



Athletes, Sexual Assault, and "Trials by Media": Narrative Immunity (Routledge Research in Sport, Culture and Society)

Deb Waterhouse-Watson

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Since footballer sexual assault became top news in 2004, six years after the first case was reported, much has been written in the news media about individual cases, footballers and women who have sex with them. Deb Waterhouse-Watson reveals how media representations of recent sexual assault cases involving Australian footballers amount to "trials by media", trials that result in acquittal. The stories told about footballers and women in the news media evoke stereotypes such as the "gold digger", "woman scorned" and the "predatory woman", which cast doubt on the alleged victims' claims and suggest that they are lying. Waterhouse-Watson calls this a "narrative immunity" for footballers against allegations of sexual assault.

This book details how popular conceptions of masculinity and femininity inform the way footballers' bodies, team bonding, women, sex and alcohol are portrayed in the media, and connects stories relating to the cases with sports reporting generally. Uncovering similar patterns of narrative, grammar and discourse across these distinct yet related fields, Waterhouse-Watson shows how these discourses are naturalised, with reports on the cases intertwining with broader discourses of football reporting to provide immunity. Despite the prevalence of stories that discredit the alleged victims, Waterhouse-Watson also examines attempts to counter these pervasive rape myths, articulating successful strategies and elucidating the limitations built into journalistic practices, and language itself.

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