

Constructions of Sportswomen's Femininity in Interactional Contexts

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Research Psychology

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Abstract

This study was aimed at investigating how the constructed links between sportswomen and femininity are produced, reproduced, and resisted through interactional practices in everyday interactions. Previous literature on sportswomen and femininity has focused on the disadvantaged position of women in sport, and the tendency of sport to be constructed as a male domain which is incompatible with normative constructions of femininity. However little research has explored *how* these constructions are produced and contested during interaction. The data consisted of open discussions in internet chat rooms, recordings of media segments, including radio and television interviews, and commentary on videos on a social media site. Data was analysed using discourse and membership categorisation analysis techniques. The results demonstrate the recurrent surfacing of two categories of sportswomen; women who exhibit high levels of normative femininity and are therefore constructed as less athletic (more feminine-less athletic), and women who exhibit high levels of athleticism and are therefore constructed as less feminine (more athletic-less feminine). Knowledge of these categories is treated as common-sense and is taken-for-granted, and therefore serves as a foundation upon which to perform other interactional practices. The analysis explores how the production of humour, insult and undermining statements can rely on knowledge of sportswomen categories as an interactional resource, which in turn functions to reproduce this knowledge. The analysis further addresses four types of resistance of sportswomen categories, namely exception to the rule, restriction, resistance of use, and implicit resistance. Results reveal that regardless of whether the speaker's intention is to resist normative constructions, the production still draws attention to the fact that such a construction exists in the first place, and in doing so, functions to reproduce it. Since categories of sportswomen are reproduced even when they are resisted, 'successful' resistance of sportswomen categories becomes very difficult to conceptualise.

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