Mass media can be a powerful influence on sport consumption (Coakley, 2007). Media tell viewers which sports are important and valuable in our society by providing coverage of some sports and not others. In addition, the characteristics of the television medium also help shape what viewers come to see as the reality of the sporting event (Duncan & Brummett, 1991). Spectators in attendance at sporting events have their own eyes and ears to interpret the action on the field, but fans who observe sporting events via television rely upon the producers, directors, and on-air personalities to interpret the events. Mediated sports fans make their own interpretations of the events, but these assessments are influenced by how the media have framed the events before delivering the product to the viewers.

Why should this matter to sport marketers? In the case of televised sports, the fans’ level of satisfaction with their choice may be directly influenced by the production value of the televised sporting event as well as to the degree that the commentators made the event interesting and exciting. For new, emerging, and non-gender conforming sports like women’s ice hockey, marketers can design marketing campaigns to draw fans to the stands. For potential fans, the marketers can paint glowing images of the sport to draw fans to women’s ice hockey games. However, if the mediated images of the sport are incongruent with the images the marketers are cultivating, then the media may be seen as an external threat to the marketing campaign. Marketers need to be aware of and understand the media portrayals of their sport as well as how media can help or hinder their efforts.

Analytical studies of televised women’s sports have focused on three main areas: (a) the quantity of media coverage, (b) the quality of media coverage, and (c) the description of athletes. Some researchers have found that commentators focused on male athletes’ physical build and abilities while female athletes had aesthetically-pleasing movements (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988). Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993) found that commentators used two different formulas for success on the basketball court. For men, they succeeded due to their talent, size, strength, hard work, intelligence, and risk taking. The women’s success formula was similar: talent, hard work, and intelligence, but they also benefited due to their emotions, luck, and togetherness. The formulas for failure differed quite a bit. Women failed because of their emotions, nerves, lack of aggression, and lack of confidence whereas men were often seen as failures due to the strength and intelligence of their opponents rather than something they possessed or lacked.

In their analysis of the television coverage of the 1994, 1996, and 1998 Olympic Games, Eastman and Billings (1999) found that most of the commentary focused on the athletes’ success or failure (72%) or their personalities and appearance (28%). As for physical descriptions, female athletes’ facial features were mentioned three times more often than men’s. Surprisingly there was no difference between the number of descriptions of male and female athletes’ body shape or size. Finally, the commentators put much emphasis on the family life of the female athletes but rarely of the male athletes.

Blinde, Greendorfer, and Shanker (1991) found that the commentators had differing expectations of the athleticism and physicality of male and female college basketball players. Male players were expected to be physical and athletic, but the commentators seemed shocked when female players exhibited moves that were strong and athletic. Expectations in terms of physical contact were also different for male and female players. The commentators did not focus too much attention on the physical contact of the male players because it is an accepted part of the game. However, they seemed to overemphasize even minor physical contact in the women’s games.

For new, emerging, and non-gender conforming sports, the Olympic Games may be the only television exposure that sports fans have to sports like women’s ice hockey. As such, one must wonder what lasting impressions these viewers have of the sport. Did they see the women as trailblazers in a typically masculine sport? Did they perceive the women’s players as being too manly and not very feminine? Did the images and commentary reinforce the image of female athletes as being lesbians? Did they think that the women’s form of the game was easier, less exciting, or less legitimate than the men’s game? Would the fans consider watching another women’s hockey game?

The purpose of this study is to analyze the NBC television broadcasts of ice hockey during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in order to determine how the network portrayed female and male hockey players. A mixed-methods approach to content analysis will be used to look at recurring themes in the descriptive, evaluative, and informational color commentary about the hockey players spoken by the on-air broadcasters. Holsti (1969) defined content analysis as “any technique for making inferences by
objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (p. 14). Traditionally, content analysis examines texts in a step-by-step method according to specific rules of analysis and places texts into categories. But how does one generate a classification scheme and categories for a particular set of media content?

In quantitative content analysis, the categories tend to be developed deductively from a review of literature and the nature of the research questions within a specific context (Holsti, 1969). Categorizing and quantifying data allows researchers to use quantitative methods to test hypotheses and determine statistically significant differences. In 2000, Mayring suggested an alternative way of analyzing texts through a blending of quantitative and qualitative procedures. He proposed that for qualitative content analysis, the categories should be developed through the use of inductive category development. This can be described as a grounded-theory model where the researcher begins with initial categories derived from background theories and the literature review. Then, after reviewing the first 10% of the texts, the researcher compares the initial categories with the content of the first 10% of the texts, and the list of potential categories is revised to correspond with the first portion of the texts. This continues piece by piece until all of the texts have been analyzed and adjustments have been made to the list of categories. Each category from this list is compared with others so that similar categories are combined and renamed so that the list of categories is kept to a workable number of categories. For each category on the final list, the researcher needs to provide a name, write an operational definition, and provide examples of texts that fit that category. Finally, the researcher categorizes and quantifies each text of the study into this new classification scheme in order to run quantitative statistical analyses, if called for by the research questions.

This current study will follow Mayring’s example of inductively creating a classification scheme and list of categories. The descriptive, informative, and evaluative comments spoken by the television commentators during a sample of both women’s and men’s Olympic hockey games will be transcribed, analyzed qualitatively, and used to create categories. Then each of the comments will be categorized and quantified. Chi-square analysis will be used to compare the types and numbers of categories used to describe female and male hockey players. This poster will describe the development of the classification scheme and categories through qualitative means in order to quantitatively compare the media’s description of female and male hockey players.