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## The Inclusion of Women's Boxing in the Olympic Games: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Gender and Power in Boxing

**Abstract** This article utilizes Foucault's theoretical perspective of modern power and constructivist perspectives of gender to examine relations of power and gender in boxing. The aim of this paper is to explore how and in what ways constructions of gender are linked to relations of power in international amateur boxing. Further, what implications the interplay between gender and power might have for female boxers. In order to identify relations of power between men and women in boxing, a series of online texts depicting the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games (2009-2012) is analyzed and discussed. To investigate what implications these gendered power relations might have for female boxers today, AIBA's recent provisional suspension of the Norwegian Boxing Federation is examined. A content analysis strategy was chosen as my analytical approach (Titscher et al. 2000), where the data material consisted of 67 online texts of which 23 were analyzed in-depth. The analysis of the material illustrates how an attempt to implement feminine outfits for female boxers in the Olympic Games was used as a gender-marking strategy in international boxing. This is further related to power by arguing that AIBA's need to distinguish female boxers from male boxers was an attempt to make the women adhere to traditional norms of femininity (Hovden 2000; van Ingen and Kovacs 2012). Furthermore, the analysis of the material indicates that men's boxing is valued as superior to women's boxing and that these gendered power relations in boxing manifest themselves through their effects on women's boxing.

**Keywords** Boxing; Gender; Power; Foucault; Olympic Games

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**B**oxing has traditionally been a male dominated sport with strong historical links to traditional norms of masculinity. Boxing can be described as rituals of masculinity, where competitors try to impose their domination on another (Gems 2014).

As a consequence, it has proven to be very resistant to female involvement and participation (Sugden 1996). In recent years, international amateur boxing, with the International Boxing Association (AIBA) as its governing body, has undergone significant changes, especially in regard to female participation and acceptance. Perhaps the most substantial change in relation to this topic is the inclusion of women's boxing in the London 2012 Olympic Games (Norges Bokseforbund 2009; AIBA 2012).

Before the Olympic Games in London 2012, boxing was the only summer sport without female discipline (Mennesson 2000). In spite of this, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was reluctant to add it to the Games in 2012. With the admittance of women's boxing in the Olympic Games in London, three different weight categories were included, mainly 51 kilograms, 60 kilograms, and 75 kilograms (Norges Bokseforbund 2009). By AIBA's competition rules, female boxers normally compete in ten different weight categories, ranging from 45 kilograms to 81+ kilograms (AIBA 2014a). For male boxers, ten weight categories are included in the Olympic Games. In this respect, boxing is different from most other Olympic disciplines, whereas the marginalization of women's boxing is evident through IOC's decision to omit seven weight categories for women. Prior to the Olympic Games in London 2012, AIBA estimated that there were more than 500,000 licensed female boxers worldwide. Women's boxing today is practiced in more than 120 countries and on five continents (AIBA 2014b). With the recognition of women's boxing as an Olympic discipline, the number of li-

censed female boxers is likely to increase further in the coming years.

This article examines how and in what ways constructions of gender are linked to relations of power in international amateur boxing. Through analyzing a sample of online texts, I will explore how gendered relations of power in boxing are visible in its effects. To investigate this, I will look at online texts depicting the process of the inclusion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games, which is a recent and significant event in international boxing that is likely to provide insight into dominant discourses regarding gendered relations of power in boxing. Furthermore, I will discuss some of the implications these power relations might have for women in boxing. To investigate some of these consequences, I will explore the recent provisional suspension of the Norwegian Boxing Federation (NBF) from international boxing (AIBA 2014c; Norges Bokseforbund 2014). The analysis in this paper is based on texts written by, and posted on, (1) AIBA's own website, (2) the NBF's website, texts from (3) Norwegian newspapers, (4) international newspapers, (5) open letters from IOC, and (6) online petitions and discussion forums. The selection of texts is described in further detail under "Methods."

### Previous Research: Gender and Boxing

In this section, I will present a concise outline of central findings from research on the topic of boxing and gender. My intention here is to establish the research field in which I aim to make a contribution.

Worldwide, boxing has been regarded as a site created by and for men. Historically, it is a sport which has excluded and marginalized the participation of women (Wacquant 1995; Sugden 1996; Lafferty and McKay 2004). Both Sugden (1996) and Gems (2014) describe how boxing is a site of masculinity:

In general sports are male dominated and this to some extent is related to the historical links between sport and militarism and warfare, themselves male dominated theatres. Boxing more than most other sports resembles its ancient, martial progenitor and has proven to be very resistant to female involvement. [Sugden 1996:192]

Boxing has historically served as a ritual of masculinity. The practice of the sport, no matter how inept, served as proof of one's courage and virility. Aggression and violence, pain and injury, even the possibility of death were accepted risks. Boxing was and is war, an individual combat in which competitors try to impose their domination on another. Such intentions hold true whether they take place in street fights or within the regulated confines of the ring. [Gems 2014:17]

Oats (1980) noted that when women engage in boxing, they challenge traditional norms of femininity by displaying aggression and power, qualities that traditionally are attributed to men and masculinity. Until recently, boxing was seen (and may still be seen by some) as a sport suitable for men only (Wacquant 1992; 1995; 2005; Boyle, Millington, and Vertinsky 2006; Dortants and Knoppers 2012). In his study, Wacquant (1992) described the culture and norms in American boxing gyms as being

essentially masculine, places where women often were (and in some cases still are) viewed as intruders. Mennesson (2000) underlined that boxing epitomizes a site where women can revel in masculine skills and capacities, and stressed that the contribution female boxers make to this sport is the redefinition of boxing as an exclusively masculine practice.

Women have been included in international boxing since 1994. In recent studies, scholars such as Dortants and Knoppers (2012), van Ingen and Kovacs (2012), and Lafferty and McKay (2004) have illustrated how female boxers still experience discrimination on the basis of gender. Men have, to a large degree, monopolized power in international boxing. In sports organizations such as national boxing Federations and license committees, men are over-represented. The same tendencies can be found in regards to media coverage in boxing, coaching positions, referees, and administrative positions (Hargreaves 1994; Halbert 1997; De Garis 2000). In other words, women are systematically under-represented in these vital power positions within boxing.

As outlined here, previous and recent research on gender and boxing emphasize how gender is portrayed as a power relation in boxing. My ambition in this paper is not to map gendered relations of power in boxing as a whole, but rather to analyze a sample of online texts depicting the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games—in order to examine how gender and power are expressed and constructed in boxing. In this study, I have chosen Foucault's perspective

on modern power and some main components of the gender order that shape masculine sports, such as boxing, football, and ice hockey, as my theoretical lenses (Hovden 2000; Hjelseth and Hovden 2014).

## Theoretical Framework

In this part, I will provide a short description of my theoretical framework for the analysis of the material. My theoretical framing contains a conceptualization of gender in sporting contexts, as well as a Foucauldian approach to understanding modern power.

### Discourse and Modern Power

Discourses connect the exercise of power with knowledge and produce truths, and are, in this paper, defined as institutionalized social practice which shapes relationships, power, and knowledge (Foucault 2000; Hjelseth and Hovden 2014). Foucault views power as relational. Therefore, power exists when exercised within relationships between individuals (Foucault 2000). In this perspective, power is anyone (and everywhere) who is able to exercise it (Foucault 1978). Hence, the question is not necessarily who has power, but rather how it is exercised in relations between groups of people (Cole, Giardina, and Andrews 2004; Markula and Silk 2011). In this sense, one could argue that modern power is only visible in its effects. Utilizing a Foucauldian viewpoint of modern power, I am able to examine how and in what ways power is exercised between men and women in boxing. In other words, how gender is

related to power in sport. From this perspective it is possible to analyze how power in boxing is visible through its effects on male and female boxers. Studying modern power through Foucault's theoretical lens can in this sense contribute to an exploration of dominant systems of power relations in international boxing. However, this understanding of power does not provide any clear or specific comprehension of what it actually means to expose (and resist) dominant systems of power relations in society. By this I mean that while this particular theoretical framing of modern power enables me to explore gendered relations in boxing, it does not, however, necessarily provide insight into how to promote change in these relations for increased gender equality in boxing and other sports.

### Constructs of Gender in Sport

Feminist scholars (e.g., Haavind 1994; Moi 1998; Hovden 2000; 2005; Norman 2010a; 2010b; Pfister 2013) accentuate that the prevalent understanding of gender in the context of sport is based on a two-sex model. This implies that the constructions of gender are entrenched in the interpretations of sexed bodies (Hjelseth and Hovden 2014). In this way, gender is often constructed through dichotomous differences between masculinity and femininity (Theberge 1993; Connell 1995; Mennesson 2000). Thus, within sports, masculinity and femininity are often expressed as antagonistic qualities, which describes differences between the two sexes. This construction of gender entails that masculinity is seen as relational to femininity in sports. Hence, masculinity is defined as that which is not

feminine (Connell 1995). Aggression, strength, confidence, rationality, independence, and dominance are often depicted as traditional masculine characteristics, while emotionality, passivity, submissive, insecurity, and caring are features used to describe femininity (Johnson 2005; Coakley and Pike 2009). As a consequence of this stereotypical view on gender, sporting activities are themselves often gendered. This results in some sports being categorized as suitable for men (e.g., masculine), while other sports are linked to women (e.g., femininity). Boxing, football, rugby, and ice hockey are examples of sports which typically are described as being masculine and "sports for men," while dance, cheerleading, and gymnastics are typically linked to femininity and women.

Within the understanding of masculinity as contradictory to femininity, a double meaning often occurs, where masculinity also represents the normal and gender neutral (Haavind 1994; Bourdieu 2000; de Beauvoir 2000). Accordingly, women and men's behavior, competence, and capacities are related to their sexed bodies, which often leads to a naturalization and internalization of this biology-rooted understanding of gender. In other words, the differences between men and women are interpreted and conceived as a result of biological differences rather than arbitrary cultural and social constructions (Bourdieu 2000). Both Bourdieu (2000) and de Beauvoir (2000) critique this dichotomic understanding of gender and underline how the social construction of gender almost always includes a relationship of power. In sports, this prevailing construction of gender often results in conclusions where masculinity and

sport for men are rated as superior to femininity and women's sport.

Using a qualitative research design, I have chosen a content analysis approach as my preferred method of analysis.

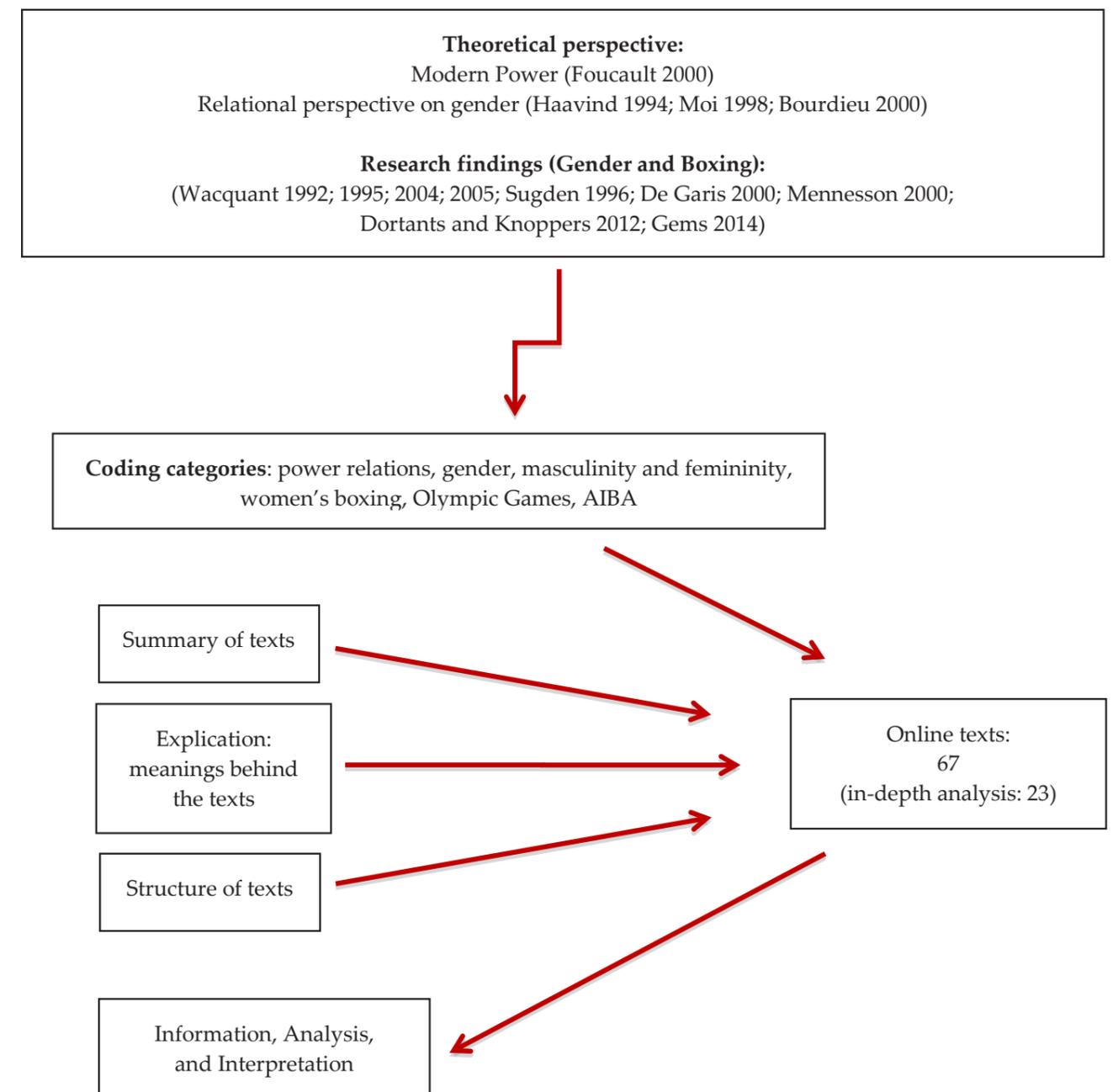
### Methodology

In this part of the paper, I will firstly describe my analytic approach: a qualitative content analysis. Thereafter, I inform about my sample of online texts and the strategic selection criteria used to construct the data material.

### Content Analysis

The analytical approach I used to analyze the data material was a content analysis approach (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Elo and Kyngäs 2008). Content analysis involves an investigation of underlying themes in the texts subjected to analysis. Bryman (2004:392) argues that qualitative content analysis is "the most prevalent approach to the qualitative analysis of documents." Content analysis is a widely used method of research and includes many different approaches. This paper is based on a directed approach, where the analysis starts with theory and relevant research findings as a guide for the initial codes of the material (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). By using a Foucauldian viewpoint of modern power, as well as a relational perspective on gender, the analysis resulted in an investigation and interpretation of some prevalent gendered relations of power in amateur boxing. My analytical process using this approach is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The analytical process of the study.



Source: Derived from Kohlbacher (2006).

Using this strategy, I started my analytical process by investigating and identifying some central concepts within the material. Here, the theoretical lenses and research findings acted as a guide in the coding and

categorization of the material. While structuring the material, I summarized some central themes and topics within the sample of texts. After identifying some main concepts in the material, my aim was to explore

how and in what ways these concepts could be linked together and how they were connected to power and gender (Foucault 2000; Markula and Silk 2011).

### Sample and Data Material

In order to obtain insight and information about gender and power relations in international boxing, I looked for enunciations: places where my object of analysis was likely to be discussed (Markula and Silk 2011). From this strategy a sample of online texts from the official AIBA website, the official website of the NBF, national Norwegian newspapers, international newspapers, open letters from IOC, and texts from online petitions and discussion forums were chosen as my data material. 67 different texts were chosen strategically for their themes. The sampling strategy was to choose texts discussing the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games, as well as the provisional suspension of the NBF. This resulted in a sample of online texts published between 2009 (when AIBA first announced the inclusion of women's boxing in the 2012 Olympic Games) and 2014. The texts were retrieved during August-November of 2014.

After reading and examining the material, 23 of the 67 texts were chosen for in-depth analysis. These 23 texts were chosen as being thematically representative for the sample. Further, these texts were interpreted as illustrating prevalent and reoccurring discourses, topics, and arguments regarding current gendered power relations. Some reoccurring topics within the sample included texts which discussed: (1) the inclusion of women's boxing in the London 2012 Olympic Games, (2) women's boxing in the Rio

2016 Olympic Games, (3) the provisional suspension of the NBF, and (4) women's dress codes in Olympic boxing.

In the process of identifying and investigating relevant online texts, some specific keywords were used, mainly: "London 2012," "women's boxing," "women," "Olympic Games," "Rio 2016," "Suspension," "AIBA," "IOC," and "Norwegian Boxing Federation."

### The Inclusion of Women's Boxing in the Olympic Games

Here, I will examine how and in what ways gender is linked with relations of power during the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games (2009-2012). By analyzing how gendered power relations are expressed among central agents and organizations like AIBA, IOC, and NBF, I will argue that the political process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games demonstrates some prevailing constructs of gender and gendered relations of power within international boxing. The use of quotations from the data material will illustrate key arguments within these discourses. These quotations are part of larger online texts within the study's sample.

In 2009, AIBA announced that IOC had accepted their proposal to include women's boxing in the London 2012 Olympic Games (Norges Bokseforbund 2009). With this announcement, AIBA stated that getting women's boxing into the Olympic Games had been one of the organization's top priorities since 2006. One of AIBA's key arguments

for the inclusion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games was not derived from a standpoint of gender equality, but rather concerning the image of boxing as a sport. One of the members of AIBA's women's commission gave voice to this argument:

Having women's boxing at Olympics would help improve the overall image of the sport. If women come in, people will feel the sport is more common, not so dangerous, and that would be a very good thing for the image of boxing. [Lynch 2008]

The arguments conveyed in this statement can be interpreted as an example of prevailing the relational understanding of masculinity and femininity in sport (Hovden 2000; Lafferty and McKay 2004; Pfister 2013). Here, women's boxing is expressed as being connected to capacities and characteristics understood as relational to a biology-rooted understanding of gender. By claiming that the inclusion of women in Olympic boxing will change the overall image of the sport internationally, women's boxing is othered from men's boxing, which here represents the normal and gender neutral (de Beauvoir 2000). The inclusion of female boxers is seen as something which will normalize the image of boxing to become "less dangerous." In other words, as a result of their sexed bodies, or of biological differences, female boxers are expected to be essentially different from male boxers. In this way, men's boxing is viewed as representing traditional and hegemonic masculine qualities such as aggressiveness, dangerousness, strength, and toughness (Connell 1995; Johnson 2005), while the key argument for the inclusion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games seems to be made from the standpoint that female

boxers have some embodied, naturalized, and essentially different (feminine) qualities. Hence, these "feminine qualities" are thought to change the prevailing image of boxing as a primal, residual, and dangerous sport. Using Foucault's (1978; 2000) relational perspective on modern power, the dominant discourses concerning women's boxing in the process of including women in Olympic boxing also imply some gendered power relations between men and women in international amateur boxing.

### Women in Skirts: A Gender-Marking Strategy in Boxing?

The material demonstrates that prior to the London 2012 Olympic Games a main concern and topic of discussion within both AIBA and IOC was the competition outfits of female boxers. More specifically, the topic of discussion was whether female boxers should be allowed to wear shorts while boxing.

In this discourse, AIBA's main argument was that if female boxers did not wear skirts, spectators would not be able to distinguish between male and female boxers in the ring. The material demonstrates several similar arguments from AIBA and different national boxing Federations. The two main topics reasoned in the material of online texts within the discourse of competition outfits for female boxers were: 1) If female boxers wore skirts, it would be easier for the spectators to determine the gender of the athletes and 2) Skirts would make female boxers look elegant. These types of arguments prevailed in the study's material, and are here interpreted as examples of how masculinity and femininity are viewed

as two mutually excluding categories in accordance with the two-sex model (Connell 1995; Moi 1998). When women engage in competitive boxing, they are, in many ways, disproving the understanding of gender, masculinity, and femininity, as dichotomous differences rooted in the sexed bodies of men and women. The attempt to force female boxers to compete in skirts can be analyzed as a pursuit to make sure that female boxers are still in accordance with views on traditional femininity. From a perspective of gender equality in sport, I wish to raise the question of why there should be a need for spectators to distinguish between male and female boxers in the ring. Why was this topic of importance to AIBA and IOC in the period of 2009 to 2012? Why should women look elegant when engaging in boxing? A sport which is normally not connected with elegance (Gems 2014).

Many national boxing Federations, such as Poland, supported AIBA's proposal for female boxers' uniforms. The material exhibits how one of the national coaches in the Polish boxing federation voiced their opinion on outfits for female boxers:

By wearing skirts, in my opinion, it gives a good impression, a womanly impression...Wearing shorts is not a good way for female boxers to dress. [Creighton 2011]

Here, it is important to take into account that women's possibilities for participation in sport vary greatly according to culture, religion, and country of residence (Pfister 2010). Historically, boxing has been considered as a highly masculine sport (Wacquant 2004; van Ingen and Kovacs 2012), and

in many cultures and countries, participation in sport, and particularly in boxing, is still strongly linked with men and masculinity. Keeping this in mind, I find it is surprising that this debate on women's competition outfits in boxing, which I here consider as a gender-marking strategy, was a prevailing discussion within large international boxing organizations.

### **Counter-Discourse? The Right to Be Called Boxers, Not Female Boxers**

The data material implies that during the discussion on women's outfits in 2011 and 2012 some counter-discourses surfaced. Among these, an online petition on change.org, where more than 45,000 individuals signed, petitioning AIBA to reverse its recommendation that female boxers should be required to wear skirts during the London 2012 Olympic Games. National boxing Federations worldwide appeared to be divided over AIBA's new proposition concerning female boxers' outfits. The online texts analyzed here suggest that several renowned coaches and athletes from different nations voiced their disagreement with AIBA on the proposed outfits for female boxers. One of the texts depicts how Britain's head coach argued that women competing in the Olympic Games had earned their right to be treated equally with male boxers:

They are boxers and they want to wear a normal boxing kit. They have earned the right to be boxers and they want to go as boxers, not female boxers. [Creighton 2011]

Although this quotation from the material clearly is a statement for increased gender equality in boxing, it

could also be said to convey gendered power relations in international boxing. As Foucault (2000) states, power can only exist when exercised in relations between people. Stating that female boxers at high international sporting level have earned the right to be treated as "boxers," and not simply be branded as "female boxers" is here interpreted as an example of the status of superiority that men and men's boxing have in relation to women and women's boxing internationally (Bourdieu 2000; de Beauvoir 2000).

Several female boxers expressed their concern with AIBA's proposition regarding outfits for women. In one of the texts, a female boxer voiced her concern:

If female boxers are forced to wear feminine apparel, then this will create more problems in gyms. [Rawi 2012]

As shown by scholars such as Lafferty and McKay (2004) and Wacquant (1992; 1995; 2004; 2005), sexism and discrimination have previously been, and still are, a widespread problem in boxing gyms. By attempting to mark female boxers as feminine through the use of some special outfits, AIBA could contribute to further discrimination against female boxers on a global scale. Discrimination of women in boxing exemplifies how power relations between men and women in boxing are visible in its effects (Foucault 2000; Cole, Giardina, and Andrews 2004). AIBA's proposition for a uniform worn only by female boxers can here be understood as an attempt to ensure that female boxers remain feminine in a hyper-masculine sporting environment. AIBA is not, however, the first sport organization to attempt to ensure that female athletes wear outfits that reinforce traditional gender norms and notions. In

volleyball, FIVB introduced regulations requiring women to wear smaller uniforms for both indoor and beach volleyball on the basis that this would increase popularity in fans and sponsors (van Ingen and Kovacs 2012; von der Lippe 2013). These two events in volleyball and boxing are similar in regard to how gender is understood and socially constructed. Both cases imply that sports clothing, used as a gender-marking strategy, can contribute to distinguish male and female athletes to serve an external goal (e.g., increased income through sponsors or for the sake of fans and spectators).

A text from the study's material contains an official announcement from AIBA, which stated that: *due to massive pressure from the general public, female boxers would be able to choose between wearing a skirt or shorts in the ring*. National boxing Federations can, however, still require their female athletes to wear skirts in competitions. This has, among other nations, been practiced by Poland and Romania.

### **Women's Boxing in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games**

Before the Olympic Games in 2012, AIBA announced that the organization worked towards increasing the number of weight categories for women's boxing in the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. The request to increase the number of women's weight categories, and thereby the number of female participants, was denied by IOC, meaning that during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games only 36 female boxers will be able to participate (12 in each weight category). This is a relatively small number of athletes compared to the men's ten weight categories, which will include 250 boxers. As a response to why IOC would not

increase the number of women's weight categories, IOC shortly stated:

The IOC Executive Board decided that to control the size and cost of the Olympic Games, any changes requested by the International Federations for the 2016 Olympic Games should, in principle, not result in a higher number of athletes or increased number of medals. [AIBA 2013]

This decision by IOC meant that in order for there to be more weight categories for women's boxing in Rio 2016, AIBA would have to reduce the number of weight categories for men's boxing. The sample of texts in this study indicates that the possibility of reducing the number of men's weight categories in order to increase the number of female boxers and thereby promote gender equality in international boxing was not a topic of discussion within AIBA or IOC. In accordance with Foucault's (1978; 2000) perspective on modern power, this is interpreted as an example of how the relation of power between men and women is visibly exercised in international boxing (Cole, Giardina, and Andrews 2004). One of the texts in the material contains a comment on this topic from a prominent Norwegian boxer:

My impression was that IOC wanted to increase the number of weight categories for Rio 2016. But, the men in power positions do not care about women's boxing, it's men's boxing they are interested in. [Verdens Gang 2013; trans. from Norwegian—ABT]

This quote from the material illustrates how men's monopoly on power positions in international box-

ing affects women's boxing. These findings are in accordance with the results from previous studies on gender and power in boxing (e.g., Halbert 1997; De Garis 2000). Furthermore, it demonstrates how women's boxing is seen as relational to men's boxing, and devalued as "less important" (Bourdieu 2000; de Beauvoir 2000).

In the next part of the paper, I will explore how the relations of power between men and women in boxing, as demonstrated in the previous part of the paper through the analysis of the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games, can have significant implications for female boxers internationally. Here, I will use the case of AIBA's recent provisional suspension of the NBF as a case (AIBA 2014c; Norges Bokseforbund 2014).

#### **AIBA's Recent Changes in Technical Rules: The Case of the Provisional Suspension of the NBF**

During 2013 AIBA changed several of its technical rules, meaning they changed the conditions of how international boxing competitions are practiced and carried out. One of the larger and more momentous revisions of the technical rules was related to the head guard. With the incorporation of the new rules, male boxers over the age of 19 would compete without a head guard (AIBA 2014a). AIBA's medical commission ruled that—based on the results of a recent study (Bianco et al. 2012)—they found that the head guard offered little protection from injuries. In this specific study, Bianco and colleagues (2012) reviewed results from close to 30,000 bouts in amateur boxing during the last 59 years. One of the central findings in this study was that there is little evidence demon-

strating that boxing head guards reduce the impact of force to the boxer's head (Bianco et al. 2012):

It is not clear if removing head guards would make any difference...It will be important to monitor this change, not only to see if the number of KO and RSCH increases, but also to see if the number of RSCI increases due to cuts. [p. 4]

From these conclusions it is unclear whether the head guard provides any protection for boxers. The analysis of the material implies that based on these results AIBA reasoned that the removal of the head guard for "Elite Men" (male boxers over the age of 19) would result in a decreased number of concussions in boxing (O'Neill 2013).

For Norway and the NBF, this particular change in technical rules had significant consequences and implications. Boxing competitions without head guards were in direct conflict with Norwegian law. In other words, in 2014, it was illegal to compete in boxing without a head guard in Norway. The NBF was left with two choices: 1) defy Norwegian law, risking that athletes and coaches be prosecuted with the maximum penalty of 3 years in prison, or 2) breach AIBA's new rules and risk being suspended from international boxing (Norges Bokseforbund 2013). The board of directors in the NBF has chosen the second option, and held the 2014 National Championship in accordance with Norwegian law, with head guards for male boxers. As a result, AIBA suspended the NBF in March 2014:

In accordance with Art. 17 of the International Boxing Association (AIBA) Statutes, the AIBA Executive Com-

mittee decided on March 26, 2014 to provisionally suspend the Norwegian Boxing Federation due to a serious breach of Art. 6 of the AIBA Statutes and Rule 22 of the AOB Competition Rules at the National Championships held from March 6-8, 2014 in Tønsberg. [AIBA 2014c]

#### **Consequences and Implications for Norwegian Female Boxers**

Paradoxically, the analysis of the material suggests that the suspension had perhaps the most critical impact on Norwegian female boxers, who had not breached any of AIBA's technical rules during the National Championship in March 2014. One of the implications of the suspension was that Norwegian female boxers were no longer able to compete internationally. Several of the texts in the material suggest that as a boxing nation, Norway had in recent years more success internationally in women's boxing than in men's boxing (Kitel 2003; Norges Bokseforbund 2009; Bryhn 2013).

Seeing how women's boxing in Norway suffered significant drawbacks as a result of the breach of AIBA's technical rules made by male boxers, it arguably illustrates and highlights how the relationship between men and women in boxing also is a relationship of power (Bourdieu 2000; de Beauvoir 2000; Foucault 2000). In October 2014, the provisional suspension of the NBF was lifted by AIBA. I find it surprising that there appears to have been no open discussion or problematizing regarding the apparent gender inequality the suspension caused for Norwegian female boxers. This issue is, in this paper, construed as an indication of how modern power in sport often is gendered and visible in its effects

on female athletes, in this case—female boxers (Foucault 2000; Cole, Giardina, and Andrews 2004).

## Concluding Remarks

My aim in this paper has been to investigate what visible constructs of gender and gendered power relations in international boxing have surfaced during the process of the inclusion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games. Further, to explore how the relationship between gender and power can affect female boxers, using the provisional suspension of the NBF as an example. The analysis of the material shows how and in what ways gender and power relations are intertwined in boxing by underlining inequality between men and women in regard to their participation in Olympic boxing.

The effects of these gendered power relations in international boxing show how women's boxing is devalued in comparison to men's boxing. These power relations are visible both in the discourse surrounding the process of including women's boxing in the Olympic Games and within the case of the provisional suspension of the NBF. The findings of this

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study suggest that dominant discourses concerning women's boxing seem to be closely linked to the exercise of power, where men represent the dominant group exercising power in relation to women and women's boxing (Bourdieu 2000; Foucault 2000).

A relevant issue to raise here is how online discourses are linked to political practices. Do the discourses in the sample of online texts influence the policy of boxing and women's boxing? And to what extent are these online discourses influenced by official and authorized discourses on boxing? The majority of the texts in my sample was retrieved from the official website of AIBA and the NBF. Although some of the texts were retrieved from online media and discussion groups, primarily linked to national newspapers, it is likely that texts from AIBA and the NBF do represent authorized discourses on boxing.

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