

Episode 7: Masculine Femininities

Object First and An Athlete Second: A Short Philosophical Analysis of Feminist Aesthetics in Sport

Olivia Howe (Charles University)

Despite the search for gender equality within and beyond sport, women find themselves preyed upon by the media, being judged for their physiques and their heterosexual appeal. This essay will identify two broad aesthetic categorisations which perpetuate woman's 'lesser' status which can be attributed the operation of the 'male gaze' within women's sports and the media's coverage of it: the 'feminine athlete aesthetic' and the 'lesbian athlete aesthetic'. It is acknowledged that these categories are very broad and, in many circumstances, exclusionary of some sporting aesthetics which women may or may not choose to align with. However, it is argued that these two categories are reflective of the dominant socially mediated ways of 'reading' the bodies of women athletes in Western society and therefore require particular focus. This essay will suggest that the feminine athlete aesthetic corresponds to the 'desirable' and the lesbian athlete aesthetic as the 'undesirable' in a heteronormative society, and will argue that these categorisations put pressure on female athletes, current and aspiring, to conform to rigid labels dictated by social conventions and attitudes of heteronormativity. Overall, this essay will argue that aestheticization (and consequent fetishization) is immoral and that we should aim to appreciate the female body for its functionality.

Olivia Howe

Olivia Howe recently graduated from Cardiff University with an MPhil in philosophy, her thesis titled 'Overcoming the Femininity Hurdle: Is Sport the Answer?'. Previously, Olivia graduated from Cardiff University in 2018 with a BA (Hons) in Philosophy, and will be undertaking a doctoral scholarship at Charles University, Prague, in October 2020. In her spare time, Olivia can be found rowing, weightlifting, and cycling.

Masculine aesthetic, Feminine treatment: femininity, women and violence in Shane Meadows's *This is England*

Martha O'Brien (Cardiff University)

This is England (2006) takes an unflinching look at masculinity, violence, and the far-right nationalism that emerged out of the skinhead subculture in the early 1980s. The visual homogeneity of the skinhead group is what indicates their belonging and keeps them safe – and yet, the visual differences that remain are reminders that belonging is conditional. In the hypermasculine world of Shane Meadows's *England*, the only individual who can be totally, unconditionally accepted as a skinhead, is the white man. Alongside the overt and aggressive racism depicted in the film lies a covert and insidious misogyny. This paper looks at both *This is England* and the spin-off TV series, *This is England '86, '88 and '90*, to argue that adoption of a masculine aesthetic does little to protect the characters Lol, Kelly and Trev from the threats of sexual abuse and harassment that women are subject to. Furthermore, Meadows's exclusion of women from hypermasculine violent scenes paints them as playing a non-instrumental role and plays into stereotypes of women as non-violent individuals. Since women are excluded from scenes of violence, and any violence towards them takes place offscreen, violence towards women in *This is England* is covert, secret, out of sight. And yet, as much as the women in the film might strive to make their femininity similarly covert, they are unable to do so, treated differently because of their visual difference. These issues are undermined and further interrogated, in Meadows's spin-off TV series from *This is England*, where the issues of sexual assault against women come to the fore – though violence committed by women remains defensive, rather than offensive. In summation, while women in *This is England* do not appear feminine, they remain treated as such – suggesting that femininity is more than a descriptive, aesthetic term.

Martha O'Brien

I'm Martha, a first year PhD candidate at Cardiff University, researching spectrality in modern Welsh Writing in English, funded by SWW-DTP2. I am interested in the ways the past communicates with and shapes our present politics and social dynamics. As well as anglophone Welsh writing, my research interests extend to modern British political theatre and film. I am also a founder and co-editor of Welsh arts magazine, *nawr*.