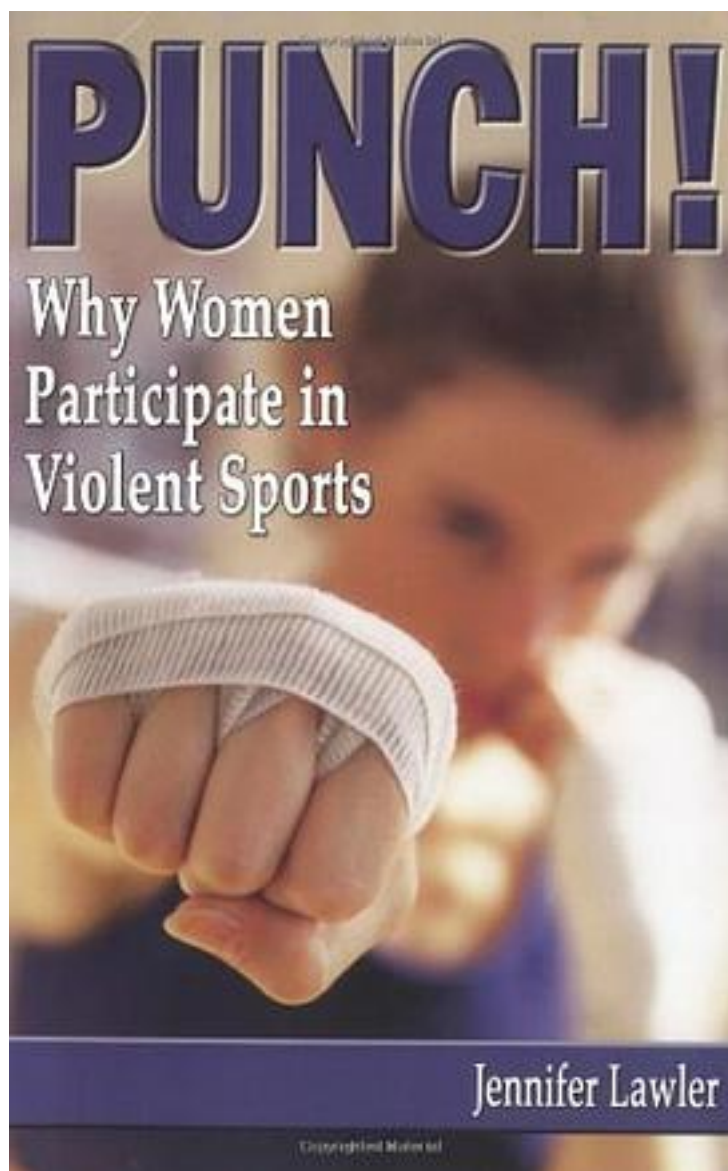


Punch!



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Over the past year, a startling development has occurred in the mainstream press: sportswriters have started taking note of women who participate in violent sports. Such women include Tonya Butler, who wants to be the first woman to play in a Division I football game; Laila Ali, a professional boxer with a winning record, who wants to follow in her father's footsteps; and Margaret McGregor, the first woman to fight a man in a professional boxing bout (she won). But there have always been women who participated in contact sports. Think of the women's hockey team who competed in the 1998 Olympics they've been playing the game for years. Or consider the Golden Gloves Boxing Championships, which allowed female competitors since 1995. Or consider the case of Susan Booth, nobody famous, a gym owner, mother of two and fifth-degree (master) black belt in Tae Kwon Do. She's been fighting for fifteen years. That women have participated in violent sports for some years doesn't mean women in contact sports is accepted or considered acceptable by most people. The Title IX regulation, which is supposed to guarantee equal opportunity for female college athletes, specifically excludes contact sports from its gender equity statement women who wished to participate in contact sports at a college and are not allowed to do so can have claim against the school; legally they are not being discriminated against. Sportswriter Leigh Montville has attacked women's boxing as "a sick athletic cartoon." He claims that women participating in contact sports are being exploited. But the women involved don't seem to think so. "This is a dream of mine," says Freeda Foreman (daughter of George Foreman). "I want to let women know there are no limitations." Laila Ali says, "I just love how it feels." As female participation in violent sports such as boxing, hockey and martial arts grows, so do the questions. It can no longer be called a 'novelty' or a 'gimmick' as it has been in the past. So, why do women participate in violent sports and what does it mean? Including the author's personal experience as an athlete and the experiences and thoughts of other women in violent sports, some well-known, some not, all of them defying traditional gender roles. Through interviews and questionnaires with athletes, coaches and observers as well as trained mental health professionals interested in the phenomenon, the reasons why women participate in contact sports and what they get out of them are examined.

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