

reviews

Linda K. Fuller, Ed. *Sport, Rhetoric, and Gender: Historical Perspectives and Media Representations*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2006. 274 pp.

Linda Fuller's edited collection opens with the promise of charting new territory by bringing together work on sport, gender, linguistics, marketing, fandom, media and a host of other topics falling under the rubric of communication studies. The volume is indeed a compilation of diverse approaches whose major contribution is to analyze the field of sport through the lens of gender and language. While the introduction serves as a helpful reference for future research in the sub-field of sports and rhetoric due to its partial structure as a bibliography, the overall effect of the scholarship is an uneven mixture of complex and simplistic arguments and case studies. An immediate draw for those sometimes overwhelmed by linguistic acrobatics is the popular press feel of the text, an element further enhanced by the variety of empirical examples. The book is divided into six sections: Sport Language Per Se, Historical Perspectives, Print Media Representations, Broadcast Media Representations, Visual Media Representations and Classic Case Studies.

In Part I, Marlene Mawson coins the phrase 'sportswomanship', a term which refers to ethical behaviors ascribed to women in sports, but resists deeper engagements with patriarchal perspectives thus reaffirming what we likely already know, namely that sport is imbricated in masculinist epistemologies which continue to the present. A critical contribution of the first section, particularly reflected in Segrave, et. al., is how the language of sport acts as a metaphorical construction for the practice and ideology of gender privilege. Part II, devoted to historical perspectives, is one of the less compelling sections with attempts at critical readings diverted either by presentist language or unintentional buttressing of oppressive comparative frameworks. With regards to the latter, Sowell, writing about 'Annie Laurie' a.k.a. Winifred Black, on page 65, writes: "Black did not write sports full time, but when she did choose to write about athletics and their contests, she proved to be comparable to the best of men who entered this specialized field that was just developing when she began her career at the *San Francisco Examiner*".

Part III is a motley assortment of chapters that would be better served with an explanation of why particular texts are important vis-à-vis others. Foucault's theories are certainly useful if not integral to discourse analysis, yet Cooky's examination of dominant discourses surrounding girls/women and sports in Chapter 8 barely articulates the lines of connection between theory and analytics. Orchard, Halas and Stark's case study of Canadian aboriginal teen mothers and how their local cultural vocabularies are influenced by global discourses, is a nuanced rendering of the intersections between texts

and their readers. Hinting at the multi-layered process of identity formation, Orchard, et. al., contend that existing literature would benefit from showing:

“how ideas surrounding idealized female images in popular magazines like *Maxim* are not unequivocally ‘bad’ but, on the contrary, are sometimes good to think with. Importantly, ‘thinking’ here is relevant not only for the young mothers, but also for researchers/instructors who ran up against problems when trying to disrupt the ‘idealized body image’ to which the teenage mothers aspire, and the attendant sociosexual behaviors they display” (Orchard et al 133).

Parts IV and V continue to explicate the circulating themes presented in the Introduction using similar examples, albeit this time through broadcast and visual media. Chapters 12 and 13 critique the aerobic discourse on a Lifetime program and track the evolving discussion of women’s athletics through sports commentary, respectively. Britney Spears appears as a research object in Part V as a way to understand the impact of celebrities’ bodies on adolescents. The final section is devoted to classic case studies and is undoubtedly anachronistic. However, a charitable read would consider the reflections included as a window on the progression of how rhetoric has changed around sport and gender.

An expected inquiry from the perspective of the discipline of Geography is whether representations varied over space. What, if any, might be the regional manifestations of the discourses presented in the volume? Continuing in this vein, some of the evidence and methodological approaches might appear either unfamiliar or mildly suspicious to the critical geographer. Contentions that women basketball athletes were found to have higher moral values than their male counterparts, for example, (Fuller 25) could set off alarm bells to some audiences. Talk of deconstruction and the near mandatory iteration of the complexity of everything have become so pedestrian in the contemporary moment that the failure to question objective truths in many of the case studies is disorienting. Having noted these shortfalls, *Sport, Rhetoric, and Gender*, not only contributes to the emerging field of gender, language, and sport, it is arguably constitutive of the sub-field making the book an important pedagogical resource and reference for burgeoning scholarship.

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