

Women Watching Football: The Televisual Gaze and Female Spectatorship



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Abstract:

Television has changed the way the game of football is played, but it has also changed how spectators are affected by and affect football images. This project examines two televised football texts The AFC-NFC Pro Bowl and the NFL Scouting Combine in order to better understand the relationship between television spectators and the persistent display of the male football body. Ever since the wedding of television and football, the sport has become a spectacle and the male football body has been created as an object to be looked at and

analyzed, though ostensibly only by men. This project, then, also investigates the role of the female football spectator how she is constructed by the discourse that surrounds female football spectators as different from and often subordinate to the male football spectator. I argue, through an examination of several female-authored football texts, that women are systematically othered as football spectators, both by the institution of football itself and by these female-authored texts. Female football spectators occupy a different space from male football spectators (as is evidenced by the female-authored football texts): that of an outsider. The discourse that surrounds football consistently positions women as less knowledgeable, less interested viewers who come to view the game for ulterior motives. While this is in some ways detrimental, it allows women to watch football from a space that they themselves can define as pleasurable. In other words, women have been intentionally left out of football, both by the institution itself and by way of these female-authored texts. Therefore, the female position in football spectatorship is always uninvited this feeling of looking in on a private world gives the female spectator pleasure in that she imagines she is seeing something forbidden. In this case, the pleasure for female football spectators arises from the chance of participating in a way that threatens the culturally specified role of the football participant as male. Women are not allowed access to the football apparatus; therefore, their pleasure comes from being able to look at the already-objectified male body while being told they are not allowed to do so. Female football spectator's pleasure comes from viewing the spectacle of football while simultaneously occupying the position of the outsider.

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