

BEHIND THE MASK

Maskenin Ardında

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ABSTRACT

In its amateur and professional formats, the sport of boxing historically has been associated with a physical and aggressive type of masculinity. The notion that a boxer might have a mental health problem was not something generally discussed in the profession. This outlook has changed in recent decades as Britain's society re-evaluates well-being. People are more open to talking about conditions like depression. Heavyweight champion Tyson Fury (born 1988; Unified title holder in 2015 and World Boxing Council holder in 2020) helped pioneer this new openness in boxing. Fury's 2019 book *Behind the Mask* addresses four key themes. The first theme is his Manchester working-class upbringing and ethnic Irish Traveller heritage. The second is Fury's analysis of his long-term mental health. The third and fourth themes are his ambitions to become the world's heavyweight champion and how he achieved his goal in 2015 and 2020. The study includes a review of Tyson Fury's book *Behind the Mask*.

Keywords: boxing, bipolar, depression, mental health, sport.

ÖZ

Amatör ve profesyonel formatlarında boks sporu, tarihsel olarak fiziksel ve agresif bir erkeklik türüyle ilişkilendirilmiştir. Bir boksörün akıl sağlığı sorunu olabileceği düşüncesi meslekte genel olarak tartışılan bir konu değildi. Bu bakış açısı son yıllarda Britanya toplumunun refahı yeniden değerlendirmesiyle değişti. İnsanlar depresyon gibi durumlar hakkında konuşmaya daha açık. Ağır sıklet şampiyonu Tyson Fury bokstaki bu yeni açıklığa öncülük etmeye yardımcı oldu. Fury'nin 2019 tarihli kitabı *Maskenin Ardında* dört ana temayı ele alıyor. İlk tema onun Manchester'daki işçi sınıfı yetiştirme tarzı ve etnik İrlandalı gezgin mirasıdır. İkincisi ise Fury'nin uzun vadeli zihinsel sağlığına ilişkin analizidir. Üçüncü ve dördüncü tema ise onun dünya ağır sıklet şampiyonu olma tutkusunu ve 2015 ve 2020 yıllarında bu hedefine nasıl ulaştığıdır. Çalışma Tyson Fury'nin *Maskenin Ardında* kitabının incelemesini içermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: boks, bipolar, depresyon, akıl sağlığı, spor.

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Fury, Tyson (2019). *Behind The Mask: My Autobiography*. London: Century.

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Fury's 2019 book *Behind the Mask* addresses four key themes. The first theme is his Manchester working-class upbringing and ethnic Irish Traveller heritage. The second is Fury's analysis of his long-term mental health. The third and fourth themes are his ambitions to become the world's heavy-weight champion and how he achieved his goal in 2015 and 2020.

The book's first theme (in Chapters Two and Three) is Fury's ambitions, marriage and family, and personal challenges (notably, diet control, weight gain and reduction). Fury outlines his Christian beliefs and says the Bible and religious practice have helped him when facing problems in life, especially when depression sets in. The values of his Irish Traveller heritage are also outlined, including how, traditionally, Traveller children left school at the age of ten and took up paid employment, buying and selling and labouring work. Early on, he learned about work and speaking confidently in public. Fury took this route, though, with hindsight, he now encourages Irish Traveller and Gipsy children to pursue formal education. He notes how education institutions help young people to mix across different communities. Pointed out in the book by the author is the racism that Irish Travellers and Gipsies face in contemporary British (and European) society. However, as social attitudes change, negative stereotyping is being criticised. Fury reported that when he was growing up, Irish Travellers, did not discuss depression, as they encouraged each other to carry on living regardless.

The book's second theme centres on Fury's long-standing bouts of depression, bipolar disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder and how his mental state has affected his childhood, adult life and sporting career. His mood swings and his illness made life difficult for him, his family and friends. In his early boxing career, Fury played the role of an entertainer and showman seeking to please the audience and boxing's business community. However, he learnt that the highs and lows of the sport negatively im-

pacted his mental health. In particular, there are the intense stresses and strains due to training, fighting, and dealing with the boxing fraternity. In response, Fury explains he developed routine practices of training designed to control or at least reduce the return of his depression. Despite his major success in the boxing ring and the material wealth that came with it, his mental health condition requires daily management. Today, he is a mental health ambassador. Fury generously donated his million-dollar prize from his 2020 fight to people experiencing homelessness (and depression).

The book's third theme outlines his amateur and professional boxing career with detailed first-hand accounts of his boxing fights against world champion contenders and champions (see Chapters Six, Seven, Eleven and Fourteen). A descriptive review of boxing terminology and his main fights assist the reading; it includes Fury's feelings and challenges for each fight. He says he wished to become a world boxing champion since first training in a local boxing gym as a youth. His father also trained him; Fury comes from a family of famous nineteenth and twentieth-century bare-knuckle fighters and fighting men in Ireland and England. (The author mentions that some of his predecessors likewise had mental health issues.) Fury has boxed for England and Ireland and had boxing successes in Britain and Europe, becoming a professional in 2008 (aged 20). He won the Unified Heavyweight World Champion title by defeating Ukrainian boxer Wladimir Klitschko in 2015. Later, he returned to boxing, and after proving himself to the boxing authorities by defeating several contenders, Fury, in 2020, won the WBO champion title by overcoming American boxer Deontay Wilder in the United States.

The fourth theme of the book is Fury's return to boxing and quest for world boxing championship status after he relinquished his world titles in 2016 due to mental health problems and weight gain. However, his drinking and partying stopped, and he took long-term training and diet seriously again. Fury delves into some detail in describing the struggle to regain his world boxing championship status. He highlights his emotions, psychology, and training journey as he prepared for his 2020 fight with Wilder.

The book's strength is its openness about mental health in the generally male-dominated boxing world. This book will help to change attitudes about sportspeople and mental health. The work questions the notion of the silent, strong man who does not express his feelings. The book's content will further the debate about toxic masculinity. This autobiography offers men an alternative model of well-being; it highlights people who care

about others experiencing persistent depressive disorder. In 2020, a British newspaper, The Daily Telegraph awarded the book the Sports Book of the Year. Fury’s story is honest and revealing, and though he labels himself the “Gipsy King”, many fans would add a second “title” and kindly and respectfully refer to him as the “People’s Champion”.

References

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