appeal is emphasized in print news reports, graphics or photos, sports event coverage and interviews with athletes. Furthermore, women's sports performances are contrasted with those of men, implying that superior sports performances are associated with masculinity. Male-centred mindsets resurface in and are used to represent women's sports, denigrating women's performances and achievements (Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002; Jones, 2011). On occasion, offensive comments and jeering tones are even used when commenting on

games or athletes' performances, to emphasize masculinity and aggression in sports (Fuller, 2006). The sports media use speech and visual media to create images of female athletes that satisfy social expectations and gender stereotypes. For example, through the medium of speech, nicknames and other representations, women's sporting ability and performance are diminished, while accentuation of their female temperament or disposition is used as a strategy. When visual images are employed, close-ups of faces and figures direct audiences' attention to female athletes' physical appearance (Birrell & Cole, 1994; Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002; Fuller, 2006; Jones, 2011; Pirinen, 2002).

In summary, influenced by the sports media's strategic representation of female athletes, these athletes experience insufficient exposure, which keeps audiences from recognizing that they are commonplace in sports venues. With all of this in mind, we investigated female representation in *Hot Shot*.

Research methodology

Research sample

Hot Shot was the third basketball-themed idol drama produced in Taiwan.¹ It was produced by Comic International Productions Co., Ltd. and supervised and issued by GTV and China Television Company, Ltd. The cast included Lo Chih Hsiang, Wu Chun, Jerry Yan, Coco Chiang, and Zhou Cai Shi. The show aired from July 2008 to September 2008, with an average audience rating of 2.47. The contents of the *Hot Shot* DVD were used as the scope for the analysis in this study. The drama comprised 16 episodes; the first two episodes were 90 minutes long and the remainder lasted for 60 minutes.

Story and discourse

This study employed the narrative theory proposed by Chatman (1978) as a theoretical framework to examine the character functions of females in sports idol dramas and the representations of gender ideologies in sports in the texts of these dramas. We separately analysed the story and the discourse in *Hot Shot*. To analyse plot, we first described the kernels which are closely related to the theme of the story. These kernels include the primary actions in the narrative, the methods and obstacles for continuing these actions and key turning points in plot development. Based on our research requirements, satellite events related to female characters were subsequently identified. These events are less crucial, and this study only investigated those that were related to or involved female characters to understand the timing of female characters' appearances and female characters' relationships with other characters. We categorized settings based on locations and sports-related spatial attributes. We focused on three female characters: Li Ying, Jie Er/The Chief and Tie Lan. We explored the positioning and functions of these characters by examining the timing of their appearances in various plots and settings. With reference to discourse, we focused on gender ideology in sports to explore the preferences and connotations regarding the costumes and camera angles used for female characters. The functions of female characters' appearances in various scenes were used to interpret the connections between female images and gender roles, women's athletic abilities and gender stereotypes in the drama text.

Data analysis

The theoretical framework for the data analysis consisted of the narrative structure proposed by Chatman (1978) and the function and character categories proposed by Propp

(1968). The narrative analysis comprised three dimensions: plot, settings and character characteristics. We collected the plot summary, character descriptions and plots of every episode from *Hot Shot*'s official website of *Hot Shot* to provide the basic data. Subsequently, the textual contents of the 16 episodes were reviewed. Based on the story contents provided on the official website, we identified the kernels in the narratives and employed Propp's functions of dramatis personae to analyse the kernels and satellites, examining the functions and representations of female characters in various plots and settings. In the setting analysis, shot cuts or transitions were the unit of analysis. We listed the settings involved in the narratives of each portion of the story and summarized the primary narrative settings of various plots, as well as the overall story. The table below shows the framework of the story and the discursive elements in the narrative analysis.

When discussing the discursive elements of the narrative, we reviewed previous studies and research questions to summarize and comprehensively analyse key issues, which were used for the analytical framework and for category settings. Additionally, specific contents for the analytical categories were indicated to ensure that the subsequent analysis proceeded smoothly. Table 1 and 2 below show the framework of story and the derisive elements in the narrative analysis.

The unit of analysis was divided into visual and language texts. In the visual text analysis, shot transitions were considered the basis for forming one unit of analysis. The settings in the *Hot Shot* text were primarily used to analyse female characters' costume preferences. In addition to identifying these, we integrated the characters' functions into the settings and plots in which they appeared, in order to study the gender connotations and strategies in the representations of the female roles. Regarding language texts, the phrasing and words used during dialogues and monologues were subjected to analysis. Furthermore, we analysed the connotations of the discourse in the language texts to explore the relationships between sport performance and gender disposition and the dynamic between gender roles and sports participation. Integrating the description of issues into various setting categories, we recorded the major narrative issues and connotations and also the female characters' functions within different settings or plots.

A preliminary analysis of the narrative structure of *Hot Shot*

The plot

Dramas use narrative to encourage audiences to immerse themselves in story development and understand the world constructed by the narrator (Chatman, 1978; Fiske & Hartley, 1978). *Hot Shot* was set against the background of the formation of a men's basketball team at Thunderbolt University (the Thunderbolt Flaming Wolves; hereafter the Thunderbolts). The plot centres on four leading characters. These are Dong Fang Xiang

Table 1. The analysis framework for the plots and settings of the story.

Story		
Plot	The establishment of the Thunderbolt University basketball team, The university basketball league competition and various games, New challenges and tasks, Pursuit of ultimate athletic performance	Setting The national university basketball league competition, Thunderbolt University campus, Street basketball courts, Hospital, Residences

Table 2. The analysis framework for the discourse content in the narrative.

Analysis category	Content item	Literature
Female characters' costume preferences	Costume styles, shooting or framing preferences	Chen, 2008; Chao, 2010
Sports performances and gender dispositions	Masculine dispositions and demonstrations of strength	Bissell, 2006; Pearson, 2001; Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002
Gender roles and sports participation	Male sports teams	Chen, 2005; Chao, 2010; Carty, 2005; Pearson, 2001
	Women should not engage in sports	
	Norms regarding female body movements Division of housework and career development	

(hereafter Dong Fang), an extremely talented superstar basketball player who is planning to give up the sport; Yuan Da Ying (hereafter Yuan), a beginner who has great basketball potential; Li Ying (hereafter W) - also known as W for her great coaching achievement² - a former NBA coaching consultant who has returned to Taiwan because of an illness and desires to pursue her final dream; and Jie Er/The Chief,³ a female character who is simultaneously Dong Fang's childhood sweetheart and a mysterious street basketball player with exceptional talent. The plot focuses on the formation of the team, training, interactions between the players and the coach, inter-school matches and the emotional development of the leading characters. The story demonstrates how the 'worst team in history' progress after experiencing difficulties and challenges to become extremely strong performers. At the heart of *Hot Shot* are the Thunderbolts, the team's games, the challenges encountered by its players and romantic or emotional relationships. The following sections analyse the core events in the plot and the appearances of female characters during these events.

The first kernel is the formation of the basketball team, the developments towards which are central to the story. Three narrative clues are simultaneously conveyed: (1) W, who is a former NBA coaching consultant, has returned to Taiwan; (2) Yuan is funded by the Lis (W's family) to study at Thunderbolt University; and (3) Dong Fang has transferred to Thunderbolt University to avoid basketball training. At this point, Yuan and Dong Fang become the key characters who will become members of the future Thunderbolts. The narrative focuses on the two characters' relationships as both friends and enemies. W subsequently assumes the role of coach and is responsible for managing the establishment of the team. She wins the team members' recognition and acceptance because of her professionalism during training.

Following the team's formation, training and preparation for the national university basketball league competition are conducted. At this point, the plot focuses on games, training and challenges to depict how the Thunderbolts face difficulties from various competitors and how they formulate coping strategies. During this portion of the plot, Coach W appears in numerous scenes and participates in games and training. In the context of highly competitive games, she analyses situations and instructs the players on how to overcome rivals' offensive strategies. Ultimately, during the championship game, she is taken to hospital because of her illness and is unable to participate in the game.

Additionally, in one scene during this period, Jie Er appears in a street basketball setting using her alternate identity, The Chief, to teach Dong Fang how to beat opposing teams more effectively. In this scene, she practises with the leading actor and assists him when he is in distress. By contrast, when not The Chief, Jie Er is a bystander or cheerleader at games, and no scenes depict her participating in games or training.

Following the completion of the university basketball league competition, a relationship between Dong Fang and Jie Er and past resentment between Dong Fang Shou and Tie Lan surface simultaneously. When the Thunderbolts are required to compete against another team, the two leading characters, Dong Fang and Yuan, engage in separate training with the assistance of Jie Er and W respectively, to enable themselves to win.

In the final portion of the narrative, Yuan and Dong Fang accomplish their tasks or 'missions' and discover a means by which to attain victory. Following overtime, the Thunderbolts and the Born Limitless team are tied. However, the players of both teams realize that, at this point, the real game is only just beginning.

Notably, *Hot Shot* adopts a classic characteristic of idol dramas – romantic relationships and developments. However, although it has a basis in conventional idol dramas' focus on romantic relationships, *Hot Shot* only includes depictions of romantic relationships between the leading roles as an addition to the central story narrative, and the plot setting focuses primarily on sport and sports performance. In discourses related to sport, the primary framework of the narrative content is the protagonists' desire to compete and win. Various competitive scenes and settings are used to illustrate both this competitive emphasis and masculine dispositions in sports.

Analysis of the female characters in *Hot Shot*

Tie Lan (hereafter Lan)

Lan, who is Yuan's grandmother, had been an excellent basketball player when she was young; however, she was forced to stop playing because of injuries. She is extremely strict with Yuan, prohibiting him from playing basketball or engaging in any activities related to the sport. She does not allow Yuan to practise basketball until shortly before her death. The objects and final words she leaves behind assist Yuan in developing his basketball skills and stimulate his motivation to play the sport. However, Lan only actually appears as a living person in Episode 1, and rarely reappears in subsequent episodes. The majority of her appearances take the form of memories and are used to explain causal relationships between characters. Although Lan only appears in a few scenes and for short durations, the show emphasizes her athletic skills when she was young. Indeed, in order to win a game, a rival team once lured Lan's lover into a dangerous situation, forcing her to terminate her sports career.

Lan's appearances are used to imply plot developments or transitions and to assist Yuan when he encounters difficult tasks. Therefore, Lan's function is to provide the tools to complete tasks or to offer guidance for proceeding to the next stage of the plot. She functions as a dispatcher or provider.

W

W is the only child of Thunderbolt University's president. Li Tian, W's grandfather, was a key basketball player at Thunderbolt University when he was young. He highly valued W's development in American basketball circles. W was sent to study abroad when she was young. Once an NBA coaching consultant, she has a degree in sports science and

training experience. Following her return to Taiwan, against her father's will, she decides to coach the Thunderbolts, who are a poor team. She conducts training even when both players and resources are insufficient, becoming the key figure in the Thunderbolts' success. In the show, both her attractive appearance and her experience in training high-level international professional basketball teams are represented. Her coaching abilities are emphasized by presenting her analyses and explanations of tactics and coaching experiences. However, she does not directly participate in sport or demonstrate her own playing skills during the show.

When the team is at a critical point between victory and loss or cannot overcome the opposing teams' tactics, she assists the leading characters to conquer difficulties and accomplish tasks, thereby performing her function as a helper. As the coach, W is present during game and training scenes. When the team wins, she becomes one of the foremost characters, participating in the celebration of success. However, because she is not the narrative subject of these events, W is actually the false hero in those plots which present her involvement with the leading characters' efforts to accomplish specific tasks or 'missions.'

Jie Er/The Chief (hereafter Jie and Chief)

Jie is Dong Fang's childhood friend. Her father had worked for the Dong Fang family. Because of her father's work, she spent a great deal of time with Dong Fang during her childhood. However, because of their differing social standings, Jie had to obey Dong Fang. Determined to break her ties with the Dong Fang family, Jie applies to a school far from home, only to again meet Dong Fang who is a transfer student there. However, Jie is later moved by the passion of the Thunderbolts and assists them. She typically appears as a cheerleader and has romantic and conflicting relationships with the two leading male characters. Jie's other identity is Chief, a street basketball master. Because of her low social status and because she was taught at a young age that women should not participate in intense sports, Jie practised secretly with street basketball players. As Chief, she rules street basketball courts, and anonymously assists Dong Fang in enhancing his skills. Because of her superior skills and performances, she has many fans. When Jie transforms into the role of Chief, she always wears a dark mask, a long-sleeved hooded T-shirt, and sports pants. After her secret identity is discovered, she only appears as Jie, and subsequent scenes showing her demonstrating sports skills are rare. Rather, she appears only as a woman attached to a male character, assuming a subordinate position and subsidiary role. Thus Jie typically performs the function of a sought-for person. She is restricted by gender and hierarchy (i.e. Dong Fang is the master and Jie the subordinate) and passively avoids reality while waiting for opportunities for freedom. Simultaneously, she assists the leading males and provides training and mental support. In contrast to Jie, Chief appears to be gender-ambiguous, dominant and an active helper who provides motivation for the leading characters to resolve problems and find new ideas.

Propp (1968) analysed the roles in Russian folktales and found that the story structures were primarily based on male leading characters. Additionally, whereas the leading characters in the narratives were primarily men, female characters were subjects sought by men. However, the strategies for setting and developing female characters in *Hot Shot* differ from previous settings. We also analysed *My MVP Valentine* and *Hooping Dulcinea*, two other basketball-themed sports idol dramas, and found that the female characters - including Xiao Xi and Angel in *My MVP Valentine* and Yi Sheng Xue in *Hooping Dulcinea* - were positioned as male characters' support figures or girlfriends. In the plots

of these dramas, the female characters are major fans and cheerleaders who follow basketball players; delicate and charming ladies; or rude, overbearing, wealthy young women. These female characters have little to do with sport; they participate only as bystanders. However, in *Hot Shot*, W is a former NBA coaching consultant and the Thunderbolts' coach, and Jie plays the role of a street basketball master who has numerous fans. Therefore, in contrast to previous idol dramas in which female characters were frequently established as sought-for persons waiting to be saved, *Hot Shot* offers female characters a combination of role functions, including false hero, provider and helper, or dispatchers, who are crucial to the plot. This differs markedly from role-setting strategies in previous idol dramas, and from real life. As opposed to the history of rejection of female participation in sports (Liao, 2007), the text of *Hot Shot* provides opportunities for women to participate in masculine sports. In addition, it features more scenes showing female characters' participation in sports training and games and positions female characters as crucial figures in plot development.

The narrative settings in *Hot Shot*

According to trailers and relevant news releases, *Hot Shot* is an idol drama focusing on basketball games, training and the presentation of athletic skill. Therefore, the show contains numerous games and training scenes. To support and accommodate plot content, the settings in the show gradually extend from the university gym to national league competitions. The five primary settings in the show are detailed below.

National university basketball league competitions

The national university basketball league competition is where Dong Fang, the leading character, makes his first appearance. Simultaneously, his future archenemy is in the same location, observing and analysing his skills. In subsequent plot developments, the national university basketball league competition is the primary setting, allowing viewers to witness the Thunderbolts playing against various teams and winning numerous victories. In the scenes set against this background, basketball players' efforts and superior skills are emphasized, with a few shots of Jie cheering on from the sidelines. The female characters who appear in this setting are primarily bystanders or cheerleaders. The only exception is Coach W, who participates in the games by directing and managing the players and giving instructions during the game.

Thunderbolt university campus

The campus is the primary setting where the leading characters gather. Classrooms, the team locker and meeting rooms and the Thunderbolt basketball court constitute the campus setting. In the team locker or meeting rooms, W is the primary narrator, demonstrating her role as coach in team training, strategy development and application. The Thunderbolt basketball court is the background for scenes involving narratives related to the players and their training. Additionally, classrooms and other locations on campus are where the romances and conflicts involving Yuan, Dong Fang and Jie unfold.

Street basketball courts

Outdoor street basketball courts are where Dong Fang and Chief develop and compare basketball skills. The majority of the scenes in this setting feature fierce physical

confrontations between the characters, with male protagonists demonstrating their masculine dispositions. Street basketball courts include crowds and players displaying their physical strength and skills. The only woman who participates in these activities is Chief, although when she appears on the court, she masks her face and expresses herself using sign language to conceal her real identity as a woman.

The hospital

The hospital is used to present the leading characters' injuries, illnesses and negative emotions, such as fear and anxiety. For example, Jie is concerned and scared when her father is hospitalized, and Dong Fang is anxious when Yuan is severely injured. Simultaneously, the hospital implies control over the female body and features male characters as the primary figures. For example, when Jie is sent to the hospital because of an injury, she is instructed to remain there for further examination, and W is asked to recuperate from her illness and forego training when she is hospitalized. However, when male characters are hospitalized, similar scenes are not shown.

Residences

The residences in the show include the Lis' home, Dong Fang's home, the Dong Fang family residence, and Yuan's hometown. In these spaces, the narrative focuses on the characters' familial and romantic relationships. Similarly, in residential settings, the primary narrators are persons with superior status in the power hierarchy, indicating hierarchical relationships in characters' families.

The settings of *Hot Shot* typically focus on sport, with the majority of critical scenes or settings being sports venues. Furthermore, in settings based around sports competitions, female characters have few opportunities to participate. The exceptions are Coach W, who appears in the national basketball league competition, and Chief, who plays on street basketball courts. Otherwise, women are primarily presented as cheerleaders. W appears in settings such as the team locker room and her home, and Jie is primarily shown on campus or as a cheerleader on the sidelines during games. Women's sports participation as depicted in the show corresponds with the low reporting rates of female athletes uncovered in studies on the sports media. This phenomenon is particularly evident in team and masculine or 'masculinized' sports (Coakley, 2009; Liao, 2007). The competitive skill, masculinity and aggression emphasized in modern sports do not fit the traditional gender roles of and expectations for women. Therefore, the three female characters in *Hot Shot* relatively rarely appear in scenes showing sports events or competitions.

Representations of women in *Hot Shot*

Hot Shot focuses on the Thunderbolts' formation, training, and games, and half of the scenes or settings depict games or training. The majority of the male characters primarily wear sportswear (i.e. jerseys); the female characters (i.e. W, Jie, and Lan) do not participate in settings in which basketball skills are displayed or don similar sportswear, as few scenes depict them coaching on court, demonstrating skills or participating in sports training and games. Relevant studies of TV dramas (Chao, 2005, 2006) have indicated that characters' costumes reveal their traits and personalities. Furthermore, understanding how camera movement and framing techniques are used in TV dramas to construct stories is beneficial for interpreting intended messages. Therefore, we analysed the female

characters' costumes and the camera angles used to film them while also considering the gendered position and performance of female characters in various setting and plots to elucidate the three female characters' images in various narrative structures.

W: the beautiful and professional coach

In *Hot Shot*, W's function is to assist the players in enhancing their skills and to provide tactical drills, evaluation and analysis during games. She primarily appears in the settings of the university basketball league competition, her home, and the hospital. When W appears at games, in the team locker room or meeting rooms, or the players' lounge, her relationship with the players as a coach is presented through medium, long, or panoramic shots. These scenes show the players gathering and listening to W's assignment of tasks and tactical analyses. Simultaneously, close-ups from the side and internal monologues present W's analyses of games and her thoughts or plans regarding instructions and tactics. These shots reinforce W's professional image and her authority as a coach. However, we also examined W's costumes in various settings and found that when she appears on the court, she wears blouses, short skirts, shorts and high heels rather than sportswear, which might be more suitable for her image as a coach. Even when she is coaching the team, she rarely wears sportswear.⁴

This image representation strategy satisfies imaginings of female images in sports venues and social culture, reinforcing the perception that women should demonstrate a feminine disposition. Particular costume codings and symbolism are used to demonstrate femininity and feminine charm. Furthermore, this is a continuation of the representation strategy used by sports media of materializing the female body. By emphasizing women's identity as women over their achievements and value in sports venues, the threat that women pose to masculine hegemony in sports culture is reduced (Cohen, 1994; Crawford, 1984; Fuller, 2006).

Jie Er/The Chief: a street basketball master wearing a mask of obedience

In *Hot Shot*, Jie primarily wears jeans and canvas shoes, and carries a backpack. Her colourful outfits present an image of a young and outgoing university student. There are no scenes in which she participates in sports. In the show, Jie primarily appears as a cheerleader. During games, close-ups of her face are used to emphasize the anxiety and worry she feels as a non-player during close games and her happiness when the team wins. Furthermore, long shots are used to show Jie sitting among the spectators and cheering. However, when appearing as Chief, Jie wears a black, long-sleeved hooded T-shirt, dark sports pants and a mask and communicates only through sign language. Chief appears primarily in scenes where she can demonstrate her athletic skills and assist Dong Fang and Yuan in overcoming difficulties. The majority of these scenes are shot with a panoramic view to depict specific situations or scenes and demonstrations of skill. Only a few close-ups on character faces and medium shots are used to relate dialogues and the relationships between characters.

The strategy used for this female image positioning is similar to those used in previous idol dramas: strong men and weak women or active men and passive women convey traditional stereotypes regarding women (Chao, 2005; Chen, 2008). In contrast, when Chief emerges to demonstrate the superior athletic skills of females, she is unable to appear as a 'woman'. Rather, she attempts to conceal physical clues that can reveal her identity. This indicates the difficulties posed by the presence of a female body in a sports

venue. Chao (2010) analysed female images in films and indicated that this form of cross-dressing and de-gendered performance represents the possibility of transcending gender boundaries and the disturbance of established gender standards in masculine cultures. Simultaneously, the processes of cross-dressing and subsequently restoring female physical features and appearances demonstrate females returning to their original gender roles and categories. This maintains female images as imagined within society and culture and sustains the gender ideology that men's values are not to be transgressed. Therefore, the role conversions or transformations between Jie and Chief demonstrate a form of loss or disappearance regarding the female body. Women who do not satisfy masculine dispositions and masculinity are excluded from sports venues. In this environment, feminine bodies that are associated with the markings of female physicality are gradually considered to demonstrate inferior sports performances (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002).

Lan: an ambiguous image of a female athlete

Lan was Yuan's grandmother and an excellent national basketball player. However, Episode 1 only shows scenes of her chasing Yuan when he breaks rules and lying in bed afflicted with a serious illness. In subsequent episodes, where she appears in memories as either an old or a young woman, she is rarely shown in scenes or costumes relevant to basketball. Instead, her excellent sports performances are conveyed through photos, newspaper clippings and other narrators. Lan's unique offensive footwork is described by various characters to position the importance of acquiring and emulating her skills. Although Lan is a leading character, her existence only serves to assist turning points in the plot. The image of Lan does not exist within the story narrative or settings. Rather, her story is narrated by characters such as Yuan, W and the president of the university, to emphasize the importance of her existence.

Through meticulous arrangements for the presentation of female images, *Hot Shot* demonstrates the gendered hierarchies of sports, implying the structural inequality that women encounter. Sport is again considered to belong specifically to men. Through continual demonstrations of differences in feminine/masculine bodies as well as sporting abilities and resources, stereotypes regarding the differences between men and women in sports venues are reinforced (Coakley, 2009). Under this assumption, women's achievements in sports venues are frequently rendered invisible or marginalized. Additionally, women's sports achievements are typically removed, leaving only messages related to women's feminine dispositions. TV dramas twist representations of female bodies in the mass media by showing masculine dispositions/masculine cultures in sports and creating the erroneous and biased perception that women are unfit to be athletes. They tend to present women's beauty, sexiness and vulnerability, satisfying society's evaluations and imaginings regarding feminine dispositions, to undermine women's sports achievements and performances (Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002; Pirinen, 2002). Female images that have sex appeal, such as those featuring decorative (e.g. cheerleaders) or nearly nude women, are used as a marketing strategy (Bissell, 2006; Hardin, Lynn, & Walsdorf, 2005). The role of the coach in *Hot Shot* was not cast based on the skills and qualities that a coach should demonstrate in actual sports training; rather, a woman with an attractive body was selected. Feminine charm and the dual meanings of images were provided to attract male viewers. Jie, who does not have an overly curvy or attractive figure, is portrayed as an ordinary and adorable woman and presented as approachable, in addition to having athletic skills. Therefore, the female characters in this sports idol drama

were constructed by adopting two strategies: (1) obscuring athletic skills and (2) emphasizing feminine dispositions and images of the female body.

Gendered discourses in *Hot Shot*

Gender discourses in sports media reflect sports culture's longstanding perceptions of female athletes and sports. The demonstration of physical ability is a criterion for either accepting or rejecting a person's participation in sport. In *Hot Shot*, which features a masculine or masculinized sport, the content communicates social norms regarding the leading characters' physical abilities and masculine performances. In particular, W is positioned as the holder of a doctorate in sports science, who is able to use her professional abilities to formulate training programmes that are suitable for enhancing the players' skills. However, W does not have any athletic skills and considers herself to be physically weak:

- Yuan: As a small Asian girl, you had to play basketball against largely built foreigners when you were nine years old! Wasn't that physically challenging?
- W: Why would I play basketball against them? I have a Ph.D. in sports science, but I'm not an athlete. I don't even play basketball!
- Yuan: Why were you an NBA coaching consultant? Why did people listen to you?
- W: Because I can read people! Several NBA superstars who are currently playing were my discoveries! Plus, I know how to enhance the fitness of basketball teams. Every year before the NBA began, numerous teams applied to participate in my 7-day training camp, and they had to use luck and their connections, and ask for favours to obtain this opportunity! (01-3738)⁵

This dialogue between Yuan and W conveys that the body images required for sports comprise physical strength and physical fitness, which are necessary for athletes to play against one another in a competition-oriented sports world. When women play sports, they must comply with the norms regarding masculine body images. Furthermore, in *Hot Shot*, physical transformation and suffering are necessary steps for obtaining permission to play. When Jie approaches street basketball courts and joins the other players, she is pushed around and jeered at by the crowd. Ultimately, a leader appears and continuously directs shots at Jie to test her ability, as a woman to resist hits and attacks. When Jie stands up again after every time she is struck, she obtains the leader's recognition and is given the opportunity to receive training and to attend street basketball games.

In *Hot Shot*, physical abilities are extended to establish norms regarding masculinity and men's athletic bodies. Because they have a dominant role in sports, men are expected to have the ability to endure intense physical interactions and confrontations.

Rival team player: Are you playing basketball or football?

Yuan: Didn't you used to play street basketball? Is this already too much for you? What a girl! (06-3131)

When men argue with their opponents during games, they mock their opponents by calling them feminine names (e.g., 'woman', 'girl' or 'sissy') to belittle their perceived lack of physical ability and masculinity.

In the scenes showing ongoing games in *Hot Shot*, men are largely dominant and highlight the masculine culture of sports. For example, when the coach asks team members to suggest a name that accurately describes the team's culture and spirit, 'Flaming Wolves' is nominated. It is emphasized that the team members should fight as wolves, closely

defending the team against rivals, remaining fearless and continuing to fight in fierce battles even against a sky of flames (extract from Episode 5). This demonstrates their aggressive, courageous and fearless spirit, which is used to prove their masculine superiority. The players establish themselves as warriors and heroes. In addition, slogans yelled out during games are based on brotherhood, or Xiong Di, to refer to male bonding in team sports. For example:

Who supports us during games? Brothers/Xiong Di!

Who assists us during games? Brothers/Xiong Di!

Who gives us confidence during games? Brothers/Xiong Di!

We are invincible with the support of our brothers/Xiong Di!

A focus is placed here on cooperation amongst male team members, and also on their fighting spirit. When the team encounters difficulties, the male characters remind their brothers/teammates/Xiong Di to assist, support and encourage each other. In contrast, the female coach, who is responsible for training and team management, disappears from the male-dominated basketball court: thereby, discourse reinforces the dominance of the male presence in sports venues. Duncan & Hasbrook (2002) indicate that in televised sports, women are frequently excluded from team games. This ensures that women are consistently associated with a feminine disposition conveyed through individual sports, while eliminating opportunities for the masculinity of team sports to be undermined. Simultaneously, men's competitiveness and achievements in team sports are used to emphasize the importance of strength and masculinity and to secure men's dominant position.

This emphasis on physical ability and masculinity is sustained and expanded in the context of sports venues, with women being regularly restricted by norms based on physical differences and experiencing differential treatment. The categorization of sports clearly indicates the types of physical activities in which women should participate, thus depriving women of equal participation opportunities. *Hot Shot* focuses on basketball, which features intense physical contact, aggression and masculinity. Women are inevitably excluded from this setting. For example, before Jie receives any training, her friends make comments such as 'girls should not play basketball with boys' and 'girls can never beat boys' to remind her and, by implication, the audience of the gender roles and social norms to which women should conform.

Can: A girl shouldn't play basketball with boys!

Jie: Who said that girls can't play basketball? Who said that girls can't make shots? With more practice I will beat you!

Can: However much you practice, you will never beat boys! Go play with your dolls! (06-4441)

When Jie first attempts to participate in street basketball, she is turned away. At one point she is even pushed to the ground (10-4854). These events emphasize that women are 'not supposed' to appear on basketball courts. Subsequently, Jie assumes the identity of Chief, enabling her to enter basketball courts without further difficulty and to become a street basketball master. When her identity is revealed, the male characters cannot understand her behaviour: 'Why would you, a girl, play basketball against these weirdos and monsters [referring to the male basketball players] ?!' (10-4520). When Chief is defeated in a game and her female identity is revealed, Yuan says to her: 'I understand street basketball. Even boys find it too rough. You . . . are a girl! You must have suffered a

lot!’ (10-5158). In this narrative, the questions are posed by men, suggesting that the male characters feel violated by seeing a woman participate in an intense sports environment. Before Chief reveals her gender identity, she is never questioned and is able to assist male characters in overcoming crises. However, after Chief and Jie are identified as the same person, Jie’s role as Chief, who possesses excellent athletic abilities, is immediately erased and she reassumes her role as Jie, who ‘is not supposed to play basketball against boys’.

In such ways, *Hot Shot* adopts traditional imaginings regarding what is gender-appropriate/inappropriate in sport. The dialogue between the characters constantly reflects the belief that female athletes lack sufficient ability in sports environments. In discourses relating to body image, the show presents women participating in sport; however, whenever representations of athletic ability and femininity are involved, there is a focus on women’s vulnerability and need for care and a devaluing of their sports participation experiences. Bissell (2006) indicates that in their texts, the majority of sports magazines reproduce norm-abiding and heterosexual sexual images. These print magazines offer a lens through which readers can observe the personal and professional qualities needed for success that are possessed by popular women, although these women are limited by their gender. The underlying thesis is that women can be independent, but that they must be simultaneously attractive. Similarly, TV dramas primarily present feminine, vulnerable and physically attractive female images, which influence audience ideologies and encourage gender discrimination behaviours in sport settings.

In addition, when women’s career development in sport is addressed in *Hot Shot*, stereotypes regarding women’s life processes are featured. For example, at one point, the importance of family and marriage is mentioned.

President: When your grandpa was alive, he kept reminding me that I should support your development in America, and that I should not pressure you! I did not even dare to urge you to marry. How could you just come back like this?!

W: I was dumped in America. I came back because I could not get married . . . !
(01-4505)

Although W has obtained enviable workplace achievements, she is asked to satisfy traditional expectations of women (e.g. becoming a wife, mother, and homemaker). Furthermore, according to W’s own narrative explanation of her return, she also considers marriage and family to be the goals for the next stage in her life. Only when the goals of getting married and having a family become unattainable does she return to the workplace. Other exchanges imply that women are responsible for housework. Indeed, they are reminded that, in addition to career development, they should prepare for future role changes so that they can become competent wives:

President: (Speaking to Yuan) Her pasta is as superb as her basketball coaching . . . Your future wife will be so lucky. Today, many girls do not even know how to turn on the gas. Men who marry these women must starve. How about this? Li Ying will teach you basketball, and you will teach her how to cook. You can’t feed your future husband only pasta, can you?

W: Then I will just find a husband that can cook like Da Ying does. (04-5750)

In the show, female characters’ sporting achievements are compared with the roles and gender relationships expected in their future family lives. Even in an idol drama that centres on sport, women cannot escape discourses that endorse the gendered division of labour. *Hot Shot* is based on the assumption that professional women’s achievements in the workplace are not as significant as their engagement in family life. As women proceed

through their life cycles, society's expectations of them gradually shift to incorporate family-related roles. This imperceptibly places limits on women's job opportunities and career development. Although several TV dramas have demonstrated women's abilities to challenge the patriarchal system and pursue their own self-identities, these shows do not break free from the boundaries of traditional love stories and thus reify gender roles and stereotypes (Chen, 2008; Wang, 2009). Lin (2012) argues that, in idol dramas, the female body is placed within male/masculine-centred ideologies. Consequently, women's abilities are typically obscured and the value of women is understood in relation to a male-centred system. Studies have verified these situations in real-life venues. For example, Hardin, Shain, and Shultz-Poniatowski (2008) and Staurowsky and DiManno (2001) examined women practitioners working in the sports industry and revealed that family life was highly likely to alter or even end women's career opportunities. In some scenes in *Hot Shots*, where marriage, work and gender roles are mentioned, women are equated with femininity, housework and marriage and dependence. An analysis of the dialogue between the characters shows that the show creates an atmosphere where women are auxiliary to men and masculinity is celebrated. It is frequently implied that women should conform to traditional norms regarding gender roles, prioritize marriage and family and prepare for marriage and housework responsibilities.

Conclusion

In addition to their promotional functions, TV dramas influence public thinking. Through the establishment of character images, various social ideologies are reinterpreted. The narrative structure of *Hot Shot* primarily focuses on sports training, competition and winning, while also portraying the romantic relationships that are typical of idol dramas. Female characters, who in the past only passively participated in sports events, are integrated as leading characters. Opportunities for direct participation in sports training and games are shown and there is an attempt to demonstrate female athletic ability. However, female characters' functions and values are less important than those of male characters. Women tend to perform supportive functions. Furthermore, the texts in various scenes or settings suggest discourses related to gendered sports stereotypes. Women who participate in masculine sports are ultimately forced to revert to gendered representations that satisfy social expectations. The dialogue between various characters constantly emphasizes the necessity of conforming to gender roles and norms. *Hot Shot* uses the attractive figures of the main female characters to provide viewers with a pleasurable viewing experience. However, the female coach's role in leading male players is obscured to reduce men's frustrations regarding defeat of losing leadership and authority in men's sport. Ultimately, the show returns the audience to mainstream hetero-normative culture, featuring patriarchy, images of vulnerable women and women who rely on strong men. The representation of narrative structure and female characters' statuses and gender awareness in *Hot Shot* reveals that the female characters are positioned in supportive roles. Furthermore, the show demonstrates their deficient athletic skills and highlights their willingness to sacrifice for their family/partners. The show emphasizes female characters' appearances and bodies to obscure women's value in sports venues.

The representation strategies for images of female athletes in various sports idol dramas can vary due to factors such as social context and sports culture. Because of the limitations in the sample selection strategy in this study, we only examined the representations of female characters in *Hot Shot*, and did not compare them with the gender representation strategies of previous sports idol dramas. However, subsequent

studies can analyse and compare similar sports dramas to explore the differences and changes in the female character representation strategies of sports idol dramas that have been produced at different times and in different contexts. Furthermore, the differences in the representation strategies of female athletes' images in various types of sports should also be examined to explore further the relationships between female image, sports competition and gender ideology representations in sports idol dramas.

Notes

1. The first was *My MVP Valentine*, which was jointly produced and aired by Sanlih E-Television and the Chinese Television System. In addition to entertainment stars, the show featured a retired basketball player from Taiwan's national basketball team in the leading role. The second was *Hooping Dulcinea*, which was a sports TV drama produced and aired by Sanlih E-Television. The show featured a cast of popular idols and stars.
2. In Chinese Characters, Ying means win. In the *Hot Shot*, Li Ying also known for helping teams have victories. W is the abbreviated version of her name and coaching achievement.
3. The Chief is Jie Er's alternate identity when she plays street basketball. The Chief is a street basketball master. In the show, she is portrayed as an excellent player, and a mysterious figure who always wears black sports T-shirts with hoods, black sports pants and a mask. Many fans imitate her style of dress. Before Jie Er's secret identity as The Chief was revealed, her athletic skills were not shown in any scenes or plots.
4. She only appears in sportswear during the team training in Episode 8 and occasionally when at home.
5. The quoted text number (01-3738) indicates that the texts were excerpted beginning from 37 minutes 38 s in Episode 1.

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