



# Making Strides in TV Broadcasts of Women’s Sports: NBC’s 2010 Olympic Hockey Coverage

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## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the television broadcasts of ice hockey on the NBC family of networks (NBC, USA Network, MSNBC, & CNBC) during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games to determine how the network portrayed female and male hockey players. Using a feminist sports criticism lens (Daddario, 1998), this study examined various ways in which the women’s games were presented differently than the men’s games.

Prior studies showed differences in television production value (Duncan et al., 1994), the use of gendered language in televised sports (Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993), and gendered stereotypes in televised sports (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994) when comparing men’s and women’s televised sports. Therefore, the study was driven by these research questions:

- (1) Did the television production quality differ between men’s & women’s ice hockey?
- (2) Did the NBC commentators use gender-related terms to denote differences between male & female hockey players?
- (3) Did the commentators portray male & female hockey players differently?

## References

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## Methodology

The games of the men’s and women’s 2010 Winter Olympic hockey tournament that aired on the NBC family of networks were recorded for analysis.

The sampling frame included games involving Team USA since the NBC broadcast was intended for an American audience. The tournament involved a preliminary round and a medal round for both the men’s and women’s tournaments. This led to two natural strata: gender and round of competition. One game from each round from each gender involving Team USA was purposively chosen. The researcher chose the most *extreme* case from each round as the most *representative* game from each stratum (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Therefore, the initial games for Team USA in the opening round and the gold medal games in the final round were selected for analysis. The sample included: USA vs. China (women) and USA vs. Switzerland (men) from the preliminary round and USA vs. Canada (women) and USA vs. Canada (men) in the medal round.

For the first research question, the frequency of various television production items were calculated. For the second research question, the researcher tallied how frequently certain gendered language was used by the commentators. Regarding the verbal descriptions, a classification scheme was developed inductively, and each verbal description was classified and counted. Chi-square analysis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007) was used to determine the presence of significant differences between the coverage of the men’s hockey games and the women’s hockey games.

## “Significant” Non-significant Results

Chi-square analysis revealed few significant differences between the coverage of the men’s and women’s tournaments. This lack of statistically significant results is in itself “significant” indicating several areas in which there were few differences between the coverage of men’s and women’s ice hockey.

Production Value – Rejected Hypotheses	N	$\chi^2$	df	P-value
Men’s games had a significantly greater number of staff providing commentary.	15	0.07	1	0.80
Men’s games used a significantly greater number of slow-motion replays.	119	1.89	1	0.17
Men’s games featured significantly more slow-motion replays that contained multi-angle camera shots.	28	0.57	1	0.45
Men’s games had a significantly greater number of live interviews with players.	14	1.14	1	0.29
Men’s games featured significantly more pre-recorded player profiles.	37	0.68	1	0.41
Gendered Language – Rejected Hypothesis	N	$\chi^2$	df	P-value
Female players were referred to by inappropriate gendered terms significantly more often than male players (i.e., women as “boys,” “guys,” “men” versus men as “girls” or “ladies”).	0	N/A		
Verbal Description – Rejected Hypotheses	N	$\chi^2$	df	P-value
Male hockey players’ physical strength (in positive connotations) was mentioned significantly more often than that of female hockey players.	138	1.86	1	0.17
Male hockey players’ technical skills (in positive connotations) were mentioned significantly more often than those of female hockey players.	947	2.14	1	0.14

## Discussion

The results of this study provide some evidence that television coverage of women’s sports is improving, especially in the areas of production value and not referring to women by inappropriate gendered terms. Although female hockey players were portrayed as strong and technically-skilled athletes, commentators still mentioned their emotions and personalities. The mediated viewers must decide whether or not these women were outstanding athletes or stereotypical women whose lives were wrapped up in emotions. It is hoped that when choosing a televised sport, Olympic viewers will consider watching another women’s ice hockey game. Sports media companies are encouraged to continue to portray female athletes in ways that emphasize their athleticism on an equal footing with male athletes.