
An Analysis of Humour Pertaining to Sportswomen in Canadian Newspapers between 1910 and 1920

By
Marian Pitters-Caswell
Windsor, Ontario

Humour has been conceptualized as a means of communication, and as a social process that performs a useful social function. Although there is some disagreement as to the nature of this function, sociologists do concur that laughter is highly susceptible to conditioning and thus capable of responding to, and in its own turn facilitating, social change. Humour is “riddled through and through with social significance, so that practically every aspect of humour is socially determined and conditioned”.

The purpose of the paper was to study the function of humour pertaining to sportswomen as it was expressed in Canadian Newspapers between 1910 and 1920. An analysis of humour was carried out, utilizing Martineau’s model concerning the social function of humour. It was found that in the vast majority of cases, humour was judged as disparaging the women athletes.

Perhaps the major outcome of the study is that humour can be viewed as a viable tool for historians in their research.