

Journal of Language and Social Psychology

<http://jls.sagepub.com/>

An Agenda That Sets the Frames: Gender, Language, and NBC's Americanized Olympic Telecast

James R. Angelini and Andrew C. Billings

Journal of Language and Social Psychology 2010 29: 363 originally published online 10 May 2010

DOI: 10.1177/0261927X10368831

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://jls.sagepub.com/content/29/3/363>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://jls.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://jls.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://jls.sagepub.com/content/29/3/363.refs.html>

An Agenda That Sets the Frames: Gender, Language, and NBC's Americanized Olympic Telecast

James R. Angelini¹ and Andrew C. Billings²

Abstract

This study used theories of agenda setting and framing to examine NBC's Americanized telecast in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Five sports (gymnastics, diving, swimming, track and field, and beach volleyball) received more than 90% of the prime-time coverage, which set an agenda about which sports were most relevant for Americans to watch. The limited scope within NBC's televised agenda, in turn, facilitated the gendered framing of Olympians through sport commentator accounts. Gendered differences were statistically present in only four sports; diving had no significant differences, whereas beach volleyball contained the most differences. Implications and directions for future research are explored.

Keywords

Olympics, sport, gender, language, commentary

Given the immensity of Olympic viewership, it is amazing how few network gatekeepers are responsible for NBC's rendition of it. Globally, 4.7 billion viewers watched some portion of the 2008 Beijing Summer Games (ESPN.com, 2008), whereas in the United States more Americans at least sampled the Games than any other telecast, leading NBC to declare it the most watched television event in U.S. television history (Hiestand, 2008). Despite this incredible degree of audience penetration, the number of people having a

¹University of Delaware, Newark, DE, USA

²Clemson University, Clemson, SC, USA

Corresponding Author:

James R. Angelini, University of Delaware, Department of Communication,
250 Pearson Hall, Newark, DE 19716-2534, USA
Email: angelini@udel.edu

major influence on how the Games are shown is relatively small. Chairman of NBC Universal Sports and Olympics Dick Ebersol reveals a relatively short organizational structure in which he is never more than two organizational rungs from a network commentator, noting that “whatever Bob (Costas) is doing live . . . to pull together the other live Olympics—the person talking in his ear is [prime-time producer] David Neal, but David’s getting every direction we’re going to go from me” (Billings, 2008, p. 30). Meanwhile, key on-screen personalities of the Olympic telecast, such as Bob Costas, report that although they certainly cannot personally write all that is said on air, they do possess a fair amount of ultimate control of the end product (see Billings, 2008). Effectively, a nightly audience of millions is receiving a rendering of history as seen through the lens of a handful of key producers and sportscasters with a vested interest in rendering an Americanized version of the Olympics that will result in higher ratings and, consequently, more advertising dollars.

As a result, two rarely combined theories come to the fore. First, the basic principles of agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) postulate that media entities such as NBC do not have direct influence on what viewers think, but can be quite successful regarding what topics we think about. Second, framing theory (Goffman, 1974) becomes step two in this process, focusing on how language frames the content already filtered through a network agenda-setting process. Thus, U.S. Olympic media gatekeepers wield the potential power to influence countless daily conversations by first selecting what they believe is important to American viewers and, second, shaping the storylines that are told within this Americanized concept of salience and importance. Thus, the *agenda* is set through a clock-time mechanism (determining what sports and athletes are shown), with the athletes that receive clock-time being *framed* through the language that accompanies sports talk narratives.

Sports communication scholars (Billings et al., 2008; Larson & Rivenburgh, 1991) have examined how identity is negotiated through media gatekeeping of megasporting events (also see Higgs & Weiller, 1994; Sage, 1998). Even more specifically, Kassing et al. (2004) argue for the need to connect issues of sport (re)production and consumption, one thread of the argument being that the examination of language within megasports telecasts that inherently serve multiple masters (such as promoting nationalism while garnering ratings and network prestige) should come to the fore of academic conversations surrounding sports media.

Along with nationalistic diversity, the most prevalent of these types of Olympic examinations has been focused on gender portrayals—in no small part because of the manner in which the event takes place, with men and women competing at the same venue and within the same telecast for nearly the same number of medals. As Cyphers and Roenigk (2008) stated before the Beijing Summer Games: “At the Olympics, women are the major players. Not only are women’s performances among the most memorable, but female viewers make up more than half of the Olympic audience” (p. 5).

Media has the power to employ sometimes overt, but mostly covert, linguistic choices (see Walther, 2004) that collectively (re)create gender dichotomies based on biological distinctions. Reid, Keerie, and Palomares (2003) argue that “gender differences in language use have evaluative consequences” (p. 211). Given that most sports talk

has been found to offer evaluative assessment of athletic performances (attributions for relative successes and failures), these consequences are central to the discussion of sport, language, and culture.

Thus, this study will not only identify the agenda-setting choices NBC employs (in terms of the types of sports highlighted within the telecast) but will also uncover the framed linguistic ramifications of the sportscaster talk embedded within these strategically selected Olympic renderings. As Kramsch (2004) articulates, “language both expresses and creates categories of thought that are shared by members of a social group . . . language is . . . responsible for the attitudes and beliefs that constitute what we call ‘culture.’” (p. 235). When considering the enormous viewership drawn in sport, the nexus of sport, language, and culture within the context of the Olympics becomes a crucial area for academic study.

Related Literature

Setting the Agenda: Five Major Sports

Previous scholarship in the area of gendered sports television talk has established agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and framing (Goffman, 1974) theories as the most appropriate grounding for the analysis of gender issues within sports media telecasts such as the Olympics (e.g., Billings & Angelini, 2007). The overwhelming majority of Olympic language studies have consisted of one composite examination—trends that are ascertained by regarding the Olympic telecast as one cohesive event with common themes and linguistic patterns regardless of the sport being broadcast. The result is a holistic approach to language, perhaps neglecting a true sense of the agenda: the strategic choices used to determine the initial linguistic data set.

However, Billings (2007) endorsed a sport-by-sport approach, finding that the “big four” Olympic sports as defined by NBC (gymnastics, track and field, swimming, and diving) of the 2004 Athens Summer Games comprised more than 85% of NBC’s prime-time coverage—to the diminishment of the other 31 events that collectively received less than 15% of combined prime-time coverage. From an agenda-setting standpoint, the discrepancy between the four major sports and the remaining events has a great deal of impact toward the understanding of linguistic implications. When boxing receives no coverage but gymnastics receives many hours in a single night, the types of gender portrayals inevitably will be affected.

In the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, Billings, Angelini, and Duke (2010) found a similar separation between the sporting “haves” and “have-nots.” More specifically, the “big four” sports found in 2004 became the “big five,” with the new prominence of beach volleyball. These five sports collectively represented more than 90% of NBC’s prime-time coverage. An overt agenda is set with such clear-cut exposure choices. For this study, it becomes the crux of an examination of how this agenda affects media frames of men and women athletes because (a) the sports largely fit the feminized domain of Kane’s (1995) notion of gender-appropriate sport and (b) methodologically, the language surrounding these five sports becomes appropriately robust and salient enough to generate detailed taxonomical analysis.

Frame by Frame, Comment by Comment

A wide range of approaches and explanations have been employed to examine sporting linguistic impact. But regardless of approach, the spoken word within televised sport is frequently observed to manifest in a way that diminishes the accomplishments of women athletes (see Bissell & Duke, 2007; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Stone & Horne, 2008). Previous studies have termed this in related ways, ranging from entrenched hegemony (Hargreaves, 1994) to systematic exclusion (Salwen & Wood, 1994) to stereotyping (Czisma, Wittig, & Schurr, 1988; Duncan, Messner, Williams, & Jensen, 1990) to marginalization (Daddario, 1994; Duncan, 1990) to bias (Eastman & Billings, 1999).

Building from the seminal work of Goffman (1974), Tankard (2001) references three functions of media frames that are relevant to sportscaster talk: selection, emphasis, and exclusion. Although there is a raw clock-time element to each of these functions (determining what specific events and athletes are shown), each function also applies to the linguistic choices (c)overly employed by sportscasters. More specifically, these media gatekeepers witness a performance, determine whether it should be deemed superior or inferior when compared with other performances, and then cognitively select attributions of success or failure based on a scheme of traditionally incorporated comments. For instance, a sportscaster *selects* a line of attribution, such as that the performance was superior because of the athlete's concentration, determines the degree to which this explanation should be *emphasized*, and makes this decision to the *exclusion* of other alternatives, such as the performance being superior because of the athlete's experience. These linguistic choices can result in profiles of individual athletes (defined as attributions of success and failure in this study)—profiles that often diverge by both the sport being and gender of the athlete.

Kane and Snyder's (1989) earlier notions of "sport typing"—the containment of women in gender-appropriate sports—come to the fore here as it appears that the five Olympic sports are largely regarded as either feminine-appropriate or androgynous according to Kane and Snyder's continuum. But, because both men and women athletes are shown in all five major sports, linguistic differences are not the result of comparing apples with oranges (e.g., watching men boxers in contrast with women in synchronized swimming). In the examination of sportscaster talk within the "big four" Olympic sports in the 2004 Summer Games, Billings (2007) noted that attribution of the successes and failures of men and women athletes differed greatly depending on which of the four sports (gymnastics, track and field, swimming, or diving) was being featured. Moreover, the sports with objective assessments (winners who could not be debated—in this case, in track and field and swimming) were far less likely to contain divergences in terms of gender than sports with subjective assessments (winners who could be debated because of a human judging element—in this case, gymnastics and diving). As Billings (2007) described it, the more artistic events that required outside judging often forced the broadcaster to try to think like the judge, resulting in commentary more likely to yield gender biases.

The degree of potential dispute in the outcome becomes a variable to test. When Michael Phelps wins a swimming final by one hundredth of a second, the result is tight but nonetheless objective. In contrast, the gold medal win of gymnast Nastia Liukin is inherently more disputable because of the role of the judge in determining the final outcome, even if it was won by a wide margin. As such, the more the winner or loser of a sporting performance can be questioned and debated, the more gender biases could be used in explaining the potential answer. Such gender attributions have been uncovered before (Farrell, 1989; Halbert & Latimer, 1994); however, the ability to examine five major sports in which both men and women compete at the same location and within the same (often interspersed) telecast is something new and, potentially, insightful.

Ultimately, modern gender biases in sportscaster talk are rarely of a sexist or overtly discriminatory nature; rather, some are covert and others are simply a form of frames employed. Relating back to Tankard (2001), this concerns the difference between the mere selection of a comment to the emphasis through repetition of the same types of comments. For instance, both men and women athletes receive comments about their physical appearance, yet the fact that women often receive twice as many comments in this area makes this frame more salient (see Billings, 2008).

Scholars have recognized for quite some time that Olympic coverage represents a double-edged sword for determining subjective notions of “fairness” and “accuracy” in the rendering of women’s athletics. On one hand, the agenda that is set within the Olympic telecast could be viewed as the highest level of aspirational fairness, with 48% of all prime-time coverage now being consistently devoted to women’s athletics within the prime-time Summer Olympic telecasts (Billings, 2008). On the other hand, the frames that are employed consistently relegate athletes into separate gendered camps, with certain attributions more salient for men athletes and other attributions residing consistently in the women’s athletic domain. The language that is selected ultimately can determine viewer perceptions and the conversations and interactions they subsequently share. Wenner (2006) summarizes the importance of examining the combination of gender and language in sports media in writing that sport “remains as a select and powerful bastion of vestigial hypermasculinity and, as such, we should use this lens to understand our identities” (p. 52).

Still, the extent to which there are certain sports that both individually and collectively represent a presumably nationalistic agenda for NBC’s telecast needs consideration before one can question the potential for gender biases within the commentary. This question has already been addressed by Billings et al. (2010), who found that 94% of all NBC’s prime-time coverage was devoted to just five sports—beach volleyball, diving, gymnastics, swimming, and track and field—confirming a firmly established sporting agenda on the part of NBC producers. Consequently, this study develops this by examining whether the linguistic framing of athletes is differentially gendered within/across the five sports, an occurrence that would suggest that the agenda setting has an extended impact. Nonetheless, before sport-specific hypotheses are formulated, a research question regarding the types of comments sportscasters employ for men and women athletes must first be proffered:

Research Question 1: To what extent does sportscaster talk surrounding athletic performances differ by the sex of the athlete?

Beyond this broader question pertaining to the taxonomical categories most likely to be employed for men and women athletes within all the major prime-time sports shown on NBC's Olympic telecast, specific hypotheses for each of the five sports can be articulated based largely on findings within the previous Billings (2007) analysis of the previous Summer Games.

First, gymnastics yielded more significant differences in sportscaster talk than the other major sports combined. Within the on-air coverage, women gymnasts were more likely to be depicted as succeeding because of experience and athletic ability, whereas men gymnasts received disproportionately more comments describing their successes in terms of their courage, strength, and concentration. In addition, when men gymnasts failed in their gymnastics performance it was more likely to be described as a loss of composure. One could claim that (a) the sample performances may have warranted such deviations and that (b) a subsequent analysis would consist of a new set of gymnasts bringing distinctive strengths and weaknesses to the event. Such claims warrant this subsequent analysis, yet one must approach the Beijing gymnastics coverage hypothesizing the following:

Hypothesis 1: Talk surrounding NBC's 2008 Olympic gymnastics coverage will contain significant differences by sex of the athlete.

Second, the other sport that yielded a substantial number of significant differences in comments by gender was diving—another event in which the winner is determined subjectively by judges. Within the Athens database, women divers were more likely to be ascribed successes because of strength and commitment, whereas men divers received disproportionate praise because of their experience. In regard to failure attributions, women divers lacked concentration, whereas men lacked athletic ability. Thus, a second hypothesis can be articulated:

Hypothesis 2: Talk surrounding NBC's 2008 Olympic diving coverage will contain significant differences by sex of the athlete.

The two other "major" sports in the Billings (2007) analysis were swimming and track and field—events in which the winners are determined by speed (using an objective stopwatch) or, in the case of field events, objective notions of distance. Interestingly, there was only one significant difference in the types of commentary employed within these two sports (women received more composure comments as attributions of failure in swimming). Thus, two additional hypotheses are postulated based on the lack of gender biases found in the Athens telecast:

Hypothesis 3: Talk surrounding NBC's 2008 Olympic swimming coverage will not contain significant differences by sex of the athlete.

Hypothesis 4: Talk surrounding NBC's 2008 Olympic track and field coverage will not contain significant differences by sex of the athlete.

Finally, the rise of beach volleyball was complete in the Beijing Olympics, making it a fifth sport that received significant coverage within NBC's prime-time telecast (nearly 6 hours of airtime). As such, this analysis included beach volleyball as a "major" sport for analysis. Given that the outcome is determined largely by preset rules (out of bounds lines and a net) with few instances in which the subjective official must negotiate these rules, the following hypothesis was created for the case of beach volleyball:

Hypothesis 5: Talk surrounding NBC's 2008 Olympic beach volleyball coverage will not contain significant differences by sex of the athlete.

The research question and five subsequent hypotheses aim to bolster our understanding of the types of language employed in gendered ways within these presumably highly marketable five major Olympic television sports.

Method

Sample

A total of 74.5 hours of NBC Olympic prime-time coverage were analyzed during the 17 nights of the 2008 Summer Olympics (August 8-24), representing 100% of NBC's scheduled prime-time coverage (which often aired until 1 a.m. EST). Only comments spoken by network-employed individuals were analyzed for descriptors and mentions of athlete names because this talk can be largely scripted and supervised by NBC editors and producers (see Billings, 2007). However, commentary was not coded for scripted versus unscripted commentary as these distinctions are increasingly difficult to consistently code given (a) new NBC practices in which reproduced profiles are shortened and complemented by integrated sportscaster talk along with spontaneous evaluation of performance and (b) blurred roles between "play by play" and "color" commentary (see Billings, 2008). Those network employees included host commentators (Bob Costas), on-site reporters (e.g., Andrea Kremer), special assignment reporters (e.g., Mary Carillo), color commentators (e.g., Ato Boldon), and all play-by-play announcers for both individual and team sports (e.g., Tom Hicks).

Coding

A "major" sport was defined as any sport receiving at least 4 hours of prime-time NBC coverage, with the result being that five sports (gymnastics, diving, swimming, track and field, and beach volleyball) were selected for analysis. Other sports may, indeed, contain deviations based on gender, yet would not yield enough generated talk to provide meaningful analysis or conclusions—given that the remaining 31 sports combine for less than 10% of the rest of the sample.

In analyzing athletic descriptors, the unit of analysis was the descriptor (defined as any adjective, adjectival phrase, adverb, or adverbial phrase), and all hours were coded for (a) the athlete's sport, (b) the sex of the athlete (man or woman), (c) the sex of the announcer (man or woman), and (d) the word-for-word descriptive phrase. Then, the descriptors were classified using the success and failure attributions listed in the Billings and Eastman (2003) taxonomy. Success and failure attributions have been operationalized as sportscaster talk attributable directly to the athletic performance (as opposed to comments on personality or physicality that may affect performance but are described in an ancillary manner). In all, nine classification categories were implemented for the analysis, encompassing comments pertaining to (a) concentration, (b) strength-based athletic skill, (c) talent-/ability-based athletic skills, (d) composure, (e) commitment, (f) courage, (g) experience, (h) athletic consonance, and (i) intelligence. One can consult the appendix for examples of commentary from the analyzed database as broken down by this category system and the sex of the athlete.

Statistical Analysis

Using Cohen's (1960) agreement formula along with Scott's (1955) formula for establishing intercoder reliability, a second coder (nonauthor) coded 20% of the database, and calculations were determined for the following variables: (a) the gender of the athlete ($K = 1.00$; $\pi = 1.00$), (b) the gender of the announcer ($K = 1.00$; $\pi = 1.00$), (c) the word-for-word descriptor or descriptive phrase ($K = .86$; $\pi = .78$), and (d) the name of the sport being discussed ($K = 1.00$; $\pi = 1.00$). Overall intercoder agreement using Cohen's kappa exceeded 96%; the overall Scott's π calculation exceeded 94%.

Once all data were analyzed and tables created, chi-square analysis was employed to determine significant differences between groups by using the percentage of overall comments as expected frequencies. For example, because 60.7% of all attributions for successes were about men athletes, it was expected that roughly the same proportion (60.7%) of comments about concentration, skill, composure, commitment, attractiveness, and so on should be established as expected frequencies for men athletes and that significant deviations would be substantially more meaningful than employing .50 as an expected frequency for each individual category.

Results

Research Question 1

Before delving into the results as divided by the five main sports that were featured in NBC's prime-time Olympic telecast, one must first understand the types of overall comments employed by NBC sportscasters to determine if sportscasters were, as a whole, employing divergent forms of sportscaster talk from previously established cognitive schema—essentially the crux of Research Question 1. The aggregate results are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Gendered Explanations of Success/Failure All Five Major Sports

	Success				Failure				Ratio of	
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men	Women
		%		%		%		%		
Concentration	7 ^a	0.2	16 ^a	0.5	8	0.8	2	0.2	0.9	8.0
Athletic skill—Strength	72	2.1	58	1.9	5	0.5	6	0.7	14.4	9.7
Athletic skill—Ability	2,089	62.1	1,961	64.0	715	73.3	611	76.0	2.9	3.2
Composure	39	1.2	31	1.0	30	3.1	21	2.6	1.3	1.5
Commitment	21	0.6	23	0.8	1	0.1	3	0.4	21.0	7.7
Courage	17	0.5	17	0.6	1	0.1	0	0.0	17.0	n.a.
Experience	716 ^b	21.3	725 ^b	23.7	109	11.2	97	12.1	6.6	7.5
Intelligence	42 ^c	1.2	18 ^c	0.6	9	0.9	5	0.6	4.7	3.6
Consonance	360 ^d	10.7	213 ^d	7.0	97 ^e	9.9	59 ^e	7.3	3.7	3.6
Total	3,363	100.0	3,062	100.0	975	100.0	804	100.0	3.4	3.8

a. $\chi^2 = 4.65$, $df = 1$, $p = .04$.

b. $\chi^2 = 5.88$, $df = 1$, $p = .02$.

c. $\chi^2 = 7.06$, $df = 1$, $p = .01$.

d. $\chi^2 = 22.77$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

e. $\chi^2 = 5.42$, $df = 1$, $p = .02$.

As Table 1 highlights, a total of 8,204 descriptors were a part of the collective databases of these five major sports. At a foundational level, one witnesses that the classifications employed remain the same and in terms of prominence regardless of gender and regardless of whether the comments were attributing success or failure. The most prominent form of comment for both men and women, and both success and failure, was (1) athletic ability, followed by (2) experience and (3) consonance (a variation of the luck variable in which things just either did or did not work out for an athlete for that given circumstance).

However, beyond these macro-level differences as defined by overall frequencies in each gender column, the cross-gender comparisons did yield significant results. More specifically, five significant differences in sportscaster talk were found within the commentary classifications including tendencies to attribute women's successes to concentration ($\chi^2 = 4.65$, $df = 1$, $p = .04$) and experience ($\chi^2 = 5.88$, $df = 1$, $p = .02$), whereas men were ascribed disproportionate success attributions in the areas of intelligence ($\chi^2 = 7.06$, $df = 1$, $p = .01$) and consonance ($\chi^2 = 22.77$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Lack of consonance was a related significant difference in attributions of men's failures ($\chi^2 = 5.42$, $df = 1$, $p = .02$), potentially suggesting an understandable inverse relationship (if a male gymnast won because it was "just his night," it's fair to assume that commentary could persist that another gymnast lost for the same consonant reason that it "wasn't his night"). These overall trends provide substantial insights to answer Research Question 1, simultaneously providing a baseline for the interpretation of the individual sport findings.

Hypothesis 1

During prime-time coverage of the 2008 Summer Olympics audience members heard 1,912 descriptors made during coverage of the gymnastics events, with female gymnasts receiving slightly more descriptors (50.5%). In considering these descriptors for gymnastics, Hypothesis 1 states the belief that NBC's coverage will contain significant gender biases. Table 2 features the gendered differences in the commentary.

The differences indicate that male gymnasts were more likely than female gymnasts to be depicted as succeeding because of their superior strength ($\chi^2 = 9.08$, $df = 1$, $p = .005$) and athletic consonance ($\chi^2 = 16.34$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), whereas female gymnasts succeeded because of their athletic ability ($\chi^2 = 8.58$, $df = 1$, $p = .005$). In addition, male gymnasts were more frequently depicted as failing due to their lack of experience ($\chi^2 = 5.17$, $df = 1$, $p = .03$) and their bad luck ($\chi^2 = 4.44$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$). For these reasons, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated that NBC's coverage of diving will also contain significant gender biases. In total 1,856 descriptors were coded during the prime-time coverage of diving on NBC. Table 3 features a categorical breakdown of these descriptors. However, no

Table 2. Gendered Explanations of Success/Failure in Gymnastics

	Success			Failure			Ratio of Success to Failure	
	Men	%	Women	%	Men	%	Men	Women
Concentration	0	0.0	5	0.7	3	1.0	n.a.	5.0
Athletic skill—Strength	25 ^a	3.9	8 ^a	1.2	1	0.3	25.0	n.a.
Athletic skill—Ability	383 ^b	59.2	477 ^b	69.3	215	71.7	1.8	2.1
Composure	16	2.5	9	1.3	11	3.7	1.5	1.3
Commitment	2	0.3	6	0.9	0	0.0	n.a.	2.0
Courage	6	0.9	7	1.0	0	0.0	n.a.	n.a.
Experience	96	14.8	111	16.1	27 ^c	9.0	3.6	8.5
Intelligence	5	0.8	3	0.4	4	1.3	1.3	3.0
Consonance	114 ^d	17.6	62 ^d	9.0	39 ^e	13.0	2.9	2.7
Total	647	100.0	688	100.0	300	100.0	2.2	2.5

a. $\chi^2 = 9.08$, $df = 1$, $p = .005$.

b. $\chi^2 = 8.58$, $df = 1$, $p = .005$.

c. $\chi^2 = 5.17$, $df = 1$, $p = .03$.

d. $\chi^2 = 16.34$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

e. $\chi^2 = 4.44$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$.

Table 3. Gendered Explanations of Success/Failure in Diving

	Success			Failure			Ratio of Success to Failure	
	Men	%	Women	Men	%	Women	Men	Women
Concentration	1	0.3	5	2	1.2	0	0.5	n.a.
Athletic skill—Strength	4	1.2	5	1	0.6	0	4.0	n.a.
Athletic skill—Ability	254	76.0	225	145	86.8	115	1.8	2.0
Composure	6	1.8	6	3	1.8	7	2.0	0.9
Commitment	4	1.2	2	0	0.0	0	n.a.	n.a.
Courage	2	0.6	0	0	0.0	0	n.a.	n.a.
Experience	42	12.6	55	4	2.4	7	10.5	7.9
Intelligence	5	1.5	1	0	0.0	0	n.a.	n.a.
Consonance	16	4.8	13	12	7.2	5	1.3	2.6
Total	334	100.0	312	167	100.0	134	2.0	2.3

Note: No significant differences surfaced.

significant differences were found in the commentary between male and female divers. For this reason Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Hypothesis 3

The prime-time coverage of swimming during the 2008 Summer Olympics yielded 1,893 total descriptors, with male swimmer receiving more (62.7%) than female swimmers. Hypothesis 3 stated that NBC's coverage would not contain significant gender biases. Table 4 features the categorical breakdown and gendered differences in this commentary.

In total, three differences were found favoring the successful athletic exploits of the male swimmers. Male swimmers succeeded because of their strength ($\chi^2 = 4.16$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$), their commitment to their sport ($\chi^2 = 4.30$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$), and luck ($\chi^2 = 9.17$, $df = 1$, $p = .005$). These results do show some gendered differences by NBC's commentators during the prime-time coverage of swimming, and therefore, Hypothesis 3 is not supported.

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 predicted that NBC's coverage of track and field during the 2008 Summer Olympics would not contain significant gender bias. Of the 2,261 total descriptors made during the track and field events during prime time, the majority were made toward male athletes (56.2%). Table 5 shows the categorical breakdown of these descriptors.

During analyses of these descriptors, four significant differences were found. Female athletes in the track and field events succeeded because of their strength ($\chi^2 = 7.55$, $df = 1$, $p = .01$) and their commitment to their sport ($\chi^2 = 4.45$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$), whereas male athletes in these events succeeded due to their level of luck ($\chi^2 = 9.41$, $df = 1$, $p = .005$). Also of note is that female athletes in track and field events were more frequently depicted as failing due to a lack of experience ($\chi^2 = 6.94$, $df = 1$, $p = .01$). Because of these results, Hypothesis 4 is not supported.

Hypothesis 5

During prime-time coverage of the 2008 Summer Olympics commentators stated 1,173 athlete descriptors during coverage of beach volleyball. Of those descriptors, female beach volleyball players received many more comments (64.6%) than their male counterparts. Due to the preset rules and the lack of subjective judges' rulings, Hypothesis 5 states that NBC's coverage of beach volleyball would be lacking in significant gender bias. The breakdown of these descriptors into their appropriate categories is featured in Table 6.

What analyses of these descriptors indicated was that beach volleyball appears to be the most gender-marked event for sportscaster talk during the 2008 Games. Female beach volleyball players succeeded because of their overall level of experience ($\chi^2 = 14.32$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$) and luck ($\chi^2 = 15.25$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), whereas male beach

Table 4. Gendered Explanations of Success/Failure in Swimming

	Success				Failure				Ratio of	
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Success to Failure	
		%		%		%		%	Men	Women
Concentration	2	0.2	1	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	n.a.	n.a.
Athletic skill—Strength	7 ^a	0.7	0 ^a	0.0	1	0.8	3	3.2	7.0	n.a.
Athletic skill—Ability	598	56.7	361	58.9	81	60.9	63	67.7	7.4	5.7
Composure	8	0.8	3	0.5	4	3.0	0	0.0	2.0	n.a.
Commitment	11 ^b	1.0	1 ^b	0.2	1	0.8	0	0.0	11.0	n.a.
Courage	1	0.1	2	0.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	n.a.	n.a.
Experience	256	24.3	182	29.7	29	21.8	18	19.4	8.8	10.1
Intelligence	12	1.1	3	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	n.a.	n.a.
Consonance	159 ^c	15.1	60 ^c	9.8	17	12.8	9	9.7	9.4	6.7
Total	1,054	100.0	613	100.0	133	100.0	93	100.0	7.9	6.6

a. $\chi^2 = 4.16$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$.b. $\chi^2 = 4.30$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$.c. $\chi^2 = 9.17$, $df = 1$, $p = .005$.

Table 5. Gendered Explanations of Success/Failure in Track and Field

	Success				Failure				Ratio of Success to Failure	
	Men	%	Women	%	Men	%	Women	%	Men	Women
Concentration	4	0.4	2	0.2	2	0.8	0	0.0	2.0	n.a.
Athletic skill—Strength	1 ^a	0.1	8 ^a	1.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	n.a.	n.a.
Athletic skill—Ability	655	62.9	493	61.2	175	71.1	116	62.7	3.7	4.3
Composure	9	0.9	9	1.1	8	3.3	6	3.2	1.1	1.5
Commitment	4 ^b	0.4	10 ^b	1.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	n.a.	n.a.
Courage	8	0.8	7	0.9	1	0.4	0	0.0	8.0	n.a.
Experience	288	27.6	250	31.0	36 ^c	14.6	49 ^c	26.5	4.2	4.4
Intelligence	9	0.9	3	0.4	1	0.4	0	0.0	9.0	n.a.
Consonance	64 ^d	6.1	24 ^d	3.0	23	9.3	14	7.6	2.8	1.7
Total	1,042	100.0	806	100.0	246	100.0	185	100.0	4.2	4.4

a. $\chi^2 = 7.55, df = 1, p = .01$.

b. $\chi^2 = 4.45, df = 1, p = .05$.

c. $\chi^2 = 6.94, df = 1, p = .01$.

d. $\chi^2 = 9.41, df = 1, p = .005$.

Table 6. Gendered Explanations of Success/Failure in Beach Volleyball

	Success				Failure				Ratio of	
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Success to Failure	
		%		%		%		%	Men	Women
Concentration	0	0.0	3	0.5	1	0.8	1	0.9	n.a.	3.0
Athletic skill—Strength	35 ^a	12.2	37 ^a	5.8	2	1.6	3	2.6	17.5	12.3
Athletic skill—Ability	199	69.6	405	63.0	99 ^b	76.7	88 ^b	76.5	2.0	4.6
Composure	0	0.0	4	0.6	4 ^c	3.1	1 ^c	0.9	n.a.	4.0
Commitment	0	0.0	4	0.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	n.a.	n.a.
Courage	0	0.0	1	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0	n.a.	n.a.
Experience	34 ^d	11.9	127 ^d	19.8	13 ^e	10.1	10 ^e	8.7	2.6	12.7
Intelligence	11 ^f	3.8	8 ^f	1.2	4	3.1	4	3.5	2.8	2.0
Consonance	7 ^g	2.4	54 ^g	8.4	6	4.7	8	7.0	1.2	6.8
Total	286	100.0	643	100.0	129	100.0	115	100.0	2.2	5.6

a. $\chi^2 = 5.51, df = 1, p = .02$.b. $\chi^2 = 25.23, df = 1, p < .001$.c. $\chi^2 = 4.35, df = 1, p = .05$.d. $\chi^2 = 14.32, df = 1, p < .001$.e. $\chi^2 = 4.50, df = 1, p = .05$.f. $\chi^2 = 4.21, df = 1, p = .05$.g. $\chi^2 = 15.25, df = 1, p < .001$.

volleyball players succeeded because of their athletic ability ($\chi^2 = 5.51$, $df = 1$, $p = .02$) and their overall intelligence ($\chi^2 = 4.21$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$). These results should be taken into consideration along with the fact that male beach volleyball players' failures were described as a lack of ability ($\chi^2 = 25.23$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), a lack of composure on the beach ($\chi^2 = 4.35$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$), and lack of experience ($\chi^2 = 4.50$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$). Because of all of these gendered differences in the descriptors during the prime-time coverage of beach volleyball, Hypothesis 5 is not supported.

Discussion

From a theoretical standpoint, one must comprehend these results in a twofold structure. The agenda-setting function that is clearly enacted by NBC ultimately is the largest factor in the determination of the media frames employed. The choices of a relative few NBC gatekeepers results in a prime-time telecast that nearly exclusively profiles five sports at the exclusion of all others, in turn setting the linguistic frames that are employed for each gender. It is fair to presume that this study could be entirely different in focus had the highlighted sports included events such as wrestling, boxing, basketball, or synchronized swimming.

One could first assume that this agenda-setting function NBC has enacted is not largely a gender-based structure—men and women are shown heavily in all five of these selected events. However, when considering the role of sport-typing (see Kane, 1995), gender plays a critical role in the understanding of the second theoretical level of discussion: framing. The range of the five “major” sports shown on NBC ranges from the androgynous (track and field) to Kane’s notion of the prototypically feminine (gymnastics). Thus, the clock-time devoted to men and women athletes is relatively representative, yet the sports televised within this notion of clock-time are not representative of all Olympic sports whatsoever. When significant gender differences in sportscaster talk arise within these five “major” sports, at least part of these differences are the result of the initial agenda-setting function of NBC’s choices about what the prime-time audience would prefer to think about—decisions that are made years in advance with a meticulous sense of what will appeal to the widest swath of mainstream America.

Norton (2000) argues that “a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time” (p. 5), and this concept is on display not only for Olympic sportscasters but also potentially for the viewing audience at home in the United States (and, indeed, globally). Insights on seemingly interpersonal talk between commentators can ultimately manifest in mediated texts (see Fairclough, 1992). The divergences in sportscaster talk based on the gender of the athlete are not merely interpersonal or media phenomenon, but have broader implications of an institutional nature (Halone, 2010). One could rightly presume that the sex of the sportscaster could have a significant impact on the talk that arises within the mediated conversation; however, the amount of talk generated from women sportscasters was meager (less than 15% of the database) and underscores other problems endemic in

the sportscasting employment structure while also leaving this empirical question open for continued examination in future research.

Delving deeper into a discussion of linguistic frames, Billings (2007) uncovered a form of gender bias that appeared to be on a dichotomy of assessment, concluding that the more subjective the athletic outcome became the more likely athletes of different genders would be described differently. Although this correlation may still be true (and future research should continue to determine whether this conclusion has validity at macro levels of sports media), this study of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics uncovered gender biases that do not easily follow this objective/subjective pattern. Rather, one may begin to conclude that gymnastics has yielded a consistent form of divergent talk: diving, swimming, and track and field are offering inconsistent results, and beach volleyball is a new event that may be particularly ripe for men and women athletes to be portrayed in starkly different ways.

Not only the event outcome but also the number of athletes typically shown could influence framing mechanisms. For instance, even with an Ameri-centric focus, gymnastics typically offers dozens of performances in a given night, particularly in team and individual event competitions; conversely, a sport like beach volleyball could be shown for an hour and yet only feature commentary about four individuals. Thus, some databases offer more breadth (in terms of number of athletes) than others. Consequently, the framing mechanism of emphasis (see Tankard, 2001) may be more likely to be exhibited in some sports than in others.

Relatedly, more research must be conducted that takes into account a greater number of sportscasters within a larger database. Given that NBC tries to have a great deal of consistency in sportscasting talent each Olympics (producer Molly Solomon refers to it as “muscle memory” in Billings, 2008, p. 32), some significant gender differences could be attributed to individuals much more than consistent systemic choices that are likely to be made by a plethora of sportscasters at all levels of modern media. It is fair to assume, for instance, that one simple change in a track and field booth could result in a change in not only commentary choices but also in interpersonal dynamics within and among broadcasting teams—leading one back to the notion at the outset of this study, that a relative handful of people are shaping a telecast touted as the most-watched in American television history. Even beyond that, additional databases of descriptors will ultimately provide an ample data set for the examination of sportscaster sex and the potential interactive role with gendered sports talk.

Another important contribution (and subsequent extrapolation) regarding this set of results is that there is a synthesizing nature of commentary that makes the taxonomy more robust, yet also makes it more likely for significant differences to arise in pairs (or potentially even clusters). For instance, a beach volleyball match between an experienced team and an inexperienced team is likely to naturally produce two related forms of comments: (a) success because of the experience of the (presumably) winning team and (b) failure because of the relative lack of experience of the (presumably) losing team. In instances such as these, it is difficult to separate success from failure as the crowning of a champion inherently begets a postmortem conversation on what other competitors lacked in comparison with the gold medal winner.

Furthermore, these taxonomical categories relate to each other in a much less distinct manner because the commentary space (airtime) is finite. If a commentator is likely to direct the preponderance of his/her comments to athletic strength, all the other categories are likely to receive less attention and focus. Within sports media, certain sportscasters highlight different aspects of performance that they believe are primary contributors to the end product (success/failure) at the Olympics; the lack of airtime for other forms of commentary is a by-product of these individualized agendas. Moreover, the fact that sportscasters devoted more than half of their commentary specifically to issues of athletic skill means that future studies should attempt to deconstruct this taxonomical category, perhaps offering meaningful subcategories beyond this broader attribution.

As women athletes permeate measurable portions of sports media, the discussion has naturally shifted to not just whether women receive coverage but what sports are most likely to be shown and, subsequently, what happens within the sportscaster talk surrounding these gendered sporting events. Scholars must still attempt to highlight the great chasm that persists in clock-time differentials in sports media (particularly outside of the Olympic Games), yet studies such as this event-by-event breakdown wield utility of a higher order as they ultimately articulate the question: When women athletes do get center stage, how are they linguistically treated in the media? By attempting to uncover trends, continuums, and dichotomies in language choices articulated by sportscasters, the combination of gender, sport, and language is inherently explored in a much more complex and robust manner. Future studies must continue to expand the sophistication of analyses from mere crosses of gender variables to extrapolations on the overarching structures inherent in commentary of national and international sporting events.

Appendix

Gendered Examples of Success/Failure Sport Commentary

Category	Success		Failure	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Concentration	"he's engaged"	"never lets anything distract her"	"let it get to his head"	"got under the pressure"
	"look at the focus"	"focused on the finish line"	"that was a complete lack of concentration"	"not paying attention"
Strength-based athletic skills	"monster strong"	"nobody hits that table as hard"	"he doesn't have quite as much strength"	"does not have the firepower"
	"he's so powerful"	"pounds it down the line"	"didn't pull the bar hard enough"	"not a real powerful swimmer"

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

Category	Success		Failure	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Talent-/ability-based athletic skills	"beautiful body lines"	"delivers another great performance"	"can't even handle the first hurdle"	"makes a few errors"
	"he is world class on the pommel horse"	"just a great racer"	"he has fallen off the pace"	"came up short there"
Composure	"calm and cool"	"she loves the pressure of competition"	"so frustrated with himself"	"a little bit rattled"
	"nothing's going to rattle him"	"she did not panic"	"can't control his emotions"	"she went to the end of the board and froze"
Commitment	"been working on this dive so much"	"never gave up"	"lack of intensity"	"maybe not the hardest worker"
	"willing his failing body to the finish"	"motivated to come back even stronger"		
Courage	"he's a warrior"	"coming out unintimidated"	"no fight in him"	
	"gutsy performance"	"really showing her courage today"		
Experience	"reigning world champion"	"world champion pair"	"he did not make the team"	"Olympics have not been her best venue"
	"defending Olympic medalist"	"winningest woman of all time"	"his best time was seven years ago"	"also fell on the first day"
Athletic consonance	"very lucky play"	"lucky serve"	"his Olympic dream is crushed"	"very, very unlucky"
	"fate on his side"	"lucky for her the ball went right"	"unreal disaster"	"she felt very unlucky"
Intelligence	"smartest player in the game"	"did the smart thing on a blind landing"	"mental error"	"just blanked on it"
	"making the right choices"	"wise move"	"not the smartest move in the world"	"what a brain lock"

Authors' Note

We express our appreciation for the detailed comments of Kelby K. Halone and Lindsey J. Meân, the guest editors, and the anonymous reviewers on earlier drafts of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

References

- Billings, A. C. (2007). From diving boards to pole vaults: Gendered athlete portrayals in the "big four" sports at the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics. *Southern Communication Journal*, 72, 329-344.
- Billings, A. C. (2008). *Olympic media: Inside the biggest show on television*. London, England: Routledge.
- Billings, A. C., & Angelini, J. R. (2007). Packaging the games for viewer consumption: Gender, ethnicity, and nationality in NBC's coverage of the 2004 Summer Olympics. *Communication Quarterly*, 55, 95-111.
- Billings, A. C., Angelini, J. R., & Duke, A. H. (2010). Gendered profiles of Olympic history: Sportscaster dialogue in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 54, 9-23.
- Billings, A. C., Brown, C. L., Crout, J. H., McKenna, K. E., Rice, B. A., Timanus, M. E., & Zeigler, J. (2008). The Games through the NBC lens: Gender, ethnic and national equity in the 2006 Torino Winter Olympics. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 52, 215-230.
- Billings, A. C., & Eastman, S. T. (2003). Framing identities: Gender, ethnic, and national parity in network announcing of the 2002 Winter Olympics. *Journal of Communication*, 53, 369-386.
- Bissell, K., & Duke, A. (2007). Bump, set, spike: An analysis of commentary and camera angles of women's beach volleyball during the 2004 Summer Olympics. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 13, 35-53.
- Cohen, J. A. (1960). Coefficient for agreement of nominal scales. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 20, 37-46.
- Cyphers, L., & Roenigk, A. (2008, August 11). The Olympics are for girls. *ESPN: The Magazine*, p. 5.
- Czisma, K., Wittig, A., & Schurr, K. (1988). Sport stereotypes and gender. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 10, 62-74.
- Daddario, G. (1994). Chilly scenes of the 1992 Winter Games: The mass media and the marginalization of female athletes. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 11, 275-288.
- Duncan, M. C. (1990). Sports photography and sexual differences: Images of women and men in the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 7, 22-42.

- Duncan, M. C., & Hasbrook, C. A. (1988). Denial of power in televised women's sports. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 1-21.
- Duncan, M. C., Messner, M. A., Williams, L., & Jensen, K. (1990). *Gender stereotyping in televised sports*. Los Angeles, CA: Amateur Athletic Foundation.
- Eastman, S. T., & Billings, A. C. (1999). Gender parity in the Olympics: Hying women athletes, favoring men athletes. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 23, 140-170.
- ESPN.com. (2008, September 5). *Beijing TV coverage drew 4.7 billion viewers worldwide*. Retrieved from <http://sports.espn.go.com/oly/news/story?id=3571042>
- Fairclough, N. (Ed.). (1992). *Critical language awareness*. London, England: Longman.
- Farrell, T. (1989). Media rhetoric as social drama: The Winter Olympics of 1984. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 6, 158-182.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Halbert, C., & Latimer, M. (1994). "Battling" gendered language: An analysis of the language used by sports commentators in a televised coed tennis competition. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 11, 298-308.
- Halone, K. K. (2010). The institutional(ized) nature of identity in and around sports. In H. L. Hundley & A. C. Billings (Eds.), *Examining identity in sports media* (pp. 239-262). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hargreaves, J. A. (1994). *Sporting females: Critical issues in the history and sociology of women's sports*. London, England: Routledge.
- Hiestand, M. (2008, Aug. 25). NBC scores mixed bag of pros, cons. *USA Today*, p. 3C.
- Higgs, D. T., & Weiller, K. H. (1994). Gender bias and the 1992 Summer Olympic Games: An analysis of television coverage. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 18, 234-246.
- Kane, M. J. (1995). Resistance/transformation of the oppositional binary: Exposing sport as a continuum. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 19, 191-218.
- Kane, M. J., & Snyder, E. (1989). Sport typing: The social "containment" of women in sport. *Arena Review*, 13, 77-96.
- Kassing, J. W., Billings, A. C., Brown, R. S., Halone, K. K., Harrison, K., Krizek, B., . . . Turman, P. D. (2004). Communication in the community of sport: The process of enacting, (re)producing, consuming, and organizing sport. *Communication Yearbook*, 28, 373-410.
- Kramsch, C. (2004). Language, thought, and culture. In A. Davies & C. Elder (Eds.), *Handbook of applied linguistics* (pp. 235-261). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Larson, J. F., & Rivenburgh, N. K. (1991). A comparative analysis of Australian, U.S., and British telecasts of the Seoul Olympic ceremony. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 35, 75-94.
- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, 176-187.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity, and educational change*. Harlow, England: Longman.
- Reid, S. A., Keerie, N., & Palomares, N. A. (2003). Language, gender salience, and social influence. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 22, 210-233.

- Sage, G. (1998). *Power and ideology in American sport: A critical perspective*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Salwen, M., & Wood, B. (1994). Depictions of female athletes on Sports Illustrated covers, 1957-1989. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 17, 98-107.
- Scott, W. (1955). Reliability of content analysis: The case of nominal scale coding. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 17, 321-325.
- Stone, J., & Horne, J. (2008). The print media coverage of skiing and snowboarding in Britain. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 32, 94-112.
- Tankard, J. W. (2001). The empirical approach to the study of media framing. In S. D. Reese, O. H. Gandy, & A. E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing public life* (pp. 95-106). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Walther, J. B. (2004). Language and communication technology. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 23, 384-396.
- Wenner, L. (2006). Sports and media through the super glass mirror: Placing blame, breast-beating, and a gaze to the future. In A. Raney & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Handbook of sport and media* (pp. 45-62). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bios

James R. Angelini (PhD, Indiana University) is an assistant professor of communication at the University of Delaware. His research focuses on the cognitive processing of media, with specific foci on mediated sports and advertising.

Andrew C. Billings (PhD, Indiana University) is an associate professor and director of the Pearce Center for Professional Communication at Clemson University. His research focuses on the intersection between sport, media, and identity. He is the author of more than 40 journal articles and author/editor of four books, including *Olympic Media* (2008).