

# PARALLEL LINES OF COMMENTARY? THE NBC BROADCAST NETWORK'S PRIMETIME DEPICTION OF MALE GYMNASTS AT THE 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES

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*Research article*

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## **Abstract**

*This study analyzes how U.S.-based NBC announcers portray male gymnasts in comparison to all other male competitors within the primetime broadcast of the Summer Olympic Games. Contrasts were analyzed regarding attributions of success, failure and personality/physicality. Analysis of NBC's primetime coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Summer Games revealed seven (7) significantly-different dialogue trends between male gymnasts and the aggregate of other male Summer Olympians. Specifically, male gymnasts were more likely to have their success (i) credited to athletic skill/strength and (ii) composure and their failure (iii) attributed to a lack of concentration and a (iv) lack of athletic ability compared to the aggregate of other male Olympians. Male gymnasts were also more likely to receive comments about being (v) modest or introverted and have their (vi) emotional state described. Male athletes competing in all sports except for gymnastics were more likely to have their successes (vii) attributed to their experience.*

**Keywords:** television, commentary, comparison, athletes, gymnasts.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

“A lot of the guys at school were giving me (flack) and saying, ‘Okay, gymnast, so you’re going to be a woman in tights?’ They can throw all the negativity they want at me. I’m not going to let it break me.” -U.S. Olympic Gymnast, John Orozco, *CNN*, 2012<sup>1</sup>

Men’s gymnastics has been an integral component of U.S. Olympic television broadcasts for decades. During the past five Summer Olympiads, the sport received over

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<http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/26/us/john-orozco-olympic-gold>

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<sup>1</sup> See video posted on Carroll, J. & Foley, V. (2012, July 26). Bronx native John Orozco an unlikely gymnastics star. *CNN.com*. Retrieved from:

27 hours of primetime<sup>2</sup> broadcast coverage, more than any other men's event at the Summer Games (Billings, Angelini, & Duke; 2010; Billings, 2008; Billings, Angelini, MacArthur, Bissell, & Smith, 2014). The NBC broadcast network dedicated 3 hours and 40 minutes of its 17-night primetime telecast to men's gymnastics in 2012, making it the third most covered men's sport at the London Olympiad, trailing only swimming and track and field. Yet, men's gymnastics consistently receives less airtime than its female counterpart (which received 6 hours and 57 minutes in 2012) and, outside of the Olympics, is typically an irregular offering on all-sports cable networks in the United States.

Despite the sport's popularity within American Olympic telecasts, men's gymnastics participation in the United States has declined significantly over the past 30 years. Student athlete participation in men's gymnastics decreased by 75 percent between 1981-1982 and 2011-2012 (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2012). During the 2011-2012 season, female college gymnasts outnumbered their male counterparts by more than a 4 to 1 margin. Similar statistics were reported in a 2007 USA Gymnastics survey (USA Gymnastics, 2008). The decline in men's gymnastics participation is the result of several factors, such as the enactment of Title IX, but one reason may be the perception of gymnastics as a feminine sport (see Csizma, Wittg, & Schurr, 1988; Hardin & Greer, 2009; Koivula, 1995; Matteo, 1988). This perception may negatively impact young males' interest in gymnastics as they could deem it gender-inappropriate to participate in the activity.

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<sup>2</sup> Primetime television hours in the United States are defined as Monday through Saturday from 8:00pm – 11:00pm (Eastern Time) and Sunday from 7:00pm – 11:00pm (Eastern Time). NBC's "primetime" Olympic coverage, however, often runs past 11:00pm and sometimes starts before 8:00pm. For the purpose of this and previous Olympic studies, primetime Olympic broadcasts are defined as the network's entire uninterrupted evening Olympic broadcast that runs through the primetime hours.

Though gymnastics has been promoted as a female-appropriate sport in the United States dating back to at least the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (see Chisolm, 2007), the sport's feminine perception is a relatively recent phenomenon. Gymnastics was part of the Ancient Olympic Games, which were open only to male competitors, and has been used as both a form of military training (see Olivova, 1981; Combeau-Mari, 2011) and nation building (see Kruger, 1996). Cahn (1994) argues that the sport underwent a "sex change" (p. 219) during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with factors such as the popularity of women Soviet gymnasts during the 1950s and U.S. media promotion of the aesthetics of female gymnastics contributing to this transformation. A popular 1955 U.S. tour highlighting Swedish women gymnasts noted for having more "elegance" and "grace" than their Russian and German female counterparts (see "Maids on a mission," 1955), may have also facilitated the sport's feminine image.

Subsequently, American gymnasts like Cathy Rigby, Mary Lou Retton, Kerri Strug and, more recently, Gabby Douglas, became household names in the United States. During the Cold War era, Olga Korbut, Nadia Comăneci, and to a much lesser extent, Nellie Kim, were catapulted into détente darling status. The public's fascination with Korbut and Comăneci (both of whom changed how the sport was performed) led to a trend where the sport's most popular figures were petite female teenagers (see Cahn, 1994). With mainstream media narratives focusing on young women, the media's emphasis on the aesthetic/graceful elements of the sport (as opposed to raw power), and male American gymnasts failing to receive media exposure comparable to the Rigbys, Korbut, and Comănecis of the world, the media helped create and reinforce the sport's feminine image over several decades.

Whether a sport is considered masculine or feminine may have very real consequences. Eagleman (2013) argues that U.S. print media coverage focusing on gymnastics at the 2012 London Games

presented both male and female gymnasts “in an ambivalent manner” (p. 12). Alley and Hicks (2005) suggest that sex stereotyping a sport may influence who chooses to participate and that “females may be perceived as more masculine and males as more feminine if they frequently participate in a ‘sex-inappropriate’ athletic activity” (p. 278). Thus, gymnastics’ feminine image could impact how male gymnasts are treated by network announcers and, by extension, the perception of male gymnasts by the general public. As NBC’s primetime broadcast of the 2012 Games scored an average audience of 31.1 million viewers per night – 9.5 million viewers more than the average for *NCIS*, the number one primetime program of the 2012-2013 season (International Olympic Committee, 2012; Schneider, 2013) – the commentary deployed during this broadcast could shape the perceptions of men’s gymnastics in the U.S. more than any other recent telecast of the sport.

By examining the dialogues of NBC primetime announcers about male athletes during the 2012 Olympic broadcast, this study will determine if male gymnasts are depicted differently than their male Summer Olympian peers on gymnastics’ biggest North American platform: NBC’s primetime Olympic broadcast.

### Related Theory

When examining gender in sports media, scholars (e.g., Angelini, MacArthur & Billings, 2012; Billings & Eastman, 2003; Messner, Duncan, & Wachs, 1996) have often used two related theories: agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and framing (Goffman, 1974). Agenda setting is rooted in Lippmann’s (1922) notion that the news media influence the “pictures in our heads” (p. 3). Building on Cohen’s (1963) assertion that the media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but (they are) stunningly successful in telling (their audiences) what to think *about*” (p. 13), McCombs and Shaw proposed that the mass media may influence audience attitudes

through the transfer of salience from the media to the audience. Media gatekeepers influence discussion, thinking, and learning by dictating what issues receive attention and this may lead to strengthened attitudes (Kioussis, 2005).

Media framing is often deconstructed into selection, emphasis and exclusion functions (Gitlin, 1980). As any given event may generate several “different stories,” communicators become “sponsors” of frames (see Gamson, 1989, p. 158). These sponsors have the power to shape the public’s interpretation of events, as issues can be defined and terms of debates set based on the frames used by the media (Tankard, 2001). How a media gatekeeper frames an athlete or an athlete’s performance may simply be an attempt to describe an event in a manner that the sponsor considers most meaningful (see Gamson, 1989). That frame, however, provides cues that may have powerful effects as Edelman (1993) asserts: “What we ‘know’ about the nature of the social world depends on how we frame and interpret cues we receive about that world” (p. 231).

Such postulates connect to cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1986), suggesting that television exposure can shape perceived social realities. Gerbner (1998) notes, however, that the influence of television involves degrees of repetition that are “subtle, complex and intermingled with other influences” (p. 180). Thus, there is an assumption of “an interaction between the medium and its publics.” As such, television does not “create” or “reflect” beliefs, images and opinions, but is part of a larger dynamic process (p. 180). When announcers structure dialogues within a sporting event – at times joining the viewer in the thrill of victory and/or the agony of defeat – the sportscasters may be contributing to much larger societal discourses.

### Gendered Studies of Olympic Television

Scholars researching gender in U.S. Olympic telecasts have often focused on gender-based differences in sportscaster commentary across entire primetime Olympic broadcasts (e.g., Davis & Tuggle; 2012; Higgs & Weiller, 1994) or the coverage of single Olympic sports (e.g., Angelini, Billings & MacArthur, 2013; Greer, Hardin, & Homan, 2009; Smith & Bissell, 2012). All 10 primetime U.S. Olympic television broadcasts from 1994-2012 have been examined for gendered attributions of athletic success, athletic failure, and athlete personality and physicality at the macro level (see Angelini, MacArthur, & Billings, 2012; Billings & Angelini, 2007; Billings, Angelini, & Duke, 2010, Billings et al, 2014; Billings, Brown, Crout, McKenna, Rice, Timanus, & Ziegler, 2008; Billings & Eastman, 2002; Billings & Eastman, 2003; Eastman & Billings, 1999). Though network announcers have portrayed men and women athletes differently in each of these 10 broadcasts, the taxonomical differences have not been consistent between Olympiads. When viewed longitudinally, these studies have not revealed consistent gender-based dialogic differences on the part of network announcers.

At a more micro level, Billings (2007) analyzed gendered-based differences in commentary within each of the four sports (track & field, gymnastics, diving, and swimming) receiving the most primetime coverage on NBC during the 2004 Games. Specifically, network announcer attributions of success and failure, and depictions of personality/physicality were examined. Angelini and Billings (2010) and Billings, Angelini, MacArthur, Bissell, Smith, & Brown (2014), repeated this approach for the 2008 and 2012 Games respectively, this time focusing on the top five sports that collectively received more than 90 percent of the coverage in primetime, with beach volleyball added to the initial Billings (2007) list. In each of these studies, gymnastics generated gendered differences

in commentary across multiple taxonomical categories, with one notable trend: in all three Summer Olympiads, male gymnasts were more likely than female gymnasts to have their success credited to their strength.

Shifting the lens away from male vs. female athletes, Angelini, MacArthur & Billings (2013) examined how male Olympic figure skaters – who, like male gymnasts, compete in a “feminine” sport dominated by female competitors – were portrayed in comparison to their male Winter Olympian counterparts within NBC’s 2010 primetime Vancouver broadcast. The study revealed significantly different network dialogue trends between male figure skaters and the aggregate of other male Winter Olympians in 13 out of the 25 (52%) categories examined. Querying whether similar differences in commentary might exist surrounding athletes competing in “sex inappropriate” sports, the authors suggested it would be useful to study the portrayal of male gymnasts against the aggregate of other male Summer Olympians as both sports (gymnastics and figure skating) seemingly struggle with feminized stereotyping.

Indeed, while there are numerous studies comparing media portrayals of male vs. female athletes (e.g., Angelini, MacArthur & Billings, 2012; Messner, Duncan, & Wachs, 1996; Tuggle, Huffman, & Rosengard, 2007), the question of how male athletes who compete in a “feminine” sport are portrayed in the media compared to male athletes in other sports has received little examination outside of the Angelini, MacArthur & Billings (2013) figure skating study. Gymnastics has not received this treatment as previous studies of network television Olympic gymnastics dialogue have typically focused on either the depiction of male vs. female athletes (e.g., Billings, 2007) or investigated the differences in play-by-play vs. color commentary (see Ličen & Billings, 2012, for Slovenian coverage of Olympic gymnastics).

Yet, this is an area of inquiry that deserves further attention as scholars examining athletes who participate in “sex –

inappropriate” sports have determined the competitors may experience gender-role conflicts (Fallon and Jome, 2007), be subjected to stereotyping (Halbert, 1997), and, in the case of boys who compete in rhythmic gymnastics, “have to negotiate between the often negative identity that others attribute to them and the one they define for themselves” (Chimot & Louveau, 2010. p. 453). Thus, if the media portray athletes in “sex inappropriate” sports differently than their same-sex counterparts in other sports, this may have profound impacts on both the participants and the spectators.

This study answers the call to investigate commentary in such a manner by examining the NBC broadcast network’s commentary about male gymnasts. Specifically, it will determine if on-air talk about male gymnasts differs from the dialogues surrounding other male Summer Olympians on the primetime 2012 Summer Olympic broadcast. Hence, the following research questions are posed:

- RQ1: What types of differences in the attributions of success of an athlete are most likely to emerge between male gymnasts and all other male Summer Olympians?
- RQ2: What types of differences in the attributions of failure of an athlete are most likely to emerge between male gymnasts and all other male Summer Olympians?
- RQ3: What types of differences in depictions of personality or physicality of an athlete are most likely to emerge between male gymnasts and all other male Summer Olympians?

## METHODS

This analysis examined all 69 hours of the primetime coverage, across 17 nights (July 27-August 12) of the 2012 Summer Olympics as broadcast on NBC. Men’s sports accounted for 19 hours and 46 minutes of the broadcast, with men’s

gymnastics accounting for 3 hours and 40 minutes of that total. Only those descriptive comments spoken by NBC-employed individuals were analyzed because this content can be largely scripted and supervised by network editors and producers (see Billings, 2008). Those network employees included host commentators (Bob Costas), on-site reporters (e.g., Andrea Joyce), special assignment reporters (e.g., Mary Carillo), color commentators (such as Tim Daggett and Elfi Schlegel), and all play-by-play announcers (e.g., Al Troutwig).

The unit of analysis for this study was the descriptor (defined as any adjective, adjectival phrase, adverb, or adverbial phrase) spoken by an NBC-employed individual. Based on the athlete for whom the descriptor was spoken, all were coded for (a) the athlete’s sport (b) the gender of the athlete (man or woman), (c) the ethnicity of the athlete (Asian, Black, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, White, or other), (d) the nationality of the athlete (American or non-American), (e) the gender of the announcer (man or woman), and (f) the specific word-for-word descriptive phrase. The descriptors were then classified using the Billings and Eastman (2003) taxonomy (later advanced by Billings, et al., 2008), which divides commentary into three recognizable categories: (a) attributions of success/failure (i.e., descriptions of the immediately viewable athletic performance), (b) depictions of personality/physicality (i.e., descriptions of athletes not directly attributable to the viewed athletic performance), and (c) neutral (i.e., comments that do not describe the athletic performance or depict the personality and/or physicality of the athlete).

In all, 16 classification categories were utilized for the analysis: (a) concentration [i.e. “best at blocking out those extraneous thoughts”]; (b) strength-based athletic skill [i.e. “got a little bit too much power”]; (c) talent/ability based athletic skills [i.e. “he was fantastic on floor”]; (d) composure [i.e. “he had a lot of jitters right there”]; (e)

commitment [i.e. “never gives up”]; (f) courage [i.e. “great fight right there”]; (g) experience [i.e. “has won every single international ring competition”]; (h) intelligence [i.e. “bad idea”]; (i) athletic consonance [i.e. “he’s got great luck”]; (j) outgoing/extroverted [i.e. “winning personality”]; (k) modest/introverted [i.e. “unassuming”]; (l) emotional [i.e. “smile says it all”]; (m) attractiveness [i.e. “has a beautiful look”]; (n) size/parts of body [i.e. “he’s a head taller than all the other Chinese gymnasts”]; (o) background [i.e. “had a tumor out of his leg at age 10”] and (p) other.

Using Cohen’s (1960) formula, a second researcher coded 20% of the database and reliabilities were determined for the following variables: (a) the gender of the athlete [ $K = 1.00$ ], (b) the ethnicity of the athlete [ $K = .98$ ], (c) the nationality of the athlete [ $K = 1.00$ ], (d) the gender of the announcer [ $K = 1.00$ ], (e) the word-for-word descriptor or descriptive phrase [ $K = .83$ ], and (f) the name of the sport being discussed [ $K = 1.00$ ]. Overall intercoder

reliability using Cohen’s kappa exceeded 96%.

Once all data were analyzed and tables created, chi-square analysis was employed to determine significant differences between groups by using the percentage of overall comments as expected frequencies. For example, because 14.6% of all attributions for success and failure were about male gymnasts, it was expected that roughly the same proportion (14.6%) of comments about concentration, skill, composure, commitment, attractiveness, and so on should be established as expected frequencies for male gymnasts.

## RESULTS

Research Question 1 queried the differences found in the attributions of athletic success between male gymnasts and all other male Summer Olympians. Table 1 highlights the frequencies in each taxonomical category, with the significant differences noted for both descriptors about successes and descriptors about failures.

Table 1. *Explanations of Success/Failure in All Sports for Male Athletes.*

	<i>Success</i>		<i>Failure</i>	
	Gymnastics	All Other Sports	Gymnastics	All Other
Concentration	2	11	2 <sup>d</sup>	2 <sup>d</sup>
Athletic Skill – Strength	17 <sup>a</sup>	28 <sup>a</sup>	1	2
Athletic Skill – Ability	237	1413	125 <sup>e</sup>	362 <sup>e</sup>
Composure	13 <sup>b</sup>	35 <sup>b</sup>	6	17
Commitment	2	22	1	6
Courage	5	13	0	2
Experience	52 <sup>c</sup>	769 <sup>c</sup>	13	66
Intelligence	1	32	1	5
Consonance	22	127	7	36
Total	351	2450	156	498

a:  $\chi^2 = 19.18$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ; b:  $\chi^2 = 5.90$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .03$ ; c:  $\chi^2 = 45.61$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ; d:  $\chi^2 = 3.99$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ; e:  $\chi^2 = 47.00$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$

Table 2. *Personality/Physicality Descriptors in All Sports for Male Athletes.*

	<i>Sports</i>	
	Gymnastics	All Other Sports
Outgoing/Extroverted	2	25
Modest/Introverted	2 <sup>a</sup>	2 <sup>a</sup>
Emotional	20 <sup>b</sup>	62 <sup>b</sup>
Attractiveness	0	2
Size/Parts of Body	4	64
Background	193	1971
Other/Neutral	121	1274
Total	342	3400

a:  $\chi^2 = 8.04$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .005$ ; b:  $\chi^2 = 22.97$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$

When examining descriptors about successes, three significant results were found. First, (a) male gymnasts were more likely to be depicted as succeeding because of athletic skill/strength ( $\chi^2 = 19.18$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and (b) their composure during competition ( $\chi^2 = 5.90$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .03$ ) as compared to male Olympians competing in all other disciplines. By contrast, (c) male athletes competing in all sports except for gymnastics were more likely to have their successes attributed to their experience ( $\chi^2 = 45.61$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Research Question 2 asked what types of differences would be found in the attributions of failure. Regarding athletic failures, two statistically significant differences were found. Male gymnasts were (a) more likely to have their failures attributed to a lack of concentration ( $\chi^2 = 3.99$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and (b) a lack of athletic ability ( $\chi^2 = 47.00$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as compared to the male athletes in all other sporting disciplines.

Research Question 3 inquired what sorts of differences would be found in the attributions of personality or physicality of an athlete between descriptors for male

gymnasts and descriptors for all other male Summer Olympians. Table 2 highlights the frequencies in each taxonomical code, with the significant differences noted.

When examining these descriptors, two significant results were found as (a) male gymnasts were more likely to be described as modest or introverted ( $\chi^2 = 8.04$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .005$ ) and (b) have their emotional state described ( $\chi^2 = 22.97$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than their male counterparts.

## DISCUSSION

When Starr (2008) noted that the Olympics medals table creates competition “primarily on an abacus, not in a sports arena” (p. 42), he was overtly acknowledging that while the Olympic Games are often referenced in the singular, they are more aptly described as a mass amalgamation of sports and athletic skills. This study highlights such divisions, noting that male gymnasts were described in demonstrably different manners than other male Summer Olympians in seven categories. While the majority of dialogue categories did not contain significant

differences, the study nonetheless illuminates areas where network broadcaster dialogues are most likely to diverge between male gymnasts and their male athletic counterparts in other major sports.

From the standpoint of media framing, tendencies to highlight certain athletic attributes above others are crucial to the overarching stories and conceptions viewers take from a mass-consumption megasport such as the Olympics. As Smith (1997) notes, "choosing the frame for any story is the most powerful decision a journalist makes" (para. 6). Consequently, part of the interrogation surrounding divergent dialogues in sports media commentary percolates around questions of (a) whether such differences are intended or unintentional and (b) whether such divergences are justified by the varying skill sets required to succeed in each Olympic event.

Relatedly, from the standpoint of cultivation theory, if one believes that the theory, at its core, argues that media can set the terms of the debate (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002), the parameters for such arguments seemingly do change between male gymnasts and all other main male Olympians. The question then becomes whether such dialogues create a macro-level conception of perceived fit between gender and the sport being enacted. Hardin and Greer (2009) found that media use played a role in gendered perceptions of a given sport as well as participation rates. Given such a relationship, the seven dialogue differences uncovered in this study could jointly provide answers as to why gymnastics tends to be placed strongly within the feminine domain of cognitively-defined sports continuums.

Delving directly into the results, three significant findings were uncovered relating to attributions for why an athlete succeeded, each of which could have at least some ancillary explanation. For instance, the focus on male gymnasts' strength could be the result of sportscaster comparisons to women's gymnastics, which seemingly places less emphasis on strength, with the

increased focus on balance (such as the beam) and flexibility (on the uneven bars). The contrast of the women's events to more power-oriented men's events (such as pommel horse and rings) could result in heightened focus on the need for strength by male gymnasts to succeed. Likewise, composure seems to be more directly observable for male gymnasts compared to other major Olympic sports; it is easier to witness a lapse of composure in gymnastics than, for instance, a swimming final because of the increased focus on facial features during gymnastics competition. Finally, the tendency to de-emphasize experience within men's gymnastics in comparison to the other major sports could be the aggregate age of the people competing. While men's gymnastics usually does not feature teenagers to the degree of women's gymnastics, it does have a lower median age of participant compared to most other Summer Olympics sports (Rogers, 2012). Thus, age could become a surrogate for experience within overall commentary.

Regarding explanations for failure, the focus on a lack of concentration of men gymnasts could again be endemic within the sport itself as a gymnast falling off of the pommel horse is much more pronounced than a diver who may have lost concentration resulting in an under-rotated dive. The second finding regarding athletic ability is seemingly less explainable by sheer direct comparison between gymnastics and the other studied sports in this analysis. Future research should focus upon whether such a trend is hard-wired within the dialogue differences of commentary in multiple Olympic Games.

Finally, there were two areas in which the personality/physicality of male gymnasts was described significantly differently than of other men athletes. The first difference dealt with male gymnasts being more modest and introverted than their Olympic counterparts in other sports. Perhaps this is a result of the judge-based nature of gymnastics, where avoiding large displays of emotion is part and parcel of the judged performance, a problem that an



extrovert such as sprinter Usain Bolt need not be concerned about. It is also possible gymnasts' focus on composure could contribute to this finding. Regardless, the number of modesty/introversion comments is too small to make any broad based conclusions.

The second personality/physicality finding, indicating that emotions were more likely to be a topic of commentary for men gymnasts than for other Olympians is also quite interesting. Future research should explore this area more as one of the traits (stereo)typically applied to women is that they are more emotional than men, a finding recently echoed in Olympic media findings (see Angelini, MacArthur & Billings, 2012; Billings, Angelini, MacArthur, Bissell & Smith, 2014). If male gymnasts are perceived as being more emotional than other Olympians, this could play a role in the belief that men's gymnastics is a feminine sport.

#### Limitations & Directions for Future Research

This study is limited in that it solely utilized content analysis, a method that can describe what exists but cannot enact causal linkages for significant differences in content. Nonetheless, the current study yields interesting findings related to *how* male gymnasts are conveyed, which is a far more interesting postulate than *whether* (or not) they receive coverage. The preponderance of studies related to gender and sport focus on the exposure (or lack thereof) of women's athletics, generally finding that in the media, women athletes are "striving to catch up, but never can" (Poniatowski & Hardin, 2012, p. 636). The same could be said regarding men athletes competing in a sport with feminized connotations like gymnastics. Male gymnasts receive significant primetime exposure on U.S. based Olympic broadcasts and they demonstrate heightened strength, agility, and many other positive athletic traits. Yet, similar to their male figure skating cousins (see Angelini, MacArthur & Billings, 2013), it appears they are anomalous when

compared to other male Olympians in major sports.

Future research should focus specifically on gymnastics—seeking to identify the athletic qualities a champion must possess. Such results could then be compared to the commentary to determine whether the skill set required to succeed in gymnastics is significantly different than skill sets for other sports or whether the opposite is true: that gymnastics requires much of the same skill, power, and control of other Olympic sports, making differentiated differential dialogues even more peculiar.

#### CONCLUSION

Overall, this study revealed many key findings collectively revealing how men gymnasts are viewed and discussed in different manners than other male Olympians. While some differences could be directly attributable to the nature of what is valued and emphasized to be successful in gymnastics, others are not as easily explained. In the coming years, more research should be conducted relating gender perceptions of the sport within the realm of its mediation. It will also be important to study the rendering of male gymnasts beyond the realm of U.S.-based NBC to establish whether such narratives are uniquely American or seemingly universal. Additional studies related to on-air commentary could help solve the puzzle of a highly popular Olympic media offering that nonetheless features fewer male participants than reported in past decades.

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