

Breaking the Mold: Female Athletes' Self-Presentation in Redefining Gender Roles

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Representation Shapes Perception

To what extent does self-presentation in Instagram photos and videos allow female athletes to and experiment with how they express femininity?

Thesis

Through this self-representation, female athletes expand the scope in which they are accepted in the social space, broadening the perception of what constitutes womanhood and bridging the gap between athletic accomplishment and personal identity.

- The study analyzes their posts to understand how self-representation can challenge traditional gender binaries, blending strength, femininity, and individuality.

Background and Theoretical Framework

- “Feminine apologetic,” Felshin 1973; Hardy 2012
- The “Female/Athlete Paradox” Paloian 2016

These frameworks provide insight into how athletes curate self-representation on Instagram to challenge and redefine what femininity and athleticism can look like.

Methodology: Qualitative Content Analysis of Instagram Posts

Scope: US Athletes in Masculine-perceived sports

The scope was limited to I selected high achieving female Olympians who competed for Team USA at the 2024 Paris Olympics, maintained an active Instagram presence during the games with a minimum of 20 posts during this time period, and competed in a masculine-perceived sport

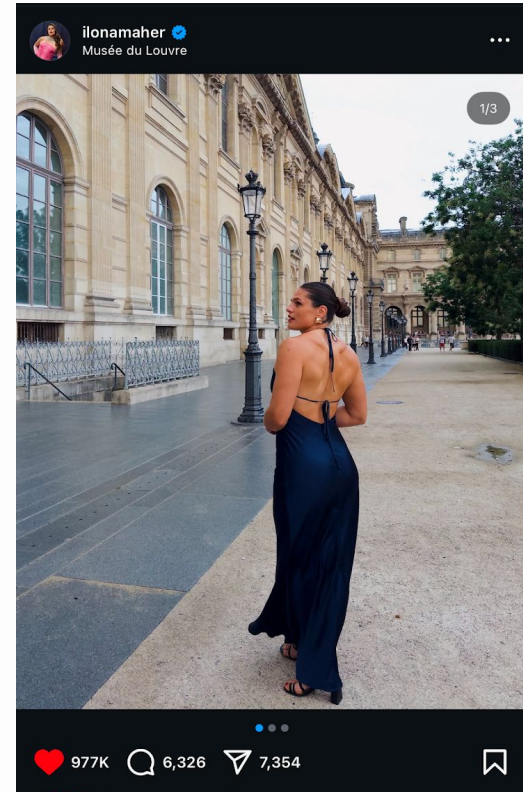
Timeframe: July 15 – August 22, 2024

10 days prior to the Opening Ceremonies; 10 days post Closing Ceremonies

Ilona Maher

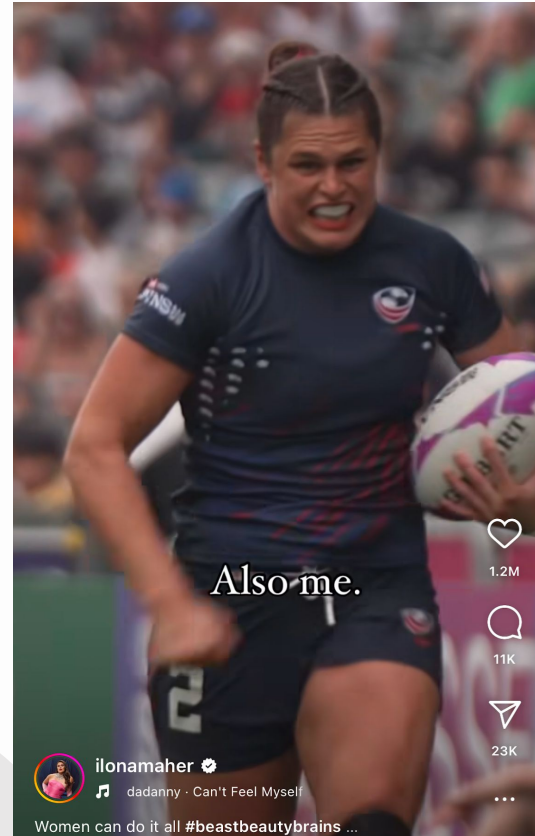
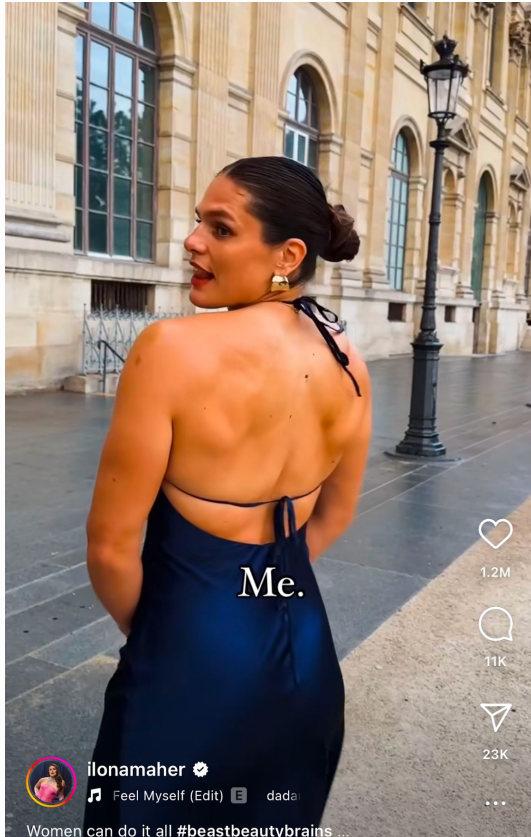
2024 Olympic Bronze Medalist - Rugby 7s

- Strength is central to the image, with no effort to minimize her musculature.
- Turned-away stance creates distance from the audience, signaling a personal, “after-hours” moment.



ilonamaher Looking for Love at the Louvre

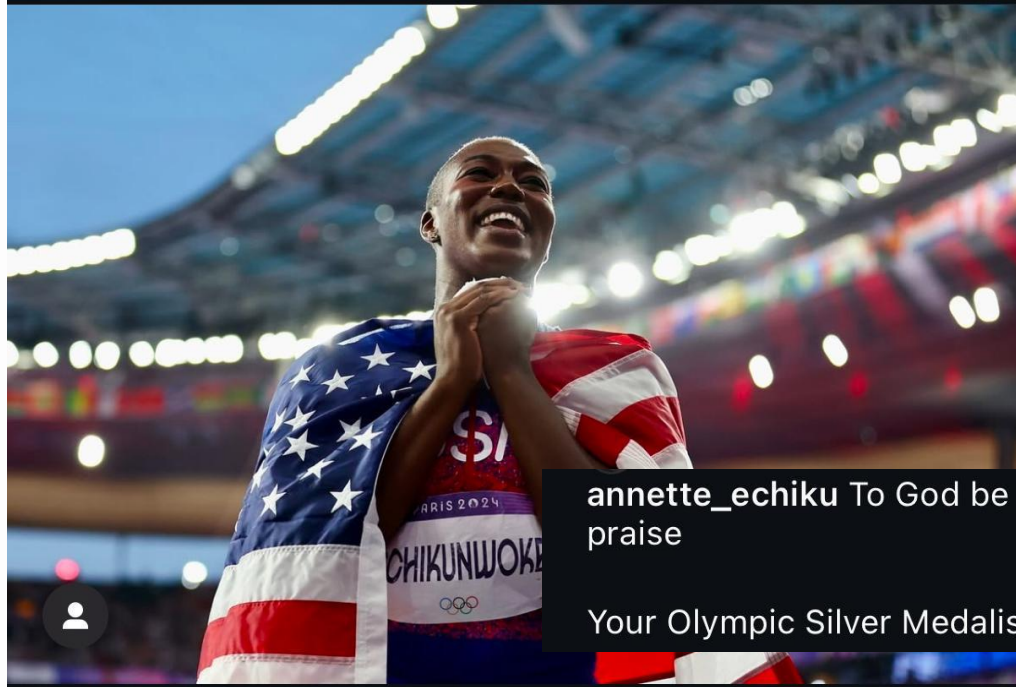
“Women can do it all #beastbeautybrains”



Annette Nneka

2024 Olympic Silver Medalist - Hammer Throw

Echikunwoke



annette_echiku To God be all the glory, all the honor, and all the praise

Your Olympic Silver Medalist 🏅 🇺🇸 ❤️ 🤍 💙

Implications for Future Research

- Large scale research trends
- Feminine-perceived sports (dance, figure skating, gymnastics, cheer)
- Race, sexuality, and competition level as intersecting identities