

MARTHE HEIDEMANN AND ILSE HARTMANN-TEWS

PRETTY POWERFUL? SELF- REPRESENTATIONS OF TOP GERMAN, BRITISH AND RUSSIAN FEMALE OLYMPIC BOXERS ON INSTAGRAM

ABSTRACT

For a long time, boxing clubs were exclusively male spaces, but this has changed in recent decades; women have taken up the sport and begun to establish themselves within its structures. However, there is a tension between their embodiment as boxers and the traditional embodiment of women. While researchers have long noted a 'female apologetic'—that is, athletes feeling the need to compensate for their athleticism by emphasising their femininity—recent research shows that new notions of femininity are emerging that combine strength and elements of traditional femininity. Informed by Bartky's theory, a visual narrative inquiry is conducted to examine Instagram accounts of members of the German, British and Russian national Olympic boxing teams. Five narratives are identified that are central for all three countries but also reveal national differences. The study shows that boxers have agency in terms of their self-representations and their conceptions of alternative femininities.

CONTRIBUTORS

Marthe Heidemann is a PhD student at the Institute of Sociology and Gender Studies at the German Sport University Cologne. Her research explores online and offline realities of Women's Olympic Boxing in Germany, Russia and Great Britain.

Prof. Dr. Ilse Hartmann-Tews is Professor of Sociology and Sport Sociology and was Head of the Institute of Sociology and Gender Studies at the German Sport University Cologne. Her areas of research include the social construction of gender in social systems (e.g. sport, media, science) and intersectional influences of gender, age(ing) and social stratification on somatic cultures.

KEYWORDS

Olympic boxing, women in boxing, social media, self-representation, gender stereotypes, femininity.

Accepted for publication on 15 November 2024



INTRODUCTION

Sport was originally a completely male sphere; for a long time, women were excluded from many sports. This was particularly true of boxing, which was seen as a prototypical 'men's sport' (Braumüller et al., 2023; Kleindienst-Cachay & Heckemeyer, 2008). Only in the 1990s were women's competitions first accepted by boxing associations (Smith, 2014). Further, it was not until 2012 in London that women were finally allowed to compete in boxing at the Olympics. However, the inclusion of women in boxing remains a challenge for both women and the male-dominated sphere of boxing.

With regard to the media representation of female athletes in general and boxing women in particular, studies have identified that they used to be portrayed as being *either* beautiful *or* powerful (Bruce, 2013; Hartmann-Tews, 2003; Pfister, 2011; Rulofs & Hartmann-Tews, 2017); as Bruce (2016) puts it: 'the traditional media approached women's sport ambivalently within an either/or discourse of pretty or powerful that constructed femininity and athleticism as incompatible' (p. 361). However, in the last decade, a shift away from this dichotomy has been observed. Global mediatisation plays an important role here: social media, such as Instagram, have led to the emergence of new online spaces where female athletes can represent themselves and interact with fans and followers (Bruce, 2016). Bruce (2016) states that, as a consequence of this new agency of sportswomen, the earlier dichotomy of femininity and athleticism as opposing concepts has transformed into a 'discourse of pretty *and* powerful [that] values both' (p. 369).

Online spaces have become a normal and omnipresent part of young women's everyday lives. However, analyses of female athletes' self-representations on social media have so far often been devoted to aspects of self-marketing (e.g. Geurin-Eagleman & Burch, 2016; Thorpe et al., 2017). This paper focuses on the online self-representations of female Olympic boxers from three national teams, understanding them as part of and leading a growing community of female boxers. It aims to explore how female athletes negotiate their role in a male-dominated sport.

WOMEN IN BOXING: DISCOURSES AND FEMININITIES

Women's boxing is still not fully established. Although institutionally integrated, a process of negotiation is still ongoing to determine the place and meaning of women's boxing and female boxers. This process, to some extent, takes place on social media. It is a part of boxing itself being in the transformative processes of disembedding (Giddens, 1991): boxing is no longer clearly organised by class, ethnicity, neighbourhood, age or gender (Heiskanen, 2012; Trimbur, 2013; Woodward, 2014a).

Especially gender aspects are shifting: As shown in interview studies with female competitive boxers (Hartmann, 2013; Kleindienst-Cachay & Kunzendorf, 2003) and several ethnographies on the everyday experiences of women in the

boxing gym (e.g. Carlsson, 2017; Paradis, 2012), female boxers experience a high level of ambivalence despite institutional inclusion. The 2012 Summer Olympic Games in London heralded not only a significant structural change for women's Olympic boxing but also a shift in media representation, showing women as fighters (Godoy-Pressland, 2015; Jennings & Cabrera Velázquez, 2015; Woodward, 2014b). In subsequent years, the frequency and type of portrayal—increasingly as active participants—within the International Amateur Boxing Association (AIBA) changed (Schneider, 2024). Nonetheless, as shown in the findings of an analysis of IOC documents (Tjønndal, 2019), as well as interview studies with British and Canadian top female boxers (Benitez Silva, 2021; McGannon et al., 2018; Oftadeh-Moghadam et al., 2020) or Norwegian athletes and coaches (Tjønndal, 2024), women's Olympic boxing remains structurally and culturally negotiated to this day.

That many female athletes who challenge gender stereotypes in a practical sense feel compelled to compensate for their athleticism by demonstratively acting in stereotypically feminine ways has been termed the 'female apogetic' and has played a role in research for decades (Felshin, 1974). However, Carlsson (2017), along with Channon and Phipps (2017), point to 'alternative femininities' in combat sports, in which positive feminine and combative self-images are combined and are no longer perceived as a contradiction. This notion corresponds to Bruce's (2016) ideas on agency in the discursive combination of beauty and strength.

New discourses that combine attractive femininity with 'badassness' can be observed in the highly commercialised and mediatised professional sports (MMA or professional boxing) on the one hand (Jennings, 2015; McClearen, 2018) and as a trend in the recreational sphere on the other (Rana, 2022). They are not without problems. Although women recently are becoming successful in the martial arts business, their success, social acceptance and visibility still depend on them being 'presentable' to the public alongside their athleticism, which Jennings (2015) has captured as 'the centrefold imperative' (p. 80). The global framework within which trends like this develop is characterised by Toffoletti et al. (2018) as post-feminist and neoliberal discourses that emphasise self-optimisation, individual empowerment, agency, and choice. In the present context, it puts the responsibility for representation on the individual athletes while rendering the defining structures within which they are expressed invisible (Channon et al., 2018; Toffoletti, 2016; Toffoletti et al., 2018).

Boxing as a combat sport with traditionally male connotations (Braumüller et al., 2023) can be considered predestined for a new and popular discourse of 'tough femininity' (Rana, 2022, p. 77). At the same time, female boxers are still societally exposed to massive doubts regarding their femininity because they practice the sport. With West and Zimmerman (1987), we understand femininity as a construct that emerges in society through interactions; that is, it is something that girls and women learn through social practice. Thus, femininity is not fulfilled individually and arbitrarily but

emerges discursively and is actively manifested in a performative sense by 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Critical theorists such as Butler (1990), Bartky (1990) and Connell (1987) highlight the importance of the body in this context of the social construction of gender. Butler conceptualises gender as a performative category: 'gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*' (Butler, 2016, p. 353). The embodiment of femininity, which is key for socialisation as a woman and whose components converge on an embodiment as the 'weaker sex', leads to a subordination of women (Bartky, 1990; Connell, 1987). Following and complementing Foucault and his concept of 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1979, p. 138), Bartky examines 'disciplinary practices that produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine'. According to her, women perform traditional femininity through three categories of embodied practices: a) practices that determine the configuration of the body; b) postures, gestures and movements; and c) practices that ornament the surface of the body (Bartky, 1990, p. 65).

Boxing, on the other hand, is often still seen as a prototypically male domain. Although the sport has long since begun to diversify, the perception of boxing continues to be served by narratives of masculinity, even by boxers themselves (Matthews, 2015; Woodward, 2007). As Matthews (2015) describes, the boxing gym and the ideas of masculinity lived out there can function as a 'male preserve' (p. 317). Produced through narratives and bodily performances, it might serve as a symbolic space of powerful manhood within increasingly dissolving gender-specific spaces of late modernity (Matthews, 2015; Woodward, 2007).

In the case of boxing, the embodiment of femininity comes into conflict with the embodiment of being a boxer. In the practice of boxing, the athletes' muscles, posture, ability to react and so on develop accordingly, and they *become* boxers (Wacquant, 2004). Simultaneously, they also show their boxing body to the outside world. Alkemeyer (2004) expresses this duality on a more general, theoretical level: embodiment can be understood as the incorporation and representation of the incorporated at the same time (p. 47). Through their social practice female boxers thus challenge both the traditional image of boxing and traditional gender stereotypes: 'Because the feminine body is linked with specific habits and definitions, the body can become a site of resistance and agency when it defies the normative practices of a feminine gendered body' (Jennings, 2015, p. 77).

'Doing gender' and the embodiment of femininity are embedded in the respective societal culture and will probably vary in different national contexts. To investigate this notion, for the present study, three sample countries were selected because of their cultural, political and socio-economic diversity, as well as the different roles and statuses of Olympic boxing in each country¹.

In Germany, women make up around 40% of the participants of organized sports (DOSB, 2024, p. 4), but are still largely underrepresented as coaches (Sinning & Hofmann, 2017) and in leadership positions (Hartmann-Tews, 2019). The recognition of women's sports in terms of visibility and financial opportunities compared to men's sport is lagging, which also is a topic of public discussion. Boxing as a sport is rather marginal in Germany. In terms of membership, it ranks 29th among Olympic sports, with only around 81,000 members, one fifth of which are female (DOSB, 2024, p. 14). In general, people in Germany are not well versed in the sport and are more familiar with professional boxing than they are with Olympic boxing. Athletes rarely enter professional boxing after their careers in Olympic boxing.

Similar to the German case, Sport England has identified a general gender gap in sport participation (Sport England, 2024) and women are still lagging behind in leadership positions, too (Piggott et al., 2019). However, in Great Britain, boxing is much more popular than in Germany. In England alone, there are 20,000 registered boxers who compete, as well as 125,000 recreational boxers. Around 9% of them are female (Ford, 2021). Successful Olympic boxers often turn professional. In comparison to other countries, English boxing clubs can look back on a very long historical tradition and are also often valued for their role in community work.

In Russian state capitalism (Ritter & Fruchtmann, 2021), sport is generally held in high regard and traditionally sports participation is promoted for both men and women; however, in the population as a whole, women are less active in sport than men (WCIOM, 2023). When it comes to official positions, women are underrepresented (Lagutina & Gudozhnikova, 2020). Boxing is very popular, but it is predominantly organised within state structures. In 2021, the then head of the Russian Boxing Federation claimed that over 700,000 Russians practiced boxing (TASS, 2021). The members of the national squad, who must prove themselves annually at the highly competitive Russian championship, receive funding and are often active in elite sport for many years. It is very common to pursue higher education while continuing an athletic career. The Russian Boxing Federation hosts both Olympic and professional boxing.

Focussing on a performative and embodied dimension of gender as discussed above, we adopt a feminist constructivist perspective to examine the following research questions:

- RQ 1 How do German, British and Russian top female Olympic boxers present themselves on Instagram?
- RQ 2 What similarities and differences can be found in the representations of the boxers from different countries, and how are they positioned in their respective national contexts?
- RQ 3 How can these representations be located in the discursive field of tension between 'pretty and powerful'?

1 No comparable data exist for all three countries, but the respective statuses of boxing as well as sports and gender are briefly characterised below.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodological approach and sample

As part of a research project based on an online ethnographic approach (Postill & Pink, 2012), the present study is embedded in long-term online observation from November 2017 to February 2022. The public Instagram profiles of sportswomen from three national elite boxing teams, including both time-limited visible Instagram Stories and regular posts were consistently observed. The approach of narrative inquiry assumes that the ‘individual tales’ that athletes tell in their Instagram accounts are ‘cultural sites of meaning’ (McGannon et al., 2022, p. 94). They refer to sociocultural narratives or discourses they are familiar with (Marshall et al., 2020b, p. 229). A visual narrative inquiry was conducted in line with Marshall et al. (2020b), who describe how different types of components, even those from several posts, jointly construct narratives (p. 232).

In the first step, around 40 accounts were observed and contextual knowledge was acquired, exploring topics, types of posts and practices. For the second step, an in-depth analysis, 15 accounts were selected, with five from each country; all the accounts represented a cohort of female boxers training in the Olympic cycle leading up to the 2020/21 Olympic Games. In addition to the account holders being part of the respective national team when the material was collected, and thus, being born between the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s, further selection criteria for the accounts were that they were used regularly and were openly accessible. The latter may be seen as limiting, but in the present context, we were explicitly interested in accessible accounts that help shape the public discourse on boxing women. Instagram is considered a ‘public by default’ platform and therefore particularly suitable for our interests (Boyd, 2014).

The boxers whose accounts were selected represented a wide range of weight categories within each country (the total sample covered 48–75 kg). It was also possible to cover a variety of demographic aspects, including social, educational and marital status. This paper considers accounts with different types of reach and degrees of professionalisation. While seven of the accounts had more than 10,000 followers, with one even having around 50,000, the other eight had fewer than 3,000 followers, and some were in the three-digit follower range.

The data relevant for the present analysis were collected in December 2020 by taking screenshots of the 15 complete accounts, beginning from the newest posts and working back to their respective starts, between 2013 and 2019. The data were imported into ATLAS.ti, which served as a systematic database. Both manual collection and longtime observation serve as ‘strategies to thicken trace data’—that is, they help build a richer ‘contextualization, description, and signification’ (Latzko-Toth et al., 2017, p. 203) aimed at achieving detailed and dense descriptions of cultural practices (Geertz, 1973). The accounts were thoroughly coded post by post using an inductive approach (Strübing, 2018). To be able to systematically grasp apparent

performance practices regarding the research questions, we carefully took into account Bartky’s (1990) considerations on disciplinary practices—that is, gestures and postures or styling behaviour (p. 65). The codes reached relative saturation when the same themes occurred repeatedly and no additional phenomena were identified. At that point, the material was sifted through, and only new phenomena were coded (Strübing, 2018, p. 43). Altogether 1,785 posts were coded (595 German, 487 British, 703 Russian). Through a circular process, the coding system was revised and developed. Finally, a whole series of narrative elements could be identified; these elements were found to form five larger narratives that were central to the self-representations of the boxers.

The primary aim was to carry out a thorough exploration and generate a thick description of the material based on the four years of observation and engagement (including field notes, circular coding process, memos, etc.). To allow us to estimate the relative weight of individual phenomena and to compare the three countries, a third step was added in which a sub-sample was fully coded with regard to central codes and categories. These were combined into code groups in ATLAS.ti, with the groups representing the five narratives. The 45 most recent posts (time frame 2018–2020) of the 15 accounts (five boxers in three countries each) were considered, resulting in an overall sample of 675 posts (225 posts per country).

Positionality and ethics

Ethnographic approaches emphasise the subjective contribution of the researcher to the empirical process (Strübing et al., 2018). Over the past few years, the first author gained boxing experience in various clubs and gyms in Germany, trained intensely, and recently had her first four bouts. As a female boxer, she also obtained personal experience of people’s reactions and behaviours inside and outside the gym. Following Wacquant’s (2015) concept of enactive ethnography, for an authentic approach, it is important to physically experience boxing. Even in this project, which focuses on online data, boxing-specific experiential knowledge is helpful to understand and classify posted content, especially that which alludes to the shared knowledge of a boxing community or the types of conflicts women experience. However, the author started boxing late and is therefore not involved in association and competition structures, which might otherwise have diluted a critical distance from the German athletes’ contexts. During the research project, the author completed several weeks of fieldwork in Russia and England, where she was able to train and meet many athletes. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the authors’ university (approval no. 102/2020) and it reflects the Association of Internet Researchers’ considerations on ethics in internet research (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Only publicly accessible accounts were included (Hine, 2015, p. 163). Athletes whose posts serve as examples in the figures have given their explicit consent to the publication.

FINDINGS

In the analysis, five narratives were identified that are central to the boxers' online self-representations and answer the first research question: how do German, British and Russian top female Olympic boxers present themselves on Instagram? These narratives are: Being a boxer; Showing strength; Showing personality; Performing traditional femininity; and Negotiating gender stereotypes. These narratives and the elements comprising them are described in detail below.

Being a boxer

The *being a boxer* narrative deals with sports-related content. The athletes keep their followers updated on recent events in their everyday lives, including training, camps and competitions. In German and Russian training posts, the athletes are mostly represented as actively involved in a physical activity; in contrast, British posts tend to include photos taken during breaks or after training. Active representations may include snapshots someone else took during a sparring session, capturing work on the pads (see Figure 1), work with the punching bag or strength training. A common setup is a shot of the athlete in the boxing gym or on a running track, just having finished a training session. Some of these pictures reveal a conscious arrangement; others show sweat and exhaustion and seem to be taken more spontaneously. The athletes clearly refrain from femininity performance practices such as body-accentuating poses or the use of make-up in the moments they present here.



Figure 1: Sample post on Instagram: Active involvement in physical activity.

In all the cases in which boxers post pictures from professional photo shoots, German and British sportswomen mainly represent themselves as athletes, whereas Russians seem to have other preferences, as discussed below. Further, this narrative is supported by stories of a boxing community's shared knowledge.

A boxer is always part of a team and needs their teammates to develop. Photos with smiling teammates after a training session or that explicitly relate to good team spirit by using hashtags, such as #strongertogether, or similar captions can be understood as an element that is strongly linked to the boxing community:

We support each other not because we are on the same team. We support each other, and that's why we are a team ✓
P.S. It's like a family, only the fights are more technical 🤔🤔🤔 (Lyubov, Russia, 09/10/2020)²

Symbolic elements that refer to shared experiences, and thus, tap into stories with which boxers can identify include post-sparring pictures. Several times, international sparring partners, who meet as part of a training camp or at a tournament, share pictures and thank each other in the captions (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Sample post on Instagram: Boxers after sparring, performing the 'boxers' fist'.

Taking photos together at the ring's edge after training is another observable common element in the boxing community, often with the 'boxers' fist': a boxer forms a fist and demonstrates it by bending her arm. It is a pose that boxers regularly use in group or pair photos, and it is either adopted automatically or proposed by one of the participants. Every now and then, the necessities of a boxer's life are mentioned, such as the renunciation of social life or the tribulations of making weight:

If I had a super power, I would probably just become invisible and eat whatever I want. 🤪 (Olga, Russia, 21/07/2020)

Thus, boxers communicate the *being a boxer* narrative not only by showing their actual involvement in physical activity but also by calling on shared experiences and knowledge of the boxing community that they, and probably many of their followers, belong to.

² All the accounts were assigned pseudonyms for anonymisation. Quotes in this article that were originally in German or Russian have been translated into English by the researchers.

Showing strength

Just as the boxers' fist already radiates strength, the boxers might adopt poses that convey body-related self-confidence, such as flexing their biceps or showing off their abs. In addition to images that emphasise muscular body parts through certain symbolic poses, other pictures depict muscles more subtly, such as by wearing short clothing. As the athletes consciously select such images, these posts must also be interpreted as showing off their muscles, and thus, their physical strength. Looking at the photo sessions of British boxers, a tendency to present themselves in an aggressive way can be noticed. Colours tend to be quite dark, and a dominant body language is used: the gaze is gloomy, the head raised; the arms may be defiantly folded in front of the chest (see Figure 3). Such space-consuming poses are not assigned to the embodiment of a traditional femininity performance, as Bartky (1990, p. 68) describes it, but correspond to their counterpart, the practices of masculinity, as do the steady gaze and lack of a smile.



Figure 3: Sample post on Instagram: Photo shoot with dominant body language.

The narrative *showing strength* is conveyed particularly clearly through the theme of mental strength. Not surprisingly, motivation is a key issue among competitive athletes. In several posts, personal motivation is explained by giving reasons for pursuing a boxing career (e.g. for one's children, for the love of the sport or to represent one's country). However, posts can also have a self-motivating character, directed at the boxer herself and at like-minded people. One form of this phenomenon is motivational quotes, which signal a willingness to perform. They are usually combined with a photo that shows the athlete on her own. These are concise motivational sayings that directly target training performance, willpower or perseverance. Even more than the quotes Germans use, the British ones seem to focus on the boxers pushing themselves, distinguishing themselves from others and being—or even deserving to be—successful, as indicated in the following quotation:

Ambition is my drug and success is the only cure..!! 🍷🏆 (Haley, Great Britain, 28/02/20)

This determination is also reflected in the representation of achievements, which is especially popular among British sportswomen. Victories in competitions are shown, as are awards, titles won and nominations for squads or tournaments. Overall, the *showing strength* narrative conveys both physical strength, mostly by presenting muscles, and mental strength as a form of self-motivation to perform.

Showing personality

While some boxers focus primarily on presenting themselves as athletes, others also dedicate space to other facets of their personalities. In addition to the performance-oriented motivational already discussed, further reflective captions deal with self-care and personal development. Writing extensive captions and framing one's posts in this way are clear characteristics of Russian boxers' Instagram profiles. General life wisdom is sometimes quoted, but the athletes mostly write longer reflections, including self-formulated ideas or quotes from novelists, poets or psychologists:

They say a person can be judged by their environment, and I'm glad I'm always surrounded by nice people 🙏 Of course, there have been cases of betrayal or deceit, but as time and experience have shown it was impossible otherwise, I wanted to be deceived and betrayed, and at that time I was surrounded by such people ... so before you blame people around you, look at yourself and what kind of person you are 😊 (Margarita, Russia, 16/06/2020)

On every Russian account studied, at least a few such posts can be found, and there are often many of them. Although they differ in style and manner, they commonly address engaging with oneself and with personal values and characteristics, as well as following a path that brings a fulfilling life. This is shown in the following example, which quotes the Soviet writer Maxim Gorky:

The meaning of life is in human perfection.
- Maxim Gorky
#livehereandnow (Inna, Russia, 15/11/2020)

The sportswomen often contemplate on the human condition in general. Not only do they cite numerous authors of Russian and world literature, but they also list cultural and intellectual fields of interest among their hobbies. They present themselves as visiting museums, playing instruments and having an interest in psychology or writing poetry. Books even become part of posed photos on several occasions, and it can be understood from the accounts that completing a university degree is a practical part of every Russian boxer's life. Some Russian and some German athletes integrate religious practices into their everyday routines or draw motivation for their sport from their faith, as represented by using psalms as motivational. A German athlete does this in the following example:

Be brave and determined! 🍷 Joshua 1:9 [...] (Katharina, Germany, 01/09/2020)

British sportswomen tend to mention family; in addition, their hometowns seem to play an important role. Support and fandom are thought of locally (rather than just nationally). The athlete is seen as 'one of us', and her achievements make the city proud; on her return, she will be duly welcomed and celebrated with a medal. Accordingly, the athletes maintain contact with and thank their fans and local sponsors, as one British boxer illustrates:

Coming back home with a silver medal! [...] Cannot thank everyone in [city] and England for the support it's been an incredible experience.
#[city] #TeamEngland #CommonwealthGames #GC2018 #Boxing #TeamAndCountry (Gwendolyn, Great Britain, 04/04/2018)

German athletes stand out by highlighting social issues. Posts might raise awareness of mental health or the lack of reality depicted in images on Instagram. Another topic is gender equality in sport, which is addressed concerning the following aspects: a) sexual abuse, where several athletes have raised awareness by using the hashtag #coachdonttouchme; b) structural discrimination, such as limited weight classes in the Olympic Games; and c) prejudices that boxing women are confronted with. A critical post from a German athlete illustrates the third aspect:

Boxing is NOT for women!!! ❌ That's why you are single. ❌ You are a good fighter—for a girl. ❌ Do you like it to get hit? ❌ Things we don't want to hear in 2020, but which are still part of the life of women in sports. (Miriam, Germany, 27/07/2020)

Other posts propagate commitment to sport-connected initiatives like getting actively involved in athletes' representation. A particular commitment that British boxers make is one of role modelling for children. Thus, the boxers communicate the *showing personality* narrative, on the one hand, by using partly extensive self-reflexive captions, and on the other, by revealing their personal interests and political views.

Performing traditional femininity

Several practices that correspond to the embodiment of femininity, such as postures and poses, could be identified in the posts. To varying degrees, their range bears the characteristics that Bartky (1990) highlights as crucial: 'Feminine movement, gesture, and posture must exhibit not only constriction, but grace as well, and a certain eroticism restrained by modesty: all three' (p. 68). The poses observed aim to present the body attractively, with a focus on certain body parts. Women straighten up, put their shoulders back and push their chests forward. Typically, when seated, the legs are crossed in a way that makes them appear long; when standing, the tip of the foot is positioned forward and the camera pointed up from below to achieve this effect (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: Sample post on Instagram: Camera angle and pose subtly emphasise the legs.

Photos taken diagonally from behind draw the viewer's gaze towards the buttocks. One hand might touch the chin softly or stroke the hair. A photo motif that is repeated a few times is kneeling in the surf on a beach.

In most cases, the postures and gestures do not look overtly erotic, but they do meet the ideal of having a certain grace. Russian athletes, in particular, use them routinely and frequently. The poses described aim to be attractive, but may convey some self-restriction: crossed legs modestly limit the space a woman is claiming, as do hands clasped together in front of the body; clasped hands also sometimes give the impression of insecurity (Bartky, 1990, p. 68). Leaning or standing on one foot does not present a firm stance; kneeling means that the viewer is not met at eye level. This might result in interesting combinations, such as in a post in which a Russian boxer in short beachwear, with one hand resting on a palm tree and the other stroking her long hair, looks into the distance. She looks away from the camera with an air of mystery, displaying a traditional feminine performance. At the same time, she shows her contoured abs and presents her well-defined arm muscles and lats—all part of her embodiment of the sport.

In photo sessions, in addition to these poses, the category of practices which Bartky describes as the ornamentation of the surface of the body plays the biggest role (1990, p. 65). Quite a few of the young women obviously like professional photo sessions or seek to raise the quality of their Instagram content in this way. Among Russian athletes, it is popular to choose a representation as an attractive, feminine woman in this context, as posts from various women and several photo sessions show. However, two German athletes also engage in this type of photo session. The spectrum ranges from shoots with natural make-up, pretty clothes and beautiful landscapes or casual setups in the city (both Germans and Russians) to fashion shoots with cool facial expressions, extravagant outfits and hairstyles or a seductive or

sexy appearance (only Russians). In the latter cases, the normative ideal of modesty that Bartky mentions is not always met. Russian posts have a high level of professionalism (they often even mention the photographer, the make-up artist and hairstylist). But 'pretty' photos can also be found with German or British accounts. However, these cases will rather be in the context of athletes going out, for example to sports galas, where elements of ornamentation will be prominent.

The *performing traditional femininity* narrative is characterised essentially by certain poses and styling. In some accounts, it is deliberately and strongly developed and has a high, independent status; in others, it occurs subordinately and is only displayed as usual social behaviours on suitable occasions.

Negotiating gender stereotypes

The final narrative relates to how a societal female stereotype is not only performed but also negotiated at the meta level. Here, the boxers explicitly make societal expectations regarding men and women a topic. The various forms of an active negotiation of gender stereotypes clearly differ between the countries. British posts address being a woman by highlighting life concepts of the modern successful woman via their families, or as the following quote illustrates, a #boxingmum (who is responsible for the majority of British posts relating to this narrative) balancing between her career as a boxer and being a mother:

Some men may struggle with our #familysetup but my partner is fully committed to everything which makes everything up here so much more easier 😊 (Rebecca, Great Britain, 26/08/2020)

The critical attitude Germans seem to take towards traditional stereotypes may be pursued humorously or snarkily. One German boxer repeatedly posts photos of herself performing activities that classically have a male connotation, such as using a drill, and adds hashtags such as #independentwoman. Another shares her snappy reactions to the gender-based doubts she is confronted with. For Russian boxers, the line they ultimately pursue is to show that being a 'normal' feminine girl and being a successful boxer are not mutually exclusive. For them, societal expectations, such as getting married, seem to be quite present. In humorous captions, they might at times reproduce stereotypes, but they also cheekily and confidently challenge them, as one Russian boxer does in the following quotation:

We are not weird at all. It's just that your society has a narrow framework of 'normality'. (Lyubov, Russia, 04/09/2015)

On Russian accounts, femininity is targeted explicitly as a concept to be discussed. Several experimental photo sessions process a perceived contradiction between femininity and sport by using symbols of both together: a boxer poses in the ring with loose hair, a silk top and make-up, but she has boxing bandages on her hands. Another combines a short glittery dress with boxing gloves (see Figure 5).

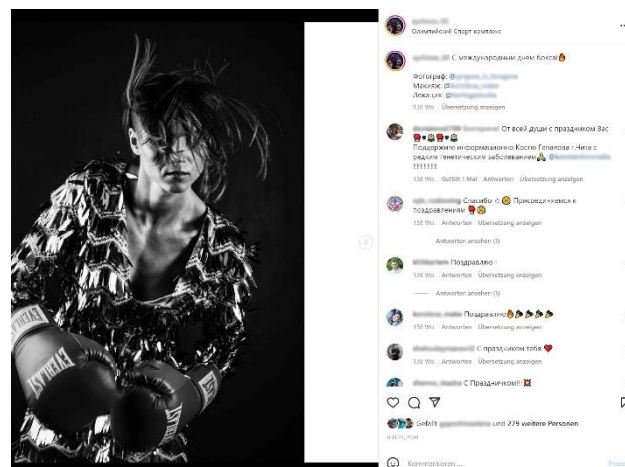


Figure 5: Sample post on Instagram: Experimental photo session.

In later photo sessions, the same boxer plays with androgynous and contrasting feminine-elegant looks, while earlier ones stage her in a girly or cool rocker manner. This boxer, who reveals different sides of herself in a seemingly confident way, addresses self-assurance about femininity in some captions, such as when she thanks a photographer:

[...] Thank you so much 🦋 🌸 🥰 ❤️ thank you for your skill 🥰 you remind me that I am feminine and beautiful 😊 😊 [...] (Anastasiya, Russia, 24/12/2017)

Focusing on the negotiation of boxing and femininity, in which we were interested in the present research, we can summarise that being a woman and boxing appear to be quite unconnected in the British accounts. The German accounts negotiate gender stereotypes in a way that is predominantly directed outwards. It is assumed that men and women are equal and that everyone can be whomever they want to be; this includes being a boxer. While the Germans reject interference and consider it their own business, the Russians seem to be more open to traditional understandings and convey that the sport is compatible with expectations to 'be feminine' placed on women. Consequently, they tend to grapple with the extent to which they meet societal expectations. An inner, subjective negotiation can be observed among Russians. This may include asking themselves how they can be interpreted as feminine in an alternative way.

Country-specific characteristics – Analysis of a sub-sample

The thorough description so far gave the impression that the extracted phenomena were more or less pronounced. The analysis of the sub-sample allowed to make these impressions more tangible and to capture the relative weight of some of the main qualitative observations. The frequencies of dominant categories for the development of the narratives could be compared with one another and taken into account to answer RQ 2: what similarities and differences can be found in the representations of the boxers from different countries? All numerical notions refer to the third step of the analysis (the full coding of a sub-sample). Table 1

describes the distribution of codes representing the respective narratives in each country. The numbers include multiple codings of posts.

The narrative of *being a boxer*³—that is, one’s representation as an athlete—is clearly the focus of *German* athletes (50% of all 225 German posts): many posts show training and/or allude to the boxing community. There also seems to be a comparatively high level of social engagement (13%), i.e. both social commitment in sport as well as engagement for gender equality. In general, the athletes combine different facets—strength, athleticism and femininity—quite naturally. As athletes, they have toned, fit, strong bodies, which they show off. When an opportunity arises, they also get dressed up, style themselves femininely and present themselves on Instagram; however, *performing traditional femininity*⁴ plays a subordinate role on their accounts (20%). They seem aware that they do not correspond to classic gender expectations and are self-confident in doing so. This is also reflected in their relaxed but emphatic handling of the *negotiation of gender stereotypes*⁵. At only 5% of posts in the overall sample, this narrative is marginal; nevertheless, it is important in terms of

content because its elements show the dynamic potential of self-positioning.

The German representations show determined women who are successful in sport, appear emancipated, pursue their interests and stand up for their beliefs. The boxers publicly complain that, as successful sportswomen, they are repeatedly judged on the level of their femininity performance and are still criticised for their choice of sport. This type of discursive positioning can be related to a pattern described by Bartky (1990, p. 81). She argues that, when successful women’s experience is still primarily measured by the success of their performance of femininity, this generates a potential for resistance. This suggestion matches well with the observations made of the German athletes. Their adversative positioning in discourse may be reinforced by the fact that a strong, independent, cross-sport athlete self-organisation has developed in Germany since 2017 (Seltmann, 2021), and its work both raises awareness of gender issues in sports and offers a framework for active involvement. Overall, the Germans’ tendency towards critical engagement seems to correspond well with general educational and discursive tendencies towards gender equality in Germany.

Table 1. Number of coded posts in the code groups representing the respective narratives in each country in the sub-sample (Code-Document Analysis in ATLAS.ti).

	Germany	Great Britain	Russia	Totals*
Being a Boxer	112	98	69	279
Showing Strength	61	78	38	177
Showing Personality	70	70	92	232
Performing Traditional Femininity	45	20	103	168
Negotiating Gender Stereotypes	13	23	10	46
Totals*	301	289	312	902
No. of actual posts (*multiple coding was possible)	225	225	225	675

3 The respective central categories and independent codes central to this narrative were: boxing community, photo session as athlete, team, training.

4 Categories and independent codes: photo session as attractive woman, feminine pose, body care/styling.

5 Categories and independent codes: experimental photo session, addressing gender stereotypes.

British women tend to emphasise the more competitive aspects of their identity. They strongly accentuate the narrative of *being a boxer* (44% of British posts), for example, with demonstrations of exhaustion after training. In addition, *showing strength*⁶ (35%) is central to their self-representations. The athletes photographically stage their muscular physique, and at times, their aggressiveness. The display of boxers' brawn, ignoring demands of normative femininity, can be interpreted as an example of 'oppositional discourses and practices' in a sense that Bartky (1990, p. 82) has already described among women who lift weights. The mental willingness to perform is underlined by using performance motivational and telling success stories. Difficulties with gender stereotypes are least noticeable in the British accounts. Some master feminine styling routinely, but there is not much room for the corresponding narrative (9%). British cultural common practices of 'dressing up' might explain why some British athletes seem to almost automatically choose very short outfits and intense make-up for galas or birthdays, while, on other occasions, they do not display traditional femininity at all (Appleford, 2021, p. 126).

Overall, an image of performance-ready, tough female fighters emerges with British female boxers. The boxers represent themselves as strong individuals surrounded by a close supportive environment (family/home makes up 18% of British posts). With respect to potential careers in British boxing, such self-representations as determined individuals seem adequate. Some athletes, although still amateurs, are already working towards a self-representation designed to win sponsors and to build up a supporter base in a professional context. In general, this presentation of determination and willingness to perform seems to match very well with the meritocratic ideals of neoliberal British public discourse.

Russian self-representations centre on negotiations of the field of tension between femininity and boxing and stand for the construction of a flexible concept of femininity. *Performing traditional femininity* is practised routinely and explicitly via poses and photo sessions (46% of Russian posts). Nevertheless, muscular, athletic bodies also play a natural role: being traditionally feminine and boxing can be in harmony and effectively combined; *being a boxer* is no marginal narrative (31%). This emphasis on a balanced personality goes hand in hand with stronger introspection and reflexivity. Russian boxers prominently use the narrative of *showing personality*⁷ (41%). In addition to various areas of interest, they show a high preoccupation with the topic of self-reflection and the development of their personalities (22%). In summary, the representations show successful athletes who have an appealing appearance and versatile, well-educated personalities and who are ready to challenge the expectations they face in different ways.

The emphasis on the full development of personality and education is deeply embedded in the Russian discursive context because of the high social prestige, value and priority of education

in Russian society. Gender stereotypes differ from those considered traditional in the West. Historically, Soviet women were more professionally employed and involved in societal spheres outside the home than was the case in Western societies (Ashwin & Isupova, 2018, p. 448). Within this tradition, active, tough, assertive activities and qualities are not contradictory to classically feminine ones in terms of character and appearance. However, the domestic sphere was explicitly female throughout Russian history. There is an unbroken tradition of expectations that women should be beautiful and fulfil the roles of good housewives and mothers (Ashwin & Isupova, 2018; Porteous, 2017). Accordingly, the boxers are challenged to convey their lifestyles as being suitable in the face of societal expectations. Russian boxers still have to deal with being measured primarily by the success of their performance of femininity, too. However, instead of open resistance, their self-representation tends towards a reconciliation of traditional femininity and their sport. Here a central issue lies in the mediation of beauty and strength.

DISCUSSION: PRETTY AND POWERFUL?

It remains to be discussed, how the boxers' representations can be located in the discursive field of tension between 'pretty' and 'powerful' (RQ 3). Regarding the apparent emphasis on performing embodied practices of normative femininity, one might ask, with Bartky (1990, p. 78), whether the boxers are not incoherent in their self-assertion. One might wonder whether, once again, a field of 'female apologetic' (Felshin, 1974) is revealed. On the one hand, the athletes perform traditional femininity to a greater or lesser extent, primarily through practices that aim to appear pretty—that is, posing and styling. On the other hand, muscles are brought into focus freely. They are proudly shown as being a result of the athletes' work—an effort they make to be successful in sport and not to comply with an ideal of beauty (Rana, 2022, p. 76). Given how determined these high-level athletes are, for them, no behaviour that limited their potential would be acceptable (cf. Dworkin, 2001). The idea of the 'female apologetic' assumes a very specific reasoning for presenting traditional femininity, in terms of a fear of non-compliance with the male gaze. However, Instagram accounts are always curated (Marshall et al., 2020b, p. 224), and thus, the observed display of traditional femininity seems to be just as much a conscious choice of the boxers as their display of strength and athleticism is. Women's *agency* in performing their self-representations is crucial here. The women do not appear to be subjected to fulfilling the demands placed on them; rather, they seem to have internalised preferences of how they would like to be and perform. Therefore, they find several alternative ways to transcend the dichotomy between 'pretty' and 'powerful'. Thus, self-confident, multidimensional self-representations are created. These can be called designs of 'alternative femininities' as

6 Categories and independent codes: success, self-confident pose, performance motivational.

7 Categories and independent codes: engagement, family/home, interests, faith-based motivational, self-reflexive motivational.

Channon and Phipps (2017) define them, constituted by 'those gendered practices which overtly signify both "woman" and "power"' (p. 27).

The plurality of alternative femininities should be taken seriously. A German boxer who identifies as a feminist combines photos in short or tight clothing with statements on women's self-determination. A Russian woman who presents herself embodying a 'sexy woman' openly discusses her doubts in advance as to whether she is portraying herself as vulgar, as well as her decision in favour of using the photo, described in the corresponding caption, because she felt she was represented authentically. Such cases could be interpreted as a display of agency and power in the sense of contemporary post-feminist perspectives.

Competitive Olympic boxers are, first and foremost, boxers. Their athleticism—their strength—is a given. Beyond that, they consider whether and how they want to represent femininity. We regard the present case of Olympic boxers displaying alternative femininities as an example of something new, something that, according to Bartky, can be classified as oppositional discourse. The boxers challenge traditional stereotypes by no longer conforming to them, either physically or attitudinally. Their choice of equipment and sportswear follows practical aspects and traditions inherent in sport; a staging as a 'sexy fighter' is marginal at best among Olympic boxers. Unlike the popular media discourse, the athletes do not actually refer to boxing itself as 'badass'. Perhaps this is because they lack a need for sensationalist terms that lend themselves to media exploitation; perhaps they simply have a realistic picture of the meaning of fighting. Instead, they focus on the physical and mental requirements of the sport, emphasising muscles, willpower and mental strength. In this way, they appear self-confident and strong. They do not reflect on their entitlement to being strong; they are not asking for permission or trying to exculpate their 'transgression'. As an essential part of their athletic performance, they *do* strength, and by doing so, they *embody* strength. They simply *are* strong, and as athletes, they are proud of their strength. This might be interpreted as pioneering a performance of a new femininity, the emergence of a 'yet unimagined transformation of the female body' (Bartky, 1990, p. 78).

CONCLUSION

The analysis showed how the athletes represent themselves as a) training boxers who are part of a boxing community, b) physically and mentally strong, c) having versatile and self-reflected personalities, d) performing traditional feminine traits, and e) negotiating gender stereotypes. These five narratives can be observed with athletes from all three countries; however, their distribution varies. While the Germans appear primarily as emancipated sportswomen, the British focus on a performance discourse and the Russians stand for a flexible concept of femininity that conveys traditional expectations and success in

sport as compatible. Boxers in all three countries clearly reject traditional claims to their femininity. These oppositional practices take different forms in different national contexts and discourses, but in all three cases Olympic boxers find ways to overcome the dichotomy between 'pretty' and 'powerful'.

Limitations and prospects for future research

This article has dealt with the individual self-representations of Olympic boxers. Still, other stakeholders of Olympic boxing, like the PR departments of the national Boxing Associations may also influence their representation. It remains to be explored how female boxers are portrayed in this context, and to what extent these representations resonate with or contrast their self-depictions. Further, both boxers and associations are voices within their respective national discourses. As Marshall et al. (2020a) claim, athletes 'construct individual narratives on Instagram within the boundaries of wider sociocultural narratives' (p. 575), which they may or may not challenge. This wider sociocultural context, and the question of how influential stakeholders of Olympic boxing position themselves in it, may stand in need of further exploration.

REFERENCES

- Alkemeyer, T. (2004). *Bewegung und Gesellschaft. Zur "Verkörperung" des Sozialen und zur Formung des Selbst in Sport und populärer Kultur*. In G. Klein (Ed.), *Bewegung: Sozial- und kulturwissenschaftliche Konzepte* (pp. 73–78). Transcript. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839401996-002>
- Appleford, K. (2021). *Classifying fashion, fashioning class: Making sense of women's practices, perceptions and tastes*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315228556>
- Ashwin, S., & Isupova, O. (2018). Anatomy of a stalled revolution: Processes of reproduction and change in Russian women's gender ideologies. *Gender & Society*, 32(4), 441–468. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218776309>
- Bartky, S. L. (1990). *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression*. Routledge.
- Benitez Silva, A. (2021). *Fighting to fight: Female amateur boxers' experiences of (in) equality in the UK* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Hull]. Repository@Hull. <https://hull-repository.worktribe.com/output/4223208>
- Boyd, D. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press.
- Braumüller, B., Menzel, T., & Hartmann-Tews, I. (2023). Gender expression and homonegative episodes in sport among LGB+ athletes. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 20(3), 243–261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2022.2121259>
- Bruce, T. (2013). Reflections on communication and sport: On women and femininities. *Communication & Sport*, 1(1-2), 125–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479512472883>

- Bruce, T. (2016). New rules for new times: Sportswomen and media representation in the third wave. *Sex Roles*, 74(7-8), 361–376. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-015-0497-6>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2016). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. In C. McCann & S.-K. Kim (Eds.), *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspectives* (pp. 353–361). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003001201-42>
- Carlsson, H. (2017). Researching boxing bodies in Scotland: Using apprenticeship to study the embodied construction of gender in hyper masculine space. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 24(7), 939–953. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1343282>
- Channon, A., & Phipps, C. (2017). 'Pink gloves still give black eyes: Exploring 'alternative' femininity in women's combat sports. *Martial Arts Studies*, 3, 24–37. <https://doi.org/10.18573/j.2017.10093>
- Channon, A., Quinney, A., Khomutova, A., & Matthews, C. R. (2018). Sexualisation of the fighter's body: Some reflections on women's mixed martial arts. *Corps*, 16(1), 383–391. <https://doi.org/10.3917/corp1.016.0383>
- Connell, R. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*. Polity Press.
- DOSB. (2024). Bestandserhebung 2024: Fassung vom 31.10.2024. Stichtag der Erfassung: 1. Januar 2024. https://cdn.dosb.de/user_upload/www.dosb.de/Medien_Service/BE/DOSB-Bestandserhebung_2024.pdf
- Dworkin, S. L. (2001). "Holding back": Negotiating a glass ceiling on women's muscular strength. *Sociological Perspectives*, 44(3), 333–350. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2001.44.3.333>
- Felshin, J. (1974). The triple option... for women in sport. *Quest*, 21(1), 36–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.1974.10519789>
- Ford, C. (2021, December 18). *Women in Boxing Conference 2021: Welcome & introduction* [Conference presentation]. Women in Boxing Conference 2021, Loughborough, Great Britain.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage Books.
- Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In C. Geertz (Ed.), *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays by Clifford Geertz* (pp. 3–30). Basic Books.
- Geurin-Eagleman, A. N., & Burch, L. M. (2016). Communicating via photographs: A gendered analysis of Olympic athletes' visual self-presentation on Instagram. *Sport Management Review*, 19(2), 133–145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2015.03.002>
- Giddens, A. (1991). *The consequences of modernity*. Polity.
- Godoy-Pressland, A. (2015). Moral guardians, miniskirts, and Nicola Adams: The changing media discourse on women's boxing. In A. Channon & C. R. Matthews (Eds.), *Global perspectives on women in combat sports: Women warriors around the world* (pp. 25–40). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137439369_2
- Hartmann, H. (2013). *Frauenboxen in Deutschland: Karrieremöglichkeiten in einem neuen Sport*. Tectum.
- Hartmann-Tews, I. (2003). Soziale Konstruktion von Geschlecht: Neue Perspektiven der Geschlechterforschung in der Sportwissenschaft. In I. Hartmann-Tews, P. Gieß-Stüber, & M.-L. Klein (Eds.), *Soziale Konstruktion von Geschlecht im Sport* (pp. 13–27). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-663-11404-8_1
- Hartmann-Tews, I. (2019). Germany: A long way to gender equity and equality in sport governance. In A. Elling, J. Hovden, & A. Knoppers (Eds.), *Gender diversity in European sport governance* (pp. 83–93). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315115061-8>
- Heiskanen, B. (2012). *The urban geography of boxing: Race, class, and gender in the ring*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203119280>
- Hine, C. (2015). *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, embodied and everyday*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Jennings, G., & Cabrera Velázquez, B. (2015). Gender inequality in Olympic boxing: Exploring structuration through online resistance against weight category restrictions. In A. Channon & C. R. Matthews (Eds.), *Global perspectives on women in combat sports: Women warriors around the world* (pp. 89–103). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137439369_6
- Jennings, L. A. (2015). 'Beauty and Strength': Defining the female body in The Ultimate Fighter season 20 promotional campaign. In A. Channon & C. R. Matthews (Eds.), *Global perspectives on women in combat sports: Women warriors around the world* (pp. 73–85). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137439369_5
- Kleindienst-Cachay, C., & Heckemeyer, K. (2008). "Um Gottes Willen, jetzt wird sie zum Mannweib!": Zur Körperpräsentation und -inszenierung von Spitzensportlerinnen in männlich dominierten Sportarten. *Beiträge zur feministischen Theorie und Praxis*, 31(69), 45–57. <https://doi.org/10.25595/934>
- Kleindienst-Cachay, C., & Kunzendorf, A. (2003). 'Männlicher' Sport - 'weibliche' Identität? Hochleistungssportlerinnen in männlich dominierten Sportarten. In I. Hartmann-Tews, P. Gieß-Stüber, & M.-L. Klein (Eds.), *Soziale Konstruktion von Geschlecht im Sport* (pp. 109–150). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-663-11404-8_4
- Lagutina, M., & Gudozhnikova, E. (2020). Проблема гендерного равенства в олимпийском спорте [Problema genderного ravenstvo v olimpijskom sporte]. *Современная наука: актуальные проблемы теории и практики. Серия: Гуманитарные науки*(3-2), 98–103.

- Latzko-Toth, G., Bonneau, C., & Millette, M. (2017). Small data, thick data: Thickening strategies for trace-based social media research. In L. Sloan & A. Quan-Haase (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social media research methods* (pp. 199–214). SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473983847.n13>
- Markham, A., & Buchanan, E. (2012). *Ethical decision-making and internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee (Version 2.0)*. Association of Internet Researchers. <http://aoir.org/ethics/>
- Marshall, K., Chamberlain, K., & Hodgetts, D. (2020a). Male bodybuilders on Instagram: Negotiating inclusive masculinities through hegemonic masculine bodies. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(5), 570–589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1722620>
- Marshall, K., Chamberlain, K., & Hodgetts, D. (2020b). Methodological considerations for visual research on Instagram. In P. Reavey (Ed.), *A handbook of visual methods in Psychology: Using and interpreting images in qualitative research* (pp. 221–238). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351032063-1613>
- Matthews, C. R. (2015). The tyranny of the male preserve. *Gender & Society*, 30(2), 312–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243215620557>
- McClearn, J. (2018). Don't be a do-nothing-bitch: Popular feminism and women's physical empowerment in the UFC. In K. Toffoletti, H. Thorpe, & J. Francombe-Webb (Eds.), *New sporting femininities: Embodied politics in postfeminist times* (pp. 43–62). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72481-2_3
- McGannon, K. R., Graper, S., & McMahon, J. (2022). Narrative inquiry: A cultural approach for understanding big and small stories of motherhood and sport on Instagram. In J. Sanderson (Ed.), *Sport, Social Media, and Digital Technology* (pp. 89–106). Emerald. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1476-285420220000015011>
- McGannon K. R., Schinke R. J., Ge Y., & Blodgett A. T. (2018). Negotiating gender and sexuality: A qualitative study of elite women boxer intersecting identities and sport psychology implications. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(2), 168–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2017.1421593>
- Oftadeh-Moghadam, S., Phipps, C., Thelwell, R., & Weston, N. (2020). Navigating the rocky road: Elite female boxers' perceptions of their boxing journey. *Martial Arts Studies*, 9, 71–85. <https://doi.org/10.18573/mas.100>
- Paradis, E. (2012). Boxers, briefs or bras? Bodies, gender and change in the boxing gym. *Body & Society*, 18(2), 82–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X12440829>
- Pfister, G. (2011). Die Darstellung von Frauen im Mediensport: Kontinuitäten und Veränderungen. In D. Schaaf, J.-U. Nieland (Eds.), *Die Sexualisierung des Sports in den Medien* (pp. 57–70). Herbert von Halem.
- Piggott, L. V., Pike, E. C. J., & Matthews, J. J. (2019). England: A 'sporting future' for all? In A. Elling, J. Hovden, & A. Knoppers (Eds.), *Gender diversity in European sport governance*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315115061>
- Porteous, H. (2017). 'A woman isn't a woman when she's not concerned about the way she looks': Beauty labour and femininity in post-Soviet Russia. In M. Ilic (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of women and gender in twentieth-century Russia and the Soviet Union* (pp. 413–428). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-54905-1_27
- Postill, J., & Pink, S. (2012). Social media ethnography: The digital researcher in a messy web. *Media International Australia*, 145(1), 123–134. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X1214500114>
- Rana, J. (2022). *Punching back: Gender, religion and belonging in women-only kickboxing*. Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781800736900>
- Ritter, R., & Fruchtmann, J. (2021). Russia. In M. Porsche-Ludwig & Y. Y. Chen (Eds.), *Handbook of Asian states: Geography - history - culture - politics - economy. Part 1* (pp. 525–547). LIT.
- Rulofs, B., & Hartmann-Tews, I. (2017). Mediale Präsentation von Sportler_innen in der Presse - Ein Überblick zu den Befunden inhaltsanalytischer Studien. In G. Sobiech & S. Günter (Eds.), *Sport & Gender - (inter)nationale sportsoziologische Geschlechterforschung* (pp. 61–74). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-13098-5_5
- Schneider, P. (2024). Increasing visibility and the (re)presentation of female boxers in print media. In S. Crews (Ed.), *Boxing, narrative and culture: Critical perspectives* (pp. 9–23). Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003312635-3>
- Seltmann, M. (2021). The institutional position of athletes in the governance networks of the Olympic movement in Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 38(10-11), 1165–1188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2021.1978428>
- Sinning, S., & Hofmann, A. R. (2017). Trainerinnen im deutschen Spitzensport. In G. Sobiech & S. Günter (Eds.), *Sport & Gender - (inter)nationale sportsoziologische Geschlechterforschung* (pp. 295–308). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-13098-5_21
- Smith, M. (2014). *A history of women's boxing*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sport England. (2024). *Active Lives Adult Survey November 2022-23 Report*. https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-04/Active%20Lives%20Adult%20Survey%20November%202022-23%20Report.pdf?VersionId=veYJTP_2n55UdOmX3PAXH7dJr1GA24vs

- Strübing, J. (2018). Grounded Theory: Methodische und methodologische Grundlagen. In C. Pentzold, A. Bischof, & N. Heise (Eds.), *Praxis Grounded Theory: Theoriegenerierendes empirisches Forschen in medienbezogenen Lebenswelten: ein Lehr- und Arbeitsbuch* (pp. 27–52). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-15999-3_2
- Strübing, J., Hirschauer, S., Ayaß, R., Krähnke, U., & Scheffer, T. (2018). Gütekriterien qualitativer Sozialforschung. Ein Diskussionsanstoß. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 47(2), 83–100. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zfsoz-2018-1006>
- TASS. (2021, May 26). Число занимающихся боксом в России за четыре года планируется увеличить до 1,5 млн человек [Číslo zanimajušičichsja boksom v Rossii za četyre goda planirujetsja uveličit' do 1,5 mln čelovek] [Press release]. <https://tass.ru/sport/11006479>
- Thorpe, H., Toffoletti, K., & Bruce, T. (2017). Sportswomen and social media: Bringing third-wave feminism, postfeminism, and neoliberal feminism into conversation. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 41(5), 359–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723517730808>
- Tjønndal, A. (2019). 'I don't think they realise how good we are': Innovation, inclusion and exclusion in women's Olympic boxing. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 54(2), 131–150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690217715642>
- Tjønndal, A. (2024). Reflections on the empowerment of women in boxing from athletes and coaches in Norway Female Box. In S. Crews (Ed.), *Boxing, narrative and culture: Critical perspectives* (pp. 87–101). Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003312635-8>
- Toffoletti, K. (2016). Analyzing media representations of sportswomen — Expanding the conceptual boundaries using a postfeminist sensibility. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 33(3), 199–207. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2015-0136>
- Toffoletti, K., Francombe-Webb, J., & Thorpe, H. (2018). Femininities, sport and physical culture in postfeminist, neoliberal times. In K. Toffoletti, H. Thorpe, & J. Francombe-Webb (Eds.), *New sporting femininities: Embodied politics in postfeminist times* (pp. 1–19). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72481-2_1
- Trimbur, L. (2013). *Come out swinging: The changing world of boxing in Gleason's gym*. Princeton University Press.
- Wacquant, L. (2004). *Body and soul: Notebooks of an apprentice boxer*. Oxford University Press.
- Wacquant, L. (2015). For a sociology of flesh and blood. *Qualitative Sociology*, 38(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-014-9291-y>
- WCIOM. (2023, October 16). Спорт для всех [Sport dlja vsech]. ВЦИОМ. <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/sport-dlja-vsekh>
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125–151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002>
- Woodward, K. (2007). *Boxing, masculinity and identity: The "I" of the tiger*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203020180-1>
- Woodward, K. (2014a). *Globalizing boxing*. Bloomsbury.
- Woodward, K. (2014b). Legacies of 2012: Putting women's boxing into discourse. *Contemporary Social Science*, 9(2), 242–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2013.838295>

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Martial Arts Studies is an open access journal, which means that all content is available without charge to the user or his/her institution. You are allowed to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles in this journal without asking prior permission from either the publisher or the author.

ISSN: 2057-5696



The journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Original copyright remains with the contributing author and a citation should be made when the article is quoted, used or referred to in another work.



Martial Arts Studies is an imprint of Cardiff University Press, an innovative open-access publisher of academic research, where 'open-access' means free for both readers and writers.
cardiffuniversitypress.org

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Alex Channon *University of Brighton*

EDITORS

Lauren Miller *Texas Tech University*

Wayne Wong *University of Sheffield*

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Jiongyan Huang *Cardiff University*

FOUNDING EDITORS

Paul Bowman *Cardiff University*

Benjamin N. Judkins *Cornell University*

EDITORIAL ADVISORY PANEL

Oleg Benesch *University of York*
Stephen Chan *SOAS University of London*
Greg Downey *Macquarie University*
D.S. Farrer *University of Guam*
Adam Frank *University of Central Arkansas*
Thomas A. Green *Texas A&M University*
T. J. Hinrichs *Cornell University*
Leon Hunt *Brunel University of London*
Felipe P. Jocano Jr *University of the Philippines*
Gina Marchetti *Hong Kong University*
Meaghan Morris *The University of Sydney*
Daniel Mroz *University of Ottawa*
Meir Shahr *Tel Aviv University*
Dale Spencer *Carleton University*
Douglas Wile *Alverno College*