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WOMEN IN BOXING: LIFE OF A FEMALE BOXER

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WOMEN IN BOXING: LIFE OF A FEMALE BOXER

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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University Honors

University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

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ABSTRACT

Boxing has reshaped me into a different person than I was before, building my resilience, confidence, and inner-strength. The lessons I have learned in the ring have also been applicable to my personal life. This unique sport has not only allowed me to discover a different part of myself, but has also helped me build and maintain many wonderful friendships and relationships with other fellow fighters. While it is undeniable that boxing requires physical toughness, this sport requires one to delve deeply within themselves, requiring the ability to create and fortify a mental fortitude. Through the use of personal anecdotes and self-documentation via smartphone, audio clips and archived footage, I aim to share with others how boxing can serve as a great personal resource of self-improvement and empowerment. My documentary will display my personal accounts of training, revealing my struggles as well as my achievements. The footage captured in this documentation will be filmed almost entirely on my own. I plan on briefly introducing my film and the process of making it, followed by a screening of the 8-minute film, and ending with a brief Q&A with the attendees.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

“We are changing the sport. Now young girls can be like, ‘I want to be like those girls and headline the Garden’. Now there is hope and I am excited to open those doors.” These words were said by Amanda Serrano. She is a signed professional fighter under Most Valuable Promotions (MVP), an organization dedicated to giving women more creative freedom in the boxing world (Richards, 2024). Serrano is also well-known for her matches against Irish female boxer, Katie Taylor, who is another inspirational figure for women in boxing. Amanda Serrano is an idol to many young girls all over the world, including myself. Her determination and her fierce will to make a difference in the boxing world has impacted many lives. She has been able to hold the world title for world champion in the featherweight division as of 2019.

When you think of boxing, what is the first thought that comes to mind? Do you think of violence, blood, and big, scary men? To a certain degree, yes, this reputation and stereotype is true. Boxing, also referred to as “pugilism” is a very contact-heavy sport. The formal definition, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “the art of attack and defense with the fists practiced as a sport.”

Boxing falls under the martial arts category along with other combat sports—Muay Thai, Wrestling, etc. Boxing was known as a gentlemen’s sport in the earlier decades, so seeing women in any kind of combative, harsh, violent sport was unheard of, or improper. The sport’s historical association with masculinity often led to some extent to the exclusion of women from any kind of professional opportunities within the sport (Smith, 2014). Including this perspective in my documentary will help provide a historical context for women’s involvement in boxing. By exploring the past, I can highlight the societal expectations and gender norms that shaped the sport. Despite challenges, women have still found ways to participate in boxing, even when it

was considered taboo and back then was far more restricted. Their perseverance, dedication, and determination for their sport is what helped them break boundaries. This will help me provide a historical point of view in my documentary, to show how women were still in the sport despite times being stricter back then.

A boxing match typically takes place within a square ring with two opponents, fighting for control of the match. A typical boxing match—also known as a spar—lasts three rounds, and each round is three minutes long with a 30 second rest in between. Three rounds in the ring is a total of ten minutes of continuous cardio, lungs at full capacity, and an increased adrenaline rush. A spar is, in short, a practice fight. It is a way for boxers to practice their techniques on a moving target to see if their skills have improved or if they wish to hone the skills they already have. Three minutes in the ring versus three minutes outside of the ring are two completely different experiences. Boxing shown in entertainment films such as the *Rocky* movies with Sylvester Stallone and the *CREED* trilogy with Michael B. Jordan is not the same as boxing in the real world. In film, boxing is romanticized and seen as cool, strong, and very masculine. It is almost glorified. In my opinion, being in a sparring match, especially my first one, is a very thrilling yet scary experience. For a second, your mind is tricked into thinking that your life is on the line, and the only way out is one of two methods—fight, or flight. In my case, my fight response is activated, and I have never felt more alive than within the ring.

METHODS

My capstone project is my personal journey as a woman in boxing. The purpose of this project is to share with others not only my personal experiences and love for boxing, but also to bring awareness to others regarding the benefits of this rigorous sport. I aim to achieve this goal using personal documentation via iPhone video footage. The original goal was to include audio

interviews with other female boxers I had met over the course of my training. However, throughout my creative process, I had found it best to just focus on my personal journey and show everyone my own point of view to make it more intimate.

I gathered inspiration from the YouTube Documentary, “Women in the Ring: The Fight for Equality in Boxing | Fight Like A Girl” directed by Jill Morley. In the documentary, Morley shares her story regarding her reasons for boxing as well her fellow teammates and friends. Morley’s documentary shows the true, authentic boxing gym setting and how women during that time were perceived as fighters. She successfully captures the emotion, grit, and strength, as well as the losses and hardships female boxers face in the gym and in competition. While Morley’s documentary was published in 2020, the time frame appears to be older than the time of its release. The documentary features women who train in New York, located on the east coast of the United States. Studying this documentary was fruitful for my own project because it provided important insights into the experiences of women in boxing. By showcasing their endeavors, it helped bring attention to their presence and contributions within the sport. Additionally, the filming techniques used in this documentary offered inspiration for my own approach. Observing how the director captured the stories and structured the narrative guided me in determining the best way to present my documentary. Overall, this documentary serves as both an informative and a creative resource. It not only highlights the role of women in boxing but also provides a useful reference for shaping the visual and storytelling aspects of my own film. It is a common misconception that women who are in combat sports such as boxing, Muay Thai, etc. are very masculine women and therefore, are not usually allowed to be feminine in a typically male-dominated sport. Women in some cases, depending on the gym, must

suppress femininity and keep their stoicism. The sport requires one to have emotional control, which can go against a woman's nature to express herself. This stereotype will often lead to challenges for female athletes who may feel pressured to fit some sort of image: even I have felt pressured on some days where I felt I need to be more masculine and "stoic" (Halberstam, 1998). This documentary will highlight the differences in how women experience and navigate the sport of boxing, particularly within a male-dominated environment. It will explore how various female boxers approach challenges during training and at the professional level, as well as how they handle media attention. By showcasing these perspectives, the documentary aims to break down common misconceptions and demonstrate that women can maintain their femininity while competing in a demanding and highly competitive sport.

My documentary is more than just a capstone project—it is a platform to share some untold stories of women in boxing. Through firsthand accounts, training footage, and interviews, I aim to reveal a deeper insight on boxing. It is not just about physical strength; it is about mental resilience, emotional growth, and the courage to keep going despite the odds. With this documentary, I hope to inspire more people—especially women—to see boxing as more than just a combat sport. I want to break down any misunderstandings and highlight the liberating feeling that comes from stepping into the ring. By sharing my journey and the experiences of other female fighters, I want to show that boxing is a tool for personal transformation and a symbol of perseverance. Below is a timeline of how the film was created and put into work.

WINTER 2025		SPRING 2025		SUMMER 2025	
Objective	Date/Week	Objective	Date/Week	Objective	Date/Week
Outline project idea	Week 5	begin filming	week 1	continue film	entire summer
		start literature review	week 2	continue literature review	week 2
start process to get IRB approval	Week 8 or 9	meet with faculty mentor	week 4	find more sources	entire summer
		submit no application for IRB later than the end of Week 4		perhaps interview fighters from Bay Area	weeks 6-7
				come back to film in the Inland Empire	wk 0 (before Fall)
FALL 2025		WINTER 2026		SPRING 2026	
Objective	Date/Week	Objective	Date/Week	Objective	Date/Week
continue film	entire Fall	finish filming	week 3	finalize capstone draft (peer review and feedback)	week 2
start interviews of other fighters	weeks 2-3	finalize and delete any irrelevant footage	week 4		
begin script of narration	week 4	talk to mentor to see if any unnecessary footage needs to be throughout quarter			
start editing and putting clips together	week 5			Complete Capstone Draft	WEEK 3
		Apply to present in Undergrad Research & Creativity Symposium	March	SUBMIT Capstone	WEEK 6
				Undergraduate Research & Creativity Symposium	May

After capturing all of my required footage, I developed a script that is linked at the end of this paper.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Throughout the year and a half of filming, training, and planning, I had found myself burnt out and exhausted at times throughout the school year. Despite being a business administration undergraduate, I had felt pressured to make this documentary look as cinematic as possible while also making sure that this was a representation of me as a person. The hardest part of the project was making sure I captured the right footage and everything flowed smoothly. Attempting to film almost every day had grown to be taxing. I am someone who goes to the gymnasium about six times a week, so having to film all of my sessions in a public area became very difficult at times. My film locations were both at the Student Recreation Center (SRC) at UCR and Corona Hills Boxing & Fitness. Corona's opening hours were open to the public round-the-clock, but figuring out the hours most where it was the least populated was a challenge. Filming at the SRC was also a challenge because no matter what hour I trained, it was almost always packed with people. I did not want to have extra people in my shots out of respect for their privacy, but also because I wanted to emphasize the solitude of my training—considering

boxing is also considered a lonely sport. The way I learned to deal with this hump was by setting certain days for filming and other days for personal training—without cameras. This helped me to avoid burnout. Many of my creative ideas came when putting all of the footage together and of course, inspiration from the YouTube documentaries I had watched, given to me by my Faculty-Mentor.

Trying to balance both this project and school was also very stressful. I am a finance undergraduate with many deadlines, due dates, assignments, and exams. The obligation to balance all of this was frustrating at times, almost too overwhelming that I would procrastinate with certain parts of the project. However, I knew I had to complete it soon and if I did not, I would risk my academic career. I pushed myself and had wonderful support from my friends, family, and mentor.

Compared to other works within this field, my documentary seems to feel more like a journal or personal video log. I am not a film student so I understood that my project was not going to reflect the same aspects of an actual documentary, but I know that I put in a lot of hard work into it. All in all, I began developing the documentary in the Fall of 2024 and finished in the Spring of 2026.

CONCLUSION

The showing of my documentary during week 4 of Spring quarter at the Symposium Presentations was a success. I screened my documentary in front of faculty, staff, and students and received amazing feedback. I believe that I achieved my goal of convincing a few women to consider taking part in the sport and brought awareness to boxing's benefits. I do hope that with time, more women will consider taking part in more combat sports. I found many friends within

this practice and became a better person. Boxing is a part of my life, and it will remain as such until I can no longer use my hands.

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SCRIPT

[Intro]

"Boxing: The Sweet Science.

Many people think it's violence... barbarity... something to watch on the television. But it's more than that—see, people notice the fights, but not the work it takes to get to that point.

For decades, boxing has been known as the "gentleman's sport." Women have been in the sport for centuries, but their recognition didn't arrive until recently—with notable names like Christy Martin, Amanda Serrano, Katie Taylor, and Claressa Shields.

However, *this* story isn't about them. My name is Alessandra Flores.

And this is what boxing means to me.

[cut to USIBA preparations]

I started boxing in April 2023 with Highlander Gloves, UC Riverside's student led boxing club.

I trained with the competitive team, preparing for USIBA, a national tournament spanning over 3 days, with competitors from

other boxing clubs from different universities all over the nation.

It was intense. There was no room for weakness.

Our training quickly cut out anyone not up to the competition. I competed in 2024 in Houston, Texas in the 132lbs Women' s beginner division. Despite all of my hard work, I had lost.

However, this is when everything changed.

Because I realized...this wasn't just something I was doing. It was something I needed.

[Drive to Corona Hills Boxing & Fitness]

I was lucky to find Corona Hills Boxing and Fitness, a boxing gym that gave its fighters the privilege of coming into the gym at quite literally, any hour they wanted. I looked forward to that 30 minute commute from my home to the gym - the anticipation for each training day was electric.

And the best part was the fact that I had the opportunity to train on my own, so it would just be me and the punching bag. My

head could go empty, and all I could think about was the round. And the round after that, and the round after that-drilling over and over again.

The crisp sounds of the bag when my gloves would connect would bring such satisfaction to my ears. If it sounds clean, it means I threw a good punch. If it sounds dull, then that punch was not delivered correctly.

Now, in boxing, or any martial art for that matter, a strong base can be one of the biggest distinctions from a good fighter... and a great fighter. Fundamentals are key: if you don't have strong fundamentals, you won't fight well in the ring.

Conditioning is a huge factor in boxing: this usually involves long runs, sprints, and weight training. Runs help build endurance, sprints help build burst power, and weight training provides the tools for stronger punches and of course, more muscle power. Surprisingly, you actually need a strong lower body to have good boxing - this is because you are not just punching from your arms, you must use your entire body to correctly throw. Think of it as a surge of power you gather from the ground and you channel it all the way up and into a minute point of your body: your fist.

Now, how do you know all of this work is paying off? You take it into sparring. Sparring is used as a tool to test what works and what doesn't. My nerves still jump every time I spar, despite my 3 years into this sport. My mind is fully aware of the fact that I could possibly get hurt, and no one *likes* to get hurt.

[show sparring while voicing over]

Rounds last 3 minutes. Now 3 minutes does not seem like a long time, but those 3 minutes can feel very different in the eyes of a spectator and in the eyes of the fighter.

As a spectator, you only see what is directly in front of you. Maybe some questions are raised: who is winning? Does that hurt? Why would anyone do this? Or, maybe you are thinking nothing at all except watching the fight.

But for the fighter: it's a whole other world. For me, my thoughts can race depending on who I am sparring.

"Am I throwing correctly? Are my hands up? Am I breathing?"

And that is where the mental game comes in, because the real fight is not in the ring, but it's within yourself.

Because on top of all of these thoughts, I also have to fight the fatigue, the fear, the pain, and the urge to quit. Which are also lessons that can be taken into one's personal life and how to deal with struggles.

Boxing is not just for the physically fit, it is for the mentally strong-willed folks of this world.

Which is all the more reason I think more women should participate in it.

Boxing requires discipline, courage, mental fortitude, and heart-which are notable qualities many women possess.

As a woman in boxing, I felt I grew stronger both physically and mentally. It makes me feel empowered.

It's a revelation to discover you are not as fragile as you think you are. That is why women belong in this sport.

Competing, fighting - all of that is very cool, but you do not need to fight to start boxing. There are plenty of people out there that I know who do not fight, but they are great martial artists.

[show footage of training at TRFC]

Originally, I started boxing because I wanted to lose weight and learn a new hobby. I was not banking on the fact that I would be so dedicated to training, but I do not regret it.

There are no requirements to start boxing: some start as little as 4 years old, or there are others who start later in life. I took a chance one spring night and said: "why not?" and it was one of the best decisions I have made in life. Now, boxing is a part of who I am. One of the most important things for me is that boxing gives me a purpose.

It gives me a reason to show up for myself. I lost nearly 15lbs because of how hard I train.

You would be amazed at the opportunities boxing has to offer.

Boxing gave me a new way to make long-lasting friendships and even showed me that there is more out there than just boxing. I have made friends who are able to give me advice on how to correct my form, try out combinations, and of course, new sparring partners.

This sport led me to the Resistance Fitness Center, a gym located in the Bay Area and I now not only practice boxing, but I recently took up another combat sport known as Muay Thai.

I am proud of myself that I took a chance on something that is not super common, but it gave me the opportunity to try something new and believe in myself."