

Is Gender a Learned Performance or a Performance Based on Previous Sporting Experiences?

A Comparative Case Study of Female University Football and Rugby athletes in the East Midlands

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Gender inequality still exists and participation rates within different sports which are adjudged to be masculine or feminine. Previous studies have outlined how gender in sport is contested. However, few studies have attempted to draw a comparison between two sports. Using a Bourdieusian framework, the principal aim of the present study was to explore how playing a masculine sport informs an agent's construction of femininity in University level football and rugby. An understanding of how participants negotiated the gendered sporting practices and gendering of their bodies was sought. Participants were recruited based on a purposive sampling method where in total, 30 athletes (15 footballers and 15 rugby players) completed a questionnaire. Of this initial sample, 5 participants from each group took part in an unstructured group interview. Both questionnaires and interviews were analysed using the three stage qualitative analysis procedure: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing; interviews were transcribed and coded using axial thematic analysis. Both rugby and football players faced similar gendered discriminatory experiences from schools, peers and in some cases strong sexist ideologies from teachers. However, due to the hyper masculinity associated within rugby, players faced considerable resistance from external sources - particularly from peers. The development of a specific embodied and gendered habitus within the field of rugby, in particular, and football was described. The findings increase current knowledge regarding female participation within the sports and offers insight into why

participation differs between the two sports thus highlight ways to engage more females in these sports.