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NBC’S PORTRAYAL OF U.S. AND CANADIAN HOCKEY PLAYERS ON THE
OLYMPIC STAGE:
A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER, RACE, AND NATIONALITY ISSUES IN
THE COMMENTARY

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by
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ABSTRACT

Beginning in 1996 NBC gained the rights to broadcast the Olympics through 2012 (excluding 1998). While much research has been conducted on gender, ethnicity and nationality during primetime coverage of the Olympics, little research has looked at how NBC’s cable affiliates cover less popular sports not airing during primetime. This research investigates how the commentary during the men’s and women’s hockey games broadcast during the 2006 Olympics framed issues of gender, nationality and race. Taking a cultural studies approach and using thematic textual analysis, U.S. and Canadian teams were analyzed. In-depth interviews with the commentators were also conducted.

Overall, gender was constructed through hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity. Natural differences of women were often constructed through comparisons to male counterparts, dependency on men, male role models, and playing on boys’ teams. Women were legitimized within the male sports hierarchy because they rejected traditionally feminine sports such as figure skating and embraced hockey instead.

A sense of U.S. and North American superiority were showcased by representing the U.S. and Canadian teams as physically superior. The U.S. women were shown as athletically superior and feminine within the male sporting world, while the Canadian women were only constructed as big and strong. U.S. nationality and North American superiority were framed to suggest that non-North American teams had a dependency on North American leagues, colleges, and coaches for their successes. Reference to on-ice officials and their nationality became a theme. Commentators agreed with calls made by
Canadian officials and disagreed with calls made by Eastern European officials, serving to construct a sense of North Americanism.

Race was framed in the context of Whiteness, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. Jerome Iginla, the only Black player, was given little attention considering his playing time for Team Canada. When Iginla was mentioned, it was often in reference to his physicality, while his White counterparts were given credit for hard work and intelligence. Whiteness was also constructed through themes of the good-guy mentality and being family-oriented. The themes suggested that while equality in the amount of coverage has improved, parity in gender, nationality, and race is still unequal.
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Preface

There are moments that define sports. A few that I recall are Mary Lou Retton winning gold in 1984, Keri Shrug’s vault in 1996, and the women’s soccer team winning World Cup gold in 1999. Such events are charged with social, political, and gender issues. However, another event occurred in 2006 during the Winter Olympics in Torino, which changed the face of sports, particularly women’s hockey, forever. For the first time in history, the United States and Canada did not face one another in the gold-medal game in international competition. Sweden beat the U.S. to advance to the gold-medal game against Canada instead. At the time it occurred, I was scarcely aware of it, because I followed men’s hockey, not women’s hockey. It was not until I began writing this dissertation that I realized the impact of this event and came to fully understand exactly what happened.

In my research I looked at gender, nationality, and race within the context of Olympic hockey commentary during the 2006 games. I have plenty of experiences with men’s hockey. I worked for both an East Coast Hockey League team (ECHL) and a National Hockey League team (NHL). My experience in sports over ten years spans not only hockey, but includes teams in Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Football League (NFL) and Major League Soccer (MLS), as well as professional lacrosse and collegiate athletics. All of these leagues and teams have their gender, race, and ethnicity issues. I am most interested in how the media portray these issues and how and if the media are changing.
Sports bring people together; defining moments in sports unite people in a common cause. Sports are so powerful because they reach so many people. The Olympics in particular, because they are charged with such nationalistic sentiments, draw in even the casual or non-fan, who will watch because of the nationality of the player. Defining moments in sports change the way we look at sports and the world. The media have the power to frame these events as interesting, exciting, political, or social. How the media frame sporting events influences audience perceptions and understanding of the world and why the moment must be defined as it is. This research shows an understanding of not only the defining moment in 2006 during the women’s hockey tournament, but how commentators choose to represent gender, nationality and race during non-prime-time hours. It is sports that bring us together, not only as a society but as a world, and the media are there to cover it and frame it every step of the way.
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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Olympics and North American Hockey

“NBC’s primetime coverage ‘often operates in an alternate galaxy from the Games going on earlier in the day.’ Instead of using the program ‘to wrap up news from the Games, NBC has stuck almost exclusively to events it will present at length that night. That usually means little or no mention of ice hockey.’”

- Journalist Neil Best from Newsday quoted in Street and Smith’s Sports Business Daily in reference to the 2006 Winter Olympics
The Olympics not only celebrate the athletic prowess of athletes from around the world but symbolize unity and peace among the nations who participate (Cashman, 1999). According to Cashman “Many commentators have referred to the Olympic Games as the world’s greatest sports festival and the largest peacetime event” (p. 3). In general, the media frame the Olympics as “an act of peace and friendship or world understanding” (Zaharopoulos, 2007, p. 238). The interlocked Olympic rings represent the five continents unified as one. The Olympic torch is one of the most powerful symbols connecting the modern games to the ancient games (Cashman, 1999). The Olympics is a mega-event where millions of people watch, making it a forum to portray norms in regard to gender, ethnicity, nationality, and identity (Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003). The Olympics also showcase the latest technology and telecommunications (Larson & Park, 1993). Because the Olympics are broadcast on a world stage, they become the shared experience of the world (Larson & Park, 1993; Zaharopoulos, 2007).

Though the Olympics aim to unify nations for two weeks, political issues sometimes interfere with the games. Governments use the Olympics to showplace their politics (Senn, 1999). For instance, the IOC excluded Germany during the 1920 Olympics in response to the Allies’ demands (Kluka, 2001; Senn, 1999). The U.S. boycotted the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow in response to the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan (Kluka, 2001; Senn, 1999). In 1984 the Soviet Union boycotted the Los Angeles games after an American group, the Ban the Soviets Coalition, was cited as a threat to the safety of Soviet athletes (Lenskyj, 2000). During the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, 11 Israeli athletes were taken hostage and killed by terrorists,
shattering the illusion that world politics did not exist in the Olympic Games (Kluka, 2001; Moller, 2004; Senn, 1999).

Sometimes the Olympics are viewed as a way to focus attention on a nation’s internal politics. In 1996, Amnesty International used the Atlanta games to protest the death penalty in Georgia, while in 2000, aborigine groups organized to protest Australian land policies (Senn, 1999). The 2002 Olympics in Salt Lake City were centered on the September 11 attacks in the United States. An unusually large amount of American nationalism was viewed in the media broadcast of the games. The media focus was on terrorism and the security of the Olympics (Zaharopoulos, 2007; Billings & Eastman, 2003). The media focus for the 2004 Olympics was on the slow progress of the Greeks in getting the venues done in time for the games (Zaharopoulos, 2007).

Not only do media focus on particular countries, but national and ideological rivalries between countries exists as well (Senn, 1999). Perhaps the biggest political battle of ideologies was the Cold War between the Russians and much of the world. For example, during the 1980 Winter Olympic Games, the U.S. hockey team’s defeat over the Soviet Union was framed as American transcendence: winning the space race, winning the arms race, and beating communism (“Miracle on Ice,” 2005). The Olympic hockey game between Canada and the Soviet Union in 1976 was viewed in much the same way. A battle of ideologies or a battle of nations in the sports realm may become apparent in the media coverage of the Olympics. For instance, during a 2006 Olympic men’s hockey game between the Czech Republic and the Soviet Union, an American commentator made a remark regarding the Soviet Union invading the Czech Republic in 1968 (Ebersol, 2006).
Media

De Moragas Spa, Rivenburgh, and Larson (1995) refer to the Olympics as a “media-constructed reality” (p. 4) meaning that the media have shaped the Olympics into an alternate reality for television audiences. Audiences do not see the Olympics themselves; instead, they see a framed and produced event that “cultivates societal views as a part of prolonged media exposure” (Billings & Eastman, 2003). The Olympics and television have grown in a “symbiotic relationship” (Senn, 1999, p.xiii). NBC paid $613 million to broadcast the 2006 winter games in Torino, Italy, and will pay $894 million to broadcast the 2008 summer games in Beijing (Cashman, 1999). During the 2006 Winter Olympics, NBC Universal Sports broadcast 418 hours of Olympic events on six networks, and more than 168 million American viewers watched some part of the games (Billings, 2008). Dick Ebersol, the chairman of NBC Universal Sports & Olympics, has been responsible for producing the media coverage of the Olympics since 1992 (NBC Universal, n.d.).

Ratings for Olympic hockey are difficult to obtain as Nielsen ratings do not usually target such specific events within the Olympics. Olympic hockey was not aired during prime time hours. *Street and Smith’s Sports Business Daily* (“Cable and Affils,” 2006) reported that CNBC and MSNBC, stations where Olympic hockey and curling were aired, both had viewership up, 537% and 76%, respectively, during the Olympic Games in February from the previous February. In Canada, more than one million viewers watched the Canada versus Italy men’s hockey game that aired on Wednesday,
February 15, 2006 at 8am, and 2.3 million Canadians tuned in for the men’s quarterfinal afternoon game against Russia (Houston, 2006).

Production Issues

The Olympics are driven by television due to the large broadcasting fees networks are willing to pay. Television serves as a medium not to just cover the games but is a part of the games (Larson & Park, 1993). The Olympics, like many other sports, are driven by advertising revenue and television ratings. Sponsorship and broadcast rights are the two biggest revenue builders for the modern Olympics. The selling of broadcast rights is the largest portion of revenue for the IOC (Larson & Park, 1993). During the 1992 summer games, television rights comprised 33.9% of the total revenue, which jumped to 50% for the 1996 games. The U.S. pays the majority of television rights fees, accounting for 66% of broadcasting fees (Larson & Park, 1993). It would be remiss to think that the media has no influence on how the Olympic Games are broadcast and are scheduled so that more important events can be aired live for American viewers.

The investment that media broadcasters make in the Olympics has several effects. NBC’s large investment in broadcasting the Olympics regularly places journalists in a position of covering the event not as independent journalists but investors (Lenskyj, 2000). Secondly, the investment made in broadcasting the games gives broadcasting companies the authority to dictate how the Olympics will actually be staged (Lenskyj, 2002). For example, during the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, NBC requested that overhead power lines be buried underground to provide a better television image (Lenskyj, 2002).
Thirdly, in 1994, the Olympics were changed to alternate the summer and winter games at different times. Every two years either the winter or summer games are staged, increasing sponsorship, revenue, and rights fees (Larson & Park, 1993).

The media frame and make choices on what viewers will see on television. Oftentimes the representation of the Olympics is ethnocentric. Gratton (1999), an Australian journalist, admonished NBC during the 1996 games for calling Michael Johnson the fastest human while “ignoring Donovan Bailey [Canadian], who won the 100 meters in a record time” (p. 130). In addition, NBC never covered some swimming and track and field events, in which world records were broken, simply because the athletes were not American. While NBC had a 25% increase in viewership during the 1996 Olympics, it won “few friends among the non-Americans” (Gratton, 1999, p. 130).

Socio-Political Climate of the 2006 Winter Games

During the 2006 Olympics, several large stories in Canada, the United States, and the world also competed with the games for attention. In light of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the Bush administration ordered the military to invade Iraq in 2003. This decision was unpopular with numerous countries around the world, including Canada. The United States was highly criticized for its involvement in the war by other countries, including Germany and France. This is significant because the 2002 Winter Olympics occurred in Salt Lake City just months after the September 11 attacks on America. The 2002 games were fraught with American nationalism, honoring those lost and those who survived the attacks. During the 2004 and 2006 games, stories were told
by NBC of athletes directly affected by the September 11 attacks. For instance, NBC aired a story during the 2006 games of Kathleen Kauth, an Olympic hockey player, whose father was a victim of September 11, and her quest to make the 2002 and 2004 teams. Thus, the socio-political climate directly affects how stories are framed, particularly of American athletes.

There were several stories related to hockey that occurred around the time of the 2006 Olympics. The first was the return of the NHL from the previous season’s lockout. The return of the 2005-2006 NHL season brought a new television contract with OLN (now Versus), rule changes, and media attention as to how the NHL was faring attendance-wise (Bellamy & Shultz, 2006; Allen, 2005). Attendance records were set during the NHL post-lockout season. Rule changes also played a factor regarding media coverage of the NHL, allowing for a faster game, less stoppages in play, and a shootout for tie games, which were met by many fans with displeasure (Allen, 2005). Thus, NHL hockey started to resemble Olympic hockey.

A second hockey story gaining media attention was the possible folding or relocation of the Pittsburgh Penguins. This was significant because it was the second time within ten years the city was faced with losing the team. The year prior to the Olympics, the Penguins drafted Evgeni Malkin from Russia, who because of a contract with a Russian team, stayed to play in Russia for an additional two years. Malkin played for the Russian national team in the Olympics, but was still playing in Russia to honor his prior contract.

The third story, which broke just days prior to the start of the Olympics, was of former superstar and Team Canada Executive Director, Wayne Gretzky being implicated
in an NHL betting ring. This was a big story in both the United States and Canada due to Gretzky’s NHL fame. Announcer John Davidson was asked how he would address the situation, and he replied, “It has nothing, nothing, to do with the Olympics” (“Operation Slap Shot,” 2006).

Leading into the Olympic Games, several international hockey championships were played, which involved both the United States and Canada. Canada had won the World Junior Men’s Hockey Championship from 1997 through 2006, going undefeated and beating the Russians in the final game to claim the tournament (“Year in Review,” 2005). In World Hockey, which involves the same players as Olympic hockey, the U.S. women took first place and the Canadian women second (“2005 Women’s World Hockey Championship,” n.d.). This is significant because throughout history in all international competitions, the U.S. and Canadian women had always faced each other in the finals for first and second place. This changed in the 2006 games when the U.S. women received bronze and the Canadians played Sweden for gold. For the men, the Czech Republic took first in the World Championships, while the Canadians took second, and the Americans took sixth (“Final Ranking,” n.d.). Many NHL players participated in this tournament due to the NHL lockout the prior season.

History of North American Hockey

Most literature written on the history of ice hockey in Canada and the United States relates to the National Hockey League (NHL). Tracing hockey history back to the 19th century yields a large amount of literature pertaining to Canadian hockey. Hockey
was primarily developed in Canada before moving into the United States. In North America, the NHL is the highest level of professional ice hockey because it does not feed into any larger leagues (Wong, 2005).

Hockey began in North America in the late 19th Century among the upper-classes and gave way to amateur hockey clubs competing against one another (Gruneau & Whitson 1993; Wong, 2005). These ice hockey clubs developed a centralized system of governance with an executive board, which made rules and deemed who could play. The first recorded hockey game was in March of 1875 in Victoria ice rink in Montreal, Canada. The Amateur Hockey Association of Canada (AHAC) formed in 1887, as players wished to have a schedule of play (Wong, 2005). During the 1892-93 season, Frederick Arthur, Lord Stanley of Preston, Earl of Derby and Governor General of Canada donated a cup to be given to the winning team, who would hold the cup for one year and pass it to the next year’s winning team. This cup has become known as the Stanley Cup and is still awarded to the winning NHL team at the end of playoffs each season.

Over the next several years, numerous other leagues were springing up in Canada. The International Hockey League (IHL) was the first professional ice hockey league. The National Hockey Association (NHA) formed in 1909 and, because of its strong financial backing, became the premier league. In 1913, the NHA and the Pacific Coast League (PCHA) agreed to a playoff series for the Stanley Cup, solidifying hockey as a Canadian national phenomenon (Wong, 2005).

In 1917, NHA owners formed themselves into a new league called the National Hockey League (NHL). For the first time in the history of North American hockey, the
new league “was moving towards consolidating decision-making power in the hands of its president” (Wong, 2005, p, 75) instead of the individual clubs struggling against one another. The NHL did not reach stability until the early 1920’s, at which point the Stanley Cup was awarded to professional teams only; NHL operations became centralized, and the league president gained more control. By 1927 the NHL was the only major professional hockey league. In 1942, the league had fully stabilized with six teams. The NHL would not expand until 1967, followed by two smaller expansions in the 1970s. Modern expansion in ice hockey did not occur again until the 1990s.

NHL Hockey Today

Today, the NHL is comprised of 30 teams. Gary Bettman, the Commissioner of the NHL, was hired in 1993 to grow the game of hockey (Bellamy & Shultz, 2006; Klein & Reif, 1998). Under Bettman, NHL teams expanded to reach larger television markets. This includes many so-called Sunbelt teams, found in warm climates like Florida, Arizona and California. Bettman has also taken strides to “clean-up” the game of hockey. Rule changes, with stiffer fines for players who instigate a fight, were implemented in 2005. Despite this, there is tension between Canadians and Americans over the game of hockey. Many Canadians consider hockey their national sport, even though officially, the national sport has been named as lacrosse; many Canadians feel they need to protect hockey from outsiders (Americans). In fact, many Canadian journalists claim that Americans, the NHL in particular, have ruined Canadian hockey (Canadian Press Newswire, 2004; Hockey Fright in Canada, 2004; Reynolds, 2000; Webster, 2004).
The NHL quickly expanded into larger television markets throughout the 1990’s, but cannot seem to gain a strong foothold in the television market compared with its major league counterparts in football and baseball (Bellamy & Shultz, 2006). The NHL entered into a national cable contract in 2005 with Versus (previously OLN) and NBC. Versus averaged a 0.19 Nielsen rating over 52 telecasts making it “one of the lowest-rated national sports properties on television” (Mickle, ¶ 9, 2006) and reaching only 117,857 households on average. This is 48% less than what ESPN averaged prior to the lockout for national telecasts. NBC broadcasts Sunday afternoon games and some playoff games. Ratings for the 2007-2008 season were up 11% from the previous season; NBC has extended its contract with the NHL (CBSSports.com, 2008a). Despite the low television ratings on Versus, attendance records were set for the 2005-06 and 2006-07 seasons (Keating, 2007). Revenue is up for the league, and fans are watching games on high-quality video found on the internet for free (Keating, 2007). Prior to the 2008 NHL playoffs, the league launched seven free channels on the internet including, highlights, morning skates, news conferences, and interviews (CBSSports.com, 2008b). As a result, the league does not need to have a strong television contract in order to succeed.

Olympic Hockey

Olympic ice hockey was first played in the 1920 summer games in Antwerp, Belgium. Ice hockey has been played in every Winter Olympiad since 1924, when the Winter Olympics were added to the schedule (“Ice Hockey History,” 2007). Canada won many of the early Olympic tournaments, until 1956, when the Soviet Union entered the
Winter Olympics. The Soviet Union dominated the sport in wins from 1956 until its break-up in the late 1980’s, only losing twice in 1960 and 1980 to the United States. In the 1980’s, NHL players were allowed to participate in the Olympics, but many did not until 1998, when the NHL actually suspended its games for two weeks to allow NHL players to fully participate (“Ice Hockey History,” 2007).

NHL player participation in the 1998 Olympics was similar to what the NBA players had done six years earlier during the Summer Olympics in Barcelona (Brunt, 1999). However, unlike the NBA, which could produce one competitive team, the NHL could produce six competitive teams (United States, Canada, Finland, Russia, Sweden, and the Czech Republic) because of its multi-national players. This, coupled with the amount of U.S. telecasting revenue, seemed like a winning situation for everyone involved--the NHL, the Olympic Games, and the television networks (Brunt, 1999).

Numerous factors surrounding the 1998 Olympic Games and NHL players would prove otherwise. Paul Kariya, a Japanese-Canadian, on whom the NHL pinned much of its marketing hopes, was struck with a concussion in a regular season NHL game just prior to making the trip to Nagano. Both the American and Canadian teams, which the NHL had marketed as marquee teams, did poorly and did not win medals. In addition, after the Americans lost to the Czech Republic in the semi-finals game, they trashed rooms in the Olympic Village, which spawned negative media attention (Araton, 1998; Bondy, 1998; Brunt, 1999; Dodd, 1998; Nadel, 1998). This negative attention from the media was noted by Americans, who did not typically follow hockey, thus thwarting any attempt of the NHL to grow the game nationally (Bondy, 1998; Fitzpatrick, 1998; Looney, 1998; Olson, 1998). Tie games in the Olympics were settled with a shoot-out,
which for traditional NHL fans is anti-climatic. The NHL, in 2005, also implemented the shootout. In addition, Olympic ice surfaces are larger, wider, and longer than rinks in North America, opening up the game. This drastically changes how games are played. According to Stan Savran (personal communication, May 24, 2004), sportscaster for Fox Sports Pittsburgh, attracting fans to NHL hockey via Olympic hockey backfired, because the brand of hockey played in the Olympics is much different than that played in the NHL. It seemed that the marketing efforts of the NHL to grow and promote ice hockey globally through the Olympics had failed.

Women as Marginalized Hockey Players

According to Backcheck: A Hockey Retrospective (n.d), women have been playing hockey for over 100 years. Lord Stanley, founder of the Stanley Cup, had a daughter who played hockey and was one of the first women photographed with a stick and puck in 1890. Women’s hockey games were common in the early 1900s in Canada, and women’s leagues were formed; women’s hockey was also played at colleges and universities (Theberge, 2000). A well-known Canadian public controversy involving girls playing hockey with boys occurred in 1955. Abigail Hoffman wanted to play a higher level of hockey, so she cut her hair and named herself “Ab” (Backcheck, n.d.; Stevens, 2006; Theberge, 2000). Later in the season, she was discovered; she was allowed to finish the season but could not return the next year.

In the 1970’s, both the United States and Canada enacted legislation to help female athletes. In the U.S., Title IX was passed; in Canada, the Canadian Charter of
Rights and Freedoms was passed, which allowed women hockey players to challenge the barriers of men’s hockey (Stevens, 2006). As a result of such legislation, both the United States and Canadian women have emerged within the top echelon of women’s ice hockey. European women have less resources and opportunities to play hockey. As a result, many women from European countries, such as Finland, Sweden, and Germany have come to North America seeking the opportunity to play at the collegiate level. In addition, many Canadian women seek the opportunity to play or coach in NCAA affiliated schools in the U.S. believing it enhances their hockey experience.

Women also wanted access to men’s and boys’ teams because the level of play was higher. Boys’ teams received better ice times and had rinks closer to home (Stevens, 2006; Theberge, 2000). More recently, the battle of gender in hockey has focused on “equal access for men and women to publicly funded sports facilities” (Stevens, 2006). According to Stevens, unsatisfactory ice time limits the appeal to girls wanting to play ice hockey. The 1996 Olympics marked the “Year of the Woman.” For the first time female athletes who had grown-up solely under the influences of Title IX were competing in the Olympics (Billings, 2008). Since 1996 more and more women, particularly in hockey, have had the opportunity to compete on all girls’ teams as opposed to playing on boys’ teams.

The expansion of women’s hockey at higher levels, such as the Olympics, has helped women’s hockey gain social acceptance. More opportunities and funding for women to play hockey have developed. Another factor is that checking has been removed from the women’s game. The hard physical and purposeful throwing of the body, considered unfeminine by many, will result in a penalty in women’s games--but is still
allowed in men’s games (Theberge, 2000). Stevens (2006) argues that, most recently, playing hockey is less about gender and more about social class. Women now have more equal opportunities, like men, to play hockey; but women from middle class families are often the ones with the economic advantage to play the sport due to the cost of equipment, coaching and paying for ice time. Despite the successes of women in hockey, they are still marginalized in the sport (Stevens, 2006).

Black and Hockey

Like women, Blacks have also been marginalized in ice hockey. Hockey is considered a mostly “White” sport with few Blacks playing the game at the higher levels, such as the Olympics and NHL (Frozen Out, 2007; Pitter, 2006). Historically, many Blacks played hockey and even helped advance the game. Hockey was introduced by descendents of slaves in the U.S. but, “A lot of this history was lost, ignored, or simply forgotten” (Frozen Out, 2007). Black leagues in Nova Scotia were the first to allow goalies to fall on the puck in order to stop it (Pitter, 2006). Other advances in hockey, made by Black players, were never credited to them. It seems that hockey does not represent all Canadians--only White Canadians. There was competition between English and French Canadian players until the two bridged the gap to create the “new” Canadian, a White one, where “People of colour…were still kept on the sidelines” (Pitter, 2006, p. 129). Blacks viewed hockey as “an expression of Canadianness” (Pitter, 2006, p. 132) and played to assimilate into Canadian culture, yet they were denied this assimilation by being forced into Negro leagues and by encountering racial slurs.
Willie O’Ree was the first Black NHL hockey player when he signed with the Boston Bruins in 1958. This was three years after Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in baseball with the Brooklyn Dodgers. O’Ree faced verbal, physical, and psychological abuse because of his color (Pitter, 2006). Change has been slow to occur in relation to Black hockey players. An exception is Jerome Iginla, a current Black NHL player for the Calgary Flames, who has represented Canada in both the 2002 and 2006 Olympics. Iginla also won the Lester B. Pearson award, the player’s choice award for Most Valuable Player in the league, as well as the Rocket Richard Trophy and Art Ross Trophy for most goals scored and most points scored in a season respectively for the 2001-2002 season (Harris, 2003).

As of the 2007-2008 season, the NHL reported 14 Black players in the league (NHL All-Star Game, 2008). This comprises about 2% of all NHL players. Cross-referencing the Olympic men’s hockey rosters with the Black NHL players’ roster, the only player who could be found in both the NHL and the 2006 Olympics was Jerome Iginla. Pitter attributes the lack of Black hockey players to economics and racism as players advance to higher levels.

Conclusion

The 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy, represented the first time that both men’s and women’s ice hockey were broadcast equally. NBC and its partner stations, CNBC and MSNBC, broadcast every men’s and women’s ice hockey game during the 2006 Olympics. Eight women’s teams and 12 men’s teams competed, so one-third more
men’s games aired than women’s (“Inside This Sport,” 2006). However, given the marginal participation of women and racial minorities in the sport, and the fact that they have had to fight to receive equality in the sport, the kind of coverage and the way they were framed within the commentary must be analyzed. Women’s college hockey games are typically not aired on television; therefore, the audience for women’s Olympic hockey is unclear.

There are several differences between men’s and women’s hockey—including the use of checking in the game and the level of play attainable for each. For men, the ultimate level of non-international play in North America and many parts of the world is NHL hockey; for women, it is the collegiate level. In addition, the men’s game has existed at a higher level for a lot longer than the women’s game. As a result, differences in the way the men’s and women’s game were framed, whether women were marginalized and constructed as inferior in the commentary become important factors that need investigated; they give clues into the construction of sexual difference, as well as, hegemonic masculinities and femininities.

The Olympics are a place to showcase not only athletic prowess but a country’s political agenda. Political rivalries are fought on the field, or in this case--ice surface. Because players play for either an NHL or college team and may face teammates who now play on an opposing national team, the rivalries may take precedence over nationality. For instance, two players from the same NHL team might face each other as opponents on different national teams in the Olympics. Both the U.S. and Canadian players seem more privileged because the NHL and colleges reside in each country. The way the commentators frame foreign players’ use of these resources may create a
particular type of nationalism or sense of North Americanism within the commentary. Rivalries based on politics and/or history is also often created within the media; investigating this possible phenomenon might also indicate a certain sense of nationalism present in the commentary.

Hockey has traditionally been considered a “White” sport where participation by Blacks has been marginal. Jerome Iginla was not only the solitary Black hockey player participating in the Olympics, but in 2002 was the first Black hockey player to receive a gold medal in the Winter Olympics (Harris, 2003). How Iginla is constructed against the backdrop of an all-White sport, as well as, how White players are constructed in relationship to race will be investigated. Olympic hockey is fraught with controversy and issues on gender, nationalism and race, which are intermingled. Hockey serves as a forum to further investigate these issues, which might or might not be present in NBC’s coverage of the 2006 Olympic Games.

The goals of this study include looking at how gender, nationality, and race are constructed and intersect on multiple levels within non-primetime hours. A second goal is to investigate how women athletes are constructed within the traditionally masculine sport of hockey. How Whiteness is constructed in a predominantly White sport, instead of focusing on Black stereotypes, is another goal of this research. Finally, a goal of this research is to begin a longitudinal study to track changes, if any, in the area of gender, nationality, and race related to Olympic hockey.
Chapter 2

Hegemony, Gender and the Media

“A few times I have made an effort to watch at least some of the women’s [hockey] Olympic or World Championship finals, hoping, in part to see the Canadian women win, but also simply to see non-girlie women being feted on TV.”

-Mary Louis Adams, 2006
Gender serves as a social construction of what it means to be male and female. The social construction of gender is upheld through the use of ideology, which reinforces notions of hegemonic masculinity and femininity. The media serve to reinforce notions of gender. Therefore, mediated sporting events serve as one of the most predominant and powerful platforms where notions of gender are reinforced because most people experience sports through the media. Scholars have investigated concepts within the sports-media complex such as binary dualism, the televised manhood formula, heterosexuality, sexual difference, sex-appropriate sports, and violence. Studies indicate that female athletes remain marginalized in the media, struggling to gain the same recognition as men for their accomplishments (Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Duncan & Messner, 1998; Eastman & Billings, 1999; Weiller, Higgs & Greenleaf, 2004).

Ideology

Ideology is defined as maintaining the status quo of the dominant culture through values, cultural norms and organized thought (Hoisington, 1996; Lull, 1995). It allows dominant groups to maintain their rights and privileges, creating a hierarchy in order to make inequalities in society seem just (Kellner, n.d.). Hall (1977) maintains that ideology works because people do not have control of their conditions nor the ability to readily change it. Further, ideology decenters culture by allowing people to believe there is no direct association or link between the hierarchies in society and that each person exists on his own. Therefore, each social hierarchy has its own ideologies suitable to it.
Althusser argues that ideology is how significant events in society appear as “natural representations of reality” so that people give consent to “structures of power and domination” (Grossberg, 1984, p. 413). Ideology is a way to discover where things fit into the “existing scheme of things” rather than a way to learn through common sense (Hall, 1977). Ideology is powerful because it appears natural and spontaneous and is mostly unquestioned.

According to James Carey, ideology is a form of cultural practice, which deploys “language for political purposes” (Grossberg, 2006, p. 201). Not everything in culture is ideological, but it is political. Ideologies are maintained through hegemony and are implemented through a culture’s institutions and histories. Ideology is powerful because it is a set of values and public agendas that are spread through everyday practices such as religion, politics, business, schools, sports, music, and popular culture (Hall, 1995; Lull, 1995). This ongoing manipulation of ideology through cultural practices maintains the dominant ideology, which “helps sustain the material and cultural interests of its creators” (Lull, 1995, p. 7). This domination is aided by the control of mass media.

Marxism understands ideology in terms of class relations or the exploitation of the lower classes (worker) by the upper classes (owners) creating inequality (Thompson, 1990). The dominant class has the ability to remain in control because they not only have material wealth but intellectual force. Marx claimed, “The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas” (Marx, 2001, p. 101). Dominant classes create ideologies to remain in control; they have time to produce “ideas” because of their material wealth.
Other types of inequality include those between genders, races, individuals and the state, and between states and nation (Thompson, 1990).

Hegemony

Hegemony explains how ideology and dominance of the elite class is sustained in societies. Gramsci defines hegemony as the dominant class’s privileged use of social institutions (such as the media) to produce and reinforce their values and control over the masses (Raphael, 2003). According to Gramsci, hegemony is perpetuated through dominant ideology, the common set of assumptions in society (Artz & Murphy, 2000; Gramsci, 2006; Raphael, 2003). It allows dominant groups to maintain power, not through coercion, but through these common sense ideas, which appear “natural” rather than “ideological,” so that their practice is not questioned (Hebdige, 2002; Miller, 1998). Hegemony is a way for culture and politics to meet the dominant groups’ interests and the minimal needs of the masses (Artz & Murphy, 2000). It is also a process where social power is exercised, and the dominant ideology of society is communicated. This power may be in the form of political-economic power between nation-states (Lull, 1995; Straubhaar, 1991).

Hall believes that hegemony is organizing popular conscience or common sense through specific social practices. For Hall hegemony “is a question of leadership rather than explicit domination and control” (Grossberg, 1984, p. 412). Hegemony is an ongoing process, rooted in cultural and social history. As long as no one questions who is in control, hegemony is maintained. Hegemony must operate within a context of
prevailing cultural norms in order to work. Ultimately, Hall believes hegemony is a relationship structured by power where dominance and subordination exist (Lull, 1995).

**Hegemonic Masculinity**

Connell (1987) built on Gramsci’s theory of hegemony to develop the notion of hegemonic masculinity. Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as a gender practice reinforcing patriarchy and the dominant position of men over women within the culture. He believes in a gender regime where a “pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity” (Connell, 1987, p.98) are framed. Connell (1990) proposes that hegemonic masculinity is idealized masculinity; masculinity must be created in opposition to something else, femininity, and there is no institution in culture that can actually do this. Connell also proposes that there is not just one type of masculinity, allowing masculinity to always be defined even if it is changing. Masculinity is hegemonic when it is “culturally exalted and that its exaltation stabilizes a structure of dominance and oppression in the gender order as a whole” (Connell, 1990, p. 94).

According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity privileges the most powerful in society by creating cultural icons and mythic images of masculinity. It reinforces the White, middle-class, heterosexual male and “is defined in relation to femininity and subordinated masculinities” (as cited in Dworkin & Wachs, 2000, p. 48). Characteristics of hegemonic masculinity include: physical force, occupational achievement, patriarchy, frontiersmanship, heterosexuality, conformity of rules and rituals, learning to defer to
male authority, pain, competitiveness, initiative, strength, power, aggression and confidence (Beal, 1996; Duncan, 2006; Trujillo, 1991). In contrast, feminine characteristics include “inferiority, weakness, incompetence, cooperation, passivity, timidity, and vulnerability” (Duncan, 2006, p. 231). Those masculinities that do not fit into one of the masculine categories, such as gayness or femininity, fall to the bottom of the gender hierarchy and are further marginalized (Connell, 2005). The military and sport are two social institutions which reinforce the ideals of hegemonic masculinity (Beal, 1996).

Hegemonic masculinity is rooted in the form of the hero (Connell, 1987; Hargreaves, 2000). The male hero is strong, aggressive, brave, and usually completes a feat using muscular strength (i.e. slaying a dragon); this makes male athletes the perfect sports heroes because they are viewed as using muscular strength to succeed. Other characteristics of the male sports hero include: breaking physical barriers, enduring adverse conditions, overcoming odds, and driving the body to the limit (Hargreaves, 2000)--all of which support the strong, tough and aggressive characteristics of male hegemony. In contrast, women tend to not be described in such terms. Characteristics of the female heroine pertain to being selfless, kind, motherly, and moral (Hargreaves, 2000). This leaves an inconsistency when describing the female athlete, who might be heroic, according to the male definitions of a hero; but who is being held to feminine standards. As a result, many more male sports heroes are presented in the media.

Heterosexual masculinity is a multiple hierarchical duality where some are privileged and some are stigmatized (Dworkin & Wachs, 2000). The binary dualism is further confounded by the fact that people cannot be at two ends of the spectrum at the
same time, creating the idea “that females will always be feminine while males will always be masculine” (Clasen, 2001, p. 37). Gender is socially constructed based on agreement of what is masculine or feminine (Artz & Murphy, 2000; Connell, 1987; Laberge & Albert, 1999; Lenskyj, 2003). Therefore, a person cannot have traits of both because they lie on opposite ends of the polar spectrum.

**Hegemonic Femininity**

Hegemonic femininity is constructed in contrast to hegemonic masculinity where masculinity is seen as the dominant gender in society, and femininity is constructed in subordination to it (Mikosza & Phillips, 1999). However, there are multiple levels of both femininity and masculinity. The gender order only helps to give structure to these multiple levels at an abstract level, while the gender regime gives structure at the local level, which includes sport, religion, work family, media etc. (Connell, 1987; Laberge & Albert, 1999). Connell (1987) argues that hegemonic femininity cannot really exist because it is constructed in opposition to hegemonic masculinity, which is viewed as dominant in society. In other words, because hegemony is about being in a dominant position and hegemonic masculinity is created as dominant, hegemonic femininity is powerless and cannot exist. This creates a dualistic relationship where “the subordinate term is negated, rather than the two sides being in equal balance” (Paechter, 2006).

Both hegemonic femininity and masculinity are based on the social organization of traditional gender roles, which are ingrained in culture and unquestioned (Krane, 2001). Characteristics of hegemonic femininity include being emotional, passive,
dependent, maternal, domestic, compassionate, gentle, thin, small, fragile, slight, and slender (Craig, 1993; Krane, 2001; Rusk, 2000). In addition, hegemonic femininity is based on the presumption that gender-appropriate roles are rooted in being White and heterosexual (Krane, 2001; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kaur, 2004). Those who appear to adhere to these roles become more privileged and accepted than those who do not (Knight & Guiliano, 2003; Krane, 2001).

Male hegemony is not only reinforced through sport but is also considered imperative to “the culturally ingrained gender system in the United States” (Hardin & Shain, 2005, p. 805). In this gender system, men are viewed as rational and cognitive, while women are viewed as biologically grounded, domestic, and able to be controlled (Hardin & Shain, 2005). In addition, women in sports are often exploited as feminine to present them as culturally acceptable. This occurs when women’s sports are portrayed as being fun and having camaraderie rather than being competitive (Etue & Williams, 1996; Krane, 2001), devaluing the work of the woman athlete. Sports such as figure skating and gymnastics are not viewed as a threat to masculinity because these female athletes wear make-up and naturally feminize themselves as part of the performance. This reinforces the notion that women are meant to be beautiful, not necessarily powerful or aggressive, and reinforces the notions of what it means to be feminine.

Concepts of Sport and Gender

The media or the information elite often create and reinforce dominant ideologies. Television has the ability to call attention to certain people, ideas, and symbols, which
Lull (1995) terms “cultural bits and fragments of information” (p. 9). These bits of information help to form the ideologies, which represent the media elite and not represent the interests of others (Lull, 1995; Barthes, 1967). Those who are a part of the information elite do not manufacture ideology, but simply reproduce, relay, process and package existing ideologies (Gitlin, 1987). Furthermore, these ideologies greatly influence how people make sense of their societies (Lull, 1995).

Researchers and theorists have varying ideas on why the media, the Olympics in particular, are controlled and produced as they are. Sport commentary serves as an ideological narrative of culture portraying various ideas on social relations and cultural meanings (Boyle & Haynes, 2000). Sports journalism reproduces ideology within a society because journalists are motivated by “considerations of interest and power” (Blaine, Boyle, & O’Donnell, 1993). In this case the media create an ideology for society to follow. Social consent is a much easier way to control thinking than coercion or force (Lull, 1995). The power of the media is the fact that it is integrated so well into everyday life that consumers do not realize the social influence and power it actually has (Lull, 1995). Male hegemony is upheld in media sports coverage by either not giving women equal coverage to that of men or giving them “ambivalent coverage that trivializes their athleticism” (Hardin & Shain, 2005, p. 805) resulting in reinforcement of what it means to be male.

The rise of women in sport threatens the ideological gender order, which exists in society (Lenskyj, 2003). For example, hegemonic masculinity reinforces that men in sports are assumed to be heterosexual, creating a dichotomy for female athletes who have, “long been viewed with suspicion” (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 35). Women, who “intrude”
on the male realm of sport, are framed as lesbians posing a threat to the gender order because they display strength, endurance, competiveness and risk-taking behaviors that are traditionally viewed as masculine traits (Lenskyj, 2003). Not only does this bring into question their sexuality but it threatens masculine hegemony. As a result, a female athlete is made to appear less threatening in the media by being exploited as “the girl next door” or “heterosexual” (Lenskyj, 2003, p. 36).

Clasen (2001) believes that as long as the paradox in athletics exists women will continue to “show-off” their femininity over their athleticism. Sports, such as figure skating and gymnastics, are not viewed as a threat to masculinity because these female athletes wear make-up and naturally feminize themselves as part of the performance. The problem with hegemonic masculinity in sport is that “even if women play sports, they must still perform sports according to characteristics of masculine play” (Clasen, 2001, p. 37).

Sexual difference is the culturally constructed differences or stereotypes between men and women and how the media construct and frame these differences (Duncan, 1990; Hardin, Chance, Dodd & Hardin, 2002; Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf, & Hardin, 2002). These differences are presented as natural and biological (Hardin, Lynn, et. al, 2002). Media construct and frame these differences by giving women’s sports less coverage than men’s sports. The media also emphasize sex-appropriate sports; that is women participating in feminine sports, such as figure skating and gymnastics, are emphasized, while women competing in more masculine sports, such as boxing and ice hockey, are downplayed (Hardin, Chance, et. al, 2002). Sexual difference suggests that because of the natural differences between men and women and because sports are “male,” women are
either not interested in sports or women’s sports are not important. Sexual difference is also framed in the media by showing women as inferior, emotional, and dependent, while framing men as superior and independent. Sexual difference not only reinforces--but goes beyond the stereotypes of female athletes because the differences of men and women are constructed as natural and real (Hardin, Lynn, et. al, 2002).

Sex-appropriate sports are those sports deemed appropriate for either men or women and are constructed through sexual difference. The social construction of sex-appropriate sports promotes the idea that some sports--such as figure skating or gymnastics--are more appropriate for women, while sports such as--football and hockey--are more appropriate for men. This is reinforced through the media who tend to “emphasize those sports which are seen as ‘sex appropriate’ for women” (Kinnick, 1998, p. 215). The sports that are deemed masculine tend to emphasize such characteristics of power and dominance, violence, and full body contact. The sports deemed more feminine emphasize characteristics of “elegance, glamour, and beauty.” (Adams, 2006; Jones, Murrell, & Jackson, 1999; Kinnick, 1998; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). In addition, women tend to be represented more in individual sports than team sports, while men tend to be represented in team sports and not individual sports, reinforcing that individual sports are more feminine and team sports are more masculine (Hardin, Lynn, Walsdorf & Hardin, 2002). This also serves to support and show sexual difference, where women are naturally more suited to individual sports than men. Sex-appropriate sports help to reinforce notions of hegemonic masculinity. Sexual difference is constructed in the media through the use of sex appropriate sports.
More recently, women athletes are being portrayed within the framework of having athletically fit bodies but still being feminine (Carty, 2005; Royce, Gebelt, Duff, 2003; Krane, 2001; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, Kauer, 2004). This “fit and feminine” portrayal suggests that women can be legitimate athletes while being feminine within the context of hegemonic male sports. This occurs when the role of being feminine is separated from the role of being an athlete, “thus allowing her to manage stereotypically incompatible identities without conflict (Royce, et al, 2003). The fit and feminine framework suggests that women use their bodies for performance rather than as objects of desire (Carty, 2005). Femininity is then seen to include: “muscles, strength, fitness, and competiveness” (Carty, 2005, p. 137). This replaces the traditional depictions of vulnerability, fragility, dependence and subservience (Carty 2005). A new paradigm is emerging where women “can be strong and feminine simultaneously” (Carty, 2005, p. 137).

Despite this, women still face adversity in regards to being athletes and being women. Having muscles, power, and strength are still considered masculine traits. Women athletes walk a fine line between being athletically-toned and not having mannish-muscular bodies, which are perceived as unfeminine (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, Kauer, 2004; Royce, Gebelt, Duff, 2003). Women, who are able to walk this fine line, meet the social expectations of femininity without being too mannish, “accrue power and privilege” (Krane, 2001; Krane et al, 2004). Such athletes include Mia Hamm and Lisa Leslie.

Royce, Gebelt, and Duff (2003) surveyed college students at an NCAA Division I school and found that women perceived female athletes as more feminine than men did,
and those who were athletes perceived female athletes as more feminine than non-athletes did. In addition, women had negative attitudes toward women body builders and those women who were athletes admitted to emphasizing their femininity off the field (Royce et al., 2003). Similarly, Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, and Kauer (2004) conducted focus groups with NCAA Division I female athletes. These athletes admitted that they wanted to appear fit and have muscle definition but did not want to appear too muscular. Appearing fit was still considered within the limits of femininity, while being muscular was identified with being mannish (Krane et al., 2004).

Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt (2000) found that televised sporting events and the commercials within them reinforce “stereotypical messages about race, gender, and violence” (Messner, 2002, p. 112). Messner et. al (2000) describe these themes as the Televised Sports Manhood Formula which includes: White men as the voice of authority, sports are a man’s world, women are viewed in stereotypical roles, and sports are likened to war. Messner et. al believe that these themes reinforce “what it means to be a man” (p. 390). Women in sport generally have been marginalized in the roles of cheerleaders, spectators, and advertising images (Trujillo, 1991). This creates and reinforces sexual difference or the notion that women are inferior to men, or less suited to sport, because of their natural differences from men (Hardin, Chance, Dodd & Hardin, 2002; Hardin, Dodd, Chance & Walsdorf, 2004).

Lenskyj (2003) further addresses how the changing of rules for female athletes promotes the masculine agenda. Modifying rules to accommodate women creates the perception that women are physically inferior to their male counterparts and must be protected from physical contact, thus reinforcing stereotypes of “female frailty” (Lenskyj,
2003). A prime example of this is women’s ice hockey where the rules have been changed so that no fighting or hard hits take place on ice.

Theberge (2000) found that women’s hockey has been constructed differently than men’s hockey because physicality has been diminished due to lack of body checking in the game and the requirement of more protective equipment for women. This causes women’s hockey to be viewed as inferior to the “real” version (Theberge, 2000). Women’s hockey is promoted as being fun, recreational, and friendly, further undermining the sport and creating an image problem for women’s hockey (Etue & Williams, 1996). This also creates an image problem for women’s hockey because it is viewed as less physical and aggressive than men’s hockey; therefore, audiences do not want to watch it, and sponsors do not want to support it (Theberge, 2000; Etue & Williams, 1996).

Theberge (2000) also notes in her research that women hockey players were not responsive to sexist comments within the game of hockey. For instance, the women did not seem to mind the use of such terms as “defensemen” or “play the man.” The coach initially was observed using terms such as “person,” “player” or “defender” to which he received quizzical looks from the women. After a while, he quit using such terms.

Sport serves to reinforce and maintain male hegemony because it is a legitimate forum for “male violence, both on and off the field” (Miller, 1998, p. 432). Sports such as ice hockey and football serve to promote male hegemony because of their physicality (Theberge, 1997; Welch, 1997). Such sports are collision or combative sports because violence is part of the strategy allowing for “controlled violence” (Welch, 1997). Hockey idealizes what it means to be a man “At elite competitive levels, men’s hockey—the
hockey that really counts—promote a hard, aggressive masculinity” (Adams, 2006, p. 73). As more women play football and hockey, entering into traditionally masculine sports, the gender gap is lessened. However, women athletes are also challenging notions of masculine hegemony and creating a resistance between dominant and subordinate groups (Rowe, McKay & Miller, 2000).

According to Boyle and Haynes (2000), “Many sports are predicated on aggressive values, where competition demands violent physical contact and often the deliberate infliction of harm or injury” (p. 136). Adams (2006) links this hard, aggressive masculinity to ice hockey and the fighting within the game. He states, “We see this masculinity reinforced in the celebration of fighting, in the idolization of players willing to give and take the biggest hits” (p. 73). The hockey fight reinforces notions of masculinity. Eliminating the fighting from women’s hockey removes the “masculinity” from the game further feminizing women hockey players. Because fighting is associated with maleness rather than femininity, sports with fighting legitimize violence, creating an “axis of power in the gender order, where physical combat, blood and bruises are considered ‘natural’ for men, and alien to women” (Boyle and Haynes, 2000, p. 137).

Media Representations of Sports

The media-sports complex serves to help reproduce notions of ideology and hegemony throughout culture (Dworkin & Wachs, 2000; Jhally, 1989). This is possible because the majority of Americans experience sports, particularly the Olympics, through some form of the media, usually television (Boyle & Haynes, 2000; Weiller, Higgs &
Values consistent with cultural hegemony are reproduced in production, framing and commentary and help to reinforce culturally constructed notions of gender, which include valorizing and revering male athletes for their athletic prowess (Dworkin & Wachs, 2000; Jhally, 1989). Sports can be constructed as interesting, exciting, or entertaining. They can also be constructed as the opposite, leaving viewers to value some sports over others. This gives producers of the media much power when reconstructing images, which are congruent with hegemony.

Research suggests the amount of coverage women’s sports receive is far less compared with men’s sports (Adams, 2006; Billings & Eastman, 2003; Messner, Duncan & Cooky, 2003; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). When the Canadian women won gold in 2002 alongside the Canadian men, the Canadian media coverage gave short shrift to women. For instance, the National Post ran a full page color photo of the men’s victory and ran four more pages of coverage in the first section (Adams, 2006). The Toronto Star and The Globe and Mail ran similar coverage. In contrast, the Canadian women’s team won gold four days earlier, and “it was celebrated in much the same way as victories in speed skating or skiing” (Adams, 2006, p. 72). The Toronto Star gave the women’s team a quarter page photo on the first page of the Olympic section and a half a column story. The Globe and Mail and the National Post were not much better. Even though hockey is “Canada’s National Game” and the women’s Olympic hockey team won gold just as the men’s team had, the coverage of the two events was largely unequal.

Messner, Duncan and Cooky (2003) found that women’s sports are rarely covered on SportsCenter and usually appear as an afterthought when they are. They believe this stems from the fact that 96.5% of sports commentators are men, and they reinforce
hegemonic masculinity by framing sports as a man’s world. During the 1996 Olympics men and women were given almost equal amounts of airtime (Eastman & Billings, 1999; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). However, the media focused on women’s “individual sports” such as gymnastics or diving rather than “team sports” such soccer or basketball. During the 2002 Olympics, men’s events received nearly twice the coverage as women’s events, a significant decrease from the 1996 games (Billings & Eastman, 2003). Even though attempts have been made to equalize men and women’s coverage of sports during the Olympics, men still control the perception of how women are viewed in sports. The equalization of coverage is not enough; how the media frame women’s athletics has more impact on how the content is shaped and directed (Tuggle & Owen, 1999).

Production value impacts the framing of women’s sports. According to Duncan (2006) the amount of women’s coverage has significantly increased, but the production value is still often lower than in men’s sports. Summarizing three AAF studies, Duncan and Messner (2000) state that lower production values were predominant in women’s sports compared with men’s sports. This included less camera work, lower quality of production, editing, and sound.

Aside from production values, the way female athletes are presented impacts audience reception to the importance of women’s sports. During the 1993 NCAA basketball playoffs, men’s basketball was framed as heroic and significant; hyping of the men’s games occurred during pregame, half-time, and post-game, but was also inserted during the women’s games (Duncan & Messner, 1998). In another study, Hailey Wickenheiser was portrayed as a “comic sideshow” in the media after playing men’s professional hockey in Finland and returning to Canada to join the women’s national
team (Stevens, 2006). The media further portrayed her as an inferior player compared with men’s European players, thus framing women’s hockey as inferior to men’s hockey.

Looking at attributes for success and failure, Eastman and Billings (1999) and Billings and Eastman (2002, 2003) conducted a series of studies looking at the gender gap between male and female athletes in the 1994 through 2002 Olympic Games. They found that in 1996 and 1998 commentators gave far more attributions to men’s successes than to women’s successes. In the 2000 Olympics, men were more likely to have their successes attributed to athletic skill and commitment and their failures attributed to lack of concentration. In the 2002 Olympics women were more likely to be attributed with failure because they lacked experience.

Jones, Murrell and Jackson (1999) found in the 1996 and 1998 Olympic Games that newspapers covering women athletes participating in sports considered masculine, such as hockey, basketball and soccer, focused on non-task related subjects irrelevant to performance such as appearance or references to personal life. This suggests that even though women achieve success they are still held to feminine standards and compared with their male counterparts with whom they are always measured, reinforcing sexual difference.

The media help to frame women as feminine by drawing attention to their physical appearance, their personal backgrounds, and portraying them in stereotypical roles. During the 1996, 1998, and 2000 Olympic games women’s physical appearance was mentioned more often than men’s physical appearance; women participating in masculine sports (hockey, basketball, and soccer) received even more references to appearance and personal life (Eastman & Billings, 1999; Jones, Murrell & Jackson, 1999;
Stereotypically feminine sports, such as gymnastics, were reported with the most stereotypical female comments, suggesting that even though women achieve success, they are still held to feminine standards (Jones, et al, 1999). In the 1996 Olympics, the emotional dependency of female athletes and women’s family life, including marital status of female athletes, was emphasized far more than with men (Kinnick, 1998). In contrast, emphasis was placed on men winning. Such images reinforce gender stereotypes and hegemonic femininity framed from within the media.

Women are often framed in terms of the male counterparts or as girls rather than women. Weiller, Higgs and Greenleaf (2004) found that 74% of the time women were compared with their male counterpart in the same sport. In the 1996 and 1998 Olympics, those women’s teams that won gold medals--women’s hockey, gymnastics, basketball, soccer and softball--were most likely to be compared with their male counterparts (Jones, Murrell & Jackson, 1999). Eastman and Billings (2000) found similar findings. For instance, a commentator compared a female soccer player to Roberto Carlos, a male left fullback soccer player. Women are also often referred to as “girls” while men were never referred to as “boys,” suggesting that the production of men’s sports reinforces hegemonic masculinity and that salience between the genders has not been achieved (Weiller et al, 2004).
Conclusion

Looking at the history of the Olympics, women did not participate in the modern day games until 1900 when “11 women were permitted to compete in golf and tennis” (Kinnick, 1998, p. 213). Women now actively participate in the Olympic Games, but they are still barred from wrestling, boxing, modern pentathlon and weightlifting (Kinnick, 1998). Not only do sports competitions, such as the Olympics, exclude and trivialize women, but the “sports media also tend to ignore and marginalize the female athlete” (Kinnick, 1998, p. 214). The media serve to reinforce ideologies through symbols, ideas, and calling attention to particular people (Lull, 1995).

During the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, two new women’s events debuted--soccer and softball, as well as both men’s and women’s mountain biking, and beach volleyball (Kinnick, 1998). Women’s ice hockey was added in 1998; and currently, a petition to add women’s ski jumping for 2010 is underway. Parity for women in the Olympics is being demonstrated even though men still outnumber women nearly two to one. Similarly, equal coverage was given for both men’s and women’s hockey games during the 2006 Winter Olympics. However, it is not just the amount of coverage of women’s and men’s sports that matters, but the production, framing and commentary which can also lead to the marginalization of women’s sports (Dworkin & Wachs, 2000).

As the studies discussed in this chapter reveal, women have been marginalized in hockey and other sports because they pose a threat to hegemonic masculinity (Etue & Williams, 1996; Theberge, 2000). Rules have been changed to make the women’s game less violent, thus an attempt to feminize it. However, studies on both women’s hockey
and the Olympic Games have yet to look at the mediation of Olympic women’s hockey. It would appear that NBC is covering the women’s hockey games equally by broadcasting every game. However, further investigation into the way the games were broadcast, specifically how NBC’s commentators treated the women hockey players will truly reveal if commentator comments reinforce the marginalization of the female athlete—by framing her as weaker than her male counterpart, comparing her to her male counterpart, unnecessarily feminizing her, focusing on her role as wife or mother, and attributing her successes and failures to outside factors. Therefore, the first two research questions are:

**RQ1:** How is hegemonic masculinity reinforced in commentary?

**RQ2:** How is hegemonic femininity reinforced in commentary?
Is it true that ‘Americans on the East Coast… like to look across the Atlantic and gloat at Europe’s problems’ but that Americans on the West Coast ‘look the other way and see China, growing at breakneck speed, bankrolling the US government while at the same time wiping out American manufacturers and building up a formidable military capability that will one day challenge American primacy in the Pacific region’? Will it be the case that in time a shift in sports dominance will prove to be a metaphor for a different kind of dominance and a different kind of imperialism—Eastern not Western?

--From J.A. Mangan in “Epilogue: ‘Empire in Denial’: An Exceptional Kind of Imperialism”
Just as gender is a socially constructed concept, so too nationality is a social construction, which helps give people meaning and order to the world around them. Nationality and nationalism do not exist by themselves but are created in conjunction with gender and race. Hegemonic nationalism is reinforced through cultural practices such as sports and media. Sports serve as a platform to help create and define nationalism; in international sports nations are defined in both the political and sporting world. Research suggests that in national broadcasts of sporting events American nationalism is reinforced with symbols such as color guards, the national anthems and flyovers (Coles, 2002; Hogan, 2003). The media reinforce nationalistic sentiments through commentary and visuals toward their home countries even though they are supposed to remain unbiased. There is no larger place to showcase nationalistic sentiments than on the Olympic stage. Certain sports are tied to nationalistic pride, such as Canadian nationalism and identity in relationship to Canadian hockey or American baseball as part of the nationalistic American pride. These sports help reinforce what it means to be a certain nationality.

Concepts of Nation and Nationalism

Jinxia (2005) defines a nation as a group of people with a common history, language and culture, which view themselves as a distinct group and “who aspire to some form of statehood of their own” (p. 531). Others believe that nations are merely symbolic formations of imagined communities (Anderson 2003; Day & Thompson, 2004; Coles, 2002; Racioppi & O’Sullivan See, 2000). Social construction suggests that nations exist
only in the wake of nationalism; first, people must have a sense of nationality before a nation can be constructed. The construction of nation is gendered and ethicized in order to reproduce social hierarchies within a nation (Hogan, 2003). Nation-states are more than just political entities; they create their identities in order to ward off difference within the nation (Hall, 1993).

Nationalism “collectively frames events” (Howard & Privedera, 2006). These events can be identified in many different areas of life, such as recreation, international position, and other socio-eco-political phenomena or militarism. Modern nationalism is having sentiments toward a nation, which has universal principles rooted in history, creating a sense of belonging and identity (Calhoun, 2006; Hearn, 2006; Jinxia, 2005). This identity is formed through ideology, social movements, and in relationship to other nations’ identities leading to notions of “us” and “them” where nations are pitted against one another (Billig 1995; Cohen, 1985; Day & Thompson, 2004). Nationalism operates within state and ideological power, helping to “generate social identities and political allegiance” (Hearn, 2006, p. 10). Nationalism is an ideological process in nation building that creates political and economic stability, perceptions in identities, nationalistic beliefs, practices and communication (Calhoun, 2006; Howard & Privedera, 2006).

Nationalism gives meaning and order to society, and is formed through social and cultural practices, as well as, the use of symbols to reinforce what it means to be American or German or Canadian. For instance, in the United States nationalism is signified by “‘liberty,’ ‘freedom,’ ‘economic opportunity,’ and its own economic place among global actors” (Howard & Privedera, 2006). National identity might also be established through tangible symbols such as flags, anthems, institutions, and heroes
(Cohen 1985; Coles, 2002; Day & Thompson, 2004). However, national identity depends on many factors including language, religion, ideology and ancestry, but ultimately it is a collective identity of people (Coles, 2002).

Hegemonic nationalism is “the specific features and actions of the desirable nation-state” (Howard & Prividera, 2006, p. 136). Hegemonic nationalism defines what it means to be patriotic, nationalistic, or in the case of the United States, American. Particularly during times of war the hegemonic process becomes more salient. Even though hegemonic nationalism transcends gender, race, social class, religion, and political groups, allowing people to unify under nationality. Nationalism and militarism are formed around masculinity and patriarchy; they define who is desirable, mainly men. This creates a dichotomy for women and minorities and further marginalizes them. Sports prowess is one way to promote nationalism.

Nationalistic hegemony gives way to nationalistic ideologies, which tell people that “all members share distinctive common descent, constituting in effect a large kin group” (Calhoun, 2006, p. 28). Hearn (2006) states that nationalist ideology serves three main functions. The first is for elites to work together toward a common cause even if they have differences. The second is to “mobilize the masses around a national cause” (Hearn, 2006, p.121). The third function is to “legitimate the national project in the eyes of the outside powers” (Hearn, 1006, p. 121) or to gain acceptance from others who have power in a nation but may not directly control governmental power. For example, in the case of war the political powers would like the media powers to support the war in order to gain national acceptance of the people for fighting the war.
Nationalism and Sports

Hegemonic nationalism is tied to sporting events; certain sports are tied to “specific political and cultural groupings” (Boyle & Haynes, 2000, p. 146). Sports serve to label and differentiate groups in society. Ideas about sports and nationalism become naturalized and accepted as common place. Media can serve to transmit identities and construct and invent identities “if the political or economic climate is suitable” (Boyle & Haynes, 2000, p. 147). For sport to function on an international level there must be a hierarchy of countries. Countries are stereotyped in sports as inferior and superior according to their place in the political world (Boyle & Haynes, 2000).

Stevenson (2002) argues that sport serves as a platform to uphold national character. This is primarily because the majority of American heroes are sports stars, who help to reinforce American ideologies, as well as “national image and identity” (Stevenson, 2002, p. 214). Sports serve as an indicator of national characteristics and national identity because sports are not only highly visible, but they focus on “symbols, winning, competition, partisan fans—and in team games the necessity of collective struggle” (Boyle & Haynes, 2000, p. 143) serve as a metaphor for nationalism.

Bairner (1996) makes a distinction between sportive nationalism and political nationalism. Sportive nationalism is that which nations use to elevate their prestige, to legitimize themselves, to compensate for other areas of deficiency and to reinforce rivalries in a peaceful way (Bairner, 1996). For instance, during the Cold War the Soviet Union funded its athletes, so they would be worthy competitors against the United States in Olympic competition. When Mary Lou Retton won gold in 1984, the U.S. was able to
show its athleticism and world dominance. International politics are always tied to international sports even when they are not intended to be. “Many states seek to use the Games in pursuit of foreign policy objectives” (Larson & Park, 1993, p. 37). This can occur because sports are perceived as neutral.

Nationalism is reinforced in the way the media portray their particular nation on a world stage, i.e. the way NBC covers Americans in the Olympics. Other ways the media reinforce nationalism include predicting or asking who will “win” at the Olympics before the games even begin (Larson & Park, 1993). The Olympics are built around the nation-state that leads to its intrinsically political nature (Larson & Park, 1993). Athletes represent their nation-states and national Olympic committees are organized by nation-state boundaries; IOC members are considered ambassadors for their country (Larson & Park, 1993). The national values of the host nation are also reinforced.

Sports also serve as a medium where rising nations can gain international recognition (Billings & Tambosi, 2004). The success or failure of an international team in sports competition serves as a measure of the place that nation sits in the larger international political world (Boyle & Haynes, 2000). According to Jarvie (1993), sporting events become a conduit for national sentiment toward the country as it creates something tangible, which signifies a nation’s existence (as cited in Bairner, 1996). This is the reason that medal counts are touted in the media. International sporting events pit nation against nation, which results in competition about place, “defined in terms of local and national identification [it] is actually at the core of the global sport phenomenon” (Stevenson, 2002, p. 215). However, NBC has taken steps to eliminate medal counts from its Olympic broadcasts (Billings, 2008).
In international games, the issue of “us” and “them” comes to the forefront; sports commentators, even though they are supposed to be bi-partisan, often refer to the national teams as “us” and “we” (McCarthy, Jones & Potrac, 2003; Stempel, 2006; Tudor, 1992). The “us-versus-them” mentality often translates into good vs. evil both on the field and within the world at large (Stempel, 2006). This worldview serves to maintain boundaries and maintain order through rules of right and wrong. Commentators are influenced partly by the audience being targeted, the media institution itself, and who is funding it. However, NBC has attempted a more bi-partisan broadcast by having strict regulations on commentators not using “us” and “them” during Olympic broadcasts (Billings, 2008).

Hockey and Nationality in Canada

Hockey has shaped Canadian identity in much the same way that football has shaped American identity. Hockey is considered Canada’s national sport—though not officially. The media have helped to reinforce national hegemony with Hockey Night in Canada, which began as a radio program broadcasting NHL games and then later became a television show. One way that Hockey Night in Canada reinforces the hegemony of hockey as Canada’s sport is telling Canadians how “we” feel about hockey (Langley, 2003). Those who do not embrace hockey are constructed by the Canadian media as deviant thus maintaining national hegemony through the sport and keeping hockey distinctly Canadian (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Langley, 2003). Hockey Night in Canada creates a common identity through nostalgia, allowing viewers to attach to “places, times, and social influences that shaped our developing conceptions of self” (Gruneau &
Whitson, 1993, p. 1). It is also able to transcend the English/French rift allowing both groups in Canada to feel unified through hockey.

It is not just *Hockey Night In Canada* that helps to reinforce notions of nationalism but hockey in general. Because of the rift between English and French speaking Canadians, hockey serves as a part of the Canadian culture that helps unify the two (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Hockey serves as an institution in Canada that like the government, the health-care system, and the CBC, has truly remained Canadian (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Hockey helps create a national identity, which is different from American identity. Hockey is part of the Canadian collective memory where “Hockey’s rhythms, meanings, structures, and contradictions can all be understood as a constitutive part of the everyday Canadian experience” (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993, p. 13).

Both collective memory and nationalism exist within Canadian hockey, allowing Canadians to express their nationalism through hockey. Canadians define themselves through their nationalism, which is reinforced with symbols, such as flags, anthems, holidays, and festivities. These symbols are linked to hockey, creating a sense of Canadian identity, because hockey is a way of life within the culture (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). On a world stage Canadians treat their defeats in hockey as a national disgrace, while other sports are less important (Adams, 2006; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993).

Canada, like the United States, had a rivalry with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Langley (2003) and Gruneau and Whiston (1993) describe the Canadian-Soviet Union Challenge Series of 1972 when Canadian Paul Henderson scored a late game-winning goal against the Soviets. Langley remembers that the game was played during school hours, and the entire school had an assembly to watch the game live. This
game, like the American win over the Soviets in 1980, symbolized a battle of ideologies. Canadians viewed the Soviets as a threat to Canadian hockey because they had a different style of play (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Media representations of sports over time serve to reinforce nostalgia and ideologies inherent in culture.

Media Representations of Nationalism

Research has been done on the construction of identity and nationalism within sports, specifically within the Olympics (Billings, 2008; Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Larson & Rivenbaugh, 1991; Sabo, Jansen, Tate, Duncan, & Leggett, 1996). Much of the Olympic research tends to focus on the broadcast media’s overall coverage, such as the opening ceremonies, primetime coverage, or the stories told during the Olympics (Gordon & Sibson, 1998; Hogan, 2003; Larson & Rivenbaugh, 1991). But nationalistic hegemony is also created by sports broadcasters, serving as a means of conveying the superiority, military strength, and power of the United States.

While nationalism does not exist independently of gender and race, most research conducted on the intersection of sport, nationality, and gender deals with masculinity rather than focusing on femininity and nationality (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Wensing and Bruce believe that oftentimes media “bend the rules” in order to accommodate nationality. During events such as the Olympics, female athletes are given more coverage, not because they are women, but because of their nationality.

Billings and Eastman (2002) did a content analysis of the 2000 Summer Olympics and discovered that while American commentators were biased in NBC’s coverage of the
games, they were proportionately biased. America won 97 medals, more than any other
country, comprising 11% of all medal winners. While American athletes were mentioned
more frequently, they deserved to be because 12 athletes won four individual medals
during the games, and four of them were American (Billings & Eastman, 2002).

In a follow-up study of the 2002 Winter Olympics, Billings and Eastman (2003)
found that in NBC’s coverage of the games, American athletes were mentioned fewer
times than non-American athletes, but there was more mention of American athletes
within the top 20 athletes. American athletes tended to receive more praise from
commentators and were given credit for succeeding because they could keep their
courage or had courage while non-American athletes were viewed as succeeding because
of experience (Billings & Eastman, 2003).

Sabo et. al (1996) discovered that during seven international events broadcast bias
existed toward the United States, including more negative comments about state funding
of athletes in other countries and no mention of sponsorship in relation to American
athletes. They also found that other countries were referred to as having a political
agenda, while the unspoken assumption was the United States did not.

Daddario and Wigley (2007) found evidence during the commentary of the 2004
Summer Olympics that stereotyped Asian athletes as hardworking, self-disciplined and
mechanical. The stereotyping was most pronounced during the diving competition where
the unemotional state of the Asian athletes was noted, as well as their desire to win.
Commentators also noted that the desire to win was “presumably motivated by a sense of
loyalty, even obedience, to the state” (Daddario & Wigley, 2007, p. 43). In addition,
Chinese divers were described, not as individuals, but as a collective unit though American divers were given individual attributes.

Daddario (1998) found three major themes in melodramas during the 1996 Olympic Games that included nationalism, excesses of capitalism, and “‘the emergence of women’ at the Games” (p. 133). U.S. ideologies are transmitted via media through the commentary of the games (Daddario, 1998). Such comments were more apparent in live coverage of events rather than in pre-recorded events because the announcers did not have time to think about what they were saying. The melodramas about athletes serve to promote ideologies and create competition between countries (Daddario, 1998).

Conclusion

According to Boyle and Haynes (2000), international media sport becomes a platform for one country to show its superiority over another. One way superiority of a country is supported by the media is by stereotyping other countries (Brookes, 2002). This can occur through targeting individual athletes, targeting the way a nation runs its Olympic program, or through the number of mentions of particular countries’ athletes. Comments regarding both non-North American and North American teams will serve to construct and frame ideologies about nationality within the hockey tournaments. Media have the power to “encourage fans to identify with different nations at different times” (Brookes, 2002, p. 84). As storylines change throughout the hockey tournament, the question is whether commentators will frame particular teams so U.S. viewers identify with different countries other than the Untied States at different times. NBC also believes
in giving American audiences a reason to care about foreign athletes by telling their stories both good and bad (Billings, 2008). While NBC has worked to eliminate medal counts and the use of “us” and “them” within its broadcasts, it remains to be seen if NBC’s control truly filters into the non-primetime hours and cable channels where freelance journalists are used. How nationalism is framed by freelance journalists reinforces hegemonic nationalism because hegemonic nationalism transcends gender and race, allowing marginalized groups to unify under nationality. Therefore, the third and fourth research questions are:

**RQ3:** How is the concept of the “United States” reinforced in commentary?

**RQ4:** How is the concept of “North America” reinforced in commentary?
Chapter 4

Race

“There doesn’t seem to be an effort to diversify the sport. You know, I don’t see the NHL out grassroots campaigning in Black neighborhoods. I don’t. It’s really interesting, and I don’t know why that is. It’s too bad if there are boys and girls, kids, [who] still feel like they can’t [play hockey] because there are no African Americans.”

--Commentator B, Olympic Hockey, 2008
Race, like gender and nationality, is also a social construction and serves to give meaning to the differences between Blackness and Whiteness. Also like gender, the concept of racial difference is reinforced through the use of hegemony and ideology, supporting the relationships apparent within the hierarchy of gender, race and class. Blackness and Whiteness are constructed in relationship to one another. The media serve to reinforce notions of race especially through the platform of sporting events (Grainger, Newman & Andrews, 2006; Sabo & Jansen, 1994). Race creates a social hierarchy within which the sports-media complex operates, serving to reinforce stereotypes of Black athletes, constructions of Whiteness, and reinforce such concepts as new racism, enlightened racism and racial stacking. The sports-media complex plays an integral role in the portrayal of race.

**Concepts of Race**

Race is a social construct that gives meaning to experiences and helps categorize them based on physical differences and organizing them in the social world (Hall, 1995; Pitter, 2006; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004; Whannel, 2002; Winant, 2004). Race is also “a set of attitudes, values, lived experiences, and affective identification” (Giroux, 1997, p. 294). Race assumes there is a link between mental, social and physical abilities and skin color, reinforcing society’s ideologies that being White is rated better than being Black (van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). The social hierarchy is organized by race, gender, and economic power, which allow “Whiteness” to emerge “as the normative basis for success, responsibility and legitimate authority” (Giroux, 1997, p. 300). All
other groups must measure up to the standards of “Whiteness,” resulting in the stereotyping of non-dominant groups, such as Blacks (Giroux, 1997; Stam, 2001; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). As long as race is applied to non-White people, then being White is the norm; and others are “raced” (Andersen, 2003). What makes the race issue so powerful is that the social hierarchy is accepted as the norm, and race becomes invisible (Andersen, 2003; Ferguson, 1990).

Whiteness has been defined as a location within the racial order and a construction of social identity that privileges and powers certain groups and not others (Douglas, 2005; King & Springwood, 2001). Whiteness is a powerful social construction because of its invisibility (Andersen, 2003; Douglas, 2005; Giroux, 1997). Only by identifying Whiteness in texts can we hope to “undermine the dominance that its invisibility allows” (Douglas, 2005, p. 260). Constructing Whiteness, particularly in contrast to Blackness, promotes hierarchies based on racial identity (Giroux, 1997), which lays the foundation of who is privileged to gain cultural and political resources.

The notion of Whiteness is always shifting according to McDonald (2005) because it is located within cultural production, history, and interrelations between people. These factors must be taken into account when looking at race within any one particular context. McDonald characterizes Whiteness as unstable and unpredictable, creating “a fluid set of practices that simultaneously produce identifications with and are imperfectly reiterated by bodies” (p. 250). Race operates even when people of color are not present (Andersen, 2003). Andersen suggests that more work in this area needs to be investigated. Using hockey as a lens with which to investigate race may provide clues as to how race operates in a group of White people because hockey is predominantly
situated as White in nature. Whites are racialized within different social locations (Andersen, 2003).

Oates and Durham (2004) conclude that hegemonic masculinity often is realized in the form of the “White supremacist, powerful, aggressive, sexist and heterosexist ideal that exists” (p. 303). It serves to equate Whiteness, males, heterosexuality, and athleticism with power (Oates & Durham, 2004). White supremacy reveals differences in people’s “biology, character, or aptitude as a binary oppositions, and then arranges these hierarchies, often grounding them in religion, nature, and or science” (King, 2005, p. 402). For example, African American men are stereotyped as “natural athletes,” stigmatizing and marginalizing them in comparison to “White middle-class norms” (Dworkin & Wachs, 2000, p. 49). Therefore, one cannot be White and a natural athlete—or by comparison, Black and a hard worker, in order to be a good athlete; the two are constructed in opposition to one another.

Race becomes an ideology or a common sense view of the world because it is a social construction (Hall, 1995). Hall believes that while overt racism may not exist in society as it did throughout history, inferential racism has taken its place (Brookes, 2002). Inferential racism may also be referred to as “new,” “modern,” or “symbolic” racism (Entman, 1992; Rada, 2000; Wilson & Sparks, 2001). Inferential racism refers to naturalized representations of race, which are unquestioned assumptions readily accepted within society. Oftentimes the statements are made “without ever bringing into awareness the racist predicates on which the statements are grounded” (Hall, 1995, p. 20). Racism lies in the resentment or rejection of Black political agendas and the denial that racism still exists (Entman, 1992). The meaning of Black athletes in sports can only be analyzed
when the historical, political, economic and social context is analyzed because media representations occur within these contexts.

Enlightened racism is the notion that the sports field is the one area where African Americans can excel as opposed to other areas of society, such as academics where Whites excel (Byrd & Utsler, 2007; Hardin, Dodd, Chance & Walsdorf, 2004). This allows Whites to feel that African Americans can obtain upward mobility “through ‘non-threatening’ means, such as sports” (Byrd & Utsler, p. 5). In addition, it gives Whites a sense that the American way of life really does work. When the media portray Black athletes as successful and gaining social mobility through athletics, it reinforces the notion that America is an open society and racism does not exist (Grainger, Newman & Andrews, 2006).

Rowe, McKay, and Miller (2000) define racial stacking as a process by which roles in sport are distributed based on racial characteristics. Racial stacking is “the tendency of coaches to ascribe positional designations to athletes based primarily on their race and/or ethnicity” (Daddario & Wigley, 2007, p. 31). Minority athletes may be placed in positions on teams to take advantage of stereotyped physical attributes rather than mental or leadership skills. Athletes performing well in positions not ascribed to them, for instance, a Black quarterback is inconsistent with the stereotype.

Canada and Race

While racism in Canada and the United States has some similarities, there are differences in the way race is treated in the two countries. Scholars have agreed that for
Canadians, talking about existing racisms is generally ignored (Mensah, 2002; Pitter, 2006). The denial of racial problems in Canada portrayed the false image that Blacks were satisfied with their conditions and that no action to correct racial relations was needed (Walker, 1985). Furthermore, scholars in the United States have focused on race relations and the intersection of race and sports; until recently, scholars in Canada have not (Pitter, 2006). Canada and the United States serve not as nation states but “multi-nation states,” nations that have become melting pots of many different backgrounds (Stam, 2001). Race relations in Canada and the United States have both been found to create a racial hierarchy; those who are Whitest can assimilate into culture easiest and those who have medium skin, i.e. Hispanics or Asians, can assimilate more easily than Blacks (Pitter, 2006).

Exploring the history of race in Canada begins around the same time as the United States. However, slavery in Canada was not racial as it was in the U.S.; slaves were any form of servant who had no economic capital. While Canadian slaves were restricted some rights “they were eligible for most of the services offered by church and state” (Walker, 1985, p. 8). This might be likened to the American indentured servant. Slavery would not be abolished until 1834 in England and 1865 in the United States. The problem for Blacks in Canada was that they were constantly thought of as inferior because of their original slave status. Canada looked to the United States as an example, which taught “colour segregation was appropriate for former slaves, even in ‘free’ states where slavery had been abolished” (Walker, 1985, p. 11). White Canadians accepted Blacks only “in circumstances of economic necessity, when they could provide a needed service” (Walker, 1985, p. 12). When the Civil War in the United States ended, many
Blacks moved into the States confirming that Canada was only a temporary refuge.

The ideology that Blacks were inferior to Whites was not formed in Canada but in Europe and the United States. However, its influence was certainly felt in Canada. The belief was that Blacks were better suited for unskilled laborer jobs, strengthening the racial line (Walker, 1985). Furthermore the majority belief existed that “If blacks were disadvantaged, it was surely due to their own inferior nature” (Walker, 1985, p. 14). Many immigrants entering Canada were quite skilled and color could no longer be directly associated with low income or low social hierarchy. Despite this, racial stereotypes persisted and in Canada “Society seemed to be polarizing along racial lines” (Walker, 1985, p. 19).

The history of Blacks in Canada has both similarities and differences to the history of Blacks in the United States. One of the main differences between the two countries is that slaves in Canada were not initially only Black like they were in the U.S. Furthermore Canada offered slaves some rights while the United States gave slaves none, and the slaves in Canada were given their freedom sooner and over time. In contrast, it was more than 75 years after Canada began freeing slaves that the United States freed their slaves and the freeing of the slaves occurred at once leaving the former slaves with no economic capital to live life. Exploring the history of Blacks and racism in Canada helps to better understand the current status of Blacks in Canada but also Blacks in hockey. Race relations, media portrayals of race, and the social construction of race help form the foundation for current topics on race, including race related to sporting contexts.
Sports and the Concept of Race

Sports reinforce ideologies of strength, class, and ethnic inequalities thus helping to construct socially acceptable identities within society (Grainger, Newman & Andrews, 2006; Messner, 1994). The representation of racial groups or the lack of representation, speaks volumes about the power of hegemonic discourses within society. However, Messner (1994) argues that the sports field also allows these ideologies to be “challenged and debunked” (p. 135) because the playing of sports temporarily suspends everyday social hierarchies. Sports are a “contested terrain” where ideologies and inequalities are “transformed and struggled over” (Messner, 1994, 2002).

Wonsek (1992) found that, even though basketball at both the college and professional levels is dominated by mostly Black players, these images of Blackness are still undercut by White images of authority such as coaches and sportscasters. This hierarchy “serves[s] to reassure the white majority that its dominance is not really being threatened” (Wonsek, 1992, p. 454). This may be particularly important in ice hockey, since it is viewed as a predominantly White sport. The idea of Black players in the sport may threaten what is considered the very foundations of the game. Therefore, the construction of ice hockey may appear largely as images of Whiteness, particularly when coaches and sportscasters, as well as a majority of the players are White.

Sports are the one area where Blacks are not only easily accepted but “also expected to appear” (Wonsek, 1992, p. 451). His concern is that the acceptance of Blacks in athletics may appear as “non-racist integration” but is merely a mask for the White majority to exploit Blacks within sport. Sabo and Jansen (1994) argue that the acceptance
of Black men by a White society within the sporting realm encourages Black men to attempt to “make it” athletically while at the same time “to simultaneously block black men’s access to the intellectual, political, and economic sources of power and opportunity” (p. 153).

The media play a large role in reinforcing stereotypes based around natural difference, constructing White athletes in relationship to Black athletes, and serve to legitimate “the institutional structures that continue to reproduce racism and sexism in sport” (Brookes, 2002, p. 107). White athletes are often constructed as intelligent, while Black athletes are constructed as athletic (Eastman & Billings, 2001; Denham, Billings, & Halone, 2002; Grainger, Newman & Andrews, 2006). This stereotype reinforces the hierarchy in society where intelligence is valued over physical qualities, thereby supporting “the privileged social position of many white men” (van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004, p. 303). This occurs because many sports journalists, editors and media owners are White men who are unconsciously preserving their dominant social roles (van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004).

White athletes are also constructed as hardworking, which further dismisses Black athletes’ work (Bruce, 2004; Giroux, 1997; Grainger, Newman & Andrews, 2006). Commentators may also make statements about Black athletes being sexually promiscuous or deviant, as well as natural-athletes (Boyd, 1997; Giroux, 1997; Grainger, Newman & Andrews, 2006; Wonsek, 1992). While such comments may more typically be made about Black male athletes, Wonsek contends that similar comments do not stereotype the White athlete as they do the Black athletes, but merely reinforce Whiteness as acceptable. Therefore, Blackness emerges as unacceptable in society.
Media Constructions of Race

Media are a site of struggle between dominant and non-dominant groups (van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004). This means that different social groups use sports media to “create and sustain discourses about social relations of power” (van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004, p. 303). The discourses are constantly challenged by non-dominant groups. Because both women and people of color tend to be marginalized, women of color have a problem trying to fit into either framework of race and gender. They tend to be marginalized in both categories with no place to fit in, for neither group is mutually exclusive (Douglas & Jamieson, 2006, p. 120). Racism in the media is directly linked to ideology because media are where ideology is reproduced and challenged (Hall, 1995). Therefore, the media construct our notions of what race is, the image race carries, and how we understand “the problem of race” (Hall, 1995, p. 20).

Media representations of race preserve power and status for White men (Boyle & Haynes, 2000). Looking at British televised sporting events, Boyle and Haynes note “the almost complete absence of Black and Asian sports presenters and commentators working within the mainstream” (p. 113). In the case of ice hockey there were no African American commentators during the 2006 Olympics. In a search for commentators on the NHL website and individual team websites, no Black commentators could be found. Sports commentary serves as the main source of reinforcing race and gender biases, which stems not only from the spontaneity of sport but the need to entertain and inform (Eastman & Billings, 2001; Rada, 1996). Sports talk contains hidden biases and ideologies (Eastman & Billings, 2001). Commentators are responsible for not only
calling the game but adding humor, analysis, and anecdotes about players, coaches and families, resulting in subconscious beliefs and attitudes being reflected in the commentary as events transpire rapidly in front of the commentators (Rada, 1996). Journalists may not even realize they are transmitting racist ideologies as they frame news to fit within “professional norms and conventions” (Entman, 1992, p. 345). Oftentimes quotes and sound bites that show conflict and drama will be used, further reinforcing audience stereotypes of particular groups.

In an analysis of the 2000 summer games, Billings and Eastman (2002) found that White athletes were attributed with winning because of “superior commitment” while Black athletes were more likely to be attributed with winning because of “superior athletic skill” (p. 359). White athletes were also attributed with being modest or introverted. Of the most frequently mentioned athletes, 55% were White athletes (Billings & Eastman, 2002). During the 2002 winter games, Billings and Eastman (2003) found that the majority of athletes in the top 20 most mentioned athletes were predominantly White (80% of the time). However, Billings and Eastman caution this is not particularly unusual given that the majority of athletes at the Winter Olympics are White. In the 2004 summer games 70% of the most mentioned athletes were White, which is more surprising since more African American athletes participate in the Summer Olympics than the Winter Olympics (Billings & Angelini, 2007).

Jackson (1989) reports that in an analysis of two seasons of NFL playoff games and one Super Bowl that 67% of the comments made about White players related to intelligence, while 87% of comments made about Black football players had to do with their physicality. Similarly, 90% of comments dealing with a player being a dunce were
attributed to Black athletes. Commentators tended to attribute mental mistakes to Black players on teams who were losing. In one specific instance, one White football player was attributed with being a “student” of the game” while a Black football player was noted as doing what he was “trained” to do. Jackson points out that the use of “student” and “trained” creates a hierarchy of one who learns and is attentive while one who is trained suggests that he is less than proficient and may need tutoring. This serves to construct the stereotypes of Blacks and Whites in contrast to one another.

In contrast, Messner, Duncan and Jensen (1993) discovered in the 1989 NCAA Final Four men’s and women’s basketball tournaments that there was a conscious effort on the part of commentators to attribute both physical ability and intelligence of White and Black athletes of both sexes. However, Messner et. al (1993) noted that many of these attributions appeared as afterthoughts as if the commentators were overcompensating in some way. These findings suggest that commentators are aware of stereotyping athletes and in an effort to not stereotype race, commentators overcompensated by trying to include both physical and mental attributes for both White and Black athletes.

Eastman and Billings (2001) found within the commentary of men’s college basketball games that White players were stereotyped as hardworking, giving a lot of effort, having great mental skill, and being shooters. Black players were stereotyped as more naturally athletic, quick and powerful. Research also suggests that Black quarterbacks are ascribed more comments about their athleticism than their intelligence (Byrd & Utsler, 2007). Comments about leadership and performance were more positive than negative suggesting that the racial gap is slowly closing. White quarterbacks were
portrayed as succeeding due to internal factors such as effort, while Black quarterbacks were portrayed as succeeding due to uncontrollable factors such as natural ability (Murrell & Curtis, 1994). The media represent the Black quarterback as not what he does but what he is, a natural athlete.

Blacks tend to be over-represented in the media in sports where they have traditionally had success such as--football, basketball, and boxing; they are under-represented in sports that have been inaccessible to them such as--golf, auto racing, swimming, hockey, and soccer. Hardin, Dodd, Chance and Walsdorf (2004) found that Black male athletes during the 2000 Olympics were overrepresented in newspaper coverage and were overrepresented in strength sports such as boxing. In contrast, Whites were overrepresented in aesthetic sports such as gymnastics or diving. This reinforces the stereotypes of Black athletes as natural athletes and also reinforces White male hegemony.

Conclusion

Blacks, like women, have been marginalized in hockey. Hockey seems to uphold and reinforce White hegemonic masculinity. Pitter (2006) states it is not only race but also the economic status of African-Americans that hinders their participation in hockey. Jerome Iginla of the 2006 Canadian Team was the only Black hockey player in the Olympic tournament. How much Iginla was mentioned within the games he played, whether attention was drawn to his race, and the comments made regarding his play and
personal background are all indicators of how NBC’s commentators serve to construct race.

It might be argued that race cannot be studied in hockey because of the absence of “non-White” players. However, as discussed in this chapter, race operates even when minorities are not present, thus Whiteness becomes an operating race (Andersen, 2003). In addition, all of the Olympic hockey commentators are White, which further reinforces the hegemony within the sport. While overt or underlying “racist” comments may not be found in the commentary, the way the hockey players are framed—perhaps as intelligent rather than athletic—helps to frame different types of athletes and reinforce ideologies. Another factor that may play a role includes references to players, for example “A great group of guys.” Such comments about White hockey players reinforce values and notions of White athletes, allowing race to operate even when minorities are not present. How Whiteness and Blackness are constructed in relationship to one another will also be an important factor. Therefore the fifth research question is:

**RQ5:** How is Whiteness reinforced in commentary?
Chapter 5

Commentary and Commentators

"Women have another dimension that men cannot give. They can give a female's insight into female athletes in swimming, golf, basketball, tennis, etc. How does a man know what problems a woman would have in a particular sport?

When I asked Kathy Whitworth, an outstanding golfer, why women can't have a better short game in golf, her reply was, 'The short game takes more muscle than a person realizes. It takes a pretty healthy swing that women normally don't have.' This confirms my belief that women can add another dimension that men generally would not."

-Jack Brickhouse
Former Voice of the Chicago Cubs
and ASA Hall of Famer
Commentators play a large role in the way audiences view sporting events and provide a framework for the audience to view and interpret events (Bryant, Comisky & Zillman, 1977; Tudor, 1992). The role of the media is to report current events, interpret social, political, and economic conditions, and entertain (Cohen, 2001). Televised sporting events, such as the Olympics, which are broadcast over a period of time and contain international competition help construct images of the world through commentary (Tudor, 1992). The line between sports journalism and entertainment is blurred. Research suggests that different types of games may bring different results in the way commentators report games. For instance, in a close game or a rival game, commentators may resort to the use of clichés, refer to athletes by last or first name only, or make more stereotypical comments they might not otherwise make. It is assumed that such occurrences happen because of the speed and excitement of games. Research also suggests that women commentators cover sporting events differently than men and that commentators refer to athletes using an inadvertent hierarchy of naming.

Concepts of Commentary

Many different scholars have defined the role of the sports commentator. Wonsek (1992) defines a sportscaster as “the professionals who deliver the play-by-play” while commentators are “those who host the event and deliver a synopsis of the action” (p. 454). Commentators are individuals who refer to the actual play of the game in a coherent manner to tell audiences what is important and significant (McCarthy, Jones & Potrac, 2003; Tudor, 1992). Commentators are responsible for portraying the drama and
suspense of sports that audiences miss by not actually being there. Ultimately it is the job of the commentator to tell an exciting narrative, which audiences understand. Commentators also serve to give audiences tools to read sports texts according to the dominant ideology (McCarthy et. al, 2003).

Sports commentary is socially constructed and tries to convey a dramatic story to the audience (Boyle & Haynes, 2000). Bowcher (2003) defines commentary as all of the talk that occurs while the game occurs. There is main commentary or a play-by play commentator, who tells audiences the action taking place in the game. There is a color commentator, “who makes analytical and evaluative comments on the game” (Bowchar, 2003, p. 449), and a side-line reporter located on the field who might give status updates of athletes. Marriott (1996) describes sports commentary as containing both “exterior” and interior” statements. Exterior statements are the objective statements in reporting the play-by-play events of the game while interior statements are the subjective statements, which may evaluate the players and the game (Marriott, 1996).

Tudor (1992) contends that sports commentary tells the story as it is happening; therefore, it does not have the benefit of knowing the outcome and having hindsight. Telling history without hindsight leads to stereotyping because the sports narrative has to constantly be reconstructed as the events of the game change. For instance, in the 1990 World Cup Soccer Tournament, Cameroon was stereotyped as the underdog at the beginning of the tournament by English sportscasters. Once Cameroon made it to the finals against England, they were suddenly stereotyped as worthy competitors (Tudor, 1992). If sportscasters knew the outcome from the beginning, Cameroon would have never been stereotyped as an underdog.
Scholars have also looked at the hierarchy of naming or how commentators refer to athletes: first name only, last name only, both first and last names, or nicknames (Bruce, 2004; Duncan, 2006; Duncan & Brummet, 1987; Halbert & Latimar, 1994; Messner, Duncan & Jensen, 1993). The hierarchy of naming is important because “it conveys status and prestige” (Duncan, 2006, p. 242). Those in dominant positions in society reinforce their dominance by calling subordinates by their first name while subordinates must call them by their proper title such as Mr. Smith (Bruce, 2004; Duncan, 2006). The hierarchy of naming is constructed by calling women and Black athletes by their first names and men by their last names (Bruce, 2004; Duncan & Brummet, 1987; Halbert & Latimer, 1994). In addition, often non-English sounding names, such as eastern European names, will be Anglicized (Bruce, 2004) or the athletes’ names will not be used because they are difficult to pronounce (Billings & Eastman, 2002).

Marginalized Commentators

Many researchers contend that even though parity is being reached between men and women sportscasters and commentators, and even though there has been a rise in the number of African-American sportscasters and commentators, the majority of sportscasters and commentators remain White men (Billings, Halone, Denham, 2002; Rada & Wulfmeyer, 2005; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2004; Wonsek, 1992). For instance in the NHL, radio and television broadcasters have been White. Because sports broadcasters are primarily White men and because commentary occurs in fast-paced,
high-pressure situations, oftentimes the commentary “is marked by errors, clichés, stereotypes and dominant ideologies” (Bruce, 2004, p. 864).

Female sports commentators have a shorter history than male sports commentators. ESPN was the first network to hire a woman as a sports anchor in 1983 (Cohen, 2001). Lesley Visser became the first woman NFL beat reporter for CBS in 1976 (Schwartz, n.d.). Women faced discrimination by not being allowed into men’s locker rooms to do interviews; and when they were allowed, they often suffered sexual harassment from the players. The 2005 AAF report revealed that White men comprised 94.4% of the anchor positions in sports news and highlight shows (Duncan & Messner, 2005). Overall, 53.8% of television anchors were White men and women while 46.3% were Black men. Women comprised 9.4% of ancillary reporters (Duncan & Messner, 2005). This report reveals that women are still in minority positions when it comes to covering sports.

**Media Studies on Sports Commentary**

Billings, Halone and Denham (2002) found that there was a difference in the amount of broadcast commentary and the types of comments made by broadcasters based on their gender. Findings suggested that male commentators focus on comments about physicality and athleticism of athletes. In contrast, women commentators made more comments about an athlete’s personality and appearance. This suggested that women commentators tended to talk about those things that women generally talk about, personal stories, just as male commentators talked about those things that men generally care
about, statistics and performance, regardless of the gender of the athletes. However, there
was far less discourse, regardless of commentator gender, during women’s games than
men’s games. This served to characterize women’s games as less important and that
commentators had bias even if they were latent (Billings, et. al, 2002). Overall findings of
Billings et. al also found that male commentators generated far more discourse
throughout games, regardless of the gender of the athletes, than women commentators
did.

Wanta and Leggett (1988) conducted a study to investigate the use of clichés by
sports commentators. Findings suggest that if an unexpected outcome occurred,
anouncers tended to use more clichés. Also, more clichés were used in games with
highly ranked teams. This occurred because in an upset, announcers were dealing with an
unexpected outcome that added pressure just as commentating about a higher-ranked
team added pressure because more people were likely to watch (Wanta & Leggett, 1998).

Bruce (2004) discovered through a series of interviews with commentators that
speed and context of the game had a significant influence in how players were
mentioned. For example, the faster the game, the more likely commentators were to use
only the last name rather than the first and last names. In addition, the higher the level of
competition, (ex. playoffs) the more likely commentators were to use first names only.
Within the context of who the athlete was, Bruce discovered that stars of the game were
generally referred to by first name only because commentators assumed the viewing
audience already knew who the athlete was. This was interesting because first name
references were considered lower on the hierarchy, yet star athletes would seemingly
belong high on the hierarchy.
In contrast Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993) found several White star athletes playing in the NCAA games that were never referred to by first name. During three of the games, all players referred to by first name only were Black. This was of particular importance because it might be assumed that audiences were more familiar with star players and knew them by their first name. Messner et. al (1993) found no difference in naming for female athletes. They concluded that the hierarchy of naming was of particular importance within the men’s games because gender became the line where dominance existed. This dominance must be further created within the men’s games in regards to race.

Bruce (2004) found in her study that commentators struggled the most with multi-syllabic names “whose vocal combinations were uncommon in English and tended to use nicknames or first names more frequently for those athletes” (p. 871). Bender (1994) also noted that commentators struggled the most with “foreign-sounding” names. Referring to an athlete’s first name or nickname was an attempt to normalize the name into “discourse of the dominant white society” (Bruce, 1994, p. 871). Using unusual names or nicknames was a way of creating boundary marking, which might not be in relation to race but in relation to “the other” compared with dominant culture (Bruce, 1994).

Similarly Billings & Eastman (2002) discovered in their analysis of the 2000 Summer Olympics that there were more mentions of a foreign athlete’s country, but American athletes were referred to by name. For instance, such terms as “Chinese divers” and “Romanian gymnasts” were used instead of the athlete’s name (Billings & Eastman, 2002). While this might be attributed to more fairness in covering nations, Billings and Eastman (2002) contended it might actually be because commentators do not know how
to pronounce foreign names and referred to the sport instead. This resulted in a strong nationalist bias towards Americans. However, in a follow-up study of the 2002 Winter Olympics, Billings and Eastman (2003) discovered a reverse trend where non-American athletes were given more mention by name (60.8%) than American athletes (39.2%) from previous Olympics.

Conclusion

Commentators have the ability to reinforce existing ideologies to audiences. Commentators’ perceptions of the audience affect how they choose to cover particular games. For instance, commentators may assume that men’s hockey games are being watched predominantly by men, especially men who normally watch NHL games and therefore understand the game of hockey. In contrast, commentators may assume women are watching women’s games and may believe this audience is less knowledgeable about hockey and adjust their comments accordingly, allowing perceptions of women’s hockey to seep in. Audiences tend to change quickly during the Olympics; therefore, commentators cannot assume they have the same viewers they did ten minutes before. As a result, the commentary and stories are often repeated (Billings, 2008). Interviews will be conducted with the commentators to discover more about this.

In this study the commentary of play-by-play, color, and sideline reporters will all be analyzed. Using each of these types of commentators will allow for data that is factual (play-by-play), as well as supplementary and insider information (color and sideline reporters), and analysis of the game (color commentator). Each type of commentator has
the ability to influence the audience’s perception of the game (Bryant, Comisky, & Zillman, 1977). Commentators give audiences clues as to which athletes they should care about, which teams they should want to win, and which games are more exciting than others. This is reinforced through the framing of gender, nationality and race.
Chapter 6

Methodology
As research shows, U.S.-based Olympic coverage focuses on the American athlete. While coverage of men’s and women’s Olympic events has become more equitable over time, constructions of masculinity, femininity, nation and race are still produced by commentators within the context of both women’s and men’s games. Taking a cultural studies approach, a thematic textual analysis of the Olympic commentary was conducted. A peer evaluation of the data and in-depth interviews were conducted in order to better understand the issues of gender, nationality and race, and how they are produced in the media coverage of Olympic hockey.

Thematic Textual Analysis

Thematic textual analysis, also referred to as qualitative content analysis, is a systematic and replicable process to analyze texts based on certain rules of coding within the context of communication (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mayring, 2000; Stemler, 2001). Thematic textual analysis preserves the rigor and advantages of quantitative content analysis in a qualitative manner. Ultimately, thematic textual analysis aims to understand the story-telling process present in “cultural texts” and further understand the relationships between the texts and society (Altheide, 1996; Washington State University, 2002).

Textual analysis is a way to unpack meanings of text in order to understand the larger cultural significance those texts hold (Kellner, 2001). Ideologies of gender, race, class, and nation are conveyed through the text to uphold cultural meanings (Kellner, 2001). For example, sports commentary provides clues on how a culture views gender,
nationality and race, sports as patriarchal, stereotypes of Black athletes, or the reinforcement of U.S. sentiments and values (Bryant, Comisky & Zillman, 1977; Tudor, 1992; Billings & Eastman, 2002). A multi-level approach to cultural studies includes discussing production of that text (political economy), engaging in textual analysis, and studying how audiences receive and understand the text (Kellner, 2001).

Thematic textual analysis will be used to investigate the commentary of U.S. commentators in the United States and Canadian men’s and women’s ice hockey games during the 2006 Winter Olympics. The socio-political context, within which the cultural texts were created, will also be considered. Transcribing the Olympic hockey commentary will allow me to use the constant comparative method to focus on what is being said in the broadcasts. In addition, using textual analysis will allow me to focus on hidden meanings “inherent in cultural texts, particularly those in the media” (Wensing & Bruce, 2003, p. 389).

Cultural Studies

Cultural studies can be a way to criticize cultural texts (Andrews, 2002). It also serves to restructure relationships between society and the academy or dominant and non-dominant cultures (Fiske, 1991). Many scholars agree that cultural studies is a negotiation between media users and the texts that they read (Morely, 1983; Fiske, 1995; Richardson, 1998; van Sterkenberg & Knoppers, 2004). Each individual’s background shapes the way a text is read. Ethnic minorities, women, and other non-dominant groups are more likely than White males to reject hegemonic discourse and create their own discourses (van
Sterkenberg & Knoppers, 2004). As a White woman researcher, I tend to view discourses differently than previous White male researchers. Because the commentators are primarily White males, I tend to reject some of the hegemonic discourses and create my own discourse.

Cultural studies is context-specific because the research agenda is never driven “by a particular theoretical position” (Grossberg, 1995, p. 263). In this case, the researcher is allowed to ask questions based on her own experiences or sense of context and political questions. Cultural studies reinforces the idea that there are many different kinds of reality, depending on an individual’s experience and the context of the event. This relates to my research in several ways. First, there are many theoretical positions that influence my reading of the text including--hegemony, ideology, the hierarchy of naming, and the construction of Whiteness and non-American athletes. Second, my experiences with hockey influence my reading and interpretation of the text. For instance, working for the Johnstown Chiefs’ ECHL team for two years and the Washington Capitals’ NHL team for four years has given me a first-hand look at how professional hockey teams operate. The nuances of the sport are familiar to me, as is the idea that the NHL is a multi-national league with few African Americans playing. I believe these former experiences give me an insider’s viewpoint on the media coverage of ice hockey and inform my research in a unique way. Third, my sense of socio-political context (described in the Introduction) influences how I view particular texts.

Putting the 2006 Winter Olympics into the context of what was occurring politically, socially and within hockey itself, not only influenced how I read the texts, but made me more aware of certain subplots or comments made by commentators. For
instance, during the Russian men’s game, commentators spoke a lot about Evgeni Malkin, who had been signed by the Pittsburgh Penguins, but was still under contract in Russia.

Cultural studies is not completely open-ended, but is still rooted in theory, has a direction, and makes a connection between culture, context, and power (Hall, 1992; Grossberg, 1993, 1995). Research questions are open to where the data takes the researcher. In this study, I asked five broad research questions so that I could remain open to the text and not have too narrow a vision. The questions were structured not too broadly but narrow enough to be able to eliminate irrelevant data. By conducting research in this way, I hoped to find connections between North American hockey culture, the socio-political context of the 2006 Winter Olympics, and the producers and broadcasters of the hockey games.

Media images help shape our identities and reveal who has power in society (Kellner, 1995). Cultural studies is a means to study how this occurs by investigating how dominant groups dictate ideologies and how subcultures respond and resist these dominant ideologies (Kellner, 1995). Even though I am studying how both the U.S. and Canadian teams are compared with the rest of the world, NBC’s production (an American company) of the Olympics was primarily for American audiences. Furthermore, cultural studies must be used within the culture where it is produced and consumed (Kellner, 1995). Ultimately for Kellner, cultural studies must not only try to understand how ideologies are reproduced, but the context or system within which these ideologies operate must be understood as part of production and consumption (Kellner, 1995).
Cultural Studies and Sports

The Olympic hockey games themselves are viewed as a text; therefore, a cultural studies approach for my dissertation was most useful in analyzing the game commentary (Real, n.d.). Athletic contests are unpredictable no matter how complete their packaging may be, leading them to be authentic (Real, n.d.). Athletic contests serve as a text of real people performing real acts, creating a cultural sports power that moves beyond the reality of popular movies, music, and literature, where the characters are fictional.

Several studies have taken a cultural studies approach to textual analysis in sports-related research. Wensing and Bruce (2003) analyzed more than 700 articles during the 2000 Olympics about Cathy Freeman, the most prominent Australian female athlete of the time, to understand how cultural understandings of gender and gendered meanings intersected. They found that while Freeman was marked as being female and as being an aborigine, the primary framing of her as an athlete was nationalism and the uniting of a nation.

Theberge (1997) conducted ethnography, in-depth interviews and textual analysis to study the production of gender in Canadian women’s hockey. Theberge found that women’s hockey, because it is physically demanding, challenges hegemonic femininity where women are considered graceful and frail. Women’s hockey rules do not allow for checking and physical violence, such as fighting, which is allowed in the men’s game. Therefore, men’s hockey is still constructed as the “real game” in this context.

Shugart (2003) examined coverage of the U.S. National Women’s Soccer Team during the 1999 Women’s World Cup Championships, conducting a textual analysis of
major newspapers, magazines, and televised coverage of the tournament. She discovered that framing female athletes as highly sexualized overshadowed their athleticism and undermined their achievements (Shugart, 2003). Women soccer players were given plenty of media coverage and were typically not portrayed as weak compared with the past where they were highly sexualized in the media. Despite this, the female athletes were packaged through passive objectification, sexualization of performance, vigilant heterosexuality and used asexuality as a foil (Shugart, 2003).

Research by Dolance (2005) used textual analysis of interview transcripts on lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual Women’s National Basketball Association fans. Dolance (2005) used five interviews to create her initial codes, allowing themes to emerge into her main arguments. More recently Daddario and Wigley (2007) conducted discourse analysis on NBC’s coverage of the 2004 Olympic Games related to the gender marking of Asian athletes. Their analysis was concerned with the discursive patterns and descriptive qualifiers in the play-by-play and pre-recorded narratives. My research will not only further investigate gender and sports from a cultural studies perspective but race and nationality as well.

In-Depth Interviews

Interviews serve as a way to ask people questions and “get them to react verbally” (Potter, 1996, p. 96). In-depth interviews tend to be longer than the regular interview, may take more than one sitting, and usually ask the respondent to divulge “a greater expression of the interviewer’s self” (Johnson, 2002). In-depth interviews are a useful
tool to be incorporated as part of a larger research design in order to dig deeper into some sort of phenomenon (Warren & Karner, 2005; Johnson, 2002). Merton and Kendall (1946) state that the focused interview, like the in-depth interview, is given in conjunction to a “particular concrete situation” (p. 541) and the situation has been previously analyzed by the researcher. The focused interview serves as a way for the researcher to verify facts, test the validity of the analysis, and dig deeper into understanding why a phenomenon exists as it does (Warren, 2002).

In-depth interviews generally contain open-ended questions and probes in a semi-structured format which are prepared in advance, but unplanned probes may be used also if the researcher uncovers something unexpected during the interview (Morse & Richards, 2002). The ultimate goal of an in-depth interview is “to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (Seidman, 2006, p. 15). Often times interviews do make unexpected turns or digressions and the interviewer must be prepared to follow these unexpected paths in order to uncover new information (Johnson, 2002). In-depth interviews tend to be more like conversations than formal interviews because a few general topics are presented to the interviewee while the interviewer tries to uncover how the participant “frames and structures the responses” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p.82). The idea of the interview is to access a respondent who can give her own opinions on a topic or has lived out an experience in different way than the researcher (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Johnson, 2002; Seidman, 2006). This provides alternate viewpoints and explanations for a particular event or phenomenon.

Some advantages for in-depth interviews are that they enable the researcher to investigate personal responses to questions and to research sensitive or confidential
information (Research Solutions, n.d.). The interview serves as a way to focus on the subjective experiences of the respondent and can even force the respondent to be specific about his thoughts (Merton & Kendall, 1946). Some disadvantages to in-depth interviews are that respondents may find it difficult to answer certain questions or be reluctant to answer certain questions (Research Solutions, n.d.; Warren and Karner, 2005). In addition, scholars caution that during in-depth interviews researchers may either knowingly or unknowingly give their frame of reference during the interview. The result is that it “invites spurious comments or defensive remarks, or else inhibits certain discussions altogether” (Merton & Kendall, 1946, p. 547).

In-depth interviews with the broadcasters of the 2006 Olympic hockey games served as a way to better understand who the commentators were and how they perceived their job of portraying Olympic hockey. Open-ended questions were asked about themes found in the commentary. The interviews also gave me insights into Olympic hockey, particularly women’s hockey, which I would not have understood had I not conducted the interviews. This additional information from the interviewees helped explain why certain statements were made during the broadcasts. They also helped me further explain my findings and answer the “why” questions of the research. The interviews provided another perspective other than my own to the research and helped me to reinterpret some of my findings. (For a complete interview schedule see Appendix A).
Sample

Purposeful sampling was used to include both U.S. and Canadian men’s and women’s Olympic hockey games in 2006. In total, NBC and its affiliates aired 38 men’s games and 18 women’s games. Of the 38 men’s games, six were played by the U.S. men, and six were played by the Canadian men. Both the U.S. women and Canadian women played a total of five games each. U.S. and Canadian men’s teams both advanced to the quarter-finals; only the United States quarter-final game was analyzed. The U.S. women advanced through the bronze medal game, while the Canadian women advanced to the gold-medal game. Both of these games are included in analysis. Opponents for both men and women included Switzerland, Finland, Sweden and Russia. (For a complete list of games included in analysis see Appendix B). These games were picked because of availability of recordings and the opponents. Opponents were kept similar in both men’s and women’s games in an attempt to minimize differences in commentary that might be heard. For instance, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic sent men’s teams to compete but not women’s teams.

There are several reasons for selecting not only U.S. games but Canadian games. First, both U.S. and Canadian cultures are somewhat similar, at least compared with European countries, such as Sweden or Finland (Gupta, Hanges & Dorfman, 2002). Secondly, there has always been somewhat of a rivalry between the two countries where Olympic hockey is related. For instance, in the 2002 Games in Salt Lake City, both the Canadian men’s and women’s teams beat the U.S. teams in the gold-medal game (Adams, 2006). In the 1998 Nagano Olympics, when women’s ice hockey made its debut
in the Olympics, the U.S. beat the Canadian women to win the gold. Third, both the U.S. and Canadian women’s teams are considered by hockey commentators and broadcasters to be in the first echelon of women’s hockey teams, followed by Sweden and Finland in the second echelon and all other teams behind. It is assumed by broadcasters that the women of Canada and the United States will face each other for the gold in international competitions. Fourth, the United States and Canada are both home to the National Hockey League (NHL), which means that they are the two countries that all other male world players look to for professional play. In addition, both Canada and the United States are home to many colleges and universities where women’s world hockey players look to play. Finally, commentators for the Olympic hockey tournament were from the United States and Canada. It seems a natural fit to compare United States and Canada against the rest of the world.

Finally, both the U.S. and Canadian teams competed at a fairly equal level during the 2006 Olympic Games. Both the U.S. and Canadian women’s teams went undefeated in the first of their three regular games. There were eight women’s teams divided into four teams in Group A—where Canada competed, and four teams in Group B—where the U.S. competed. Both the U.S. and Canadian women’s Olympic hockey teams advanced to the semi-finals. Canada beat Finland to advance to the gold-medal round against Sweden, beating Sweden for the gold. The U.S. lost the semi-final round against Sweden but advanced to win the bronze-medal round, beating Finland 4-0 (A Historic Upset, n.d.).

In contrast, there were 12 Olympic teams overall competing in the men’s division. They were divided into two groups of six each. The Canadian men competed in Group A,
as the Canadian women had, placing third with a 3-0-2 record after five games behind Finland and Switzerland respectively. The U.S. men were in Group B and came in fourth with a record of 1-1-3 behind Slovakia, Russia and Sweden respectively. Both the U.S. and Canadian’s men’s Olympic hockey teams played in the quarter-finals, only to be defeated by Finland and Russia respectively.

Method

For the study, all of the games were recorded from television at the time of broadcast. I transcribed the games word-for-word. Pre-game, post-game, and intermission commentary were not transcribed. Transcripts included the play-by-play commentary, color commentary, and sideline commentary for each game. The game constituted the commentary from the time the game was about to begin after commercial break and ended when the game was over and the first post-game commercial break occurred, excluding intermissions. Interviews on the sidelines with players were not included. I prepared my transcripts, loosely modeling my procedure based on Deby’s (2002) three-step process methodology of transcription. Initially, the commentary was transcribed from the audio portion of the recordings. Next, the transcripts were cleaned for basic grammar and spelling errors. This step also included researching various names used during the commentary that were unknown to me. Then the transcripts were checked against the recording for accuracy. At the same time, the transcripts were checked against the recording in order to indicate when commentary “accompanied live visuals, and what talk accompanied replays or graphics” (Deby, 2002, p. 25).
During the process of transcribing, a journal or notebook was kept of initial observations; that is “who, where, when, what, and how” were noted when it seemed significant (Lindlof, 1995, p. 203). At this stage I began writing down my initial thoughts, informed by sensitizing constructs from the existing literature (Denzin, 1989), as well as any new emerging themes that I had not previously considered. For example, I noted based on previous literature that women were often compared with their male counterparts, but I also noted that there was a strong emphasis on the echelons in women’s hockey, which had not been in the literature. I also included important facts that I thought might be a factor in the analysis. For example, the commentators mentioned that the women’s Italian team did not qualify for the Olympics but were playing because they were the host country. As I progressed through the transcription process, I also wrote down any general and specific interview questions that I had for the commentators. For example, “What is the major difference in men’s and women’s hockey?” and specifically for A.J. Mleczko, “What was it like commentating on former teammates and competitors?” Finally, I wrote down questions that I wanted to contemplate myself, such as “How do I account for Blacks not being in hockey?” The “’Why’ interpretations” were not addressed at this stage (Lindlof, 1995, p. 203). I did not begin to address the “why” questions until I actually had formed many of my themes and was beginning to write the results. At that stage, I started to understand how the themes fit together and questioned “why” they fit together as they did.

Lindlof (1995) suggests that thematic textual analysis consists of creating the data-text(s), creating a system of coding, and preparing to quit the field and write the results of the research. Preliminary readings of the text help the researcher familiarize
herself with the data, while subsequent readings become more purposeful (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lindolf, 1995). My data-text was created during the transcribing process and this, in conjunction with the subsequent two cleanings of the transcripts, served as a way to familiarize myself with the text. In total, I read through each game transcript three times before analysis even took place. My coding process was influenced by not only my literature review but the notes I had originally written in my notebook. Initially, I used the main frames of constructions of gender, constructions of nationality, and constructions of race to begin my coding.

As I coded for these frames, more specific themes began to emerge such as: referees, explanation of rules, physicality, player background etc. Because I used open coding, I initially did not discount any of the themes I found, even if they did not seem to directly answer my research questions. For instance, within the referee theme, subthemes included: commentators, players or coaches agreeing or disagreeing with officials’ calls.

In later readings I began “to look for indicators of concepts identified as relevant” (Lindolf, 1995, p. 219). I reworked the themes at least five times before settling on the final emergent themes found in the results section (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Reconfiguring the themes took place after talking with the peer evaluator, after talking with several other scholars (not in the official peer evaluator role), and even as I wrote and rewrote the results section. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that qualitative research is not linear but cyclical in nature. The construction of race was the hardest frame for me to identify because the game of hockey is so predominantly White. I had to reconfigure this frame to constructions of Whiteness and recode for themes pertaining to this.
There were numerous themes that I initially found and coded, but were not used in the final analysis of the game transcripts. Themes included: an explanation of rules (NHL vs. Olympic, men vs. women, European vs. Olympic, Past vs. Present), commentators, coaches and players agreeing or disagreeing with a referee’s call; the hierarchy of naming, and comments on a team’s play (way they play, strategies used, choices made, way it looks, future and past match-ups, mistakes made). Within player background, which was used, subthemes that were not used were the age of the player and mention of NHL teams for particular players. Within the theme of physicality, comments on penalties and injuries were not used. Other themes that emerged, but were thrown out, included the emotion of the women, leadership of veteran players, and the idea of “weaker” teams staying in the game mentally. These themes were not used because they became irrelevant to the research questions or were not significant enough to make a case.

Frames and Themes

There are many different definitions of framing and frames, and general consensus on exactly what framing is or what it does, has not been reached (Entman, 2004; Hertog & MCleod, 2001). Entman (2004) defines framing as the power of communicating text which influences human consciousness. Reese (2001) states that framing is the way events and issues “are organized and made sense of” (p. 7). It is a coherent way of understanding the world. Framing also allows society to function by being a social process and has powerful effects because it goes unnoticed (Durham, 2001;
Framing is also powerful because it has the ability to favor certain arguments without actually showing bias (Tankard, 2001). Framing, as opposed to bias, reveals hidden assumptions beneath the news coverage because it is more complex and works to actually define situations.

Frames are ways “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (Entman, 2004, p. 391). Frames work because there is either a presence or absence of words, phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information or themes; however, frames that “guide the receiver’s thinking” may not reflect the frames the communicator intended (Entman, 2004, p. 392). Multiple meanings may arise from the same text depending on each individual’s background. What helps to keep frames consistent is that they function as everyday occurrences that are part of a society’s shared belief system and become common sense or accepted conventions (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). In other words, frames may fit into a given ideology. Frames are cultural phenomena that contain symbolic power, widespread recognition and remain persistent over time (Hertog & McLeod, 2001). However, “the types of frames investigated depend on the types of issues examined” (Zaharopoulos, 2007, p. 238). Different types of frames are used to investigate different types of issues, but the use of episodic and thematic frames fit into an accepted framing scheme (Zaharopoulos, 2007).

Iyenger (1991) defines thematic frames as being more in-depth and interpretative if an appropriate context is used. Thematic frames use collective or general evidence instead of concrete events to frame the issues. Baptiste (2005) states that framing is a continuous process based on the goals of scholarly study and begins at the initial concept and “proceeds through data gathering, reduction, and write-up” (p. 1). For my research, I
define a frame as an overarching idea that guided my research from its inception through the final write-up of the data. These frames are rooted in culture, informed by existing literature, and are recognized and persistent over time. Therefore, the frames that I used to guide my research include: constructions of gender rooted in hegemony, constructions of race, particularly Whiteness; constructions of U.S. nationalism, and constructions of North America.

Frames and themes differ from one another. Frames serve as an overarching design for understanding the data collected. Themes are identified before, during and after data collection (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Labeled data may include images, numbers, symbols, words, phrases and themes. Once the labeled data has been categorized into themes with similar characteristics, the relationships between them can be observed. A theme then is a set of words or phrases that are related in some way; they “may be mutually exclusive or overlapping” (Baptiste, 2001, p. 8). Themes are also reoccurring ideas that begin the formal process of data analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Finally, themes are found within media text and “can be minor, significant, or central to the unfolding of the story” (Holtzman, 2000). Themes help audiences to understand ideologies and values within culture.

Themes help the researcher to make sense of the data. However, themes are informed by the researcher’s own background, theory, as well as what the researcher observed during data collection (Holliday, 2002; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Themes also have the power to change the initial direction of the study (Holliday, 2002). In other words, as themes emerge they may not be what the researcher expected; the researcher may have to refine or rethink her categories and approach to the data. Or she may have to
collect more data, such as interviews, to understand the themes she is finding. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest investigators begin with their own themes, based on a literature review, and add and remove themes as they analyze the data. Themes may also be based on professional definitions, commonsense constructs, and the characteristics of the phenomena (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

For my research, I define a theme as a set of reoccurring ideas within the commentary I studied. The themes are informed by my literature review, my previous experience with hockey, and my reading and rereading of the texts. The themes may either overlap one another or act independently, but all themes fall within one of the frameworks that I previously defined.

**Triangulation**

In order to give the study validity, I triangulated my findings. Triangulation is defined as “collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods” (Maxwell, 1996). Triangulation aids the researcher in exploring different aspects of the data in order to construct the social world in different ways for a more complete picture of it (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Using textual analysis to reach conclusions about themes of gender, nationality and race in the commentary will give one view.

Conducting several in-depth interviews with commentators also added to the validity of the findings and gave me a perspective from those who produce the commentary in the Olympic Games. In-depth interviews were conducted to verify facts
and ask commentators questions about statements made in the commentary in order to gain a better understanding of how and why such comments were produced. IRB approval was obtained (See Appendix C for approval letter), and the commentators were first contacted via a letter. Over a two month period, numerous follow-up phone calls were made and messages were left regarding scheduling an interview. Most did not respond. One reason may be the commentators were contacted during March and April, the two months leading into the Stanley Cup Playoffs; many of commentators had obligations to the NHL teams for whom they worked. Of the six commentators broadcasting in the ten studied games, two responded and were interviewed by phone. I taped the interviews and then transcribed them. Commentators who participated were then sent a transcript of the interview for a member check. Member checks give participants the opportunity to read their transcript and delete, add, or change any of their comments (Hardin, Shain, & Shultz-Poniatowski, 2008). Only one commentator asked that some comments be deleted. The interviews were merely used as supportive information to better understand the commentary during the games.

Peer Evaluation

A validity check with a peer helped to validate the strength and trustworthiness of the findings (Warren & Karner, 2005). This was done to make sure consensus on gender, nationality and race frames was obtained. This is important because texts are open to individual interpretation; validation by a peer reviewer reinforces that the interpretations are accurate (Riessman, 1993). The peer was given approximately 36 pages, or 10% of
the pages coded. A cross section of both men’s and women’s and U.S. and Canadian games were used. For consistency, all games were against the same opponent or country, Finland. The peer was already quite knowledgeable in the literature of media and sports, particularly gender, but was given the overarching frames I used, the themes that I found, some background on the literature review, and asked to code the 36 pages. The peer reviewer and I discussed the themes and coding until consensus was reached. This meant numerous conversations regarding the themes as I reworked them. Themes were further defined and refined to create overarching and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Peer evaluation allowed for a consensus on common themes within frames to occur.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study regarding U.S. commentary during NBC’s coverage of U.S. and Canadian men’s and women’s ice hockey at the 2006 Winter Olympics are:

RQ1: How is hegemonic masculinity reinforced in commentary?

RQ2: How is hegemonic femininity reinforced in commentary?

RQ3: How is the concept of “United States” reinforced in commentary?

RQ4: How is the concept of “North America” reinforced in commentary?

RQ5: How is Whiteness reinforced in commentary?

The results of this research will contribute to the larger body of knowledge in media and sports in several ways. Images and themes of gender, nationality and race in the Olympics have been primarily studied within the context of the opening ceremonies
and the primetime coverage of the Games. Gender, race and nationality in relationship to a specific game, such as hockey, is limited at best. Billings (2008) makes a call in his book *Olympic Media: Inside the Biggest Show on Television*, for more research in the area of “nationalistic salience on NBC’s other telecasts in different time slots and on their cable networks” (p. 103). This dissertation will further research in the area of gender, nationality and race themes in U.S. commentary of specific games on cable stations during non-prime-time hours. The commentators for Olympic hockey are either American or Canadian with experience in broadcasting for the NHL. The only exception is A.J. Mleczko, a former Olympic women’s hockey player. These commentators make up a portion of the freelance journalists that NBC employs for the Olympics; they have prior experience covering the Olympics. According to Billings’ research (2008), Dick Ebersol creates a vision for each Olympics and imparts it on the rest of the NBC counterparts covering the Olympics. Because of the amount of coverage Ebersol cannot micro-manage; he closely oversees the primetime coverage and the opening and closing ceremonies. But where the cable affiliates are concerned, he trusts his producers and commentators to carry out NBC’s vision. My research will look at how the Olympic commentary frames gender, nationality, and race during the cable coverage of hockey.

Daddario and Wigley (2007) found that highly successful athletes are marked in more masculine terms. In other words, the success of an athlete is characterized in masculine terms because sports are highly masculinized. Hockey is socially considered a masculine sport, unlike volleyball, which Daddario and Wigley (2007) studied. Both the United States and Canada are considered to be in the top echelon of women’s hockey.
Commentary can serve either to reinforce notions of masculinity or reinforce notions of femininity, depending on the sport and particular commentators.

In relationship to race, ice hockey is a unique sport where the players are predominantly White; only one Black player even participated in the ice hockey tournament. Therefore, race may be constructed more in terms of Whiteness than stereotypes of Black athletes and more attention may be paid to nationality rather than race. The players, the majority from the NHL, are known to be a diverse group hailing from Canada, the United States, Sweden, Finland, the Czech Republic, Russia, etc. While much scholarly attention has been given to Tiger Woods, a so-called Black minority in the predominantly White sport of golf, little attention has been paid to Black hockey players. My dissertation will explore this possibility and further investigate race in sports and constructions of Whiteness within a highly White sport.

My dissertation will further the literature in gender issues in Olympic hockey for several reasons. First, because the men’s and women’s Olympic ice hockey coverage was given equal coverage in 2006, the issue is not so much how much coverage was given to the women’s teams as compared with the men’s (as in previous studies) but the quality of that coverage. In addition, because two of the three commentators for the women’s games and the men’s games were the same, this helps serve as a control mechanism for the study. Investigating the frames of gender in Olympic ice hockey in this manner will help further the base of literature in the ever-changing world of how gender is reinforced and presented within the sports-media complex. It will also be notable to see how former U.S. Olympian, AJ Mleczko, treats her fellow American athletes and former teammates. In addition, there is a large amount of literature on the Summer Olympics, as opposed to the
Winter Olympics, and individual sports, as compared with team sports. Generally, the Summer Olympics not only have more athletes and nations participating, but have more events and tend to draw larger and more diverse audiences (Billings, 2008). My research will further the body of literature in not only the Winter Olympics but in team sports. The 1996 games were called “the year of the woman” because it marked the first time that female athletes had grown up entirely under Title IX and participated in the Olympics. The 2006 games marked a transitional period where some women have had more advantages than others because of Title IX and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The way commentators address these issues is of importance. Finally, my dissertation will be unique because it will take into account how gender, nationality and race all intersect in the sports-media complex. Many studies have looked at either gender or race or nationality--but usually not all three together. For instance, Daddario and Wigley (2007) and Lenskyj (2002) looked at nationality and gender, and Billings and Eastman (2002, 2003) looked at race in the Olympics. Billings and Eastman (2002, 2003) investigated gender, ethnicity, and nationality, but my research will further the literature in all three areas of gender, nationality and race.

Establishing Trustworthiness

I plan to establish trustworthiness of my findings using several methods. Credibility and external validity will be created through triangulation. Specifically, using a peer evaluator for themes found in the transcripts and member checking of the interviews will build and strengthen my arguments (Potter, 1996). Member checking will
allow for interpretative validity of the findings (Johnson, 2002). Next, by applying sensitizing constructs based on the literature review to inform my themes during open coding will allow me to remain open to emerging themes but will also give me a guideline as to how theoretical explanations fit the data and backup my findings (Denzin, 1989). Finally, I will establish trustworthiness with potential interviewees by sending them a letter detailing my background in sports, particularly working for the NHL. This will help to gain rapport with potential respondents and give me credibility as a researcher (Hardin, Shain, & Shultz-Poniatowski, 2008).
Chapter 7

Results

“This is probably the only time that some individuals in the United States, and it might even be close to a majority, ever watch hockey. So that’s a tremendous opportunity for anybody who’s commentating on it at the Olympics. I don’t think a lot of people understood the women’s game because they hadn’t had a chance to see it before 1998.”

--Commentator A, NHL and Olympic Commentator, 2008
Constructions of Masculinity and Femininity

Throughout the games, images of hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity were constructed through comments about the physical nature of the game and physical appearance of players. The men’s and women’s games were often compared with one another, including the difference between body checking and body contact within the women’s game. Player background not only served to fill airtime, but specifically what the commentators chose to discuss helped to construct images of both masculinity and femininity. Finally, emphasis was placed on the dependency female athletes had on their male counterparts, witnessed through commentator comparisons of women to men, the support of the men’s teams, men as role models and heroes, and girls growing up playing on boys’ teams.

Physicality

Making a distinction between body contact and body checking in women’s and men’s games, as well as drawing attention to the amount of equipment women wore compared with men was often heard within the commentary. Comparisons of the physicality of the men’s games versus the finesse of the women’s games were also often used to construct the women’s game as inferior to the men’s game. Such comparisons reinforced both hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity.

*Body contact vs. body checking.* The biggest difference between men’s and women’s hockey is that in women’s hockey, body contact is allowed--but checking is
not. This factor was mentioned repeatedly by commentators in the women’s games.

During the U.S. and Switzerland women’s game AJ Mleczko said:

There is a lot of body contact, and I think if you look at them, they [the women] are fully outfitted, fully protected, full facemask, which you don’t see on the men. And you can’t play the game of hockey without body contact.

During the semi-final game between Canada and Finland, Mleczko made a similar statement:

As we all know, hockey is a game of physical contact. Look at all the gear they are wearing head to toe, even more than the men. So you can’t play this game without some body contact.

During the gold-medal game between Canada and Sweden Mike Emrick stated:

And body checking is not legal, but it is a collision sport, and once in a while you have body contact, but in that case it wasn’t for playing the puck. It played the player, and that will cost two minutes.

During the U.S. and Finland game Mleczko stated, “There’s [a] tough time in women’s hockey to call the grey area between body checking and body contact.” Mleczko made a similar statement during the Canadian and Finnish game commenting that “There is that grey area between body checking and body contact, so it adds to a lot of confusion.”

The first two statements served to tell the audience that while there was body contact and the women’s game could get very physical, the women were still more protected than the men by the type of equipment they wore. For instance, women were required to wear full facemasks, while men were only required to wear helmets (facemasks or face shields are not required). Compared with men, women were
constructed as needing the extra equipment protection, thus a “feminine frailty” (Lenskyj, 2003) factor was created, reinforcing hegemonic femininity.

The third statement served to construct femininity by reinforcing that checking is illegal in women’s hockey. But the fact that one cannot play hockey without body contact reinforced masculinity; these women were playing hockey with body contact, which allowed the women to perform as athletes within the context of femininity. The fourth and fifth statements reinforced this idea because both implied that there was not much difference between body contact and body checking. A dichotomy was created because the sport was divided in two—marked by a game that allowed body checking and a game that did not, which created two games instead of one and upholding hegemonic masculinity.

*Strength vs. finesse.* Differences in physicality were constructed by contrasting the men’s and women’s games. For instance, in one women’s game between the U.S. and Finland, Mleczko contrasted the games by stating:

I think that that’s what a lot of people think—that’s one of the weaknesses is the difference in women’s hockey—that women tend to pass too much. I know the team has worked--Team USA has worked really hard at getting shots and making sure they are bearing down.

This statement suggested that passing is a weakness in hockey. Therefore, because women pass more than men, the women’s game has been traditionally viewed as weaker than the men’s game. However, Mleczko’s comment that the United States women have worked hard to make more shots and pass less, suggested that the American game was
not weak. The U.S. women were constructed as strong when they needed to be, which reinforced their athletic superiority.

In another instance, during the U.S. and Switzerland game, Mleczko contrasted men’s and women’s hockey by stating that women’s hockey was typically thought of as being a game of finesse. She said, “You’re not allowed body checking in women’s hockey. And I think if you talk to some of these players, Angela Ruggiero said women’s hockey is much more a game of finesse.” The women’s game was presented as having more finesse and passing than the men’s game. The men’s game was considered to have more skating. Because skating was viewed as being more physically demanding than passing, it was also deemed as more masculine, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. This caused the women’s game to be viewed as inferior by comparison for its lack of physicality, which was equated to a weakness and passivity in the game, reinforcing hegemonic femininity. Finesse served to construct the women’s game as more feminine. Yet as the previous comment showed, it also constructed the American women as athletically superior. The American women were able to operate as athletically superior athletes and within the epitome of femininity. This particularly related when analyzing how the Canadian women were represented in regards to their physicality.

Statements such as these reinforced sexual difference. They also served to construct women as physically weaker because they passed rather than shot, suggesting that the women’s game was weaker and the men’s game was dominant. However, because it was mentioned that the American team was trying to compensate for passing, by shooting the puck more, it positions the American women as athletically superior,
playing more like the men, compared with their competitors, who are not shooting the puck.

*Player Background*

During the Olympics, commentators provided audiences with background information on the athletes. It might be assumed that Olympic hockey audiences would be more familiar with the men’s than the women’s players because the majority of the men play in the NHL. However, according to Commentator A, Olympic hockey audiences were considered to be everyone from all walks of life—people who were not necessarily considered hockey-savvy. Despite the fact that hockey commentators viewed hockey audiences for both men’s and women’s games as not hockey-savvy, there were still large differences found between the games when the commentators referred to players’ backgrounds.

The men’s games contained more actual play-by-play of the game, while the women’s games offered a lot more insight into players’ backgrounds. This was similar to the findings of Kinnick (1998), who suggested the family life of women and their marital status were mentioned more than men. This might be because the color commentators were different. Mleczko was the female color commentator for the women’s games as opposed to several different men, who were color commentators for the men’s games. Subthemes within player background included: references to last names, marital status of female athletes, and women devaluing traditionally feminine sports.
Last names. Last names were referred to differently in the men’s and women’s games. In the women’s games, commentators discussed women changing their names or hyphenating their last names because of marriage. This served to reinforce the heterosexuality and femininity of the women hockey players in a largely male sport. For example, attention was drawn to Patricia Elsmore-Sautter’s last name as the commentator said of the Swiss player, “Here we see Patricia Elsmore, as we were talking about Elsmore-Sautter on the back of her jersey, and then the two American and Swiss flags on the back of her helmet. She’s a dual citizen now that she’s married to an American.”

In another game Elsmore-Sautter’s name was mentioned again:

Emrick: One other thing we’ve noticed in terms of the back of the jerseys, you may have seen earlier that save by Patricia Elsmore. That is not the only name on the back of her jersey.

AJ: No, she previously competed as Patricia Sautter. Recently [she] got married to a man in Duluth Minnesota, which is where they live, and she attends the University of Minnesota, Duluth, and she now goes by Patricia Elsmore, but on her jersey it says Elsmore-Sautter.

Further references to female players’ heterosexuality through marriage occurred during the U.S. and Finland game:

Pierre: Well Doc, both you and AJ were talking about Tricia Dunn-Luoma and her commitment to hockey. She’s also committed to her husband. She actually plays in the game with her wedding bands on. The reason why, she says I am just so proud of being married I just want the other girls to know it’s a great thing.

Emrick: Outstanding and she’s very proud of that second name that she’s got.
AJ: She is. She said someday when they start a family, have kids of their own, it would be really fun to look back and see Luoma on the jersey.

During the U.S. and Switzerland game, mention was made of Jenny Potter having gotten married. “She played in ’98 and then married Rob Potter, which we know her now as Jenny Potter.” The framing of all three players as heterosexual because of marriage to a man diminished the threat women pose to the dominant men’s game. The players were feminine because they were married; thus, the women players did not pose a threat to the masculine hegemony of the game but reinforced feminine hegemony instead.

In contrast, the hyphenation of names was not an issue for men, but discussions on the changing of the pronunciation of last names were often talked about in regards to foreign players. The discussions usually had something to do with the Anglicized version of last names after European players entered the NHL. There was a long discussion between commentators during one of the men’s games:

John: Toni Lydman plays for the Buffalo Sabres and is having a great season. . .

Used to be Littman is now called Ludman, which is the proper way of saying his name.

Emrick: It’s interesting what we learn after a guy’s been in the league half a decade.

In another example:

John: Yeah, cause when the Europeans come in they, I remember when there was Mere-noff and Mer-on-off. They were brothers. Each one of them wanted it said differently. Huh, they’re brothers.

Emrick: Weren’t the Caberlays the same way? Caber-law and Caber-ley?
John: Yeah.

Emrick: And originally it was Team-00 Sell-00 when he arrived in Winnipeg, and after a while everyone was Anglicizing it to Sa-lanny, and so he just said okay.

In a different men’s game mention was made of a player changing his name: “Parco, we mentioned he changed his name to Parco from Porco. Porco is, it means pig in Italian, and his future wife wouldn’t marry him unless he changed his name.” These comments within the men’s games were geared more toward nationality than gender. Players from European countries Anglicized their names to fit in with their surroundings. In the case of Parco, he changed his name so it would no longer mean “pig” in Italian. In addition, commentators may struggle with foreign sounding names and Anglicize them to make them easier to pronounce. This would be one reason for the difference in Teemu Selanne’s name. This was similar to the findings of Bruce (2004) and Bender (1994). Anglicizing the names served to reinforce a sense of dominant North American culture. In the case of the men, hegemonic masculinity was reinforced through nationalism; Anglicizing a name was more masculine than the original pronunciation. In contrast, hegemonic femininity was not reinforced through nationalism but through gender and the idea of marriage (last names) was equated to heterosexuality.

Women as legitimate athletes. Female athletes were positioned within the commentary as being both feminine and legitimate athletes. Such comments were viewed within the context of female athletes moving away from traditionally feminine sports such as figure skating, shinny, bandy and ringette (a women’s version of hockey).
Women hockey players were often mentioned as having previously participated in more feminine sports such as figure skating, bandy, shinny and ringette before switching to hockey. For example, Emrick said of Julia and Stephanie Marty, who were twins on the Swiss team that they were “figure skaters and then saw hockey and decided it was a lot more fun.” Commentators also talked about Jenny Potter and her five-year-old daughter, Madison. Potter “actually got her daughter Madison out on the ice at age one. Maddy is now five-years-old and has apparently expressed interest in figure skating, much to her mother’s chagrin.” The comment served to feminize her daughter, a little girl, playing a socially acceptable sport, even though Potter did not want to endorse her daughter’s figure skating. Potter, along with Julia and Stephanie Marty were positioned as women who were moving away from the traditionally feminine sports, such as figure skating. This challenges masculine hegemony because women are being accepted into the traditionally masculine sport of hockey as they devalue traditionally feminine sports such as figure skating. It serves to legitimate the female athlete within the male sports hierarchy. However, showing Potter as maternal reinforces the characteristics of hegemonic femininity.

Sports such as ringette, bandy and shinny were also mentioned. Emrick said of Canadian goaltender, Charline Labonte, “The face-off to come back near the goalkeeper Charline Labonte who started out playing a game called ringette.” Mleczko then explained, “A lot of these Canadians started playing ringette, on the ice…And it is something that was more traditionally a girl’s sport than hockey.” In reference to the Russian women Joe Micheletti said:
Most of these women didn’t start playing, you know, didn’t start skating until late. Most of them played a game called bandy, which is played without skates and a ball. But you know, that’s kind of how they learned the basics of the game, but a lot of them didn’t start skating until later on.

Finally, Mleczko explained about Danielle Goyette of Canada that “She didn’t have her first official practice, ice hockey practice, until she was 29 years old. She had played hockey, played shinny, played games, but had never really practiced until she was 29 years old.” Such statements served to reinforce sports as masculine. They showed women moving away from less legitimate, traditionally feminine sports toward more legitimate male sports--such as ice hockey. It reinforced the position of sports as masculine and continued a hierarchy that devalued figure skating, shinny and ringette. This served to legitimize female athletes within the male realm.

Constructions of Women Athletes

Women hockey players were constructed in the commentary in several different ways throughout the games. First, women were often compared with their male counterparts while the men were never compared with their female counterparts. Second, women were often viewed as needing the support of the men’s teams while the men’s teams were not constructed as needing the support of the women. Third, men were viewed as role models for the women though mention was also made that more female role models were emerging. Fourth, commentators often mentioned that women had grown up playing on boys’ teams, suggesting a reliance on men for their success.
However, as with male role models, commentators also pointed out that women now had more opportunities to play on girls’ teams than previously.

*Women compared with men.* Similar to the findings of Jones, Murrell and Jackson (1999), commentators constructed female athletes in comparison to their male counterparts. Male athletes were not compared with their female counterparts.

Throughout the women’s games, female athletes were compared with such players as Peter Forsberg, Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, and Sidney Crosby--all well-known NHL players. Mike Emrick likened Swedish player, Erica Holst to Peter Forsberg during the women’s gold-medal game:

> Erica Holst, who you see there at the bench, [is] one of the best face-off players for Sweden, and in the tournament was one of the shooters in the shootout. And an interesting thing, Peter Forsberg, who has long been the star of the Swedish men’s team, was successful in 1994 with a fancy move in a shootout for the gold medal against Canada. She tried it; it didn’t work out quite as well.

This statement not only compared Holst to Forsberg but reinforced the men’s game as the dominant game. Forsberg succeeded in his penalty shot; Holst copied his moves and failed. Holst was constructed as the weaker player while Forsberg was constructed as the star player; Erica Holst was not able to measure up to Peter Forsberg. Such comments further marginalize women’s hockey and promote hegemonic masculinity.

Later in the same game, Canadian, Hayley Wickenheiser, was compared with former Canadian players, Mario Lemieux and Wayne Gretzky. Wickenheiser was considered the best women’s player on the Canadian team and one of the best women’s hockey players worldwide. Mike Emrick asked of AJ Mleczko:
Well, here is Wickenheiser. You know, she’s so positive, so skilled; you think at times, and I guess we used to ask the question of players like Mario Lemieux [and] Wayne Gretzky. Do you think the game is a challenge at all? Because so many things happen so easily for Hayley Wickenheiser.

Mleczko’s response:

She makes it look very easy, but I think the reason she makes it look so easy is she’s worked so hard. She’s obviously very talented and very gifted. But she has worked incredibly hard, and she is a machine. She really makes very few mistakes, mental or physical.

Emrick suggested that Wickenheiser was a natural athlete just as Lemieux and Gretzky were considered natural athletes. This ideologically made the game unchallenging for them. However, Mleczko never really answered Emrick’s question. Mleczko’s response contradicted the idea of Wickenheiser as a natural athlete by suggesting that she had indeed worked hard to become the player she was. Her intelligence helped her to be a good player. Similarly, men were viewed as the natural athletes, while women worked hard or used their intelligence as a substitute for physicality to become good athletes. This reinforced a binary dualism--one cannot be a natural athlete and hardworking.

Another women’s game reference was made to Canadian Megan Agosta being likened in the Canadian media to NHL player Sidney Crosby. Kenny Albert stated, “In fact there have been some comparisons [of Megan Agosta] in the Canadian media to Sidney Crosby. The media called Agosta the female version of Sidney Crosby in Canada.” Joe Micheletti, the color analyst for the game added that these types of comparisons add pressure to players and that Sidney Crosby was compared with his male
counterpart, Wayne Gretzky. The commentators not only acknowledged that Agosta was being compared with Crosby, but that Crosby had also been compared with another male player. Both comparisons were flattering to both Agosta and Crosby. Crosby was being compared with Gretzky, whose nickname is “The Great One” because of his athletic ability, skating skills and goal-scoring. Because Agosta was compared with her male counterpart, it was as if the commentators were saying that she too had great goal scoring, athletic ability, and skating skills. However, they did not just say that those were her skills; they had to compare her to a male player in order to make this known to the audience. She was not compared with another female player because those players were unknown in comparison to male hockey players. This further reinforced the male hegemony of sports and the men’s game as dominant.

Such comparisons of women’s hockey players to their male counterparts exist because men’s hockey existed before women’s hockey. It served to construct femininity as secondary to masculinity by constructing men as strong and women as weak. Men’s hockey was viewed as the dominant game to which the women’s game was constantly compared, reinforcing notions of hegemonic masculinity and the ideology that sports were a male realm. It also supported the idea of sex-appropriate sports since the men’s game was still viewed as the dominant game. It was assumed that the majority of the audience was more familiar with the men’s game than the women’s game. This made sense to some extent because men’s games were broadcast on a regular basis and women’s games were not, which continues to the present.

Support of men. Throughout the games, mention was often made of the men attending women’s games, encouraging the women, and acting as role models for the
women. For instance, during the gold-medal game there was frequent mention of the Swedish men’s team supporting the Swedish women’s team. One commentator stated that in the Swedish win over the Americans:

The [Swedish] players were thrilled to come out, come off the ice after the shootout victory celebrating on the ice. They came out and all their heroes from the men’s team Sweden were there to high five them, give them hugs.”

During the bronze-medal game, mention was made of both men’s teams supporting the women’s teams. Joe Micheletti first talked about the support the Finnish men gave the women:

Saku Koivu, Teemu Selanne, Jari Kuri, and Erik Westerlund, the coach of the men’s Finnish Team and Anko Burku, a former NHL player, and assistant coach, came in and spent 15 minutes with the girls. They all sat in a circle. They sat in the middle of the circle, and Saku Koivu talked about some of the greatest moments in his career.

Shortly after that Mike Emrick mentioned the U.S. men supporting the women as he said, “Team USA’s men’s squad has been represented. Individual members have come here in prior games. . . Scott Gomez of Team USA and Mark Parrish were here to watch earlier in the competition.”

In all of these instances, the support of the men’s team was announced to the audience. In the first passage, the Swedish men were referred to as the women’s heroes. The second two passages referenced NHL players supporting and giving the women advice. Continual reinforcement of the men supporting the women, while no mention was made of the women supporting the men, suggests that the women were in some way
dependent on the men’s team for their success. It reinforced the notion that the women had something to learn from the men, but not other women, and served to reinforce an emotional dependency on men (Kinnick, 1998). It not only reinforced the maleness of the game, but also served to reinforce hegemonic femininity of women through emotional dependency even though they were the best women hockey players in the world. Such references legitimized women in a sex-appropriate and male-dominated sport by showing the audience that men supported it, so it must be okay.

*Men as role models.* Men were also viewed as role models and heroes for women. During the Canada and Russia game the commentators stated:

**Albert:** In case you’re wondering why Cassie Campbell wears #77, she was a big Edmonton Oilers fan, Paul Coffey

**Micheletti:** Not a bad idol to have, one of the great skaters in the history of the game.

There was a human interest factor in this comment, yet the men’s games contained no such statements even of heroes for male athletes. One reason for such comments in the women’s games might have been because some of the men’s numbers had been retired and could not be worn within the men’s game. This would not necessarily cross-over into the women’s game. However, bringing constant attention to men as heroes within the women’s game served as a way to legitimize the women’s game.

During the gold-medal game, there was focus on Charline Labonte, a Canadian player, and her idol. Joe Micheletti tells the story of how Marty Brodeur called her prior to the game:
How does a young goaltender without any international experience get prepared for a game of this magnitude to try and win a gold medal in the Olympics? Well, how about a call from Marty Brodeur? I mean, who can do it better? And Marty Brodeur did call her.

The follow-up comment of AJ Mleczko was, “It’s wonderful to hear these stories about the men’s team that these women have looked up to for all of their lives.” The commentary transitioned into the idea of the lack of current female role models for young women hockey players, but that slowly the current women’s players were now becoming role models for little girls. AJ added, “Charline Labonte someday will call a little girl preparing for her gold-medal game and share her story, but for this generation of athletes the NHL is really who their heroes, who their idols were.” Later in the same game, Mleczko said of Shannon Gunn:

Part of the emotion is also that it’s the last time she’s going to be playing with some of her heroes. That’s what she said, and I think that will happen more and more as the older players stick around and the younger players come up; they’ll play with the players that are the reason they started playing themselves.

During the United States and Finland game, Emrick and Mleczko exchanged commentary about female role models:

**Emrick:** Darwitz, Wendell and Stephens, along with Ruggiero and Wall. Are we at the place now, AJ, that there are young women who are starting to play hockey who have girls teams to play on rather than, as so many of these Olympians, who had to begin at an early age and had to play on boys teams?

**AJ:** Absolutely, and I think even some of these players have played for girls
teams more often than looking back at the 1998 team where really there wasn’t even that option. It was also interesting, also you talked a little about Sue Merz coming to Helen Resor’s school and talking in Greenwich. There are some players out here that in Nagano are playing here today because of that team’s success, and I think that maybe they have female role models. Of course, they still look to the NHL; it’s something that is very high profile, but it’s really wonderful for the sport of women’s hockey that people can look at players like Kelly Stephens and Krissy Wendell, who we see out here right now, and want to be like them.

**Emrick:** So the earlier generation of players, if you don’t mind yourself being included in that, has mostly maybe NHL men as their role models rather than prominent female players.

Although these comments, like the previous ones, served to legitimize the game of women’s hockey, they also suggested a legitimization of the women’s game in its own right. AJ acknowledges that indeed the male athletes were role models for the women playing in 2006, but this was framed in terms of women’s hockey was new. For those players growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, the only hockey that could be viewed on television was men’s hockey. Mleczko’s comments revealed that there were some female role models for the current players, but they were limited; she suggested that current women hockey players would be the role models of young girls just learning to play hockey so that in the future, audiences will be hearing more stories of women as role models.
In a follow-up to her previous statement, Mleczko added, “There weren’t any prominent female players; maybe female athletes, if you looked at tennis or figure skating, are the typical female sports but certainly not with ice hockey.” Both of these statements were framing male role models as only temporary, placing female role models as a hope for the future. A turning point was marked in women’s hockey during 2006 where there was a mix of players on the Olympic teams. Some were older, growing up with men as their idols. Other younger players had the ability to grow up with women as their heroes. While the commentators attributed the men as heroes, they also acknowledged that they hoped, as women’s hockey progresses, to see more women as role models in the future.

_Girls playing on boys’ teams._ Oftentimes throughout the women’s games frequent mention was made of girls growing up and playing on boys’ teams. For women playing in the 1998 and 2002 Olympics, there were not many options for girls growing up to play on girls’ teams. Women playing in the 2006 Olympics have had more equal advantages than the original 1998 teams did. Like the frame of men as role models for women, the frame of girls playing on boys’ teams was mentioned frequently, but the counterpoints to these statements were framed to suggest that this was also changing.

Mention was made in the U.S. and Switzerland game of how unaccepted girls were in hockey at the start:

I think the players love having them [the parents] here. They’ve been so much a part of their hockey; especially in women’s hockey, where when a lot of these women were younger it was not an accepted sport, so their parents had to put up with a lot of nay-saying and criticism from different people.
During the bronze-medal game AJ Mleczko stated:

I think in terms of teams to play on, people always talk about, oh, that must have been such a great story. You were the only girl on your boys’ team, but pretty much everybody on the team had the same exact story. There were no options, and now you talk about Minnesota. There are girls’ teams everywhere.

Later in the gold-medal game Mike Emrick said:

This young lady, Labonte, was a boy’s team goaltender at ten. As we have further generations coming along, by the time we get to Vancouver in 2010, we will be seeing athletes who have played on nothing but girls’ teams, as opposed to those at Nagano, who had to almost exclusively start playing on boys’ teams just to get any kind of experience at all.

In all three of these comments, the commentators acknowledged how many of the women played on boys’ teams growing up. But they were quick to add that it was because there were not options for girls, and that the girls and their families received a lot of criticism because it was not accepted like it is today. The non-acceptance of girls playing hockey supported notions of sex-appropriate sports, but the commentators also make mention of the fact that since the premier of women’s hockey in the 1998 games, women’s hockey had drastically changed and was now widely accepted. Commentators then tended to focus on the fact that while women may have grown-up playing on boys’ teams, comments that again suggested a dependency on men, for many of today’s youth and even a small fraction of the Olympic athletes, they have had more opportunities to play on girls’ teams. Such comments frame sexual difference and sex-appropriate sports as not only obstacles that women have had to overcome but also framed women’s hockey as
growing and changing for the better. Because commentators were quick to point out the changes in women’s hockey, it also began to legitimize the sport in its own right.

Summary of Findings

The first two research questions addressed gender.

**RQ1:** How is hegemonic masculinity reinforced in commentary?

**RQ2:** How is hegemonic femininity reinforced in commentary?

Overall, I found that both hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity were constructed in juxtaposition to one another. For instance, the themes of body contact versus body checking and skating versus passing, not only reinforced the men’s game as the dominant game, but served to construct hegemonic masculinity as aggressive, physical and tough. In contrast, hegemonic femininity was constructed using the characteristics that the women’s game was more finesse, passive, gentle, and that women are frail. In addition, such frames also serve to reinforce the sexual difference between men and women, constructing the idea that there are natural differences between men and women.

The themes of comparing women to male counterparts and the men supporting the women’s teams served to legitimize the women’s game. Once again, this reinforced the men’s game as the dominant game, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity through confidence, assertiveness and independence. The women’s game was constructed as a counterbalance to the men’s game, thus reinforcing the idea that femininity is constructed as the opposite to masculinity. Femininity then becomes secondary to masculinity. The
women hockey players were viewed as dependent, passive, and more emotional. The support of the men’s teams in particular served to legitimize the women’s game to audiences.

Legitimizing women athletes within the male sports hierarchy occurred within the context that some women athletes were moving from traditionally feminine sports such as figure skating, bandy, and ringette to hockey, a traditionally masculine sport. This supported the ideal that sports are masculine. But more importantly, such comments served to legitimize those women athletes who have moved away from “girlie” sports. The barriers of sex appropriate sports and sexual difference broke down in this instance, allowing women to appear as women athletes. Of course, this was juxtaposed with athletes as mothers, which reinforced the notion that for some women athletes, they were maternal, a characteristic of hegemonic femininity.

Drawing attention to women’s last names in relationship to marriage served to reinforce the heterosexuality and hegemonic femininity of the women athletes. In this way, the women may be more physical or aggressive but do not pose a threat to male hegemony because they are not lesbians. They are viewed as legitimate women athletes within the confines of masculine sport.

Within framework related to gender, either hegemonic masculinity or hegemonic femininity were constructed and reinforced. However, there were a few cases, where dichotomies to the gender order were found. For instance, under the themes of men as role models and girls’ playing on boys’ teams, both hegemonic femininity and hegemonic masculinity were supported. Women were viewed as being dependent on men for their success and needing emotional support, supporting hegemonic femininity. Women also
looked to men as their heroes. Hegemonic masculinity is naturalized in the characteristics of a hero who is confident, assertive and independent; this was reinforced in the commentary. However, such comments were juxtaposed with comments that more girls were beginning to play on women’s teams and that slowly and hopefully in the future more women were becoming role models for girls. Such comments not only indicated a transition period in women’s hockey, but legitimized women athletes in their own terms, essentially threatening the foundations of hegemonic masculinity. The theme of advancing women’s hockey fits into this category of change because again women were constructed as strong, contradicting hegemonic femininity. In this case women were characterized by their nationality and not their gender.

Constructions of the United States and North America

The hockey games, regardless of gender, served to construct the concept of the United States and North America. There was a divide within hockey in regard to North American and European hockey. Because more players from Europe are entering the NHL to play, this divide has diminished somewhat since the 1960s and 1970s. The concept of the United States and North America were constructed through attributes for success and excuses for failure, European players coming to North America to play hockey, advancing women’s hockey, Miracle references, and referees and nationality.
Attributes for Success and Excuses for Failure

Throughout both the men’s and women’s games, commentators provided the audience with a vast amount of reasoning as to why teams either succeeded or failed. In the women’s games, European teams were presented as lacking confidence, while strength was a measure of success for the U.S. team. In contrast, the Canadian women’s team was presented as successful because of physicality and size. Similarly the Canadian men were attributed success to physicality and size, while commentators tended to focus more on the physicality of the U.S. men rather than their size.

Confidence and strength. Particularly during the women’s games, failure on the part of European teams was attributed to their lack of confidence while success of the U.S. teams was attributed to confidence. Lack of confidence for European teams included such comments as needing to gain confidence against superior teams like the U.S. and Canada, particularly after losing to them on pre-Olympic tours. One commentator said, “That confidence is a big key for all of Team Finland, not just Maja Hassinen.” In reference to a game in the preliminary round between the U.S. and Finland, “He [Finnish Coach Hannu Saintula] said they played maybe 20, 30 minutes of good hockey, and that’s the next step for them--having the confidence and physical stamina to play 60 minutes of good hockey against these better teams.” In another example about the Finnish team: “I think a lot of that is not panicking, is having the confidence to know that they are just as good as the people they are playing.” According to commentators, it was not just the Finnish team that lacked confidence. In a game between Switzerland and the United States, Mleczko said, of Patty Elsmore, the Swiss goaltender, “In a situation like this, the
more shots that Elsmore gets, obviously, the more confidence she’s going to get, but at some point a fatigue level has to set in.” In the gold-medal game between Sweden and Canada Mleczko said, “Team Sweden has struggled to penetrate the defensive zone of Team Canada, and this is their chance right now. They have 50 seconds left on this powerplay; they need to set something up, gain a little confidence.” Such examples reinforced the idea that European teams not only lack confidence in playing against North American teams, but could gain confidence by playing against these teams and succeeding. This reinforced the dominance and superiority of the U.S. and Canada, creating a North American hegemony.

The United States women were also framed with statements about their confidence and strength. For example, during one U.S. game Pierre McGuire said:

The big thing for me is when you watch Krissy Wendell play, and the fact of the matter, she has so much confidence. That will help the 11 first time Olympians just get that much more comfortable in this tournament.

In reference to American Kathleen Kauth, Mleczko stated, “She’s gotten stronger off the ice, is skating her stride, and I think with that comes so much confidence.” U.S. goaltender Chanda Gunn even had confidence: “You can see right here she is all over the puck. She is burying it. She looks like she has a lot of energy and a lot of confidence out there.” Commentators attributed the success of the Americans to the confidence they had and their strength. In contrast, the success of the Canadian women was often attributed to their physicality and the size. This dichotomy further feminizes the American women in contrast to the Canadian women.
An example of the success of the U.S. women players related to their strength was “She [Katie King] is so strong and so fast and has such a powerful stride.” Another example about an American player was “Angela Ruggiero is such a strong blast from the point.” During the game against Switzerland Tricia Dunn-Luoma was “so strong, and you can see her picking up the puck and skating in.” In the same game:

Natalie Darwitz is definitely one of the smaller players, however, she is so strong, and I think the physical fitness level and strength level of the U.S. team is . . . so much higher than the Swiss that when they collide--they [the U.S.] are just stronger on their skates, and the weaker person will go down.

These types of comments constructed the U.S. women as successful because they were strong. It also served to construct the European teams as unsuccessful because they were weaker.

*Physicality and size of the Canadian women.* Even more mentions were made regarding the physicality and size of the Canadian women. For instance, in reference to two of the Canadian players, Mleczko said, “Caroline Ouellette with Gillian Apps are two of the tallest players on the team, 5’11” and six feet, and they do use their size very effectively.” In another game in reference to Gillian Apps, Pierre McGuire said, “She’s big. She’s strong. She’s extremely aggressive.” Further evidence of Apps size and physicality occurred during the Finnish game as the commentator said, “Team Canada is up by a player out there. Gillian Apps, six feet tall; she is the biggest player in this tournament. She’s just battling hard, but she has the leverage on her.” Canadian players other than Gillian Apps were also mentioned for their size and physicality. During one
play in the Canada and Finland game Albert discussed a play and Mleczko followed up with the size of the Canadian women:

**Albert:** Good line on the ice for Canada as Wickenheiser looks to move forward with the puck on the face-off win, off the boards for Piper, two on one with Wickenheiser, and the play broken up beautifully by Pelttari.

**AJ:** Excellent play by Pelttari. Two big players coming at her, and she had a lot of poise, a lot of composure right there to keep her stick in the passing lane.

During the game against Sweden Emrick said, “Gillian Apps, Cherie Piper, Hayley Wickenheiser--the big guns are starting it off for Canada.” Mleczko said of one player: “Caroline Ouellette is one of the bigger stronger players on Team Canada.”

The major difference in the comparisons between the U.S. women and the Canadian women was primarily that for the U.S. women, their strength and power were mentioned. In contrast, the Canadian women’s strength and power were mentioned along with their physical size and even their aggressiveness. Physicality, strength, power and toughness are associated with masculinity, thus such comments did not serve to reinforce the femininity of the Canadian women. Canadian women were big and massive compared with all other teams. Reviewing the stats of the American and Canadian women, the Canadian women were slightly taller and heavier than the American women. Overall, both the American and Canadian women were larger in stature than many of their opponents. However, commentators focused on the size and physicality of the Canadian women and not the Americans. It also became an attribute for success for the Canadian women. They could succeed not only because they were more powerful and faster but because they were physically larger. Because gender contains multiple levels of
masculinity and femininity, this frame placed American women at the more feminine end of the hierarchy, and the Canadian women at the more masculine end of the hierarchy. Thus, the American women were constructed as not only athletically superior but also feminine compared with other teams, creating a national symbol, albeit a relatively new one, where women could operate within the masculine world of sports as both fit and feminine. In contrast, the Canadian women were constructed as only athletically superior—but not feminine.

Physicality and size in men’s games. References to size and physicality were also attributed to Canada and the United States in the men’s games. While the U.S. games contained references to size, they contained more attributes of playing in a physical manner. In a U.S. game the commentator said, “There is a hit by Keith Tkachuk even though he went down on the play, 230 pounds coming at you hard.” In one instance, Evgeni Malkin was hit by a U.S. player, and the commentator said, “I think Mr. Malkin just found out what it’s like to play against a great big nasty, very nasty defenseman, and Hatcher just hit him right in the mush.” In another game against Finland American Erik Cole had a hit on Olli Jokinen. Davidson stated, “Jokinen gets hit and Erik Cole, he’s really starting to rattle some bodies.” Comments regarding the size of the U.S. players were also part of the commentary. For instance, “He’s a big man [Derian Hatcher]. You wonder about his speed on this big ice, but he’s handled it well” and “Erick Cole, the big winger from the Carolina Hurricanes, tripped up again!” In another game Cole was referred to as “a big imposing winger.” John Davidson said of Robert Esche, one of the U.S. goaltenders, “He is a good goaltender. He has got a big size.”
The Canadian men, like the Canadian women, were also attributed with a large physical size. John Davidson said of the forward line, “Big forwards” and in another game Mike Emrick said, “for Canada the big boys, Todd Bertuzzi, Joe Thornton, and Rick Nash.” Todd Bertuzzi was referred to as a “big powerful forward…a big man,” thus reinforcing the size and dominance of the Canadian men. In another instance, Davidson said, “big Joe Thornton came off the bench and was able to set up some kind of scoring chance.” The Canadian men were also referred to as “big bodies battling for loose pucks.” The Canadian team was also called giants. For instance, “Bertuzzi, he’s a giant. Oh, Pronger is there too, another giant.” In the game against Finland, Davidson said, “Canada’s great big giant line.” These types of comments were substantiated in one game when Davidson said, “Only two players not counting goaltenders are under six feet for Canada. They are Draper and Sakic. Only six forwards and a goalie are under 200 pounds for Canada.” This gave audiences an idea of the size of the Canadian men, but it also served to reinforce the dominance of the North American teams and the masculinity of the players through physicality, strength, power and toughness, thus maintaining the ideological gender order. It reaffirmed sportive nationalism of both Canada and the United States and served to reinforce the superiority and power of the two countries in a larger international political world.

Playing in North America

Another way in which both the United States and North America were constructed by commentators was through the idea of non-North American players...
coming to North America in order to get training and succeed in hockey, thus living out the ideology of the American dream. Mention was also made of North American coaches and players traveling to European countries to coach players and teams there. This concept was constructed through the idea that there were more advantages to playing in North America and that somehow the North American training aided European players in their success.

There was mention of players playing for North American colleges and the NHL. For instance, during one men’s game John Davidson said about a Finnish player, “[Antti] Laaksonen on the ice. You talk about grit learned by the Fins; he went to Denver University, learned a little bit there.” Davidson attributed the grit with which Laaksonen plays to the fact that he played at Denver University, a North American or U.S. claim to the Finnish player’s success. In one of the women’s games, Mleckzo said:

I think that participation in the American colleges by these foreigners, by the Fins, by Emma Laaksonen, and we were talking about Mari [Saarinen] and some of the Swedish players, it has really helped their program. It is something that Emma Laaksonen, who we are looking at right now, she has said that it has really given them the confidence to know that if I can beat them at college then I can beat them at the Olympics or at Worlds, and it has really helped close that gap, given them a place to play consistently, play a full schedule, and I think that that’s something that those coaches out there in the NCAA can be very proud of.

This statement suggested that European teams, Finland and Sweden in particular, were successful because their players had played at the collegiate level in American colleges. Playing with Americans had also given the Europeans confidence in themselves in
playing against Olympic teams such as the United States and Canada. This served to reinforce not only nationalistic hegemony but reinforced the American ideology of success through hard work and living out the American dream. These European women were successful after coming to the U.S.; this was further evidenced in the Swedish upset of Team USA.

There was also a certain sense of dependency on North American training for European players. Oftentimes comments were made about a player or coach’s success in regard to the fact that he had trained with a U.S. or Canadian coach or within North America. In reference to training with North American coaches, Davidson stated:

You know when Pierre made the comment about the European players becoming more gritty, I think it’s also a byproduct of North American coaches coaching in Europe... But they are getting more and more gritty and able to compete with Canada and the United States.

The determination that the Finnish team had added to their game brought their game more in line with what was considered the dominant game, the North American or NHL-style game that was more physical in nature. Davidson’s comment that European teams were now able to compete with the United States and Canadian teams reinforced the superiority of the North American teams.

During the Russian game, Evgeni Malkin’s success was attributed to a Canadian coach:

One of the things that has really helped Evgeni Malkin’s game develop is he is actually being coached by a Canadian born coach Dave King, who’s a legend in
international hockey. . . It’s really Malkin’s adjustment in terms of understanding NHL-style hockey.

This statement revealed that there was indeed a difference between NHL and international hockey even though many European players played at the NHL. It is also important to remember that in 2006 Malkin was not yet playing in the NHL; he wouldn’t have experienced the NHL-style of play.

In another game, Davidson said of the Finnish coach:

*Now there’s Coach Westerlund, Erika Westerlund. Back in 92-93 he moved to Calgary, spent three months with the hockey Canada group. . .the Rangers coach, and with the Calgary Flames of the NHL to learn how to get his players in Finland to play not only with a skill game but a grit game. And that grit has shown up here, hasn’t it?*

This statement, like the first one, suggested that the NHL game had more grit and physicality to it. Such statements reinforced not only the physicality of the North American game but the physicality also reinforced hegemonic masculinity as if to suggest that North American players were naturally more physical and masculine than their European counterparts. Framed success of players at North American colleges and because of the training of North American coaches reinforced the idea that there was a dependency on the U.S. and Canada in relationship to success.
Advancing Women’s Hockey

Despite the U.S. loss to Sweden, which allowed Sweden to enter the gold-medal round against Canada, the United States was presented as a superior team throughout the tournament. The U.S. loss was seen as positive for advancing women’s hockey. Until the 2006 Olympics, the United States and Canada had met in every gold-medal tournament in international play. Throughout the preliminary games, commentators spoke about the existing echelons in women’s hockey. The U.S. and Canada were in the top echelon, followed by Sweden and Finland in the second echelon, and all other teams were somewhere below that.

The echelons shifted when the United States lost to Sweden. Of course as the storyline changed, so did the commentators remarks about the teams and the echelons. However, after the United States lost, the team was still positioned as dominant, which served to reinforce the U.S. as a world leader in athletics even when it was not. For example, during the Canada and Finland game in the semi-final round just after the upset, Kenny Albert speculated with AJ Mleczko about Canada and the United States not facing each other in the final round:

**Albert:** Do you feel it would be a let down for Canada should they advance and not face the United States?

**AJ:** I do think so. There’s such a rivalry. We talked about the rivalry between Finland and Sweden; the rivalry between Canada and the U.S. is even more storied, and it’s always been. I think, for them to go on and win a gold or silver medal, if they were to advance after this game without facing the United States
would, I don’t know how they would feel about that. I think that that is something you would want--to battle the best, and I think they feel the best is Team USA.

Obviously, Sweden had something to say about that today.

The above comment constructed North American and U.S. superiority. To suggest that Canada would be disappointed not to play the U.S. in the gold-medal game suggested that other teams were inferior to the U.S. Mleczko stated that the Canadian team believed the U.S. team was the best. However, since Sweden beat the U.S. to advance to the gold-medal game, it did not hold true. The United States and Canada were stereotyped as the superior teams. All comments were framed around this assumption.

Later in the gold-medal game Mleczko said, “But it is strange for the Canadians to play this way to winning the gold medal without ever having to beat Team USA.” It was as if she suggested the win for the Canadians was a hollow victory because they did not have to face the United States. This left Sweden in an inferior position compared with the U.S. when Sweden was the one who had beaten the U.S. Of course, Mleczko as a former Team USA member, has a unique perspective on the changing echelons because she has actually been a part of the rivalry between the U.S. and Canada.

During the bronze-medal game, Emrick asked Mleczko if the Swedish upset will not also help the Finnish team. Mleczko replied, “I think [for] Finland the next step is a mental, confidence game, knowing they can play with teams like USA and Team Canada, and I do think the Swedish upset will help them with their confidence.” This comment attributed Finland’s lack of performance to lack of confidence. Lack of confidence of European teams against the United States and Canada reinforced the superiority of both
North American teams and signified the confidence of these teams. Mleczko stated later in the same game:

That’s one thing that earlier in the week we always talked about the elite of women’s hockey, and the elite teams consisting of Team USA and Team Canada. Obviously that has been shaken up a little bit this tournament, but I think the difference is that they’ve [the U.S.] been able adapt, they have been able to roll their lines and trust their fourth line fairly equally.

Mleczko’s comment reinforced an American superiority because even though the United States lost, it had adapted. They did not let the loss get to them and were still playing harder than ever, which was a victory of its own. The U.S. women were constructed as confident and adaptable compared with the European athletes. All of these comments ultimately served to construct the United States women as superior athletes even though they lost.

*Miracle on Ice References*

Both the men’s and women’s games contained numerous references to the United States’ 1980 win over the Soviet Union. This event has come to be known as “The Miracle on Ice” or “Miracle.” The win over the Soviet Union occurred on February 22, 1980, and the 26th anniversary of the event happened during the Olympic Games. Mention of the anniversary was made during the U.S. and Finnish men’s game:

Twenty-six years ago today, Lake Placid. Many of you have seen the movie; some of you saw it when it was first televised. Maybe some of you were inside
the Olympic arena in Lake Placid when Mike Eruzione scored the goal. Do you believe in miracles?

Later in the same game:

Davidson: By the way, Mike Eruzione is here in attendance.

Emrick: Winning goal-scorer 26 years ago today in a delightful little town of Lake Placid, NY.

The anniversary was also mentioned during the U.S. and Russian men’s game, “Twenty-six years ago tomorrow the United States of America 4, the USSR, the Soviet Union 3, in Lake Placid.”

Former players and coaches. However, many references were also made to the Miracle on Ice in the context of former players from that team, who were coaching current players, references to Herb Brookes’ philosophy, and players watching the movie Miracle for inspiration. In both the men’s and women’s tournament, commentators informed the audience that current Olympic players were being coached by former members of the 1980 men’s Olympic team. In one women’s game, Emrick and Mleczko talked about Mark Johnson:

Emrick: Mark Johnson, a member of the 1980 US Olympic men’s team, is the women’s hockey coach at Wisconsin.

AJ: He is. And I think he’s got two players in this tournament, Molly Engstrom for the U.S., a defenseman, who is not dressed tonight, and Carla Macleod a defensemen for Canada.

In a different women’s game, Mark Johnson was mentioned again:
Albert: [Carla] McLeod, the former captain at the University of Wisconsin, where she played for Mark Johnson the 1980 U.S. Olympian.

AJ: She and Team U.S. defenseman, Molly Engstrom, graduated together, were friends and captains there together, and I’m sure that they got a lot of the Olympic fever playing for Mark Johnson for a couple of years.

During the U.S. and Russia men’s game, John Davidson talked about a coach from the 1980 team:

Nabokov, the goaltender, had a rough start with San Jose but had his games go much better in the last month or so. There’s a person that helps him who lives in St. Paul, Minnesota; he helps him. . .Warren Strelow is the goalie coach for San Jose. He was also the goalie coach for Jim Craig at the 1980 Olympics in Lake Placid. One of the greatest goalie coaches ever is Warren Strelow.

Such references gave the audience background on former hockey players and coaches who made history and on current players who were still influenced and trained by them. The fact that this was reiterated throughout both the men’s and women’s tournament, served to construct the United States as yet again a superior entity within the sports world and reinforced American ideologies of success.

_Herb Brookes’ references._ References to the late Herb Brookes, head coach for the 1980 team, and his coaching philosophy were also made by commentators. During the U.S. and Finland men’s game Davidson said, “He [Doug Weight] said Herb had a saying, ‘The legs are the wolf. The legs are the wolf.’ In other words, hunt down loose pucks, hunt down the opposition players, and end them, but the legs have to do it.”

During the Canadian and Finland women’s game, one commentator asked, “Remember
the skating drill where Herb Brookes would just not stop skating his team over and over back in 1980? . . . The Swedish coaches have used that drill for the last three months...

They took one after Herb Brookes.” These instances, as well as others that occurred throughout the games, commemorated the late Brookes. It also reinforced the dominance and superiority of the United States. By copying the Herb Brookes philosophy and drills, other teams might be successful just as the United States was in 1980. Teams were framed as successful when they followed the Herb Brookes philosophy.

*The movie “Miracle.”* Finally, commentators informed audiences repeatedly that teams and players were watching the movie *Miracle* and using it as inspiration throughout the tournament. This served to reinforce the idea that the U.S. was a superpower and other teams could learn from it. It reinforced nationalistic hegemony, the idea of good versus evil, and the underdog triumphing. For example, during the men’s quarter-final game between the United States and Finland, John Davidson talked about an American player watching *Miracle*. Davidson said, “Not long before these Olympics began, DiPietro watched the movie, *Miracle*, just to get himself pumped up, and he’s earned the spot to be the number one goaltender.” This statement attributed DiPietro’s success at making the United States team to the fact that he “pumped himself up” by watching the movie, *Miracle*. It suggested a certain sense of success through history.

During the women’s gold-medal game, Emrick said, ‘Peter Elander and his team have watched the movie, *Miracle*, the depiction of the 1980’s U.S. Men’s Olympic team. They have taken that as one of their inspirations for this.” Later in the same game Mleczko said, “I definitely have Team Canada as the favorite. Obviously, Team Sweden is looking for; they’ve been watching that movie, *Miracle*. They are looking for a miracle
of their own.” Commentators even mentioned Sweden watching *Miracle* during the Finland and Canada game, “By the way, the Swedish team has watched the movie, *Miracle*, over and over the last couple of weeks.” What is interesting about these comments is that they all occurred in the later semi-final and gold-medal games when winning might seem to matter more. More mentions were also made of teams watching *Miracle* within the women’s tournament than the men’s tournament, suggesting a certain dependency of the women on the men, who they might look to as role models. The fact that non-American teams were using the 1980 USA’s win as inspiration reinforced U.S. hegemony and nationalistic pride while presenting opposing teams as not being able to succeed unless they are inspired by the United States.

**Referees and Nationality**

One unique theme that occurred throughout the men’s tournament was that referees were framed based on their nationality. Commentators tended to strongly disagree with calls made by Eastern European officials while agreeing with calls made by Canadian officials; commentators neither agreed nor disagreed with the calls of Western European and U.S. officials. Commentators mentioned all officials’ nationality and background at one time or another throughout the games, but specific attention was paid to a Slovakian referee and a Russian referee.

*The Slovakian linesman.* In the United States versus Finland quarter-final game, commentators drew attention to the Slovakian linesman Milan Masik. Masik was working the game with two Canadians, Steve Miller, a linesman, and Paul Devorski, the
referee. In the play, American, Derian Hatcher, hit the puck and on the follow-through clipped Finnish player, Teemu Selanne in the face. Technically, because the play was a follow-through, it was accidental and should not have been penalized. However, Masik, the Slovakian official, called a penalty, forcing the U.S. to become shorthanded for two minutes. After the call was made, the commentators first said, “It’s the linesman that called this. In no way did Devorski call this.” Then the commentators continued to discuss the event:

**Davidson:** I think it’s a Slovakian linesman that called it. Masik called it. It wasn’t Miller, and it wasn’t Devorski. It’s a Slovakian linesman that made the call here, Pierre.

**Pierre:** Right on, John. That’s exactly right. Milan Masik made the call from Slovakia. Steven Miller is the linesman, who’s about to drop the puck right now, felt this was a follow-through. That should not have been a penalty.

The comment was interesting because the commentators wanted the audience to know that neither of the Canadian officials had anything to do with the bad call against the United States. They blamed the bad call solely on the Slovakian official, calling into question his judgment. This was reinforced through such commentator statements about the play such as “there’s no question that’s an accidental play” and “Boy, oh boy, it’s a follow-through only, and that’s the curious thing about it.”

Throughout other games, commentators agreed with calls made by Canadian officials. For example, in the United States and Finland game, John Davidson said, “Well, Devorski has to make the call. There’s no doubt about it; this’ll be another five on three.” Later in the same game Emrick said, “Paul Devorski made the right call; that’s the
important thing...see the important thing is now it’s four against four.” In the U.S. and Russia game the Canadian official was said to be, “calling it [the game] with a zero tolerance here in the first period for both clubs.” In the U.S. and Sweden game the commentator said, “Good call by the linesman on the other side of the ice.” Such differences in the way commentators treated different officials, particularly different officials from certain countries, served to construct some countries as superior to other countries just as international athletes were constructed differently in the media, preserving a nationalistic hegemony.

The Russian referee. A similar incident to that of the Slovakian official occurred during the Canadian and Swiss men’s game regarding a Russian referee, Vyacheslav Bulanov. Bulanov was working the game with Miroslav Halecky of Slovakia and Kevin Redding of the United States. In this case, there was a history between Bulanov and the Canadian team. The commentators did not draw attention to the Slovakian or U.S. officials regarding their nationality other than to initially announce it to the audience. In contrast, almost every time the commentators referred to Bulanov, they called him the Russian referee. After Bulanov called a penalty, Davidson said, “Bulanov, you are looking at, is the referee from Russia. He may be very strict. It looks like he will be” and later after another call Davidson said, “This Russian referee is calling everything” and “the hot guy from Russia, the referee, is not missing anything.” In the Canada and Finland game, the day after the Swiss game, reference was made to Bulanov, who was not even officiating in the game. John Davidson said:

How about the officials in this tournament that we’ve seen? Well, I’ve been able to see the linesmen at least. This Russian official is the only one who has called
everything. All the other officials have let go and are just basically saying, ‘Play boys, Play.’

These statements marked Bulanov as Russian, reminding the audience constantly of his nationality when no other officials were so decisively marked by their nationality. The comments also revealed the commentators’ disdain for the number of calls Bulanov was making. The last statement contrasting Bulanov to other officials suggested that perhaps Bulanov was being too strict.

The Canadian and Swiss game took a turn during the second period when Canada scored, but Bulanov called it a disallowed goal because Todd Bertuzzi had his skate in the crease. This play happened during a commercial break, so it was only described briefly by the commentators upon return, “Now while we were away for a commercial, the Canadian Team scores, but Bertuzzi was called for being in the net before the puck got there.” A few minutes after this Canadian Rick Nash, scored a goal that Bulanov signaled as a no-goal. Even the commentators thought it was a goal. Davidson said of the incident, “The light came on, but the referee said no. And this Russian referee is not making any fans in Canada. That may go back for years and years of hockey history.”

There proceeded to be a long period where the game was halted in order for Bulanov to call upstairs to the off-ice officials who watched the video-replays and determined if the goal was valid or not. At one point Davidson said to Emrick:

I don’t know if the referee from Russia speaks English, so they have to make sure that they have the right language, on the same page. This is international hockey; it’s not in North America where everybody would be very fluent in English. Boy, oh boy. There is a lot riding on this one, isn’t there?
It ends up that the goal was not allowed. Later in the game, Davidson made comment that Canada was currently down by two goals and this was due to the fact that they had two goals disallowed. The fact was, in the first goal, one of the Canadian players had a skate in the crease, but the commentators choose to excuse this and blamed the referee for disallowing the goal instead.

Toward the end of the game, the audience found out that there was actually some history between Bulanov and the Canadian team. Pierre McGuire said:

What’s upsetting Team Canada so much is Bulanov the official is somebody who worked the game last year when Canada played Sweden, and in that game Canada lost. Bulanov was really a major target in that game, and at the end of the game he had a vicious collision with Rick Nash, which potentially led or could have led to potentially an international incident. I was there, and it almost got Rick Nash kicked out of the tournament. In this game, [the] first penalty came against Rick Nash. The goal that was denied to Canada, Rick Nash [was] at the puck. So the Team Canada people are not very happy with referee Bulanov.

This helps to explain to some extent why the commentators kept reminding the audience that Bulanov was the Russian referee. But the commentators still chose to frame the Russian referee in a bad light, calling his judgment into question and telling the audience there was a bad history between him and Canada. Pierre McGuire, who is Canadian, was the one who explained the history of the team and the referee. The statements regarding the calls against Rick Nash suggest that McGuire believes the referee had ulterior motives. This related to the collective memory and nationalism that exists within Canadian hockey; in other words, Canadians express nationalism through hockey,
creating a Canadian identity. The insinuation was that the referee was trying to subvert Canada with his calls. While the Canadian team was not happy with Bulanov’s calling, perhaps it was McGuire who really disliked the calls.

The overarching message of the commentators was that two disallowed goals during this game led to Canada’s loss. This was also the game that became the surprise upset in the men’s tournament. Commentators and players were not expecting the Swiss to beat the Canadians. Constant attention to the referee’s nationality and English skills, in addition to questioning his calls, brought into question his status as a referee, particularly when transposed against Canadian officials who always seemed to make the right calls. Media tend to target individual athletes from other countries as a way of showing their superiority; in this case, it was not the individual athletes who were targeted—but individual referees from Slovakia and Russia—framing Canada as nationally superior to other countries where officials were concerned.

Summary of Findings

The two research questions which addressed nationality were:

**RQ3:** How is the concept of the “United States” reinforced in commentary?

**RQ4:** How is the concept of “North America” reinforced in commentary?

Overall, there were generally more constructions of the United States than of North America, which is to be expected because the broadcasts were by an American company aimed at an American viewing audience. Within the theme of attributes for success and excuses for failure and the theme of physicality, both the United States’ men’s and
women’s teams were constructed as superior. Superiority of the women’s team was constructed by portraying the confidence of the U.S. women. In contrast, European teams were often constructed as lacking confidence. The United States men were constructed as succeeding because of playing in a physical manner. Physicality is a trait of hegemonic masculinity and served to reinforce U.S. hegemony. It serves to elevate the status of the U.S. within the concept of sportive nationalism and legitimizes the country within the sporting world.

Constructions of North America were also seen in the physicality and attributes for success and excuses for failure themes. In the women’s games, European players were often viewed as gaining confidence by playing both the American and Canadian teams. Again, this not only reinforced the superiority of the Americans but the Canadians. The Canadian women were often attributed with being successful because of their size and their physicality. Interestingly enough in this context, the Canadian women were constructed as more masculine. While the American women were powerful, they were still constructed within more feminine terms on the gender hierarchy. In relationship to nationality, these constructions of both the U.S. and Canadian women served to reinforce North American salience within the commentary. Therefore, nationality was more important than gender in this context; and while hegemonic masculinity and femininity were not preserved, North American hegemony was.

In contrast, both the Canadian and United States’ men’s teams were constructed as showcasing physicality, strength, power, and toughness within the commentary. This constructed North America as superior and powerful, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. It also reinforced those traits often linked to militarism serving as a metaphor for the
military and political power of the United States. Canada became an ally not just in the sports world but the political world as well.

United States and North American superiority was also evidenced in the “Playing in North America” theme. Players attending American colleges, improving their game in the United States, and gaining confidence, all served to construct the American game of hockey as superior. Furthermore, such constructs ultimately reinforced U.S. hegemony and the American ideology of living out the American dream, or that America was the land of opportunity. Similarly, comments about European players playing and training in North America or North American coaches traveling to Europe served to reinforce the North American game as the dominant game of hockey. In a sense, foreigners conformed to this dominate game through their training, which served to maintain a North American hegemony and superiority. Further, it created a hierarchy of countries where the United States and Canada fall at the top (the elite group), and other countries were stereotyped as inferior.

The United States’ women were constructed as a superior team even though they lost to Sweden and did not advance to the gold-medal game against Canada. Such a representation of the U.S. team served to construct the U.S. as a leader in athletics, even though they lost. It also reinforced a sense of U.S. nationalism and hegemony. In addition, mentions of Canada being disappointed to not play the United States, whom they considered the best, served to suggest that the U.S. was still a dominate team despite the loss. This in turn also served to construct a sense of North American superiority where Canada and the United States were elite in women’s hockey. Comments that the Swedish upset would help with the confidence of not only Sweden but other teams, such
as Finland, create an American superiority. There was no mention of the U.S. lacking confidence after their loss; instead the U.S. women were able to “adapt” and persevere after the loss, reinforcing American ideologies of hard work.

Compared with the previous themes found within the gender framework, which indicated that women needed emotional support and were dependent on men, these instances point to constructing the U.S. women not as women within the traditional definitions of hegemonic femininity. Instead, the U.S. women are constructed as confident because of their nationality. This creates an alternate level of femininity, one that is confident and more in line with masculinity but is still accepted.

The concept of the United States was constructed through Miracle on Ice references. Acknowledging the anniversary of the event, talking about former players as recent coaches, referring to the Herb Brookes mentality, and players watching the movie for inspiration, all aided in constructing the United States as a superior entity. It reinforced the American ideology of success through hard work and determination and the American ideology of capitalism over communism. References to Miracle also supported the dominance of the United States in both the sports and the political world, particularly during the Cold War. The idea that players, both American and non-American, would watch Miracle for inspiration supported an American nationalistic hegemony and pride as well.

The concept of North Americanism was further constructed within the “Referees and Nationality” theme. All of the commentators, except for Pierre McGuire, were American; the fact that the commentators always agreed with the Canadian officials’ calls and did not agree with many of the Eastern European officials’ calls solidifies the
construction of North Americanism. It served to construct North America as good and superior, which preserved North American hegemony. It also served to preserve the idea of the United States and Canada as political allies against Russia during the Cold War. Further, the sense of North Americanism was constructed by telling audiences the history between Bulanov and Canada, and then blaming him for Canada’s failure, framing North America as superior.

Constructions of Whiteness

NBC’s commentary served to construct race through the portrayal of Whiteness. Jerome Iginla, the one Black player in the games studied, was given little attention and no attention was drawn to his race. The fact that race was not mentioned within Olympic hockey games only served to reinforce the notion that hockey is a White sport. Whiteness was reinforced through hard work and intelligence, the good guy mentality, players as family-oriented, and players as hardworking and intelligent.

The Case of Jerome Iginla

As a member of the Canadian team, Iginla was physically, not the largest player, but one of the larger players on the team, though he was not marked as such within the commentary. He also was one of the leading goal-scorers for Team Canada and played on either the first or second lines. Commentators made reference to this during the game against Switzerland. For example, Emrick said at the beginning of the game:
We asked their staff who’s playing well so far, and Jerome Iginla right off the top.
You’re seeing a couple of goals that he’s been able to score in the tournament, but you can actually look all the way through their line-up. Big forwards, who’s doing well. Look at these guys, Jerome Iginla, Gagne’s already got three assists, or pardon me, three points. Todd Bertuzzi, big powerful forward from the Vancouver Canucks, he’s been very good, and they’re very happy with his ability to play.

This comment showed that Iginla was one of the leading goal-scorers but what was also important to note was that particular attention was drawn to Todd Bertuzzi being a big, powerful forward while Gagne and Iginla are referred to as part of the “big forwards” but no individual attention was drawn to their size.

More mentions were made of Iginla being on one of the top lines. A commentator said in reference to Iginla, “They have Sakic up front along with Iginla and Bertuzzi; the same group that has started the last powerplays. This is powerplay number eight in the game.” Later in the game Davidson said:

Mike, I said to Ken Hitchcock one of Canada’s coaches before the game, if you needed a goal and you were down by one or two late, who would you put on the ice? He said Bertuzzi, Sakic and Iginla. That’s Ken Hitchcock who you are looking at. That was the line that was just put together for the powerplay.

All of these statements reinforced Iginla as a key player on the Canadian team. However, compared with many of the other players he was mentioned less throughout the commentary. His contributions to the team did not seem to justify the lack of commentary about him.
Generally, when Iginla was mentioned, it was in the play-by-play commentary such as “Along it came near Jerome Iginla; you see Jokinen lifted his stick” or “Nudged back across for Jerome Iginla as Sakic gets to the front of the net, but is just spun off the corner by Ville Peltonen” or “Next with the pass ahead, carrying it on and handing it back over was Iginla, hoping to hook up with Gagne, but that doesn’t work.” These were very common statements made about all players.

Other comments that were made tended to pay particular attention to Iginla’s physical nature as a player. For example, in the game against Finland, John Davidson said, “[Kimmo] Timonen was nailed by Iginla. I mean nailed from Canada… What a hit by Iginla.” Later in the same game Timonen got a stick in the face from another Canadian player, but Davidson referred to the earlier incident with Iginla: “And Timonen is a player that was just freight-trained by Iginla.” Other comments regarding Iginla’s physicality included: “Iginla nails it [the puck] into Bertuzzi” and “There’s the battle, and Iginla used his stick to knock out the leg of Bezina, and he knocked out the leg of the man, and he knocked him down to the ice.” All of these comments were pretty standard for how commentators called games. However, because White players were given attributions of hard work and intelligence and Iginla was not, it further reinforced the race hierarchy where Blacks are viewed as lazy or less intelligent than Whites, thus preserving the White masculine hegemony that exists in sports.
Reference was often made to how hard the White players worked to be successful athletes or in relationship to working hard to succeed on a play. In relationship to play, commentators said of American players, “Boy, Cole worked hard” and “I think Gionta made the play at the very end of the shift, played hard” and “He’s [Erik Cole] trying hard; he’s playing hard, but on that shift they couldn’t score.” Commentators also spoke of the European players as hardworking: “That was some work in the corner by Zetterberg and Holmstrom, and they were playing a lot against Hedican, a lot against Schneider. That is just old-fashioned hard work.” Of a Russian player, “Boy some hard work by Malkin” and of a Finnish player, “Well, hard work along the backboards by Koivu on Pronger. Great effort.” Regardless of nationality, players were attributed with being hard workers.

Not only were the White hockey players viewed as hardworking, but they were viewed as being highly intelligent as well. Comments were made that reinforced this such as, “I think he makes a brilliant, brilliant save” or “Brilliant penalty killing by the Swedes.” A Swedish player was said, to be “a great defensive-minded player” while American player, Craig Conroy, was a “great defensive mind on the penalty kill for Team USA.” In another instance regarding a U.S. player, the commentator said, “Smart play by Modano” and in another game “Tkachuk reads Blake going to the net.” Nationality did not seem to matter; what mattered was that White players were regarded as intelligent while Iginla was given no mentions of being intelligent. The Swiss goaltender was praised with, “Gerber is sharp early, isn’t he?” while Russian player “Datsyuk was said to be a “brilliant passing center man” and later in the game “Datsyuk, he’s like a slinky.” He
slides in. He slides out. He’s just very intelligent.” Framing hockey players as making brilliant plays, reading plays, or being sharp reinforced the intelligence of the players within the game.

**Good-Guy Mentality**

White hockey players were also repeatedly described as “a good group of guys” by commentators. Other comments included, “What a nice guy,” and “The Italian guys that played here representing their country are just a great group of guys.” Stories about players also emerged throughout the games that reinforced the good-guy mentality. For instance, during the U.S. and Russia men’s game, Mike Emrick spoke about Alexi Kovalev from Russia and his charity efforts:

Kovalev, during the off-season or during last season when they had the lockout no NHL hockey, went across a good portion of Russia. He has his own aircraft in the states. He rented one there. Flew across a good portion of the country and was able to hand out at hockey camps and give out equipment and jerseys to the kids, and the last couple of cities he went to he had a helicopter. . .This guy Alexei Kovalev is one of the better human beings you’ll ever meet.

Later in the game Davidson said of Kovalev:

Yeah, well Kovalev will leave Montreal and fly down to NY, park the aircraft and head to Briton Beach where they have a great Russian community and buy the Russian food and see the Russian people and then get back in the aircraft and fly back to Montreal.
These statements presented Kovalev as doing more than playing the game; he truly cared about other people and wanted to make a difference in the world. Kovalev was presented as giving back to society, not taking from or causing trouble in it. In addition, the second comment showed how Kovalev was touching base with his heritage by visiting the Russian community in New York. It gave a sense that he was not afraid to embrace his heritage.

Also in the U.S. and Russia game, John Davidson talked about Alexander Ovechkin, also Russian, and how he kissed and waved to the crowd after he scored a goal:

He’s a nice kid, too. When you have a chance to watch the Washington Capitals like we do and go and broadcast the games, you talk to people. You talk to the players. This kid loves hockey; loves the NHL; loves Washington, D.C. and has absolute flavor and color to his game and is a strong addition to the NHL, a real strong addition. . . And he kissed and waved again.

Within the comments that Davidson made, he first said that Ovechkin was a “nice kid.” Ovechkin was a young player; calling him a kid presented Ovechkin as childlike and innocent. The fact that he loved hockey, the NHL and Washington, D.C. framed him as a happy person not out to harm anyone or purposely be deviant. The mention of him waving to the crowd was not only amusing for audiences but worked to show that he had that good-guy mentality.

Finally, during the U.S. and Swedish men’s game, Mike Emrick spoke of Peter Forsberg, a Swedish player, who had to sit out the game because of an injury. However, Emrick said of Forsberg, “When people talk about Forsberg, they talk so much about his
heart and his drive and his willingness to compete and his want to compete.” During this game Forsberg was sitting on the bench dressed even though he was not playing. Just after this statement Davidson said, “He’d rather be part of his team, sitting there. And if they put him on the ice, he can’t go halfway.” These statements supported the idea of a good-guy mentality because he was dedicated to his team. If he were to play he would play at full-strength even if it meant injuring himself further. These were just several of the ways the good guy mentality was reinforced within the games.

Family-Oriented

Hockey players were also constructed as family-oriented. During the games, mention would often be made of the players in relationship to their families. For instance, a story was told about Italian player, John Parco, in one game, but later during the Russia and U.S. game, the commentators corrected the story. John Davidson said:

Yes, his father was watching in Sault Ste. Marie in Ontario, and I mentioned, it was me, I mentioned…. Parco we mentioned he changed his name to Parco from Porco. Porco is it means “pig” in Italian, and his future wife wouldn’t marry him unless he changed his name. It was not true. He met his future wife two years before he changed the name. I talked to him today, and he told me about it. He says, “Dad called,” and we wanted to make sure we got it right. I apologize. This statement showed a strong family tie. Not only was Parco’s father involved in his life, but Parco was married. This helped reinforce the idea of players as family-oriented. Showing Parco as heterosexual further reinforces hegemonic masculinity.
In other references to family, Finnish player Niklas Hagman’s father was identified as being a former NHL player. Davidson said, “It’s got to be a thrill for him, sitting wherever he is and being able to watch his son play.” Mention was also made of American Bill Guerin’s family, “Guerin’s wife, four children, parents, father-in-law, and even the nanny are here.” In reference to American, Paul DiPietro, “His parents actually honeymooned from here in Torino, so it’s quite an emotional time for him to be able to make the Olympic team.” Finally, Alexander Ovechkin’s mother was mentioned, “His mother was a two-time gold medalist in basketball, as you see the fancy skates there. She wore number eight, so he wears number eight.” Framing White hockey players as family-oriented presented them as a good group of guys with strong family relationships.

Summary of Findings

My main research question regarding race was:

RQ5: How is Whiteness reinforced in commentary?

Iginla’s invisibility in the commentary did not seem justified by his play on the first or second line or the amount of playing time he received. He was one of Canada’s leading players; the commentators even said so. Yet, compared with other leading players on the team, Iginla was mentioned less in general and also mentioned less for hard work and intelligence than his White counterparts were. This may be partially due to the fact that in the particular games studied, he did not score any goals. All of his goal-scoring occurred in games that were not studied. However, it still does not seem to justify the lack of attention he received compared with his White counterparts. There was also no
background given on him, which was surprising considering his uniqueness as a Black player in the sport of hockey. Not making an issue of his race simply served to further construct Whiteness within the White sport of hockey, further framing Whiteness within hegemonic masculinity.

Much attention was paid to Iginla’s physicality. This only became important in light of the fact that Iginla’s White counterparts were not only attributed with physicality but hard work and intelligence. Iginla was not constructed as hardworking or intelligent. This created a divide where hard work and intelligence fell at one end of the racial hierarchy, that is the White end, while physicality fell at the other end, the Black end. Further, it served to construct Whiteness as something to which all other groups aspire because these are dominant constructs of race which reinforce hegemonic masculinity.

An interesting note in relationship to race is that White men were constructed as hard workers. However, in relationship to gender, White men were constructed as natural athletes, and women were constructed as having to work hard to succeed. There are multiple levels of race and gender operating where any one athlete may fall into the gender/race hierarchy depending on the circumstances. This proves that neither gender nor race operate independently. The use of multiple hierarchical dualities allows some athletes to be stigmatized and some to be privileged depending on the context.

Whiteness was also constructed through the ideology of having a good-guy mentality. The good-guy mentality included traits of giving back to society, embracing heritage, childlike innocence, being friendly to fans and dedication. Because White players were portrayed in these ways, it serves to construct Whiteness with such characteristics as innocence, friendliness, and dedication. White players were also
constructed as being family-oriented. Players, who are married and are shown as heterosexual and patriarchal, further reinforce hegemonic masculinity.

Granted, the majority of athletes not just in hockey but in the Winter Olympics in general were White athletes. However, constructing hockey players within the context of intelligence, hardworking, and family-oriented only served to reinforce the idea of Whiteness, thus allowing race to become invisible. The fact that so many of the players’ mentioned within these themes were not only American but Europeans, who have come to play in North America, reinforced the American ideology of upward mobility in the United States and the idea that America was an open society. In other words, the American way of life really does work. It also served to suggest that perhaps American society was open to those who fall within a certain social hierarchy—that is, those players within the White social hierarchy.
Chapter 8

The Olympic Hockey Commentators

“It’s always a fine line to walk and we don’t always successfully do it. Let’s use track and field. The people that follow it religiously are going to be offended by all the emphasis on storytelling. They want to just see the action because they already know all the stories; they just want to see the action...It’s our job to tell the uninitiated—the causal fans—stories of all the different athletes, so they have some reason to care whether they win or lose.”

--Tom Hammond, NBC Olympic Sportscaster, from Billings (2008, p. 60)
Commentators have the ability to shape audience perceptions of the events broadcast on television. In order to gain a better understanding of how Olympic hockey was produced and why events were constructed as they were, several interviews with commentators of the 2006 Olympic hockey games were conducted. Both commentators interviewed were free-lance journalists, who normally announce for other hockey games. Because of the confidentiality promised the commentators, no more information regarding the commentators can be given. However, the interviews served to inform my analysis of the commentary in a number of ways.

First, it helped me understand the audience for Olympic hockey and why the games were broadcast as they were. Second, the interviews helped me interpret my findings in ways I had not considered prior to the interviews, and it reinforced that certain themes I had found were valid. Third, the interviews gave me insights into how commentary was produced. Both of the respondents interviewed were asked to comment on the audience of Olympic hockey, the mentioning of colleges and the NHL, the differences between men’s and women’s hockey, the physicality between the men’s and women’s game, the support of the men’s teams, the echelons in women’s hockey, the idea of advancing women’s hockey, race in hockey, the differences between NHL and Olympic hockey, the differences between North American and European hockey, and changes in hockey they have seen. All of these topics were based on themes I found in the commentary during textual analysis. These themes sparked “why” questions in my mind that I could not answer without interviewing the commentators. Other topics emerged as well throughout the interviews, and I asked probing questions to better understand these comments. Such unexpected topics varied with each commentator.
Following are a list of some of the more important topics discussed during the interviews and how asking the commentators about these topics served to inform my analysis.

The Audience and Production for Olympic Hockey

Both commentators were asked who they perceived the audience for Olympic hockey to be. Commentator A responded that the Olympic hockey audience was “everybody, people young and old, and all walks of life.” In addition, Commentator A said that as a commentator:

You have to assume that there are some people that don’t know the rules of hockey because they only watch every four years. And so that’s why you have to be a little more precise in those things, [explaining rules] because you don’t want to totally shut off the people that follow the sport a lot.

Commentator A also added that those who follow hockey on a regular basis lower their expectations of the commentators during the Olympics because they realize that people, who do not normally watch, were watching. Therefore, the veteran fans tend to be tolerant of frequent rule explanations during Olympic hockey broadcasts. Commentator A also said that the Olympics were the only time “that some individuals in the United States, and it might even be close to a majority, ever watch hockey, and so that’s a tremendous opportunity for anybody who’s commentating on it at the Olympics.” What Commentator A means by this is that the Olympics were a time for commentators to share the stories of the hockey players and explain the rules, which would not have been done as frequently in an NHL broadcast.
In relationship to the audience for the women’s games, Commentator A believed that like the men’s games, the audience was also everyone and that people were even more unfamiliar with the women’s game than the men’s game. As Commentator A said, “I don’t think a lot of people understood the women’s game because they hadn’t had a chance to see it before ’98.” However, Commentator A then mentioned that ten years after the premiere of women’s hockey in the Olympics, more women were starting to play hockey, “In another 5-10 years [we’re] probably going to see a tremendous number of college kids [play hockey], or maybe we will even before that.”

Regarding production of Olympic hockey, Commentator A mentioned that the United States Olympic hockey games were broadcast commercial free because Olympic hockey does not stop for television commercials like NHL hockey does. Commentator A said, “You don’t take commercial breaks in the Olympics. Play just tends to go continuously . . . you just keep going. What that means is that there are very few commercial breaks because it is too risky, and there might be a goal if you take a break.” Commentator A said as a result NBC does not take many commercial breaks during the non-American games, “which gives us more time to tell stories [to the audience].”

In relationship to the audience for Olympic hockey, Commentator B responded that hockey was different than sports like basketball and football because “hockey has pockets of just crazy urban supporters. I mean New England for the most part; Michigan has areas like that, and it’s growing in popularity with the expansion of the NHL, but the NHL has been struggling.” Commentator B linked the hockey audience to economics and the idea that basketball and football can transcend many different backgrounds because not as much equipment is needed nor does ice time have to be paid for like in hockey.
In relationship to the audience for the women’s game, Commentator B said, “I think there is actually a following for women’s hockey that is looking for the purer aspects of the game.” Commentator B stated this following included older men, who believed women played the game the way it was meant to be played, without all the clutching, grabbing and fighting. It also included families with young children, particularly girls, who enjoyed hockey.

Understanding who the commentators perceived the Olympic hockey audience to be for both the men’s and women’s game was useful in my research. It helped me to understand why the rules, especially differences between the men’s and women’s game, were repeatedly mentioned. Instead of constructing one game as superior and one as inferior, the rule differences really served to inform the audience of the rules. Particularly in women’s hockey where the audience was less knowledgeable of the game, rule differences and comparisons to men’s hockey served to give the audience a point of reference.

In addition, understanding that the Olympic hockey audience included everyone, particularly families and people who might only watch hockey during the Olympics, helped me to understand why personal stories and background of the players were provided. It was a human interest factor that made audiences aware of who the players were and gave a reason to care about them. This lead to the following theme, the reference to both NHL and college teams, which emerged in my data analysis.
Mention of NHL and College Teams

I asked both commentators to explain why there was so much discourse on both NHL and college teams throughout the games. Commentator A said that mentioning colleges and NHL teams was to “tie the American audience into a relationship with players on both teams.” Commentator A said it was not about promoting a school’s program or a particular NHL team. Tying the audience to both American and foreign players “is a way of somehow or another drawing the audience we have at the Olympics into learning a little bit more about the players.” Commentator A said frequent mention of college and NHL teams also had to do with the idea that people might realize they did not have to travel all the way to Italy to see a particular player. Commentator B echoed this sentiment, “They don’t have to fly over to Italy to see these people play.” Commentator B also said it was “letting those people know that those people playing on TV next year will be playing at the University of Minnesota, Duluth or Harvard or you know wherever it was…so if they lived in that area they could go see them play.”

Another function of mentioning NHL and college teams so frequently was because the audience was constantly changing. Commentator A said, “You don’t have the same audience five minutes from now that you had before.”

Commentator B said that the number of references to colleges in relationship to the women’s game was really to help develop women’s hockey. Commentator B felt that more fans were needed at the college level in women’s hockey, “and in order for the programs to continue to thrive, they need attendance [people] to come and people to pay at the gate.” Commentator B said that in relationship to the NHL, mentioning the team
was partly for the same reason because “The NHL is not doing that well, so you know, they want to get people out to see them.” Understanding that references to colleges and the NHL served to inform the audience in a human interest way, which gave them a point of reference, was useful.

Additionally, Commentator B believed that part of the reason for mentioning colleges and the NHL was to promote them. However, Commentator A believed this was not the case. Regardless, understanding these perspectives helped me to reinterpret my findings. Initially, I believed that references to college and NHL teams had more to do with promoting US and North American sentiments because foreign players were coming to the United States and Canada to play hockey. While this still might be an underlying assumption, it was not the whole truth.

Difference Between Men’s and Women’s Hockey

I asked the commentators to explain what they felt the biggest difference between men’s and women’s hockey was. Commentator A said that the women’s teams put their teams together sooner than the men’s teams do: “I know in ’98 they [the women] were together a lot during the course of that winter season, and that made a big difference, you know. They put them together in the fall, and I remember they had like a pre-Olympic game up at the University of Vermont between the United States and Canada.” This created a familiarity with teammates that the men’s teams did not have because most of the men were playing in the NHL until they left for the Olympics. Commentator B also talked about the fact that the women’s teams assembled their teams sooner. However,
Commentator B also mentioned that for the women in Canada and the United States, in order to try-out and participate on the Olympic team, college women were almost forced to leave college for a year, “If you want to play for the U.S. or Team Canada, you do have to take at least one year off.” Commentator B explained this in more detail:

The pre-Olympic tour that I referred to, which usually starts around August, at least for Team USA, and goes through the Olympics in February [sic] so you would miss, I guess if you went to a school like at Dartmouth where they are on trimesters, I guess you could go back to school in the spring, but you would miss your hockey season.

Understanding these differences between men’s and women’s hockey was insightful because it helped me to understand the obstacles that women were faced with compared with the men. The women essentially had to give up college to play, but the men were able to still participate in the NHL and the Olympics without having to make a choice. This theme did not necessarily directly influence how I read the manuscripts, but it served to give me background into women’s hockey, which was important in understanding all of the events unfolding within the games.

While Commentator B agreed with Commentator A’s comments that the women’s teams assembled their teams sooner, Commentator B felt that the biggest difference between the two games was the fact that the men’s game allowed checking and the women’s game did not. Commentator B noted that “Basically the heart and soul of it is that men’s hockey has checking and women’s doesn’t.” Commentator B also said that the result of this was that open-ice checking was not allowed in the women’s games, stating that “There isn’t the open-ice hitting that you see in men’s hockey; and with that being
said . . . I think there’s a little bit more flow to the [women’s] game in general. There’s a lot of passing in women’s hockey because of it [lack of open-ice hitting].” These comments were useful to me in my analysis because I noticed all the attention being drawn to the differences in the men’s and women’s game, such as repeated mention of the lack of body checking in the women’s game and the finesse and passing of the women’s game. Commentator B’s comments served to reinforce what I had already observed, validating my findings.

*Physicality in the Game*

Physicality of the game was another recurring theme that I found within my textual analysis. As a result, I asked each commentator through probing questions if there were any physical differences between the men’s and women’s game. Commentator A responded to my question about physicality by saying that body checking was penalized in the women’s games but not the men’s games, by stating “Men are encouraged to hit, and the women are penalized for it.” Commentator A added that this did not mean that the women’s game could not be physical but that “The women’s game can be rough, but it is penalized.” To probe further after these statements I asked Commentator A to speak about the physical size of the women in the Olympic tournament. Commentator A said that emphasis was placed on the small size of some of the goaltenders like Noora Ranty simply because “with goalkeepers being small, they better be fast because there is so much net there.”
Commentator B responded to the physical differences between the men’s and women’s games by stating that they were because of biological differences, which could not be helped, “I mean, to me, it’s a biological issue that men are faster….I mean, it’s a fact. It’s not something that, you know, it’s not a weakness to the game, it just makes you focus on different skills.” Commentator B also mentioned that there were both pros and cons to the men’s game being faster. One con was that “the men are so fast and so strong that sometimes the game moves too quickly for the non-hockey people to follow it.” However, playing on the larger ice sheet for the men was a plus because “I do love men’s hockey on the Olympic size sheet for that reason. They are so fast and so strong, and that’s why I sort of actually like watching women’s hockey on the smaller sheet of ice.” Commentator B was saying that the larger Olympic ice sheet opens up the game for men, allowing the game to slow down because they must cover more ground. In contrast, the women tend to pass more on these larger sheets of ice to compensate for the distance they would have to skate. Therefore, it seems more appropriate for women to play on a smaller sheet of ice and be able to skate more than pass.

Comments by both Commentator A and B were useful in different ways. First, understanding that having a small goaltender means she better be fast helped me to reinterpret some of my findings about the physicality of the European teams. Initially, I thought it was solely because of nationality and a sense that the U.S. and Canada were superior because they were larger in size and more physical. However, drawing attention to the smallness of a European goaltender simply meant that she must be good if she can stop saves because she must cover more open net. Understanding that Commentator B felt the physical differences between the men’s and women’s game were biological or
natural was fascinating because it reinforced the notion of sexual difference and maintained masculine hegemony. The power of such a statement was the fact that most people take it for granted and do not question it.

Support of the Men’s Teams

Both commentators were asked to reflect on why it was important for the men’s teams to support the women’s teams throughout the Olympic tournament. Commentator A said, “It’s a matter of country rather than sport….I think that’s probably just as much a link to being teammates as the fact that it’s women’s and men’s.” Commentator A said that it was simply a matter of support for one another and, “to share each other’s glories or at least be there to support the other people who are playing the sport.”

Commentator B had quite a different answer to the same question. Commentator B felt that mentioning the support of the men’s teams so often in the commentary had to do with legitimacy, “I think it’s basically, in some ways, it’s legitimacy, if that’s the right word, in the sense that men’s hockey is accepted and people know it’s there, and it’s fairly widespread.” Commentator B said that because the men’s game was more established it made it more powerful to audiences to see the men supporting the women, “I just think that anybody who goes out and cheers on the men’s hockey and then the men’s team supports the women’s team, it makes it that much more interesting to people.”

Each commentator gave two very different answers to the same question. This served two purposes in my research. Initially, in reading the transcripts I felt that such
comments of the men supporting the women served to legitimize the women’s game, as Commentator B stated. Commentator B’s comments served to reinforce my findings and approach to the theme. However, Commentator A’s response of support and sharing successes was contradictory to this idea, which not only gave me a new perspective to consider, but a secondary way to think about interpreting the data. Commentator A’s response suggested that the media did not frame the women’s game as inferior to the men’s game.

Echelons and Advancing Women’s Hockey

Commentators were asked to comment on the importance of the echelons in women’s hockey. Commentator A responded that he did not know that the echelons were important, but they served to “convey the development in these other countries because Canada, of course, invented the sport. The United States took it on, and women started playing it largely.” Commentator A said this led to Canada being first, the United States second and all other teams somewhere below because they waited longer to start women’s programs. Commentator A stated, “It was always the U.S. and Canada and then Finland and Sweden were distant; and then if you talk about distant, Russia and China and Japan. Japan was only competing in ’98 because they were the host country, and they had to.”

Commentator A linked the echelons to the advancement of women’s hockey after Sweden upset the United States. Commentator A said that “The fact that one of those two teams [Finland or Sweden] advanced was really good for women’s hockey. It was bad for
the United States, but it was good for the women’s game.” Commentator A stated the reason it was good for women’s hockey was because it helped advance the game in other countries. When the Swedish women won the silver medal in 2006, it “caused a greater demand for ice time and that there would be young women growing up playing this sport. Sweden would see the benefit of it. Not right away but in another six to eight years.”

Commentator B responded to the question about the importance of the echelons similarly to that of Commentator A. Commentator B said of the echelons:

They aren’t important to maintain. The reason there’s significance is for so long it had been a two team tournament when we are talking on the world stage, whether we are talking about the World Championships or the Pacific Rim Championships or for the Nation’s Cup or the Olympics. Always, until 2006 in Torino, if Canada and the U.S. were in any of those tournaments I just mentioned, the finals were always between Canada and the U.S. for 16 years….So that’s why it’s important because there was a big fear that it would be a two team [tournament], and again Canada won all of those until Nagano.

This statement not only answered the importance, or lack there of, the echelons, but began to give the idea of how women’s hockey was advancing. It is important to understand that in the history of women’s hockey until the 1998 Olympics, Canada had always won. When the United States beat Canada for the gold that year, it helped advance women’s hockey in the United States. Commentator B said of the U.S. win in 1998, “to beat them [Canada] was a huge thing for hockey, for American women’s hockey. And it sort of brought American women’s hockey to the forefront.” Similarly, the Swedish win over the United States did the same thing for Sweden. Commentator B
said, “with them [Sweden] beating Team USA in the shootout, it just basically means, from what I understand…the Swedish hockey federation is willing to give them more…you know, more resources, and what I mean is to be centralized…have them live together for a period of time, train together.” Until 2006 the Swedish team, along with many of the other European women’s teams did not centralize like the U.S. and Canada did. The fact that they were starting to do so meant there had been advancement in women’s hockey. Sweden should continue to improve with more training, centralization and more resources.

Understanding the echelons and advancement of women’s hockey served two purposes in my analysis. First, I had originally assumed that the emphasis on echelons during the broadcasts was to reinforce the superiority of both the United States and Canada. However, after talking to the commentators, it became apparent that the echelons were mentioned because they were not important to maintain but because they were being broken down. This was particularly good for advancing women’s hockey as a whole. However, it still does not explain my findings of how the U.S. women were framed as physically superior and were helping to advance women’s hockey despite their loss. Second, the idea that the Swedish upset would help to advance women’s hockey reinforced the themes I found in these regards within the commentary. But interviewing the commentators helped me to also understand that non-North American teams did not have as many resources as the United States and that was why the echelons existed as they did.
Race in Hockey

Both commentators were asked to respond to the idea of race in hockey, or the lack of Blacks playing hockey. Commentator A responded, “We have 14 in the NHL right now that are players of color. I guess we would have to say some are African American and some are African Canadian.” In relationship to the Olympics and people of color, Commentator A said, “I believe Jerome [Iginla] was in fact the only one from Canada. There weren’t any from the United States.” Commentator A did not have much else to say about the idea of race and hockey.

Commentator B was also asked about race and hockey. Commentator B responded in relationship to the women’s teams saying that Black women might have played at the college level but not at the Olympic level. Commentator B noted the most notable women’s minority player was Julie Chu, who is Asian American: “She was born and raised in the U.S.…both her parents were born and lived their earlier years in China and then came over. She’s pretty Americanized, but you know, sometimes a big deal was made that there was an Asian American playing hockey.”

Commentator B went on to say that the lack of Blacks in the sport was a mystery. In relationship to Black players in the NHL Commentator B said, “There are Mike Greer and Anson Carter in the NHL. There aren’t many Black players, but there is a couple that you think would spur on a few more kids.” Both Commentator A and B mentioned that the 50th anniversary of Willie O’Ree, the first Black player in the NHL, had been celebrated in February 2008. Commentator B said, “I think there is a little more awareness being paid to it, but it’s not something you hear about in terms of
broadcasters.” Commentator B also said, “I don’t know if it’s just one of those snowball effects that there are no Blacks playing so young Black girls don’t want to pick it up, or if it’s an affluent [sic] question.”

The fact that neither commentator could really answer my questions about race in hockey was revealing in itself. One reason might be because both were White and had never really considered it. But the fact that neither had considered it merely reinforced the Whiteness of the sport and the fact that the NHL and Olympic hockey lacked racial diversity. Commentator B’s comments that neither the NHL nor broadcasters seemed to focus on it brings to the forefront that race was not worth mentioning even if a Black player was playing. Such comments served to reinforce my framework that Whiteness was constructed within the commentary and little attention was drawn to Jerome Iginla, the only Black player in the Olympic tournament.

Summary of Findings

The goals of conducting in-depth interviews with the hockey commentators were to better understand who the audience for Olympic hockey was, to gain insights into how the commentary was produced, and to validate or come to a new understanding of themes that I found in the commentary. First, conducting the interviews helped me understand the audience for Olympic hockey and why the games were produced and broadcast as they were. Olympic hockey audiences were considered to be all types of people, both hockey fans and non-fans. Catering to such a diverse group of people, some of whom understand hockey and some who do not, means that commentators must cater to both
groups without excluding either. The result was that commentators explained the rules of the game more and kept audiences interested by talking about the players’ backgrounds more. In addition, because women’s hockey was not generally broadcast on television, even the avid hockey fan may not have understood all the rules and nuances of the women’s game. The women’s games were produced with this in mind and more comparisons were made to the men’s game to give audiences a point of reference.

The Olympic hockey games were also produced differently than NHL games because Olympic hockey did not stop for television commercials. NBC aired all U.S. games without commercials so as not to take a chance on missing a goal. The result was that commentators had more airtime to fill. They filled this time with more information on player backgrounds, such as the colleges and NHL teams where players played before the Olympics. This served to inform the audience by giving them a human interest perspective and a reason to care about the players.

The interviews also helped me interpret my findings in ways I had not considered prior to the interviews. For instance, initially I believed that frequent mention of college and NHL teams was to promote a North American sentiment or superiority. While this might be true, after the interviews I discovered that the mention of colleges and NHL teams also served to inform the audience of players’ background and give them a reason to care about the players.

Secondly, I assumed that mentioning the smallness of the foreign goaltenders in the commentary was also to construct the American and Canadian teams as physically superior. However, as Commentator A explained, a small goaltender must be fast to cover the large area of the net. Essentially, this means that a small goaltender must be
very good. This gave credit to those smaller players, who performed well despite their small size, against physically larger teams.

Thirdly, talking to the commentators regarding the echelons in women’s hockey and the idea of advancing women’s hockey made me largely rethink my approach to these themes. Initially I assumed that mentioning the echelons was because they were important to maintain in order to sustain a North American hegemony. However, both commentators stated that the significance of the echelons was that they were not important to maintain, and they were important because they were finally shifting. In essence, teams other than the United States and Canada were becoming worthy competitors. In conjunction with this, commentators talked about how the Swedish upset would advance women’s hockey because the Swedish women received more funding and support from their federation as a result. Such comments helped me to understand that most of the European teams do not have the support that the U.S. and Canadian teams do. This was an interesting finding because it forced me to view the themes of advancing women’s hockey from the standpoint that some countries did not have the resources that others did. Yet, it still suggested a North American superiority because Canada and the United States do have the most funding.

Finally, the interviews served to reinforce certain themes I had found, thus validating my findings. Commentator B said that comparisons between the men’s and women’s game were used because it was the only thing people would understand in comparison. Commentator B also said that differences between men and women were biological and natural. Finally, Commentator B stated that mentioning the men’s support of the women was to give the women’s game legitimacy. These comments reinforced my
findings based on my literature review and supported the ideas of hegemonic masculinity and sexual difference. Finally, neither commentator was able to give me much of an answer regarding race, or the lack of non-Whites, in hockey. This served to support my themes of the construction of Whiteness within the Olympic hockey broadcasts.
Chapter 9

Conclusion

“When you go from gold (Nagano) to silver (Salt Lake) to bronze (Torino) in successive Olympics, your hockey program is not moving in the right direction. Speaking as a 15-year veteran of the USA National Women's Hockey team that is simply not acceptable”

– NBC commentator and ’98 U.S. women’s hockey Gold Medalist Cammi Granato, on the decline in the women’s hockey program (NBC Olympics, 2006).
Prior research of the Olympics in regard to gender, nationality and race has focused on primetime and the opening ceremonies coverage (Billings 2008). Relatively little research has been conducted on NBC’s cable broadcasts of specific sports during the Olympics. My research has attempted to take a closer look at the sport of hockey aired predominantly on NBC’s cable affiliates, CNBC and MSNBC, to further understand how the intersection of gender, nationality and race were framed within commentary.

Several factors make this research unique. First, the 2006 games were marked by an upset in the women’s tournament, causing the break down of pre-existing echelons. The 2006 games were also constructed as a transition period for women in hockey. Some female players had only male role models and had only been able to play on boys’ teams growing up--in contrast to a newer generation with female heroines and the availability of playing on girls’ teams. Second, because hockey is a mostly White sport, my research has attempted to expand the literature in the area of how race operates within a relatively “White” context. Third, in regard to nationality, there was a unique frame of dependency on the United States and North America that had not been reported in prior research. In addition, game officials were framed within the context of their nationality, a newer finding.

Gender

One attempt of this dissertation was to solely look at the way women were represented within a team sport because generally coverage of women athletes occurs in
individual sports only. Although many of the findings were expected, for instance--focus on personal background, women compared with male counterparts, and women’s emotional dependency--what was more surprising was the idea of a transition period in women’s hockey from women having had only male heroes to currently and in the future having more female heroines. This was a relatively new phenomenon simply because we are at a point in society where current athletes have grown up entirely under the influences of Title IX in the U.S. and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada. However, just because women have had this privilege does not mean that the older athletes have had all of the advantages that of some of the younger players now have; both types of players were present in the 2006 Olympic Games. The commentary suggested a hope for the future where women athletes would some day be constructed as legitimate in their own right.

The presentation of women as emotionally dependent on men reinforced the hegemonic feminine traits of weakness, inferiority, timidity and vulnerability. According to the commentators, men played a large role as heroes to women and supported the women during the games. When interviewed about this, both commentators said it was to give validity to the women’s game. This suggested that the women’s game was not valid in its own right. Despite this, commentators did point out within the games themselves some of the reasons for such attributions. For instance, until recently, women have not had female role models or opportunities to play on girls’ teams. These statements in the commentary served as a sort of apology for comments regarding women’s dependency on men. Previous research would not have had these apologies because it was only recently that the change from women playing on boys’ teams and having only male role models to
women playing on girls’ teams and having female role models has occurred. However, the only true indicator of improvement will be with time. Commentators indicated, both in interviews and during the games that with time female athletes will have more women role models. If this is true, then commentators should eventually cease to compare women to men or talk about men as women’s heroes. Further research, perhaps of the Winter Olympic Games in 2010, should be conducted to look for changes in commentator attitudes and framing in regard to women athletes as role models.

Female hockey players are still viewed as a threat to the hegemonic masculinity of the game. This was demonstrated in the fact that frequent mention was made of body checking not being allowed in the women’s game as it was in the men’s game, the women wearing more protective equipment than the men, and the women’s game having more passing than the men’s game. The men’s game was constructed as the dominant or superior game to which women must measure up to masculine standards. The fact that women were not allowed to body check or fight and must wear more equipment than the men solidifies the women’s game as inferior further creating sexual difference. It also serves to reinforce hegemonic femininity of the women players by focusing on their “female frailty” (Lenskyj, 2003) and constructing them as weaker.

Although, I did not note comments made on the personal appearance of female athletes during my research, comments about female athletes’ personal lives were often made. Women’s backgrounds, personal life, and marital status were often mentioned. Specifically, attention was drawn to the fact that some were married and had changed their last names or that some were mothers. This served to reinforce the heterosexually and hegemonic femininity of the women. However, mention of female athletes having
initially participated in more feminine sports such as bandy, shinny, ringette, and figure skating, but then switching to ice hockey, a more masculine sport, legitimized the women as athletes and reinforced sports as male by devaluing feminine sports. In contrast, men were spoken about in terms of their training and work ethic with comments about personal life to frame the “good-guy” image or if foreign, “the non-threatening” image. Very little was mentioned about appearance other than some male players were “big” guys.

Physicality and confidence also became an important theme within women’s hockey, reinforcing the masculinity that exists within sports. The Canadian women were represented as the most physical, European players were often small and lacked confidence, and the U.S. players were strong, physical, and confident. However, U.S. women were described as still not being as big as the Canadian women. This worked to feminize the U.S. women while allowing them to appear strong both physically and mentally. In contrast, the Canadian women were constructed as just big and strong but not feminine. This created a hierarchy within femininity where the U.S. women were more feminine than the Canadian women. However, both the Canadian women and the U.S. women were physically superior to the European women, and the U.S. women were confident. Multiple levels of physicality were operating. In relationship to gender, women were inferior to their male counterparts, thus preserving both masculine and feminine hegemonies. In relationship to nationality, the U.S. women were constructed in more masculine terms of strength and power. As a result, the U.S. women were presented as both athletically superior and feminine within the male sporting world. Future research
should investigate the differences within women’s sports and physicality as related to nationality.

Nationality

One facet of my dissertation was to better understand how nationalistic coverage in the Olympics occurred during the cable programming rather than during primetime coverage. According to Dick Ebersol, NBC strives for nationalistic salience in its Olympic coverage (Billings, 2008). While NBC did not run medal counts and the use of “us” and “them” was not noted in the games I studied, there was still an underlying sense of American nationalism and North American superiority present within NBC’s Olympic hockey commentary. Hockey coverage reinforced hegemonic constructions of masculinity, and American, Canadian, and North American identities, tying the game to specific political and cultural groupings. For example, the construction of Eastern European referees and the “Miracle on Ice” references served to remind audiences of the former Cold War while reinforcing American nationalistic hegemony. North American identities were also related to the echelons in women’s hockey and to the fact that many non-North American athletes succeeded because they had trained in North America. This not only created cultural groupings of North American and non-North American players but produces a hierarchy of countries within hockey.

Hierarchies on an international level are dependent on how well a country’s team performs. This was evidenced in the women’s tournament, with focus on the echelons of hockey. Commentators said during interviews that these echelons were only important
because they had existed for so long and because there was an upset. The echelons were not, however, important to maintain. This becomes important because it suggests that commentators only reinforced the significance of the echelons in their commentary to help audiences understand why the upset was so important. The upset was framed within the commentary as important to advancing women’s hockey. However, focus on advancing women’s hockey took attention away from the United States’ loss, making it seem like a good thing because all women’s teams would benefit from it. It created a sense of dependency on the U.S. for Sweden’s success even though the U.S. really had nothing to do with it. It reinforced the existing hierarchy where the U.S. and Canadian teams were on top rather than creating new ones.

Countries are stereotyped as superior and inferior according to their political place in the world (Boyle & Haynes, 2000). This was true in the hockey tournament where politically, the United States was a superpower, not only in the world, but on the ice. Canada served as a political ally and worthy sports competitor. Other countries like Russia, Switzerland, Sweden, and Finland were not political superpowers and therefore, deemed less of a threat in sports. The nationalistic hegemony created within the hockey commentary served to reinforce the superiority, military strength, and power of the United States.

Although there were not direct stereotypes of foreign athletes, countries’ athletic programs and how they were run were mentioned. European athletes training in North America, being trained by North American coaches, and playing in U.S. colleges and leagues was often mentioned. This served to reinforce the superiority of the United States.
and North American programs. This was despite the fact that the United States women received bronze, and neither the U.S. or Canadian men advanced out of the quarter-finals.

Both American and North American identities were reinforced in the hockey tournament by linking the Russian referee to his nationality and making frequent references to “Miracle on Ice.” Such comments about the Russian referee and “Miracle” are political remnants of the Cold War. This is powerful because nationalism is rooted in history. Not only is there a history between the U.S. and Russia but also between the U.S. and Canada. In the case of Canada and Russia, there was not only a Cold War battle, but a history between the Canadian men’s team and this particular referee. As Pierre McGuire said during the broadcast, “It almost created an international incident.” Such statements regarding the Russian referee and “Miracle” encouraged North American identification, reinforcing nationalistic hegemony. Future research should be conducted on referees and judges who participate in international events as little research has been done in this area.

Race

Within hockey, Whiteness has been the normative basis for success to which all other groups must aspire (Anderson, 2003). This was viewed through the construction of Whiteness in the commentary. Commentators presented hockey players as hard-workers, family-oriented, and good guys. In addition, little if any attention was drawn to Jerome Iginla, the only Black player in the games studied. When Iginla was mentioned, comments were usually in regards to the physical nature of his game, even though he was
one of Canada’s leading goal-scorers. Constructions of Whiteness and constructing Iginla as a physical player served to reinforce notions of masculine hegemony, preserve the White man’s status, and maintain the racial divide.

White athletes were not only constructed as hardworking and intelligent but as family-oriented and “good guys.” Because race operates on a social hierarchy where Whiteness is more valued than Blackness, linking these characteristics to Whiteness becomes the norm for which all other groups must measure themselves. Showing White athletes as intelligent, hardworking, and family-oriented reinforced hegemonic masculinity which contains these characteristics and thus maintains the power of Whites in society. Investigating race in hockey and other predominantly White sports should be a future area of study.

Most interestingly, Jerome Iginla was not given any special attention because he was Black. This was surprising since his race makes him unusual in hockey, a mostly White sport. Mention was made of Iginla as a top player, leading goal-scorer, and in the play-by-play commentary, which was really no different than any other player. The difference was that commentators often mentioned White players’ physical style of play, as well as, their hard work and intelligent plays. For Iginla, however, commentators only mentioned his physical style of play. The social hierarchy indicates that intelligence is valued over physical strength; therefore linking Whiteness to intelligence, as the commentators have done within the hockey games, suggests that Whiteness is more valued than Blackness. Constructing Iginla as a physical player, while constructing his White counterparts as not only physical players but hard-workers, merely served to dismiss the work that Iginla has done as one of Canada’s leading players. Such a
difference in portrayals of Black and White athletes only reinforced Whiteness within the context of hegemonic masculinity.

Summary of Findings

**RQ1:** How is hegemonic masculinity reinforced in commentary?

Hegemonic masculinity was reinforced in the commentary by constructing the men’s game as the dominant game in comparison with the women’s game; this was seen in the difference between body contact and body checking, as well as passing versus skating. Men and the men’s game were also constructed as aggressive, physical, tough, confident, assertive, and independent, reinforcing the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. Men were seen as role models and as supporters of the women’s game to further legitimize the sport. Hegemonic masculinity was naturalized in the characteristics of confidence, assertiveness, and heroic independence. Sports were constructed as masculine in nature, particularly when women rejected traditionally feminine sports and accepted hockey, a traditionally masculine sport, which further emphasized hegemonic masculinity.

**RQ2:** How is hegemonic femininity reinforced in commentary?

Hegemonic femininity was constructed within the commentary by framing the women’s game as inferior to the men’s game because body checking was not allowed and more passing rather than skating occurred, thus creating sexual difference. The women’s game was constructed in opposition to the men’s game where women were dependent, passive, and emotional in comparison to their male counterparts, which reinforced
hegemonic femininity. The men were shown supporting the women, which served to legitimize the women’s game. Women were also shown as being married and having children in order to reinforce their heterosexuality.

RQ3: How is the concept of the “United States” reinforced in commentary?

The concept of the United States was constructed within the commentary by constructing both the U.S. men’s and women’s teams as superior athletes, even though the neither team advanced to the gold-medal rounds. U.S. women were also constructed as superior because they had confidence, physicality, and were more feminine than their Canadian counterparts. Physicality, power, and toughness were traits of the U.S. men, which served to construct them within the framework of hegemonic masculinity and reinforced the military and political power of the United States. United States hegemony and the American ideology of the American dream were constructed through images of non-American players attending U.S. colleges to play hockey. The dominance of the United States during the Cold War and American ideologies of capitalism, determination, and success were reinforced through references to Miracle on Ice. Such references also supported American nationalistic hegemony.

RQ4: How is the concept of “North America” reinforced in commentary?

The concept of North America was primarily constructed as superiority to non-North American teams where the non-North American teams relied on North America for training, participating in leagues, attending college, and coaching. This reinforced a North American hegemony within the sport. Both the Canadian and American teams were characterized as having physicality, strength, power, and toughness, which served to construct North America as superior and powerful, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity.
and linking Canada and the United States as both sports and political allies. Depicting the Canadian women’s team as disappointed to not be playing the best team, the United States, in the gold medal round reinforced the echelons in women’s hockey, suggesting other teams were inferior to those of North America. Finally, referees were constructed in terms of their nationality. Canadian officials were characterized as making the right calls, while Eastern European officials were blamed for Canada’s inability to score a goal, thus preserving North American hegemony and remnants of the Cold War where Canada and the U.S. were allies.

**RQ5: How is Whiteness reinforced in commentary?**

Whiteness was constructed in the commentary by first primarily ignoring the one Black athlete, Jerome Iginla, who participated in the hockey tournament, who was also a leading goal-scorer. When Iginla was mentioned, references were often made to his physicality. In comparison, his White counterparts were constructed as not only physical, but hardworking and intelligent. Whiteness was framed within hegemonic masculinity and served to create a racial hierarchy. Whiteness was also constructed through references to good-guy mentality and to players as being family-oriented. White athletes were portrayed as innocent, friendly, dedicated, patriarchal, and heterosexual, which served to reinforce hegemonic masculinity within the racial context. Constructing race within the ideals of Whiteness allowed race to become invisible.
Strengths and Limitations

There were several ways I achieved trustworthiness of my data gathering and analysis. First, I used triangulation of my findings to build and strengthen my argument. Finding a common perspective with the peer evaluator and the commentators interviewed lent credibility, confirmation, and external validity to my findings. In addition, interpretative validity was reached through member checking of the interviews. Each respondent was allowed to read his transcript and add, delete, or make changes to it. Interpretative validity allowed the meaning attached to the participants to be accurately represented. Second, theoretical validity was reached by completing an extensive literature review upon which sensitizing constructs were created to analyze the data. Findings in the literature were used initially as a basis during open coding. For example, themes of attributes of success and excuses for failure, physicality, and the hierarchy of naming were all initially coded.

Finally, I established trustworthiness with those whom I interviewed by telling them about my background when I contacted them via letter and email. In the case of one respondent, I was asked about my background on the phone prior to the interview. I shared with all potential respondents that I had worked in sports for approximately ten years, six years in hockey with four of those years at the NHL level. I explained the nature of my current project as well. This helped me to build rapport and trust with respondents prior to the interviewing process. Each of these areas of trustworthiness served to validate the findings.
There were several limitations of this study. First, a relatively small sample was used in relationship to gender and nationality. For instance, although ten games total were analyzed, only two of the analyzed games were U.S. women’s games and two were Canadian men’s games. Looking at a few more games for each might yield more generalized results. In regards, to the games selected and race, Jerome Iginla played in only two of the games analyzed, and neither of the games were his best games. His scoring and assists occurred in games not studied but were mentioned within the games studied. Perhaps looking at more games containing Iginla would also yield more generalized results. The study was also limited by the fact that Iginla was the only Black player in the tournament.

While limiting opponents to four countries (Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland) might have helped to minimize differences found within the commentary, it was also a limitation of the study. These four countries fell into the Nordic countries, Eastern European, and Western European classifications. However, looking at more countries from Eastern and Western Europe, such as Latvia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Germany might yield stronger themes in areas pertaining to nationality. However, because Germany was the only team listed above that sent both men’s and women’s teams, it would be hard to compare gender in those instances.

Regarding the commentators, one limitation of this study was the fact that only one-third of the commentators, who appeared in the broadcasts, actually responded, although all were contacted for interviews. While gaining two viewpoints regarding Olympic hockey served to strengthen my findings, more viewpoints would have strengthened and validated the findings even more. AJ Mleczko was also the only woman
commentator studied during the broadcasts. Therefore, it was difficult to make direct comparisons between her comments and her male counterparts’ comments. Cammi Granato, a former U.S. hockey Olympian, served as an analyst in the studio; however, this was beyond the scope of my study; therefore, she was not contacted.

Looking to the Future

Sports are powerful because they are mediated and shape the way audiences view the world. Mediated sports do not create ideologies but reinforce existing ones. This study suggests that some improvements have been made in the salience of gender. The American women were presented as both fit and feminine, a fairly recent development. However, there was a lack of salience in regard to race and nationality; Whiteness and North American sentiments were reinforced. Gender, race, and nationalism are rooted in history and context and dependent on one another. In other words, all three are always operating together.

There are many areas for future research. First, more research should be conducted on Olympic sports broadcast on cable networks. More comparisons should be made as to how the primetime coverage does or does not differ from cable coverage because differing audiences may be a factor. This would be useful in studying because the less popular sports are usually broadcast on cable stations, they are broadcast during more non-primetime hours, and Dick Ebersol does not oversee this production as closely because he is concentrating on the primetime broadcast. Distinct differences may appear. Second, a look at women’s World Cup or women’s Olympic soccer in relationship to ice
hockey would be another important study. Both soccer and ice hockey are somewhat similar because traditionally they were both male sports, but with the advent of Title IX and gold-medal wins for the U.S. women’s soccer team in 1999 (World Cup) and the U.S. women’s hockey team in 1998 (Olympics), this has encouraged more girls to participate in these sports. Perhaps soccer is more socially accepted for women than ice hockey is, and some differences might be revealed there. Third, more research needs to focus on the construction of Whiteness in sports, in particular how race operates within predominantly White sports, such as hockey and other Winter Olympic events. Fourth, the literature needs to be expanded in the area of media’s treatment of referees and judges regarding nationality, gender and race. Finally, future research should continue to investigate women’s hockey in order to track changes in framing of women’s dependency on men, particularly in relation to heroes and training. Tracking such changes will continue the discussion of gender, nationality and race issues and reveal if and how improvements occur, as well as if parity in sports is being reached.
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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

1. How long have you been a commentator? How long have you been a commentator in hockey?
2. What is the biggest change you have seen in hockey since you started?
3. In your view, what is the major difference between Olympic hockey and NHL hockey? College and Olympic hockey?
4. In your view what is the major difference between men and women’s hockey?
5. Who do you perceive to be the audience for Olympic hockey? Is there a difference in audiences for the men’s and women’s games? Is this a different audience than an NHL audience?
6. I have heard broadcasters say that it is important for women’s hockey teams to have support of the men’s teams, why is this?
7. What’s the biggest change in women’s hockey since 1998 in Nagano?
8. I noticed lots of talk about echelons, particularly in women’s hockey. Why is this so important?
   a. How do you compare the U.S. and Canadian teams with other teams?
9. How has Olympic hockey changed since the professionals have been allowed to compete?
10. Is there a difference between North American hockey vs. European hockey?
11. Miracle References
12. Why was there such an emphasis on college and NHL teams-particularly college teams for women?

13. How can winning by particular women’s teams help advance women’s hockey?
### Appendix B

**Games Used in Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Women's Games</strong></th>
<th><strong>Men's Games</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saturday, February 11, 2006</strong>&lt;br&gt;Switzerland vs. United States&lt;br&gt;Aired on USA Network, 12pm&lt;br&gt;Mike Emrick and AJ Mleczko</td>
<td><strong>Saturday, February 18, 2006</strong>&lt;br&gt;Canada vs. Switzerland&lt;br&gt;Aired on CNBC, 9am&lt;br&gt;Mike Emrick and John Davidson</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sunday, February 12, 2006</strong>&lt;br&gt;Canada vs. Russia&lt;br&gt;Aired on CNBC, 10:30 am&lt;br&gt;Kenny Albert and Joe Micheletti</td>
<td><strong>Sunday, February 19, 2006</strong>&lt;br&gt;United States vs. Sweden&lt;br&gt;Aired on NBC, 10:30am&lt;br&gt;Mike Emrick and John Davidson</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Friday, February 17, 2006</strong>&lt;br&gt;Canada vs. Finland&lt;br&gt;Semi-Final Game&lt;br&gt;Aired on MSNBC, 11am&lt;br&gt;Kenny Albert and AJ Mleczko</td>
<td><strong>Sunday, February 19, 2006</strong>&lt;br&gt;Canada vs. Finland&lt;br&gt;Aired on CNBC, 3:30pm&lt;br&gt;Mike Emrick and John Davidson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monday, February 20, 2006</strong>&lt;br&gt;United States vs. Finland&lt;br&gt;Bronze Medal Game&lt;br&gt;Aired on NBC, 10:30am&lt;br&gt;Mike Emrick and AJ Mleczko</td>
<td><strong>Tuesday, February 21, 2006</strong>&lt;br&gt;United States vs. Russia&lt;br&gt;Aired on USA, 2pm&lt;br&gt;Mike Emrick and John Davidson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monday, February 20, 2006</strong>&lt;br&gt;Canada vs. Sweden&lt;br&gt;Gold Medal Game&lt;br&gt;Aired on NBC, 1pm&lt;br&gt;Mike Emrick and AJ Mleczko</td>
<td><strong>Wednesday, February 22, 2006</strong>&lt;br&gt;United States vs. Finland&lt;br&gt;Quarter-Final Game&lt;br&gt;Aired on USA Network, 10am&lt;br&gt;Mike Emrick and John Davidson</td>
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Appendix C

IRB Approval

Hi Kelly,

The Office for Research Protections (ORP) has reviewed the above-referenced study and determined it to be exempt from IRB review. You may begin your research. This study qualifies under the following category(ies):

Category 2: Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human participants can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants; and (ii) any disclosure of the human participants’ responses outside the research could reasonably place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the participants’ financial standing, employability, or reputation. [45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)]

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING:

• Include your IRB number in any correspondence to the ORP.

• The principal investigator is responsible for determining and adhering to additional requirements established by any outside sponsors/funding sources.

• Record Keeping
  o The principal investigator is expected to maintain the original signed informed consent forms, if applicable, along with the research records for at least three (3) years after termination of the study.
  o This will be the only correspondence you will receive from our office regarding this modification determination.
    ▪ MAINTAIN A COPY OF THIS EMAIL FOR YOUR RECORDS.

• Consent Document(s)
  o The exempt consent form(s) will no longer be stamped with the approval/expiration dates.
  o The most recent consent form(s) that you sent in for review is the one that you are expected to use.

• Follow-Up
  o The Office for Research Protections will contact you in three (3) years to inquire if this study will be on-going.
If the study is completed within the three year period, the principal investigator may complete and submit a **Project Close-Out Report**. ([http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/areas/humans/applications/closeout.rtf](http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/areas/humans/applications/closeout.rtf))

- **Revisions/Modifications**
  - Any changes or modifications to the study must be submitted to the Office for Research Protections on the *Modification Request Form - Exemption* available on our website: [http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/areas/humans/applications/modrequest.rtf](http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/areas/humans/applications/modrequest.rtf)
  - Modifications will **not** be accepted unless the Modification Request Form is included with the submission.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Andrea

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Research and Teaching Interests
- Gender Studies
- Sports and Media
- Public Relations/Advertising
- Communication Research Methods

Publications


Competitively Selected Conference Presentations


Hardin, M., Shain, S. and Shultz, K. (2006, August). “I may decide it’s not worth it to balance it all”: The experiences and values of young women in sports journalism careers. Presented at the meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Francisco, CA.


Courses Taught
Basic News Writing Skills, COMM 160, The Pennsylvania State University (Spring 2006-Fall 2007)
Media & Sport/Media, Sports and Society, JMA 434 & 534, Duquesne University (Fall 2006; Fall 2007)
Media Sports Relations/Media Sport Practices, JMA 436 & 536, Duquesne University (Spring 2007; Spring 2008)