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### "Man, That Was a Pretty Shot": An Analysis of Gendered Broadcast Commentary Surrounding the 2000 Men's and Women's NCAA Final Four Basketball Championships

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SPORTS AND MEDIA

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“Man, That Was a Pretty Shot”:  
An Analysis of Gendered Broadcast  
Commentary Surrounding the 2000 Men’s  
and Women’s NCAA Final Four  
Basketball Championships

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*Current research on sports broadcast commentary indicates that the commentary type employed to evaluate athletic performance by men and women is implicated through the language of gendered assumptions about the respective athlete and the respective sport. This study analyzed the broadcast commentary surrounding the 2000 Men’s and Women’s National Collegiate Athletic Association Final Four tournament games to assess the prevalence and degree to which gender-based evaluations characterized athletic performance by men and women. A content analysis of*

*2,367 lines of broadcast commentary revealed significant differences that categorically accounted for male athletes primarily in terms of physicality and athleticism, whereas female athletes were categorically evaluated in terms of (a) positive consonance, (b) personality, (c) looks and appearance, and (d) background. Results also revealed that, irrespective of broadcast commentator sex, the men's games generated significantly more lines of broadcast commentary than did the women's games. Male broadcast commentators also significantly monopolized airtime, even in the presence of female sportscasters, across men's and women's games. The results have implications for future research in the domain of sports communication in particular, and the domain of synthesis scholarship (O'Sullivan, 1999) in the communication discipline in general.*

Although any given sports year has many pinnacles—from the Super Bowl to the World Series—perhaps no sport dominates American culture the way college basketball pervades the month of March. Given that the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) basketball tournaments for both men and women happen during these same 3 weeks, the media commentary surrounding this annual ritual of “March Madness” also provides an opportunity to take its fans down an athletic path strewn with gendered assumptions. Eastman and Billings’s (2001) analysis of 66 regular season men’s and women’s collegiate basketball games revealed that athlete gender significantly altered the ways in which the commentators employed gender-based language to describe athletic performance. These findings contribute to an accumulating body of literature documenting the existence of gender bias in televised sports broadcasts (cf. Daddario, 1994; Eastman & Billings, 1999, 2000; Halbert & Latimer, 1994; Tuggle, 1997; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). Clearly, the media have the ability to discursively shape reality (cf. McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Indeed, previous research has concluded that mediated portrayals of sporting events endorse implicit assumptions suggesting that female athletes are inferior to male athletes (Kane, 1989). Therefore, an analysis of sports broadcast commentary at men’s and women’s sporting events can reveal cultural-based assumptions about gender biases. Through conducting a content analysis of the Final Four telecasts, one can inquire whether such mediated inferiority permeates commentary at the highest level of a sport.

## RELATED LITERATURE

In 1999, the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) unveiled its new slogan: “We got game.” Although the slogan proved to be successful in terms of increased ratings (Barron, 1999), the media continue to characterize women’s basketball as being second rate when compared with men’s basketball. Research in the domain of sport studies (Daddario, 1994; Eastman & Billings, 1999, 2000; Halbert & Latimer, 1994; Tuggle, 1997; Tuggle & Owen, 1999) has identified the

presence of gender bias in televised sports broadcasts. Here, scholars have contended that female athletes continue to be the victims of stereotyping. For example, Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) conducted a content analysis of the 1986 men's and women's NCAA college basketball national championships, finding that broadcast commentary degraded and trivialized the female athlete. Hallmark and Armstrong (1999) likewise studied the men's and women's NCAA basketball championships (1991–1995) and, from a media production orientation, found that the women's championship game employed fewer cameras and fewer graphics than did the men's championship telecast. This led them to deduce that differential production decisions could mediate public perceptions about the value and significance of the NCAA women's championship games. From this, they concluded that technical coverage of women's games was inferior to that of the NCAA men's championship games (Hallmark & Armstrong, 1999). In addition, Messner, Duncan, and Wachs (1996) examined the coverage of the men's and women's Final Four basketball tournaments, concluding that the men's Final Four was constructed by the sports and media complex to be a “must see,” whereas the women's Final Four was constructed largely as a “nonevent.” Here they contended that such coverage serves to preserve processes of hegemonic masculinity and financial gain for television networks, while preserving dominant power structures in collegiate athletics.

Mediated accounts of gendered athletic performance have been examined almost exclusively within the research domain of sport studies. Despite the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, this fragmented—yet slowly accumulating—area of research can be generally explicated in terms of (a) the nature of on-air broadcast commentary and (b) mediated exposure (i.e., clock time) of men's and women's athletic events.

### On-Air Broadcast Commentary

Sport scholars have analyzed mediated gender portrayals of athletes via broadcast commentary employed by on-air sportscasters. The research in this venue of sport research can be generally characterized in terms of (a) evaluative content of broadcast commentary employed to characterize athletes and (b) specific language use employed in broadcast commentary to characterize athletic performance.

Halbert and Latimer (1994) conducted a seminal analysis of the evaluative content employed by broadcast commentators during an exhibition tennis match that occurred between Martina Navratilova and Jimmy Connors. Their content analysis indicated that the commentary surrounding the event evaluated Navratilova less favorably than Connors. They found egregious instances of (a) naming practices (e.g., Navratilova was called “Martina,” whereas Connors was referred to as “Connors”) and (b) gender marking (Navratilova was usually

qualified as “best in women’s tennis,” whereas Connors was considered the “best in tennis”) throughout the broadcast. The ratio of commentary praise to commentary criticism was overwhelmingly distinct by gender. For example, Navratilova was criticized more often than she was praised (29 praises: 41 criticisms), whereas Connors was praised more than four times as often as he was criticized (70 praises: 16 criticisms; Halbert & Latimer, 1994). Although Connors did eventually win the tennis match between the two, the researchers observed that the broadcast commentary—even when the score was tied—was skewed in favor of Connors. Most notably, when the score was tied at three games in the first set, Connors had been praised 30 times by commentators whereas Navratilova was praised only 7 times (Halbert & Latimer, 1994).

Research by Billings (in press) corroborates these findings. The praise-to-criticism ratio of broadcast commentary in the 1999 U.S. Open tennis tournament showed that (a) female athletes were criticized more frequently than they were praised, whereas (b) male athletes were praised more often than they were criticized (Billings, in press). Halbert and Latimer (1994) found this praise-to-criticism ratio to be 0.7:1 for Navratilova and 4.3:1 for Connors—an overwhelming difference. Billings’s (in press) study yielded a smaller, yet still significant, ratio—0.9:1 for women and 1.2:1 for men. Building heuristically from the work of Halbert and Latimer (1994), Eastman and Billings (1999) analyzed 3,256 evaluative descriptors in the 1994 (Winter), 1996 (Summer), and 1998 (Winter) Olympic games. They examined the explanations that broadcast commentators employed to account for an athlete’s success or failure. Interestingly, for two Olympic games (1996 and 1998), significant differences emerged among the number of explanations commentators employed. In both years, Eastman and Billings (1999) showed that the differences in both events favored male athletes; the success of male athletes was accounted for in terms of (a) exceptional courage, (b) experience, (c) composure, and (d) athletic skills. Alternatively, “lack of experience” was listed as the evaluative reason for failure among the female athletes four times more frequently than it was for their male athletic counterparts (Eastman & Billings, 1999).

Differential language use by on-air sports commentators has also implicated assumptions of athletic gender roles surrounding athletic performance. Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993) and Koivula (1999), respectively, found a generalized language bias against female athletes, observing that women were often referred to as girls by those commentators narrating the event. Eastman and Billings’s (1999) study of the 1994, 1996, and 1998 Olympic games found that language use across broadcast commentators in all three Olympic telecasts was significantly (i.e., statistically) different in its characterization of the attractive nature of female athletes. In addition, language use surrounding the strength of male athletes more than doubled similar comments advanced about the strength of their female counterparts (Eastman & Billings, 1999).

A recent study by Eastman and Billings (2001) examined the language-based and evaluative features surrounding broadcast commentary in 66 regular season NCAA men's and women's college basketball games. Content analysis of the descriptors (operationalized as the adjective or adverb words or phrases) as its unit of analysis revealed that both race and gender of the athlete significantly predicted the ways in which broadcast commentators described the respective game. For instance, White female athletes received a disproportionate amount of commentary (42%) when considering the percentage of White female athletes playing the game (32%). In addition, the authors found that commentary about the female players contained increased attributions of slower speed and team rather than individual effort. These gender-based results were consistent with the findings of Eastman and Billings (2000), whereby sports news program anchors were found to treat athletes differently according to athlete gender. For instance, language choices used to describe female athletes included "just not ready for this kind of competition" and "necessity was the mother of invention for her." In contrast, words such as "Kryptonite," "savior," and "messiah" were employed to account for the gendered activity of male athletes (Eastman & Billings, 2000, p. 208).

Clearly, the aforementioned studies—collectively—begin to suggest that the mediated nature of sports broadcast commentary is accompanied by gender bias, a bias that appears to communicatively manifest itself in a relatively dynamic (a) mild-to-extreme, (b) latent-to-manifest, and (c) overt-to-covert fashion. What has yet to emerge from such findings, however, is a theoretically based explanation that attempts to communicatively account for this mediated occurrence.

### Mediated Exposure

Several researchers have shown that female athletes, and the respective sports that accompany them, have encountered difficulty overcoming historically governed assumptions and traditions that surround mediated aspects of sports culture. Eastman and Billings (2000) examined media coverage of female athletes in televised sports programs. Drawing their observations from a 76-night database, they found that CNN's *Sports Tonight* devoted only 7% of its coverage to female athletes and their respective sports, whereas ESPN's *SportsCenter* only devoted 5% to female athletes and their respective sports. Research examining Olympic telecasts from the (a) 1992 (Winter, Summer; Higgs & Weiler, 1994), (b) 1994 (Winter; Eastman & Otteson, 1994), (c) 1996 (Summer; Billings, Eastman, & Newton, 1998), and (d) 1998 (Winter) Olympic games (Eastman & Billings, 1999; Tuggle & Owen, 1999) revealed that male athletic events were shown significantly more frequently than female athletic events (Eastman & Billings, 1999; Higgs & Weiler, 1994; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). Given that female

athletes won all the gold medals for the United States in 1994 and, moreover, that NBC declared its telecast to be the Year of the Woman Athlete in 1996, such findings create a paradox. Tuggle and Owen's (1999) analysis of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games additionally revealed that the television network almost exclusively televised those events that were physically attractive to the viewer, such as gymnastics, diving, and sprinting. The physically unattractive sports—such as field hockey, shot put, discus, and softball—were relegated to short segments between main events, if covered at all (Tuggle & Owen, 1999). As Jones, Murrell, and Jackson (1999) lamented, the domain of sports broadcasting is still divided by gender, separating the pretty from the powerful (p. 183). Indeed, when considering mediated comparisons of television exposure, female athletes and their respective sports have been communicatively shortchanged.

### BROADCAST COMMENTARY AS A SITE FOR SYNTHESIS SCHOLARSHIP

Communication scholars have lamented over the (interpersonal and mass) bifurcation that has historically and conceptually characterized the identity of the communication discipline (see Hawkins, Wiemann, & Pingree, 1988). Although empirical evidence exists to support such a contention (Rogers, 1999), a proposal to overcome this bifurcated disciplinary identity is what O'Sullivan (1999) identified as "synthesis scholarship." Conceptualized as "scholarship in which the author(s) addressed communication phenomena in a way that sought to incorporate, bridge, or transcend interpersonal and mass mediated perspectives" (p. 575), an analysis of mediated sports broadcast commentary would both logically and unequivocally satisfy O'Sullivan's criteria as a theoretical site for synthesis scholarship. First, the phenomenal nature of sports broadcast commentary can be characterized as both mediated and interpersonal discourse. Second, sportscasters, given that all are employed by network conglomerates, concurrently serve an organizational role. Third, the goal of sports broadcast commentary is to generate media ratings, while accomplishing their respective organizational task in their enacted organizational role.

The interpersonal and mediated demeanor of the broadcast commentary employed by sports commentators at a sporting event has an influential impact on how viewers experience, and subsequently interpret, the outcome of that event. As Wenner (1989) explained:

The fan at home is aided and abetted in interpreting the contest by the television camera, which focuses on action deemed important. Announcers add to this focus, as their commentary reinforces and heightens the significance of the contest and its players. (p. 15)

Wenner and Gantz (1998) contended that a “fan’s orientation to sports, to a certain sport, to a certain team, or a featured play can shade [their] experience” (p. 234). Given that such sports fans probably listen to a sporting event employing an appreciative versus a discriminative listening orientation (cf. Wolvin & Coakley, 1996), the broadcast commentary used to account for, and subsequently evaluate, the athletic performance of male and female NCAA basketball athletes during the 2000 Final Four tournament games might have discreetly established a gendered agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) of a peripheral nature (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) for those 14.3 million and 3.43 million homes that were respectively engaging in the men’s and women’s championship games this past year (Withers, 2000). This prompted the consideration of the first research question:

RQ1: How did sports commentators describe the athletic performance of male and female athletes in the broadcast commentary surrounding the 2000 NCAA Final Four basketball championship games?

According to Eagly (1987), women have historically occupied communal (e.g., caregiver) roles, which have traditionally been ascribed a lower social status than the roles of men, who have historically occupied instrumental (e.g., provider) roles, which have traditionally been ascribed a higher social status. The societal perpetuation of these respective roles has concurrently led to gender-role expectations and gender-related stereotypes (Eagly, 1987), leading to an interactive assumption that higher status individuals are viewed as influential (i.e., men), whereas lower status individuals are viewed as influence prone (i.e., women; Eagly & Wood, 1982). Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory extends Eagly’s (1987) interpretation of gender into an intergroup framework. Specifically, Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) theory explains that (a) the occupation of different social roles by men and women would, in turn, (b) create a differential social context (or reality) for each group, resulting in (c) the formation of a differential social identity for each group, that would (d) foster an intergroup orientation, which would (e) foster differential assumptions, expectations, and beliefs regarding each group, that could ultimately (f) influence the nature of the interactive episode among respective intergroup members.

Applied to the situated event of sports commentary, one could reason that the female collegiate athlete is occupying a status role that has been historically and traditionally occupied by men, possibly constituting an expectancy violation (cf. Burgoon, 1978, 1995; Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997). Therefore, the gendered nature of the evaluative broadcast commentary employed would be significantly influenced by (a) the gender of the individual occupying the athletic role (i.e., man, woman) and (b) the gender of the individual occupying the sports commentator role (i.e., man, woman). Thus, the following two hypotheses are advanced:



H1: The gendered nature of the evaluative broadcast commentary employed by sports commentators will be significantly different depending on the gender of the athlete under evaluation throughout the 2000 NCAA Final Four championship games.

H2: The gendered nature of the evaluative broadcast commentary employed by sports commentators will be significantly different depending on the gender of the sports commentator throughout the 2000 NCAA Final Four championship games.

Given the aforementioned discussion of assumptions based on differential gender roles, it is worthy to note that the occupational status characterizing the sports commentator has been historically dominated by men. However, the inherent task communicatively surrounding the nature of sports commentary is the process of engaging in interpersonal dialogue—a communicative function that is developmentally fostered, and has been historically enacted, more competently by women (cf. Sheldon, 1996). Therefore, one might expect female sports commentators to generate more interpersonal dialogue surrounding a respective athletic event. Yet, given that the organizational climate surrounding a sporting event is one that has been traditionally framed in masculine terms (Kane, 1989), the informal context of a respective athletic event might mitigate any opportunity for the female commentator to comfortably enact this presumed gender role. Therefore, given the dynamic uncertainties surrounding this facet of the athletic context, the following research questions are advanced:

RQ2: Does the amount of broadcast commentary generated surrounding the 2000 NCAA Final Four championship games differ depending on the gender of the athlete?

RQ3: Does the amount of broadcast commentary generated surrounding the 2000 NCAA Final Four championship games differ depending on the gender of the broadcast commentator?

## THE RESEARCH STUDY

Because both the men's and women's college basketball Final Fours were telecast on major networks (CBS and ESPN, respectively) and telecast on the same weekend (March 31–April 3, 2000), conducting a comparative analysis of broadcast commentary within the men's and women's Final Four offers an opportunity to comparatively examine the intersection among communication, media, gender, and sport. The specific intent of this study was to determine if, even at the highest level of athletic accomplishment—such as the Final Four—

gendered evaluations pervaded sports broadcast commentary. Although prior research has revealed an announcer bias against female athletes (Tuggle & Owen, 1999), the inherent nature of the NCAA college basketball Final Four implies that viewers will be watching the best men's and women's basketball that college has to offer. Thus, undergoing an analysis of the best four teams in both men's and women's college basketball would preliminarily, yet accumulatively, advance the current knowledge base of gender-based evaluations of male and female athletes.

This study advances the interdisciplinary research on gendered evaluations of athletic performance in a fourfold fashion. First, this study examines an entire genre of a mediated sporting event (i.e., championship games) rather than a particular sample among sporting events (i.e., regular season games). Second, this study eliminates confounding factors (e.g., clock time, temporal and historical issues of television programming) that might differentially influence the extent to which gender-based evaluations might surface throughout broadcast commentary at a respective athletic event. Third, this study situates sports broadcast commentary as a communicative event, which serves multiple interpersonal, institutional, and mediated message orientations. Fourth, this study specifically examines those actual messages that reveal how sports commentators account for athletic performance in the dialogue employed by those sports commentators as they are engulfed in narrating the athletic event (cf. Hansen, 1999).

## METHOD

Content analytic methods (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989) were employed to analyze broadcast commentary surrounding the men's and women's NCAA Final Four basketball games in the year 2000.

### Population of Investigation

All men's and women's 2000 NCAA Final Four basketball games ( $n = 6$ ) were subject to analysis. The NCAA men's games ( $n = 3$ ) consisted of two semifinal games (Michigan State University vs. University of Wisconsin; University of Florida vs. University of North Carolina) and its championship game (Michigan State University vs. University of Florida). The NCAA women's games ( $n = 3$ ) likewise entailed two semifinal games (University of Connecticut vs. Penn State University; University of Tennessee vs. Rutgers University) and its championship game (University of Connecticut vs. University of Tennessee).

## Preliminary Procedures

Each game was videotaped from pregame commentary to postgame commentary. Word-for-word transcripts of broadcast commentary were typed from the videotape of each game. Transcription of broadcast commentary first consisted of literal transcription of the discourse employed among commentators (e.g., distinguishing broadcast commentary between CBS commentator Jim Nantz and CBS commentator Billy Packer). Six individuals occupied commentator roles in this analysis. Broadcasters for the men's games, televised on CBS, consisted of Jim Nantz (play-by-play action), Billy Packer (color commentary), and Armen Keteyan (floor reporting). Broadcasters for the women's games on ESPN consisted of Mike Patrick (play-by-play action), Anne Meyers (color commentary), and Michelle Tafoya (floor reporting). A line of broadcast commentary served as the unit of analysis, operationalized as "the narrative account employed by the broadcast commentator, whether in a single sentence or in a series of sentences, to evaluate the athletic performance of a collegiate athlete in an athletic event" (cf. Burnett, 1991). The men's games generated 185 pages of broadcast commentary, respectively, between the two semifinal games ( $n = 60$ ; 65 pages) and its championship game ( $n = 60$  pages). The women's games generated 87 pages of broadcast commentary, respectively, between the two semifinal games ( $n = 35$ ; 24) and its championship game ( $n = 28$  pages). This initially resulted in 272 transcribed pages of broadcast commentary.

Following the work of Eastman and Billings (2001), broadcast commentary was analyzed from the beginning of the game (i.e., starting tip-off) to the end of the game (i.e., where the second-half clock strikes 00:00). This subsequently resulted in 160.50 pages ( $n = 1,488$  lines) of broadcast commentary for the men's game, and 76.25 pages ( $n = 879$  lines) of broadcast commentary for the women's game; a total of 236.75 pages ( $n = 2,367$  lines) of broadcast commentary suitable for analysis.

## Category Construction

Broadcast commentary was analyzed by employing eight ( $n = 8$ ) criteria: (a) game status (semifinal; final), (b) game time (before half; after half), (c) broadcast announcer gender (man; woman), (d) athlete gender (man; woman), (e) athlete race (White; Black), (f) commentary type (color; play-by-play; floor), (g) whether the athlete was accounted for in a broadcast commentary line (yes or no; if yes, note descriptor), and (h) whether multiple descriptors were employed to account for an athlete in a broadcast category line (yes or no; if yes, note additional descriptor).

Following the work of Eastman and Billings (2001), broadcast commentary accounts were initially categorized, and subsequently analyzed, according to

(a) physicality and athleticism (e.g., can physically dominate the lane), (b) intelligence and mental skill (e.g., can read defenses easily), (c) hard work and effort (e.g., going the extra mile tonight), (d) determination and motivation (e.g., he simply won't let them lose), (e) speed (e.g., blows past everyone), (f) positive consonance (e.g., he's feeling it), (g) negative consonance (e.g., her entire game is completely off), (h) leadership (e.g., everyone follows from her example), (i) versatility (e.g., he does it all out there), (j) team orientation (e.g., always does what is best for the team), (k) physical power (e.g., knocks him over on the way to the hoop), (l) mental power (her smarts are the top reason she dominates), (m) personality (e.g., if you've ever met her, you'd know she's a good kid), (n) looks and appearance (e.g., sleek body), (o) background (e.g., grew up in Compton), and (p) other (e.g., she does not always get the credit she deserves).

### Coding Procedures

Four individuals ( $m = 2; f = 2$ ) served as coders for the study. Two of the 4 individuals ( $m = 1; f = 1$ ) had been, or were currently, a student athlete, whereas 2 ( $m = 1; f = 1$ ) of the 4 were scholars associated with the study of collegiate athletics.

A training session was conducted, providing coders with a code book and procedural instructions to clarify subsequent coding responsibilities. On completion of the training session, a trial coding process was conducted. Broadcast commentary selected for inclusion in this trial process consisted of 10% of transcribed pages representing one men's final four game ( $n = 6$  transcribed pages). This resulted in a sample of 101 lines of broadcast commentary. Selected transcript pages were generated as a result of employing systematic random sampling with a random start.

Each member of the coding team independently analyzed all 101 lines of broadcast commentary in light of the aforementioned categories ( $n = 8$ ). Upon completing of this trial coding phase, intercoder reliability was assessed (Holsti, 1969). Overall reliability achieved among the four coders in this phase of the coding process was .96. Game status achieved a reliability of 1.00; game time achieved a reliability of 1.00; announcer gender achieved a reliability of 1.00; athlete gender achieved a reliability of 1.00; athlete race achieved a reliability of 0.99; and commentary type achieved a reliability of .88.

Descriptor codes collectively achieved an overall reliability of .79. Individual reliabilities for each descriptor code were (a) physicality and athleticism (.84), (b) intelligence and mental skill (.82), (c) hard work and effort (.79), (d) determination and motivation (.77), (e) speed (.83), (f) physical power (.72), (g) mental power (.70), (h) positive consonance (.80), (i) negative consonance (.77), (j) leadership (.81), (k) versatility (.79), (l) team orientation (.82), (m) personality (.79), (n) looks and appearance (.84), and (o) background (.82). Due to inconsistent

coding practices among the 4 coders, the categories for (a) physical power and (b) mental power were subsequently collapsed with (a) physicality and athleticism and (b) intelligence and mental skill, respectively, establishing new reliabilities of .85 for (a) physicality and athleticism and .83 for (b) intelligence and mental skill. Two members of the coding team subsequently continued to independently code the remaining lines of broadcast commentary.

## Analysis

On completion of the coding process, all data were entered into SPSS for Windows 10.0 (2000). Data were analyzed in a 2 (Sex of Commentator)  $\times$  2 (Sex of Athlete) research design. Differences among respective groups were assessed to address the two hypotheses and the three research questions employing the chi-square statistic at the .05 level.

## RESULTS

Within the six recorded basketball games, a total of 2,367 spoken lines of broadcast commentary were transcribed and coded for analysis. Within the 2,367 spoken lines, a total of 1,118 accounts of athletic performance were identified. Although the majority of the lines contained no descriptors accounting for athletic performance 1,574 lines (66.5%) and 549 (23.2%) lines contained one descriptor, 177 (7.5%) lines contained two descriptors, 51 (2.1%) lines contained three, and 16 (0.7%) lines contained four descriptors accounting for athletic performance in a single broadcast commentary line. Lines of broadcast commentary were identified in terms of (a) color commentary ( $n = 1,840$ ; 68.3%), (b) play by play ( $n = 477$ ; 20.2%), and (c) floor reporting ( $n = 50$ ; 1.8%). Lines of broadcast commentary generated remained relatively consistent from the first half of the game (1,175 lines; 49.6%) to the second half of the game (1,192 lines; 50.4%) and from the semifinal games (402 per game; 67.9% of total) to championship games (380 per game; 32.1% of total).

### Research Question 1 (RQ1)

RQ1 examined how sports commentators accounted for the athletic performance of men and women surrounding the NCAA Final Four championship basketball games. Table 1 illustrates those examples employed and frequencies to which sportscasters accounted for athletic performance.

TABLE 1  
Accounts of Athletic Performance Embedded in Sports Broadcast Commentary

<i>Athlete Descriptor</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Physicality/athleticism	582	52
Women's game: "... Shae Ralph—great double punch move."		
Men's game: "That's how strong Mateen Cleaves is."		
Intelligence/mental skill	105	9
Women's game: "she keeps her head up and sees the whole floor."		
Men's game: "... smart play by Hudson."		
Other	89	8
Women's game: "... probably hasn't gotten a lot of credit in this line-up ..."		
Men's game: "Mateen's talked about the dream—now it's time to live it."		
Background	81	7
Women's game: "starting guard and Philadelphia native, Kristen Ace Clement, suffered a lateral right ankle sprain."		
Men's game: "... breaking the press like an old option quarterback like he did in high school ..."		
Speed	42	4
Women's game: "she's like a train—fast, smooth, and quick"		
Men's game: "... right into the teeth of his quickness ..."		
Positive consonance	41	4
Women's game: "Shumacher's having the game of her life."		
Men's game: "... really in-sinc tonight ..."		
Determination/motivation	39	3
Women's game: "it's a game that she has wanted since she was a little girl playing football in D.C."		
Men's game: "... very decided and determined in attacking the press ..."		
Leadership	28	3
Women's game: "... back to April McDivitt—she tries to calm down her teammates ..."		
Men's game: "... he steps up and tries to take charge ..."		
Negative consonance	24	2
Women's game: "she is now 0 for 8:"		
Men's game: "... Dupay struggling shooting in the zone tonight ..."		
Looks/appearance	24	2
Women's game: "... and they're gonna need Tennessee, another good game like that from Pillow because of her size, she's got a big body."		
Men's game: "huge, huge hands on this young man."		
Versatility	20	2
Women's game: "she got her hip into the defender, gave herself a little room, and then put it up for the score."		
Men's game: "... nice move—Vershaw the other way ..."		
Hard work/effort	17	2
Women's game: "Catchings is right there plugging things up."		
Men's game: "... doesn't give up a lot of easy baskets ..."		

(continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

<i>Athlete Descriptor</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Personality	14	1
Women's game: "she's got Philadelphia attitude for a Chicagoland kid."		
Men's game: "this should be Duany Duany's kind of action that he prefers—that sense of urgency . . ."		
Team orientation	12	1
Women's game: "you have to love that every player is challenging each other."		
Men's game: ". . . a well-executed screen . . ."		
Total	1,118	100

As Table 1 reveals, at least 1% of the total database was classified within each descriptor category. The three most common athlete descriptors accounted for across all broadcast commentary included (a) physicality and athleticism ( $n = 582$ ; 52%), (b) intelligence and mental skill ( $n = 105$ ; 9%), and (c) other ( $n = 89$ ; 8%). Athlete descriptors employed the least across all broadcast commentary included (a) hard work and effort ( $n = 17$ ; 2%), (b) personality ( $n = 14$ ; 1%), and (c) team and orientation ( $n = 12$ ; 1%).

### Hypothesis 1 (H1)

H1 predicted that the gendered form of the evaluative broadcast commentary employed by sports commentators to account for athletic performance is affected by the gender of the athlete under evaluation. Broadcast commentary concerning male athletes characterized 77% of all cases. Therefore, tests for significant differences within descriptor variables were based on an expectation of men receiving 77% ( $n = 1,488$ ) of all comments and women receiving 23% ( $n = 879$ ) of all comments. Table 2 reports the types of comments differentially employed by these sports announcers.

Table 2 reveals five significant differences in the manner that male and female athletic performance was evaluated. Male athletes were described as much more physical and athletic,  $\chi^2(1) = 27.05, p < .001$ , whereas comments about female athletes were significantly accounted for more than male athletes in terms of (a) positive consonance,  $\chi^2(1) = 21.85, p < .001$ , (b) personality,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.20, p < .02$ , (c) looks and appearance,  $\chi^2(1) = 29.39, p < .001$ , and (d) background,  $\chi^2(1) = 5.73, p < .03$ . Interestingly, these four categories characterizing female athletes were completely unrelated to their athletic performance. In addition, even comments about positive consonance by sportscasters implied that female athletes succeeded because of some influence unbeknownst to them (e.g., it being "their night" or

TABLE 2  
Accounts of Athletic Performance by Gender of Athlete

<i>Descriptor</i>	<i>Man</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Woman</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Physicality/athleticism	526 <sup>a</sup>	61.1	56 <sup>a</sup>	21.8	582	52.1
Intelligence/mental skill	92	10.7	13	5.1	105	9.4
Hard work/effort	15	1.7	2	0.7	17	1.5
Determination/motivation	28	3.3	11	4.3	39	3.5
Speed	27	3.1	15	5.8	42	3.8
Positive consonance	13 <sup>b</sup>	1.5	28 <sup>b</sup>	10.9	41	3.7
Negative consonance	19	2.2	5	1.9	24	2.1
Leadership	20	2.3	8	3.1	28	2.5
Versatility	16	1.8	4	1.5	20	1.8
Team orientation	8	0.9	4	1.5	12	1.1
Personality	5 <sup>c</sup>	0.5	9 <sup>c</sup>	3.5	14	1.3
Looks/appearance	2 <sup>d</sup>	0.2	22 <sup>d</sup>	8.5	24	2.1
Background	49 <sup>e</sup>	5.7	32 <sup>e</sup>	12.5	81	7.2
Other	41	4.8	48	18.7	89	7.9
Total	861		257		1,118	

<sup>a</sup> $\chi^2(1) = 27.05, p < .001$ . <sup>b</sup> $\chi^2(1) = 21.85, p < .001$ . <sup>c</sup> $\chi^2(1) = 6.20, p < .02$ . <sup>d</sup> $\chi^2(1) = 29.39, p < .001$ . <sup>e</sup> $\chi^2(1) = 5.73, p < .03$ .

“they’re feeling it”). As a result of these differences, H1 was supported, because more comments were directed toward men’s athleticism, whereas more comments were directed toward women’s (a) personality, (b) appearance, and (c) background.

## Hypothesis 2 (H2)

H2 predicted that the gendered nature of the evaluative broadcast commentary employed by sports commentators would be significantly affected by sports commentator gender. Male commentators represented the large majority (87.3%) of commentator accounts characterizing all championship games. Therefore, meaningful significance tests required that the chi-square tests for significance were conducted employing the 87.3% and 12.7% split that characterized commentator accounts between male and female sportscasters. These findings are reported in Table 3.

As Table 3 suggests, significant differences emerged. All three categories achieving statistical significance overlap with the findings from Table 2, as male commentators focused more of their comments on physicality and athleticism,  $\chi^2(1) = 9.41, p < .01$ , whereas female commentators employed accounts that focused more on the topics of personality,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.34, p < .02$ , and looks and appearance,  $\chi^2(1) = 21.34, p < .001$ . This finding is worthy to note, as it suggests that female sportscasters may



TABLE 3  
Accounts of Athletic Performance by Gender of Broadcast Announcer

<i>Descriptor</i>	<i>Man</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Woman</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
Physicality/athleticism	556 <sup>a</sup>	56.9	26 <sup>a</sup>	18.4	582	52.1
Intelligence/mental skill	94	9.6	11	7.8	105	9.4
Hard work/effort	16	1.6	1	0.7	17	1.5
Determination/motivation	33	3.3	6	4.2	39	3.5
Speed	33	3.3	9	6.4	42	3.8
Positive consonance	29	3.0	12	8.5	41	3.7
Negative consonance	19	0.1	5	3.5	24	2.1
Leadership	23	2.4	5	3.5	28	2.5
Versatility	17	1.7	3	2.1	20	1.8
Team orientation	9	0.9	3	2.1	12	1.1
Personality	6 <sup>b</sup>	0.6	8 <sup>b</sup>	5.6	14	1.3
Looks/appearance	9 <sup>c</sup>	0.9	15 <sup>c</sup>	10.6	24	2.1
Background	64	6.5	17	12.1	81	7.2
Other	69	7.1	20	14.2	89	8.0
Total	977		141		1,118	

<sup>a</sup> $\chi^2(1) = 9.41, p < .01$ . <sup>b</sup> $\chi^2(1) = 6.34, p < .02$ . <sup>c</sup> $\chi^2(1) = 21.34, p < .001$ .

be employing more gendered descriptors that mediate athletic stereotypes for female athletes than for male athletes. In contrast, male sportscasters did not exhibit a tendency to comment on social (or tangential) aspects of the women's game. Instead, they were more likely to talk about task-related issues of athletic performance. H2 was subsequently confirmed, as male and female commentators differed in their gendered accounts of evaluating athletic performance.

### Research Question 2 (RQ2)

RQ2 sought to examine whether gender of athletic contest influenced the amount of overall broadcast commentary generated. Of the 2,367 lines of discourse commentary generated, 1,488 lines (62.9%) of commentary characterized men's coverage; 879 (37.1%) lines of commentary characterized women's coverage. The men's games generated nearly twice as many lines of commentary discourse across broadcast commentators than did the women's games,  $\chi^2(1) = 78.7, p < .01$ .

### Research Question 3 (RQ3)

RQ3 addressed whether gender of commentator influenced the amount of sportscaster commentary generated across all championship games. Mediated discourse

generated among male commentators (1,932; 81.6%) was greater than the mediated discourse generated among female commentators (435; 18.4%), constituting a majority of the broadcast commentary for both male and female NCAA Final Four basketball games. This difference was found to be significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 474.0$ ,  $p < .001$  because the amount of commentary generated across all women's games contained more lines generated by male commentators (451; 51.3%) than that of female commentators (428; 48.7%). Still, there was no significant interaction among the ways men and women commentators characterized athletes. Indeed, this is an important finding, when compared with prior research, as the differential nature of gender bias that is mediated among broadcast commentators occurs irrespective of male or female commentator roles.

## DISCUSSION

Schroeder (1999) contended that the study of the intersection between communication and sports provides an "integrated intellectual approach to understanding cultural phenomena that connects the process of signification to institutions and social structures" (p. 4). Cole (1994) agreed, insisting that the academic study of sports should be a primary venue for the discussion, and subsequent explication, of "social and political power, domination, ideology, agency, and transformative possibilities" (p. 5). This study provides a contribution to the accumulating body of research by examining the gendered nature of broadcast commentary surrounding the men's and women's 2000 NCAA Final Four basketball tournament championship games. What follows is a threefold discussion of those theoretical, methodological, and pragmatic contributions that have arisen from this study.

### Theoretical Contributions

First, the study sought to conceptually interrogate the issue of mediated portrayals of gender bias that was prospectively manifest in the broadcast commentary surrounding female and male athletic events. By framing this study from a communication perspective, scholars in the respective domains of sports communication and sports studies are provided with a preliminary opportunity to identify the communicative origins and communicative outcomes that perpetuate issues of gender bias in evaluations of athletic performance. Conceptualizing this study from the perspectives of (a) a structural account of gender roles (Eagly, 1987), (b) social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and (c) expectancy violations theory (Burgoon, 1978, 1995), scholars interested in media portrayals of gender bias now have a theoretically situated account by which to explain the mediated perpetuation of these broadcast commentary practices. In addition, this message-based

study of broadcast commentary provides scholars with a provocative venue by which to synthesize the false bifurcation that currently characterizes much of the communication scholarship (O'Sullivan, 1999).

### Methodological Contributions

This study makes a methodological advance in that it actually examined the mediated nature of broadcast commentary in its authentic state. Specifically, the messages examined throughout the broadcast commentary enabled a clearer understanding of the communication episode in which an athlete descriptor was employed to account for an athlete's performance. Future studies would benefit by examining the nature of sports commentary from conversation analytic perspectives (cf. Hansen, 1999) in conjunction with the visual aspects (e.g., Messaris, 1997) that might promote spectator impressions, evaluations, and reactions to such messages. Engaging in such methods might further reveal how the structural content of such commentary can be contingent on its larger institutional and societal context. The results from this study also provide preliminary confirmation for the taxonomy of athletic descriptors revealed in previous research (Eastman & Billings, 2001). Although the evaluative categories of physical power and mental power were collapsed for clarity of coding structure, the remaining 14 categories were found to—minimally—contain at least 1% of all descriptors employed by sportscasters in this respective athletic event. Worthy of note, however, is the percentage of comments labeled as other identified by the coding team. This leads one to question the exhaustive nature of this respective taxonomy; more evaluative commentary forms employed across sports broadcasters might indeed exist. In light of this contribution, sports communication scholars should move into a position whereby a comprehensive method for assessing commentary content may be revealed.

### Pragmatic Contributions

Finally, practical conclusions can be drawn about the differences in the communicative portrayals of female and male athletes after analyzing, and subsequently viewing, these NCAA Final Four basketball championship games. One startling finding appeared that, despite the equal number of televised games for men and women, sportscasters had many more evaluative comments about the male athletes. However, not nearly as surprising was the finding that male sportscasters dominated the total number of comments, possibly due to the greater presence of male broadcasters in the mediated profession of sport.

Although it was initially reasoned that female broadcasters might generate more interpersonal dialogue surrounding the event, an alternative explanation might be that the female commentators allegedly enacted another gender-based role by actually listening to (e.g., observing) the athletic event prior to constantly advancing commentary regarding what was transpiring during the athletic event.

When considering how viewers might be differentially affected, to consider the gendered nature of athletic performance, while participating in these athletic events—even within the context of the Final Four—male athletes were evaluated as being significantly more physical and athletic in nature. Conversely, female athletes were accounted for primarily with respect to (a) where they come from, (b) having a good night, (c) having a good personality, and (d) what they look like. Specifically, male commentators were more likely to comment on the physicality and the athleticism of the athlete, whereas the female commentators were more likely to comment on the personality characterizing the athlete. Moreover, female commentators significantly focused on the looks and appearance surrounding an athlete's performance. Indeed, it would appear that the evaluative status of female athletic competition—even at its highest caliber—is in a state of contention that continues to be under question. This, consequently, begs the question of how viewers might be affected by such commentator practices. The myriad applications to the broadcasting world are evident, as sportscasters and media gatekeepers of all genres can use these findings to show how commentary biases, even when not overt, can have important implications surrounding interactive aspects of social identity and attitude change. Sportscasters, in particular, should strive to be more mindful (e.g., Langer, 1980) to achieve more gender equity, not only in terms of athlete characterizations, but also in terms of the amount of discourse they use to cover men's and women's sporting events. Future research would benefit from examining the temporal nature of this discourse, most notably when, where, and how these accounts become employed in sports broadcast commentary.

The lack of commentary during the women's games speaks volumes about inequalities currently prevalent in televised sportscasts. Yet, this study only represents a snapshot of six commentators within 1 year's Final Four telecasts. Clearly, these findings can be used as a catalyst for continued research that considers (a) additional sports, (b) additional seasons, and (c) additional commentators. Indeed, by continuing to investigate how sports commentators account for athletic performance, communication scholars can comfortably position themselves into a role that rightly enables them to examine how gendered assumptions become the interactive artifact that is discursively drawn on to construct (a) what an athlete is, (b) their athletic performance, (c) their respective sport, and (d) the symbolic rituals surrounding the thousands of individuals interactively engulfed in the culture of March Madness.

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