A self-paced reading experiment investigated the degree to which emotional dominance – the degree of control – exerted by verbs affected the interpretation of gender relations in online processing of two sentence texts. The first sentence introduced a stereotypically male, female, or neutral occupation/role (doctor, nurse, author). The second sentence was a continuation of the first and referenced the occupation or title of the first sentence with a male or female pronoun (A and B below). The pronoun either matched or mismatched the stereotypical gender of the role or occupation name. Furthermore, the verb following the role name was controlled for emotional dominance. We hypothesized that if readers attended to emotional dominance, where male characters were thought to stereotypically be attributed with high in-control verbs, then verbal dominance may act as a cue to reduce or increase inhibitory effects where the occupation-based stereotype and pronoun matched or mismatched.

(A) The dancer envisioned performing on Broadway by twenty five. Actually achieving that goal was not something that (he/she) ever imagined would be possible.
(B) The beautician lost the nail file somewhere in the store. It had been one of those weeks when (he/she) couldn't keep track of anything.

Preliminary results from linear mixed-effect models (all reported effects, t’s > 2) show that in the mismatching condition, where gender stereotyped role or occupation names were mismatched with the other gender’s definite pronoun, segments were read more slowly than in the matching conditions. These effects provide evidence that further supports what past researchers have documented: that readers make inferences about character gender based on role or occupation name stereotypes during reading (Carreiras, Garnham, Oakhill & Cain, 1996; Gygax & Gabriel, 2008; Reynolds, Garnham & Oakhill, 2006). When the expected gender of the character introduced by the role or occupation name was read by participants and did not match the inferred gender, the segment took more time to read as participants presumably reassigned gender to characters in their situation models. Furthermore, a main effect was also found whereby the mean dominance of the verb was positively correlated with segmental reading time. High in-control emotional dominance verbs lead to longer reading times and high controlled emotional dominance lead to faster reading times.

It appears, however, that emotional dominance did not have the effect hypothesized to be present in these circumstances. The degree of emotional dominance appears to have affected reading time in both the high in-control and high controlled verbs, regardless of either the gender stereotype of the role or occupation name or the gender of the pronoun. Reading times were faster for high controlled dominance verbs and slower for high in-control dominance verbs. Even though the results suggest that there may have been a greater effect increasing reading times for female stereotyped role or occupation names in the mismatch condition, this effect did not reach significance in the present self-paced reading experiment. As this is the first study of its kind to investigate the role of emotional dominance in reading, our follow-up work will inquire further into the ability of readers to make use of implicit cues from emotional dominance using a more sensitive method, eye tracking.
References:

