

Discursive construction of sexual (non-)consent in an online community: a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis

A key evidential aspect of legal proceedings on many potential sexual offences is whether there was 'sexual consent'. However, as Haworth (2017) indicates, verbal accounts of the disputed events often represent the only evidence, suggesting that subjective understandings of 'consent' can thoroughly influence the outcome of a legal procedure. In the context of heterosexual relationships, debates around whether 'consent' constitutes the appropriate threshold for distinguishing between legal and illegal sexual relations have been gaining attention in the last few years, as consent narratives "can and are being used by some men to justify and obscure sexual violence" (Jeffrey, 2022:4) against women. One context whereby such narratives gain relevance is that of the Pick-up Artist community (PUA). As a community, their main goal is to secure as many heterosexual relationships as possible, unifying and ritualising men's sexual practices with women. A key aspect of their 'seduction strategies' consists of 'overcoming last minute resistance' (Wright, 2020), indicating a clash between the ultimate PUA aim of securing sex with women *no matter what* and modern understandings of consent.

By collecting online forum posts from a PUA community, this study aims to provide an understanding of how discursively constructed gendered beliefs or presuppositions about sexual consent normalise and legitimise forms of sexual violence or oppression against women (Lazar, 2014). This is done by applying a corpus-assisted approach to critical discourse analysis. The paper shows how community members discursively (re)produce and perpetuate rape myths to justify their views through a collocation analysis of the linguistic construction 'no resistance' as consent.

References:

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