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## The Fight In and Out the Ring for Mexican American Women Boxers

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## The Fight In and Out of the Ring for Mexican American Women Boxers

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### ABSTRACT

*In the context of the United States (U.S.) sport sector, particularly within the boxing domain, a prevalent hypermasculine culture has been widely observed. Despite this prevalence, there exists a significant gap in research: addressing the shared experiences of Latinas, specifically Mexican American women boxers in the U.S. To bridge this divide, the authors employ a qualitative study utilizing Latin Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) as the primary theoretical framework to further investigate the boxing experiences of Mexican American women inside and outside the ring. The study engaged 10 participants in semi-structured interviews, while additionally collecting data from their respective boxing gyms' media sites. The findings revealed that despite facing numerous biases, Mexican American women boxers demonstrated resilience and determination in their efforts to overcome the barriers posed by both Latin cultural dominance and the male-dominated U.S. sports landscape. Overall, this study contributes valuable insights to the existing scholarship on Latinas, specifically Mexican American women in the sports field, while also offering practical suggestions for future research.*

**Keywords:** Boxing, Diversity, Inclusion, Latina, Sport

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Over the years, researchers have consistently observed a significant disparity in the representation of women across various facets of the United States (U.S.) sport sector (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007; Senne, 2016; Walker & Bopp, 2010). Nevertheless, there is a notable lack of literature specifically addressing the participation of Mexican American women in the U.S. boxing domain (Tjønndal, 2017; 2019). One likely explanation for this research gap is the delayed recognition of women's boxing as an Olympic sport. While men's boxing attained Olympic status as early as 1904, women's boxing only entered the Olympic arena during the London 2012 games (Bearak, 2012; Tjønndal, 2017). Another contributing factor is the insufficient scholarly attention devoted to the experiences of Latinas in the U.S. sport milieu. A scoping study conducted by Alanis et al. (2022) shed light on this gap, highlighting that a mere 14 scholarly articles focused on Latinas in U.S. sport over a span of 40 years. Consequently, there is a pressing need for an analysis to critically comprehend the multifaceted challenges faced by Latinas in the US hegemonic sport domain.

In the U.S., Latinos constitute the second-largest demographic group of boxers, comprising 20.7% of participants, with White individuals leading at 54.6% (Zippia, 2023). However, this proportion significantly diminishes when examining gender dynamics, with women accounting for only 31.8% of boxers in the U.S. (Zippia, 2023), a concerning trend given the sport's widespread popularity. For instance, the market size of boxing gyms and clubs in the U.S. was estimated to be approximately \$1.2 billion (Statia, 2023). Additionally, boxing holds considerable cultural significance in Mexico, where it is revered as one of the most popular sports, contributing to the formation of a "sporting Mexican diaspora" (Mondragón, 2021, p. 301). For Mexican prizefighters, boxing served as a vehicle for developing a sense of national identity and gaining acceptance within American society (Alamillo, 2020). Despite the sport's prevalence, there exists a notable gap in research exploring the experiences of Latinas in this domain. Some scholars

attribute this gap to cultural priorities within the home setting, which may limit Latinas' participation in physical activities (McGovern, 2020).

Hence, the primary objective of this analysis is to critically examine the gender, cultural, and racial experiences of Latinas, with a specific focus on Mexican American women boxers. The analysis aims to investigate whether Mexican American women boxers receive support within their Latin cultural context (RQ1), how they are financially supported within the U.S. sports sector (RQ2), the challenges they encounter in participating in this domain (RQ3), and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges (RQ4). To address these research questions, the study adopts the theoretical framework of Latin Critical Race Theory (LatCrit). LatCrit offers a comprehensive perspective to examine the systemic oppression faced by Latinas and to understand the intricate intersectional dynamics of gender and race within the sports realm (Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

### **Latin Critical Race Theory as the Theoretical Framework**

Derived from Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latin Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) specifically examines the manifestations of racism experienced by the Latin population within the cultural context of the U.S. (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Although LatCrit bears a slight variation in name, it aligns with the same tenants of CRT, namely: (a) recognizing the embedded nature of racism within both U.S. and global societies; (b) challenging the prevailing socially constructed ideologies; (c) seeking remedies for racial oppressions; and (d) employing the frameworks of intersectionality and interdisciplinary knowledge (Birk, 2022; Crenshaw, 1991; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

At its core, those scholars who advocate for the use of LatCrit theory highlight how "race, class, gender, and sexuality" all intersect with one another, causing numerous oppressions and discriminations experienced in the U.S. (Huber, 2010, p. 78). Racism is what guides LatCrit theory; thus, this article follows Huber's (2010) definition of racism in the U.S. and components of CRT to define racism in this article as "the assigning of values to real or imagined differences in order to justify white supremacy, to the benefit of whites and at the expense of People of Color, and thereby defend the right of whites to dominance" (p.80). This definition of racism and the understanding of LatCrit components allowed us to note the discriminations Latinas encounter within the sport sector.

Moreover, Villalpando (2004) noted that LatCrit provides a thorough examination of the interplay among different social identities, encompassing "language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, and sexuality," within the Latinx population (p. 43). This renders LatCrit a valuable theoretical framework for scholars aiming to scrutinize the overlapping identities of Latinx individuals, which give rise to various forms of oppression, including racism and sexism (Delgado et al., 2023; Stefancic, 1997). Consequently, LatCrit proves highly relevant to this study, empowering the authors to spotlight the experiences of Latina boxers' social identities and address the challenges they encounter within the boxing domain (Villalpando, 2004).

LatCrit has undergone significant development over the years, with numerous scholars utilizing it to enrich the body of Latinx scholarship both within and beyond the U.S. (Keith & Johnson, 2008). For instance, Jowers and Curtner-Smith (2021) applied LatCrit to comprehend microaggressions and racial discrimination experienced by Mateo, a Latinx NCAA Division I basketball coach. Furthermore, within the U.S. media landscape, Latinas frequently confront extensive hypersexualization, evident in portrayals across television, newspapers, and literature, which often accentuate their physical attributes and sexual characteristics (Guzman & Valdivia, 2004; Rodriguez, 2018). These depictions contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes among community members and other racial groups, frequently overlooking the deeply ingrained aspects of Latinas' "religious, conservative, and family-oriented" culture (Correa, 2010; p. 425), thereby contributing to the expansion of LatCrit theory.

In the U.S. boxing domain, biases were observed wherein amateur women athletes received compensation ranging from \$200 to \$400 per match, while their male counterparts earned significantly higher amounts, ranging from \$2,500 to \$5,000 per match, indicating a disparity in remuneration based on gender (Bleiweis et al., 2022; Ivanov, 2019). These trends are apparent throughout the sport industry and among different racial groups, as recommended salaries for

Latinas in sport lag behind those of their peers (Vick & Cunningham, 2018). Moreover, Latinas' participation in U.S. sport is scarce (Ramsammy, 2021). According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2019), while approximately 55% of girls from various racial backgrounds engage in at least one sport during high school, the participation rate drops to only 48% among Latina girls. These findings underscore a concerning trend wherein Latinas in the U.S. not only receive lower compensation compared to their counterparts, but also exhibit reduced participation in sports.

Furthermore, scholars have shed light on the entrenched gender roles within Latin culture (McGovern, 2020). Traditionally, Latinas have been expected to assume domestic roles within the confines of "the home" setting, while Latinos are encouraged to pursue careers and make decisions that impact their familial lives (Acosta, 1999, p. 44). This cultural expectation is exemplified through the concept of *machismo*, which emphasizes the image of Latino men as strong and authoritative figures who serve as the heads of households and bear the responsibility for important family choices (Faulkner, 2003).

In contrast, Latinas often are ascribed the role of *marianismo*, embodying qualities of being the primary emotional caregiver, nurturer, and "*la mujer buena*," who selflessly cares for her family (Castillo et al., 2010, p. 164). While these gender norms have been deeply ingrained within Latinas through cultural transmission across generations (Gloria, 2001), more recent research has revealed the adverse effects of such norms on professional pursuits, sports participation, and educational opportunities (D' Alonzo, 2012; McGovern, 2020).

An exemplary study by D' Alonzo (2012) provides insights into the influence of strong marianismo beliefs on the health-related factors of Latinas. The research highlights how Latina immigrant women consistently prioritized their family responsibilities over their own health needs, resulting in limited engagement in physical activity. This research demonstrates the significant impact of marianismo on the well-being and lifestyle choices of Latinas.

Overall, the available literature, as it relates explicitly to Latinas in sport, is limited (Alanis et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a pressing need for additional studies to contribute to the advancement of Latinas in the realm of sports, especially in light of the rising participation levels among women in traditionally male-dominated sports such as boxing (Schlabach, 2020). By employing LatCrit as the primary theoretical framework, the authors explore the experiences of Latinas, specifically Mexican American women boxers in the hypermasculine US sport industry. Moreover, considering the robust Latin cultural norms and the entrenched hypermasculine nature of the US boxing domain (Lafferty & McKay, 2004), we recognize that the struggle for Latina boxers extends beyond the ring. Latinas' presence in boxing should not be a matter of debate but one of acceptance (Lafferty & McKay, 2004). This study is guided by four research questions:

**Research Question 1 (RQ1):** Are Mexican American women boxers supported (i.e., finances) within their Latin culture?

**Research Question 2 (RQ2):** Are Mexican American women boxers supported (i.e., media coverage, and finances) within the U.S. sport domain?

**Research Question 3 (RQ3):** What critical challenges do Mexican American women boxers face when participating in the U.S. boxing sector?

**Research Question 4 (RQ4):** How are Mexican American women boxers countering the various challenges exerted within the U.S. boxing sector?

## Methods

### *Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design method, utilizing semi-structured interviews with Mexican American women boxers to understand how they view the support and challenges faced by their Latin culture in the U.S. boxing sector. Qualitative investigations are especially necessary when addressing a critical issue that quantitative models may not specifically answer through their studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Bernard et al. (2016) stated that applying qualitative methods to a study can help uncover information about the participants' experiences and strengthen their unique voices. Moreover, a qualitative phenomenological research design method examines participants' lived experiences, especially

between topics where little is understood or seen (Donalek, 2004). Therefore, this method is extremely helpful in understanding the Latina boxers' critical responses.

#### *Positionality Statements*

The primary investigator identifies herself as a Latina boxer. Her family originates from Mexico, she has lived in that country for many years, and her first language spoken was Spanish. Moreover, she participated, trained, and sparred within the U.S. boxing domain but left the field entirely to pursue the questions she could not get answers to inside the ring. Thus, she is part of her participants' in-group (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Furthermore, this study was deeply rooted in her Latina boxing experiences and epistemological beliefs. That is, she understands society to socially construct knowledge and ideas (Nørreklit et al., 2016). Lastly, she is bound by a pragmatic constructivism paradigm. The primary author's main goal is to explain how the community understands knowledge by using the best research methods to do so. Thus, this paradigm and the motivation to highlight the voices of the marginalized Latin community in the U.S. influenced the research process tremendously.

The second author identifies as a White, heterosexual, able-bodied man who, though not a boxer, is physically active. He has conducted diversity and inclusion research across several decades and in doing so, has adopted different methodological approaches, including in-depth, semi-structured interviews. His role in the study is related to idea generation, theorizing, study design, writing, and feedback.

The third author identifies as an African American athletic woman. She, too, boxed for numerous years and is very familiar with the masculine sport setting of the boxing domain. Her unique epistemological beliefs and research area in the sport management domain greatly aided the study forward. Moreover, her epistemological beliefs played a pivotal role in the paper's editing, writing, and feedback portions.

#### *Participants*

To critically analyze the Mexican American women boxers' sporting experiences inside and outside the ring, the primary author conducted 10 semi-structured interviews. All 10 participants were of Latin ethnicity, specifically from Mexico (see Table 1). Though all the boxers were born in the United States and attended school there, their parents were Mexican immigrants. Therefore, they identified as Mexican American due to their familial link to Mexico's culture (Alvirez et al., 1981). Additionally, the mean age of the participants was 28.7 ( $SD = 9.69$ ), with a range of 31 years.

**Table 1**  
*Participant Demographic Information*

| Pseudonym name    | Ethnicity        | Socioeconomic class | Social support received from tournament personnel (Below average, Average, and Above average) | Had diversity and inclusive statements on their website or media outlets | Boxing gym attending (A, B, C, D) | Diversity and inclusive statement |
|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Luana</b>      | Mexican American | Middle-class        | Average   | No   | Boxing Gym A                      | No                                |
| <b>Agustina</b>   | Mexican American | Middle-class        | Above average   | No   |                                   |                                   |
| <b>Antonella</b>  | Mexican American | Lower-class         | Average   | No   |                                   |                                   |
| <b>Ximena</b>     | Mexican American | Middle-class        | Average   | No   | Boxing Gym B                      | No                                |
| <b>Josefina</b>   | Mexican American | Middle-class        | Average   | No   |                                   |                                   |
| <b>Alissandra</b> | Mexican American | Middle-class        | Average   | No   |                                   |                                   |
| <b>Ana</b>        | Mexican American | Middle-class        | Average   | No   | Boxing Gym C                      | No                                |
| <b>Catalina</b>   | Mexican American | Middle-class        | Above average   | No   |                                   |                                   |
| <b>Mariana</b>    | Mexican American | Middle-class        | Above average   | No   |                                   |                                   |
| <b>Andrea</b>     | Mexican American | Middle-class        | Above average   | No   | Boxing Gym D                      | No                                |

Moreover, to help the investigators gauge the insight into the participants' family and cultural background, all participants were asked about their family's social class. Nine out of the 10 participants came from a middle-class background, while one identified with the lower socioeconomic class (see Table 1). The middle-class in this study was determined by the Pew Research Center's definition of "households that earn between two-thirds and double the median U.S. household income, that being \$65,000" (Frankenfield, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), whereas the lower-class in this study is defined as earning less than the middle-class household income. Additionally, it is also noteworthy to mention that all 10 Latina boxers attended gyms in similar middle-class neighborhoods.

Lastly, because the investigators also wanted to note the social support Mexican American women boxers received from the official boxing tournament environment and personnel, we asked participants to rate the support they received from the boxing tournament officials. Response options included "below average, average, and above average" (see Table 1). Support was defined in this study by the amount of assistance the tournament staff gave the Latinas before, during, or after a boxing bout (i.e., prompt/clear communication, medical assistance given, and active listening). Additionally, once the support option was chosen, participants were asked to elaborate on "why" they selected that answer, and those findings are described in the Result section. Informed consent was obtained before any data was collected.



### *External Data Collected*

To gain a deeper understanding of the participants' home boxing environments, we collected diversity, equity, and inclusion data from the websites and social media pages of their respective gyms. Although we interviewed 10 Mexican American women boxers, most were teammates and attended the same boxing gym. Thus, there were only four different boxing gym websites and social media outlets to examine (see Table 1). Overall, gathering this data helped note the background of the Latina boxers' space while also showcasing the skewness these Latina boxers face at the organizational level (Lafferty & McKay, 2004).

### *Procedure*

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this research study, the recruitment process commenced. Initially, the principal investigator contacted two Mexican American women boxers via email and social media. Subsequently, the remaining eight participants were recruited utilizing a snowball sampling method (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As previously mentioned, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted – a number based on data saturation and the emergence of common themes among the interviewees. The semi-structured interviews (see Table 2 for interview questions) helped spark more follow-up questions and provided additional insights on perspectives not explicitly tied to a specific structured interview (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

**Table 2**  
*Interview questions*

1. Are you currently participating in boxing? If not, why have you left this field?
2. Have you ever felt uncomfortable or unsupported by your team, coach, or family as a woman doing boxing? Why?
3. Have you ever participated in a boxing tournament or bout? If so, what was your experience?
4. Between these three choices; above average, average, and below average: how do you feel boxing tournaments support Latinas competing? Why?
5. How would you rate your social class? Do you believe that your social class affects your participation and performance when it comes to boxing? Why?
6. Do you feel valued as a Latina boxer?
7. Has your family supported your decision to be a women's boxer athlete?
8. Do you believe your gender affects the amount of support you receive from your teammates, coach, or tournament personnel? If so, why?
9. Would you like to add any final remarks on your boxing experience in the U.S.?

To help with trustworthiness and minimize risk to the participants, the primary investigator wanted to conduct interviews in a safe environment (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Thus, she asked all participants to choose a location where they felt most comfortable completing this interview. Five of the 10 participants were interviewed via Zoom, and the other five had face-to-face interviews. All interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes in length.

Moreover, before starting the interviews, the investigator asked the participants if they preferred the discussion to be conducted in their native tongue. Choosing a language created a more honest and dependable discussion (Canin, 2021). All 10 participants responded that they speak both Spanish and English and felt safe doing the interviews in both languages. Thus, the participants' and investigator switched back and forth throughout the discussions between English and Spanish languages. Again, the investigator did this to make the participants feel culturally safe while participating in the study (Hesse-Biber, 2014).

The five Zoom interviews were conducted between the principal investigator's home setting and the participants' respective home or work settings. Furthermore, during the five Zoom interviews, the primary investigator concurrently captured field notes, while Zoom recorded all

sessions to generate English verbatim transcripts, preserving Spanish words and conversations in the original language. This approach aligns with established literature, emphasizing that word-for-word transcriptions contribute to the rigor and accuracy of the data in a study (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006; Hill et al., 2022). However, when it came to the five participants who chose to do the face-to-face interviews, their location was specifically noteworthy, as all five women selected their respective boxing gyms as their safe locations to do their interviews. The gym sites varied by city, but all were conducted in the same state. Therefore, the primary investigator visited each boxing gym and conducted personal face-to-face interviews, during which field notes and audio recordings were collected. Subsequently, following the completion of the face-to-face interviews, the primary investigator transcribed the audio recordings verbatim in English, preserving Spanish words in their original language.

Throughout recruitment and data gathering, the primary investigator was self-reflexive of her positionality within the study (Darwin Holmes, 2020). As mentioned earlier, she identifies as a Latina boxer; thus, she is part of her in-group population – meaning that the primary investigator shares the same interests, identity, and solidarity with the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Therefore, to reduce bias and aid the two theoretical frameworks, the primary investigator only mentioned her background once participants personally asked. Additionally, she kept a reflexivity journal always present throughout the study. The primary investigator wanted to allow the participants' thoughts within this domain to generate freely.

Moreover, to protect the identity of the Mexican American women boxers, pseudonyms were assigned. Kaiser (2009) states that confidentiality among the participants in a study can be addressed by correctly "replacing the respondent's names with pseudonyms" (p. 1635). Therefore, all pseudonym names were assigned by the principal investigator, who made it a priority to select names that enhanced the participant's proud Mexican culture and background. In doing this, investigators have clean data that does not contain identifiable information that can potentially harm the participants (Saunders et al., 2014).

### *Analysis*

The coding process commenced immediately and continued until the end of the data collection. Specifically, the primary author transcribed the interviews verbatim, and each interview included 12 to 34 pages of transcribed data collected from the participants. The mean number of pages was 17.4 ( $SD = 6.75$ ). Inductive coding was implemented within this study as the primary investigator reviewed the data, grouped several codes, and then developed themes (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019). Once the coding process ended, themes were developed. Creswell and Poth (2016) define themes in a qualitative research study as "broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to [create] one common idea" (p.186).

Coding and analysis were influenced by the positionality of the first author, who, as mentioned earlier, is also a Latina with extensive training and sparring experience across various boxing gyms. To enhance credibility, she maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study, as recommended by Guba and Lincoln (1989). Thus, the primary author wrote her own interpretation of the discussions completed in her journal after every interview. Here are some examples of the questions and notes she wrote in her journal: "Before, during, and after interviewing my participant, what did I feel? Did I relate to their experiences? Now I see I am not the only one experiencing this." Additionally, the second and third authors contributed to the data analysis and coding process by reviewing the summary of collected data and approving the identified themes.

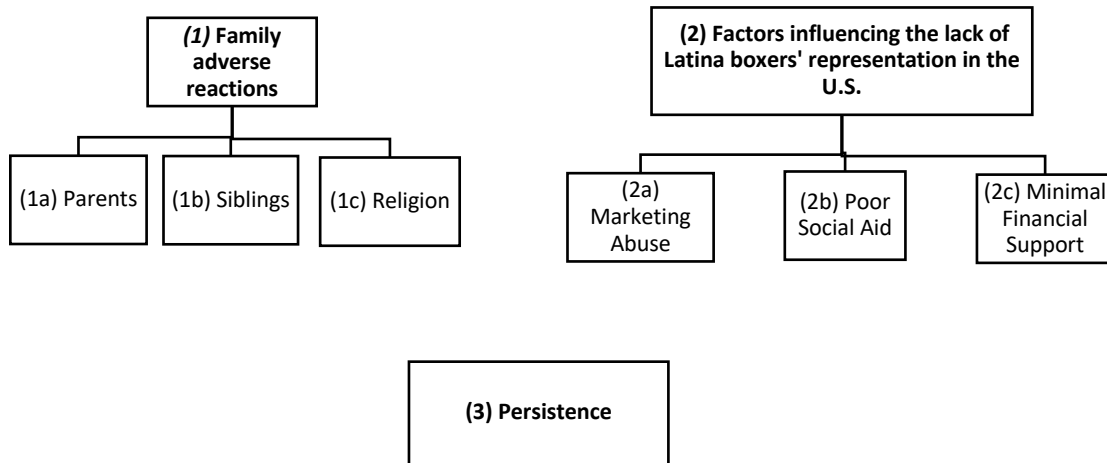
## **Findings and Discussion**

The primary investigator, who is fluent in Spanish, categorized the data into six codes, merging into three broader themes (a) family adverse reactions; (b) factors influencing the lack of Mexican American women boxers' representation in the U.S; and (c) persistence (see Figure 1). As discussed in further depth in the following space, the Mexican American women boxers in the study routinely encountered biases but remained in boxing because of their desire to compete and



train. They deemed it worthy of fighting through it to break the cultural Latin and hegemonic masculinity barriers prevalent today (Ramsammy, 2021).

**Figure 1**  
*Main Themes from Study*



#### *Family Adverse Reactions*

To answer our first research question (RQ1), we asked whether our Mexican American women boxers are supported within their Latin culture. We identified three lower-order themes (parents, siblings, and religion), all of which were subsumed under the more prominent theme of *Family adverse reactions* (see Figure 1).

The first lower-order theme identified was parents. We found that most of the participants in this study received negative feedback from their parents when they decided to pick up their boxing gloves and get into the ring. Andrea stated: "So, I started liking boxing in high school, but I did not actually get to do it because my parents did not think it was something I needed to do." Luana also stated that she felt unsupported by her dad as she recalled him telling her: "It is not ladylike for you to do this; females do not do this type of thing [box]." Moreover, Alison explicitly recalls her mother asking her: "Why would you do that [box]? You are a woman; there is so much more out there for you to do."

These findings are consistent with previous research showing the influence of traditional family values and feedback directed toward Latinas (McGovern, 2020; Ramsammy, 2021). For example, Covarrubias and Fryberg's (2015) study noted that incoming Latinx first-generation college students who attend a university away from their home city experienced guilt, resentment, and lack of support because their families negatively viewed them for leaving the family household. Regarding our study, the same absence of aid common in the literature is mirrored, as Josefina recalled her mom telling her: "When you lose your first fight, you will realize why boxing is never for you." Josefina's mother had already anticipated her daughter's loss and did not encourage her to excel. The theme of parental influence was prominent in all 10 interviews.

Although we interpreted these findings in conjunction with previous research as indicative of the impact of traditional family values on Latinas, we also considered another possibility. It is plausible that parents of female boxers might express such reservations regardless of their ethnic or racial background, suggesting that the patterns reflect gendered ideals more than other influences. As we exclusively interviewed Mexican American women boxers, we were unable to dismiss this potential alternative explanation.

However, our initial interpretation gains further support when considering the role of siblings and their resistance rooted in cultural norms, particularly if the Mexican American women boxers had other brothers or sisters who adhered to cultural norms and expectations (Roksa et al., 2020). "I don't know if it's because I am her daughter and all, [but] she (mom) would rather see me get

married and have kids like my sister," remarked Antonella. Catalina also mentioned that despite coming from a family of boxers, her mom was "very concerned" when she stepped into the ring: "I felt like she didn't want me to do this, even though all my brothers did it." For years, the belief that Latinas must fulfill domestic roles within the home has been ingrained (Acosta, 1999). However, if they deviate from this understanding and engage in masculine environments, Latinas often are perceived as unappealing and masculine (Cahn, 2015; Coakley, 2016). These patterns are especially prevalent if their siblings conform to normative expectations.

Third, the lower-order theme of religion emerged. The collected findings underscored the robust ties of Latin culture to the participants' ancestries and religious beliefs (Rueschenberg & Buriel, 1989). Throughout history, many Latinos have demonstrated respect for their local priest and Catholic church hierarchy by attending church or following their respective preacher's guidance (Campesino et al., 2009). However, we observed negative responses from these higher-status individuals to Mexican American women boxers. "Before my first fight, my mom took me to church...she went up to the priest and asked him to bless me," recounted Andrea. Andrea later recalls that this was her mother's way of protecting her and getting her out of the environment. She remembers that the Latin male priest also expressed his strong disapproval, remarking: "I'm super against it...just look at the other women and your sister...they [women] don't box." Moreover, Agustina also mentioned that even though people wanted to practice and spar, her boxing gym was "closed on Wednesdays and Sundays for church services."

Overall, the participants in this study expressed enthusiasm to participate in the sport sector but repeatedly encountered negative responses from their church, siblings, and parents. In some cases, and across other domains, these negative experiences have been linked to physical and emotional effects (Parke et al., 2004). For instance, McCord et al.'s (2018) study noted a strong significant relationship between "cultural stressors and depressive symptoms" (p. 61) in the educational setting. Despite a plethora of literature highlighting the positive impact of sport on individuals (Tiner et al., 2020), Latinas must constantly weigh the worth of entering, as most of them faced disapproval and lack of support from their families.

#### *Factors influencing the lack of Mexican American women boxers' representation in the U.S.*

We framed research question two (RQ2) and research question three (RQ3) to assess participants' support (i.e., financial and media coverage) and challenges encountered within the U.S. boxing domain. Findings revealed a connection between these two research questions, suggesting that the lack of support closely correlates with the challenges faced by Mexican American women boxers in the sport. Specifically, lower-order codes indicated that Mexican American women boxers received minimal (a) financial, (b) social, and (c) marketing support (see Figure 1). Thus, all these components contributed to the broader theme of *Factors influencing the lack of Mexican American women boxers' representation in the U.S.* (see Figure 1).

First, the participants unveiled that all the marketing practices are geared toward Latino athletes. For instance: "I know he [professional media and marketing personnel] took pictures of all of us in the gym, but he only posted the ones of the guys," Andrea stated. We further see this highlighted as Antonella said: "You do not really hear a lot about female boxers, especially Hispanic-Latina ones...you hear more about like Katie Taylor [Irish professional women boxer]." Ana ties into this subtheme and states that there are "more male fights than females, even though girls can fight...I definitely feel there is a bias." We argue that these experiences can play a vital role in the participation rates of Mexican American women boxers, primarily since they must compete against their men counterparts.

It is also noteworthy that two boxing gyms specifically showcased a Latina coach and its women members on their social media and gym website. This social media search was conducted during the duration of the study, beginning with the acceptance of the participant to do an interview with the investigator and concluding after the interview. However, with closer examination and after discussing the media attention with the participants, one of the two boxing gyms only did this because a Latina coach was a co-owner of the gym. The other boxing gym only highlighted its Mexican American women members because they were related (by family) to the boxing gym owner. This boxing gym family comes from a historical line of boxers and sons who compete. Therefore, it is noted from the literature that because the Latino brothers also participate

in the same physical activity, the Latina daughters can potentially be involved. However, engagement is limited (Roksa et al., 2020).

Regarding the other two boxing gyms' respective social media and gym websites, we could not ascertain if they had Latina boxers competing or training. All that was showcased were Latino boxers, indicating that the Latinas were not highlighted, advertised, or featured, despite being members, competitors, and sparring partners at those gyms.

Social support is the second lower-order code that adds to the broader theme of *Factors influencing the lack of Mexican American women boxers' representation in the U.S.* To better understand the support received, a specific interview question was asked, with responses split between 50% who felt "average" support and the remaining percentage who felt "above average" support (see Table 1). Ximena answered she felt "average" support only because "they [boxing coaches] support the people who they know and are ranked good." Antonella also stated that she felt "average" support because the "tournament staff and personnel are notoriously biased to those they already like and know they will do well." More women who answered "average" noted the significant amount of marketing, financial, and tournament attention Latino males receive compared to them. "Especially [during] weigh-ins, girls are either first or last; they have to segregate us," Luana stated. However, the individuals who responded with "above average" indicated that "women generally do not get as much support as the guys do, but, like women boxing, Latinas get more," Andrea said. Although the social support is minimal, Latinas are supported more than other women of color. Therefore, these findings align with LatCrit theory, such that Latin individuals experience biases due to the intersection of their multiple identities (Huber, 2010).

Additionally, through examining the external data (gyms' websites and social media), none had a specific diversity and inclusivity statement (see Table 1). This omission is meaningful as diversity and inclusivity mission statements are how one can "assess the values that shape [organizations'] culture and goals" (Wilson et al., 2011; p.126). It demonstrates the pledge an institution will strive for to attain an equitable workplace environment (Massachusetts Biotechnology Council, 2021).

Finally, the third lower-order theme of financial support was noted. Martin (2017) underscores that participation in combat sports, like boxing and Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), is notoriously expensive. Athletes pay an exceptional amount of money for adequate gear, tournament costs, and travel expenses (Martin, 2017). Moreover, to fight and perform, boxers must be able to balance their current weight class (Agirbas et al., 2018; Barley et al., 2019). Thus, dieting and healthy eating habits also play a vital role in the financial cost a fighter must consider (Martin, 2017). However, because eating healthy in the U.S. is a privilege and not easily accessible for those with lower financial means (Rao et al., 2013), the cost to participate in boxing continues to rise. As a result, these financial responsibilities worried our Mexican American women boxers: "We had to pull together and make it work, no matter what... we're like let's sell some food, let's fundraise," Josefina noted. Agustina also expresses how "crazy expensive boxing is... like everything costs money."

Applebaum (2021) explained that most boxer athletes' financial and marketing support comes from outside sponsors or the community. Yet, the Mexican American women boxers in our study stated that most of the sponsors went to Latino males, as the community "knew the guys more than us," Antonella noted. She later says: "If it was not for my coach reaching out and finding donations, I do not know where I would be and would have probably quit the field." We argue that these biases can play another part in the low participation rates among Latina boxers (Arinze & McGarry, 2021; Ramsammy, 2021), especially as three out of our 10 participants had sponsors, but the rest had to "find money where you can," Mariana stated.

Drawing from LatCrit theory, we contend that gender and racial (or ethnic) identities intersect to shape the experiences of individuals (Huber, 2010), which is evident in our participants' accounts. In this study, our participants expressed that most financial and social support went to the Latino boxers. Therefore, these findings emphasize Mexican American women boxers' challenges in entering the boxing arena and highlight the need to address gender and racial biases in the boxing domain.

*Persistence*

To address research question four (RQ4), participants were asked about their strategies for overcoming the adversities encountered within the U.S. boxing domain. Findings indicated that these women demonstrated persistence and resilience in their approach to the sport of boxing (see Figure 1). Their determination to enter the ring remained steadfast, irrespective of the challenges they faced. Mariana stated: "There is always that big argument that women cannot do everything men can; yeah, that has flaws, and it needs to change." Luana also recalls the moment her dad told her she could not box because "she is a woman and they do not do this.... yeah, that made me [Luana] want to do it even more and prove to him that I can." Similarly, Ana noted: "Latina females CAN fight... and although we do not get the same treatment and recognition as the males do, you do not see it stopping us [other Latina boxers] from getting inside the ring."

Recently, a study highlighted that Latin girls in the sport context continue to be "othered" and excluded by the dominant group (Lopez, 2021, p. 3), which in the U.S. sport sector are White, heterosexual, cisgender, non-disabled men (Brassil & Lutz, 2020; Cunningham et al., 2021). Thus, we contend that sport organizations, managers, and prevailing cultural ideologies have misrepresented "other" Latinas. Despite encountering constant biases, all 10 participants in this study persevered in their pursuit to step inside the ring and engage in a sport they cherished. Regardless of the stereotypes, negative interpretations, or challenges they faced, they continued to train, actively spar, and compete in the U.S. boxing space. This sentiment was echoed when Alissandra stated: "I have to continue fighting; this is for the betterment of myself, and although my family does not see it, it is for them too."

Consequently, the pervasive theme of persistence emerged prominently in the narratives of all participants, highlighting their steadfast determination to confront the barriers they encountered. Catalina articulated this resolve, stating: "You know, we got to start breaking those barriers...even though there [may be] an argument." Ximena echoed the same sentiments: "When I get in the ring, I own it...because I am fighting for myself and many other women who are not allowed to." Again, we see that these Latinas continue to face cultural ("machismo and marianismo"; Gloria, 2001; Sequeira, 2009), personal, and societal challenges, yet they fight to break those barriers because they actively want to knock out the stereotypes. Alison commented: "I think [change] starts at home...we got to break down those barriers that kind of just tell women, hey, you know if you do not get an education, you're going to be cleaning houses." The notion that women did not want to fall under the stereotypical Latina women portrayed in the U.S. media or cultural history books inspired all of our participants to continue fighting (de D'Amico et al., 2016; Rodriguez, 2018).

Lastly, the third lower-order theme of persistence aligns with LatCrit theory, highlighting the presence of oppression, particularly at the intersection of gender and race (or ethnicity) for our participants (Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). However, our findings showed that if a person identifies and connects with a specific context, no number of oppressions will deter them from participating. In this study, boxing was the identifying connection for our Mexican American participants.

### Conclusion, Limitations and Future Implications

The Latinx population continues to be the fastest-growing minority population in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2023; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Yet, minimal data highlights their assimilation into the robust male-dominant U.S. culture (Htun, 2000), especially within the sport domain (McGowen, 2020). As Alanis et al.'s (2021) scoping study indicated, between 1980 through 2020, only 14 articles published among the Latinas in sport literature had this group as their primary data sample. Thus, this gap will continue to grow unless future research is conducted.

Hence, our study identifies numerous avenues for enhancing research. First, our findings revealed that despite facing cultural and gender oppression, Mexican American women boxers exhibited a steadfast commitment to their sport: actively engaging in sparring sessions against men and breaking down barriers. As such, we propose that scholars explore whether this determination to persist and advocate for their beliefs is unique to the boxing realm or extends to other sports, organizational contexts, or cultural assimilations. Second, future scholars should underscore the

influence that close siblings exert on the ability of other relatives to participate in external activities and defy Latin cultural norms. Delgado (2020) noted the significant stress experienced by first-generation college students, who not only strive for their own education but also assist their younger siblings in "demystifying norms and rules" prevalent within the Latin community (p. 1).

While this study has made significant contributions, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. First, the primary author who conducted the interviews identified herself as a member of her study's in-group, meaning that she identifies as a Latina boxer. Some researchers may argue that her position introduces bias, as preexisting experiences and relationships potentially could influence and guide the coding scheme (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Mullen et al., 1992). Nonetheless, data from each participant's respective boxing gyms were collected, supporting the codes and themes derived from the powerful narratives of the Mexican American women boxers. Secondly, member checking was employed in the study to establish participants' credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, Smith and McGannon (2017) cautioned against potential limitations of member checking, such as "power relations" and participant comprehension issues (p. 107). Nevertheless, when member checking was implemented in this study, the primary investigator made sure to ask if they needed any clarification on the presented information. Lastly, our study gathered data from one southern state in the U.S. Therefore, caution should be exercised in generalizing and applying these findings to all Mexican American women boxers within the U.S. boxing domain.

Finally, it is imperative for sport organizations to prioritize educating their personnel on the advantages of embracing diversity (Cunningham, 2023). By implementing diversity practices as a core tenant in an organization, sport managers and its members will soon see the positive reinforcement it brings (Cunningham, 2008). Catalina highlights the disparity in treatment between women and men boxers, stating: "At tournaments, boxing staff and personnel respect the Latino boxing guys...us [Mexican American women boxers] they do not." Agustina echoes this sentiment, noting that "no one took us seriously...or cared about our weigh-ins." Given the pervasive bias experienced by the women in this study due to their race and gender, it is imperative for researchers to promptly investigate this aspect of the sport.

In conclusion, this study underscores the pronounced disparity between U.S. sport and Latin cultures (Ortega, 2019). By specifically illuminating the experiences of Latinas, particularly Mexican American women boxers, within this domain, the authors address an issue that historically has been understudied. Despite longstanding scrutiny of Latinas' role in society (Lafferty & McKay, 2004), this research signifies a shift from mere debate to a call for acknowledgment and inclusion.

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