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## Women, Boxing & Prejudice, the Facts

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### Short Report

Colossal changes have occurred within women's combat sports in the last two decades, which have challenged society's perception of women in boxing and mixed martial arts (MMA) [1,2].

Very little research has been produced on either the physiological effects on women or on their position in society by their inclusion in boxing. However, press publications promoting women's participation in the boxing world, has been very positive.

Following the London 2012 Olympics, female participation in boxing increased dramatically compared to males, in the UK. The Commonwealth Games in 2014 also had a positive effect on participation for both men and women. Not unusually following such events, the male participants decreased and fell to levels just above how they were pre-Commonwealth games [3]. However, surprisingly, female participation increased.

This suggested that opportunities for women in the boxing world may be improving, compared to previous years.

Nonetheless the number of males involved in boxing, still outweighs the number of females. The suggestion is that there are still gender related issues involved in combat sports.

Females in combat sport confront barriers and negative experiences as a consequence of their gender including; verbal and physical abuse, sexual harassment, lack of opportunity and lack of financial investment [4-6].

In Australia, Lafferty and McKay (2004) found that females were given less access to sparring opportunities and not taken seriously by coaches.

Comparable concerns were also present in a study in the USA by Paradis (2012) which also showed substantial levels of verbal abuse from male boxers.

The negative psychological implications these issues can have on women may also lead to a reduced retention rate of female boxers [7].

In sports such as boxing and MMA, these disputes arise because they do not fit in with the traditional expectations of femininity [8].

Women are expected to be beautiful, graceful, submissive, and elfin with negligible belligerent tendencies.

There are conflicting values in female boxing which reward the participants. Cultural femininity is challenged when customs are opposed.

Nicola Adams won gold at the 2012 Olympics, which had a progressive effect on challenging the dominance of males in boxing, but she received a series of negative criticisms on her appearance and legitimacy as a boxer [9].

Alfermann and Stambulova [10] have stressed, an athletic career depends on a subtle balance of resources and overcoming barriers.

Will current prejudices in boxing [11] continue to hinder the progress for females in boxing in the UK?

To prevent such pessimism, should not their rewards be the same as males, as in other sports, e.g., tennis?

It is critical that we assess the subjective and collective experiences of females who progress from amateur status to professional at an elite level, and the entire sporting atmosphere of boxing.

Ultimately, while the modern woman might utilise boxing to categorise a fundamental discontinuation from past eras, or a reinvention of herself, she might also use it to stage the violence and trauma of the era in which she lives, whilst still aware of its limits and vulnerabilities [12].

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