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Bodies, masculinities, and sports. The front covers of *El Gráfico* magazine, Argentina 1920-1930

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Abstract. This study analyzes the ways that one of the most important sports magazines in Argentina, *El Gráfico*, presented and (re)presented men in the extensive and diverse universe of physical and sports culture of the 1920s and 1930s. To investigate the different senses of masculinity, we focus on the front covers of this famous magazine. Employing a qualitative methodology that articulates hermeneutic historical analysis, visual history, and gender studies, we identify the dominant male body model and the different meanings it encapsulates: strength, courage, skill, chivalry, tactical intelligence, *creole* mischief, antagonism, physical display, resistance, character, dynamism, a sense of national belonging, social recognition, nobility, and status.

Keywords: press, sports, bodies, masculinities

Introduction

In 1919, the first issue was published of an Argentine magazine that would soon be famous and well-regarded. Its front cover alluded to a patriotic anniversary, and the caption read: “Students from the capital’s public schools march before the President of the Republic, who watches with his entourage from the balcony of the Casa Rosada.”¹ The cover of this “illustrated Argentine weekly” showed a typical photograph of a school parade, packed with students and national government authorities. This image filled almost the whole cover, although without mentioning any physical, gymnastic, recreational, or sports activity. As the years went by, this magazine became the most important commercial and cultural sports project in Argentina. It was called *El Gráfico* and it became, for the near one hundred years of its existence,² the print medium that described and, at the same time, interpreted and constructed—through the universe of sports, gymnastics, or recreation—a series of representations and narratives related to corporal and kinesic usages, health and hygiene, physical decadence and biological deterioration, Argentinity and foreignness, sexuality and genders, masculine and feminine sexual morality, beauty and ugliness, emotions and sensibilities, and physical normality and corporal abjection, among many other topics.

El Gráfico was part of a complex and varied international process in which the sports press played a central role. This was closely linked to the diffusion and popularization of physical and sports culture, as well as to the invention of the ever-more profitable modern recreation industry. The transnational publishing process developed out of successful business and cultural ventures in sports newspapers or magazines associated with physical and sports culture that emerged in the second half of the 19th century in Europe, especially England, France, Italy, and Spain, as well as in the United States (Tate, 2020; Raney & Bryant, 2006; Andújar, 2013). In this period, the magazine became an item of masculine consumption as well as an important producer and transmitter of a pattern of desirable virility.

Keeping this in mind, this study analyzes the way that *El Gráfico* presented and (re)presented men in the broad and diverse sphere of physical

1 All translations from Spanish are by *Apuntes*. Translator’s note: the Casa Rosada houses the offices of the president of Argentina.

2 *El Gráfico* was published as a weekly for 83 years, until March 2002. In mid-1998, the Atlántida publishing house sold the magazine to Torneos y Competencias. In 2002, amid the Argentine economic crisis, the magazine became a monthly. On January 16, 2018, Torneos y Competencias announced that the printed edition would no longer be published.

and sports culture during the first decades of its existence. The objective is to investigate the different meanings related to masculinity that were deployed and, at the same time, those that were excluded, focusing our attention on the covers of this famous magazine. We think that covers are one of the most powerful semiotic signifiers when filtering, transmitting, pondering, and prioritizing certain meanings and signifiers (Traversa, 2005). In this sense, they are a central element of any magazine since they serve to establish first contact with a potential consumer, to differentiate a magazine from its competition, to reinforce the magazine's identity, gender, and style (Steimberg, 2013), and to construct an affective–imaginary link with the consuming public. In many ways, covers are a crucial part of the success of the magazine, in terms of both identification and marketing.

One of *El Gráfico*'s initial and recurring characteristics was that all its covers included multiple photographic images, photomontages, or, to a lesser degree, drawings accompanied by brief texts, whose semantic projections were linked with the fabrication of certain modern somatic fictions about the male body and its political, aesthetic, and sexual place in the social world. The photographs and/or photomontages operated as sociocultural practices, fulfilling a central role in the production of meanings and significances regarding bodies, genders, and sexualities. The photographic images reproduced on the covers did not reflect the universe of masculine corporality but rather produced a phenomenon that they regularized and constrained (Butler, 2002) since they constructed, in a performative manner, certain meanings related to corporality and sexual difference in a specific historical context. Thus, the covers deployed not only a repertoire of images but also a set of visual discourses (Sontag, 2005) that organized a corporal field of the visible and the invisible, the beautiful and the ugly, the healthy and the unhealthy, the desirable and the undesirable, the moral and the immoral, and the masculine and the unmasculine.

In this framework, we focus our analysis on what we call the sports scene, which we conceptualize as a somatic fiction deliberately constructed to project and transmit a model of ideal masculine corporality based on five interrelated elements. The first is related to the individual/protagonist shown on the cover. The second component is linked with the place/space/scenario in which the protagonist(s) on the cover appear. The third factor is associated with the material culture that accompanies the scene depicted. The fourth element is related to the way the kinesic field is “presented.”

The fifth and final factor is linked to the linguistic³ text that accompanies the image, photograph, or photomontage.

Taking all this into consideration and employing a qualitative methodology that articulates hermeneutic historical analysis, visual history, and gender studies (Butler, 2002; Burke, 2001; Traversa, 2009), we analyze the following questions: What were the dominant masculine body models that circulated on the first covers of *El Gráfico* between 1920 and 1930?; What were the sports practices most and least publicized to achieve a certain ideal of masculine corporality?; Who were the men who participated in this process?; What dissonances existed relating to the dominant model of masculine corporality?

During the decades studied, we found that the imagery on the magazine covers can be divided into three different periods, each with their own specific meanings and logics. The first, between 1919 and 1921, was the time in which masculine bodies were least present and visible in quantitative terms, and there was diversity and variety in the depictions of modern sports. The second period, between 1922 and 1924, encapsulated—in addition to a multitude of sporting events—the construction of the ideal of the male Argentine athlete, starting with a publicized transnational case. The third period, between 1925 and 1939, was characterized by the diversification, consolidation, and naturalization of some sports linked imaginatively—and arbitrarily—with the fictional masculine plane, as well as with the creation and proliferation of specific national and virile sports idols.

1. *El Gráfico* and the social, political, and sports context

The practice and consumption of gymnastics and sports in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—then most associated with certain well-off social groups and sectors or with certain ethnic communities (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, among others)—was consolidated and expanded starting in the 1920s and 1930s. This growth in popularity was related to developments in the field of physical culture as well as to processes linked to the broader social and political context.

In the first case, the medium of physical culture developed due to the growth of athletics and sports organizations—whose origins can be traced to the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century—as well as the

3 On most of the covers, the linguistic text is minimized vis-à-vis the force of the image on the cover. Nevertheless, in many cases, the text has the function of “anchoring” the linguistic message in relation to the image in order to fix the floating chain of signifiers; that is, to guide—but never completely—possible interpretations.

increase in sports federations dedicated to the organization of local, regional, and provincial tournaments and competitions. The latter development was accompanied by the construction of new “sporting” spaces (stadiums, “physical exercise plazas,” public parks, sports fields, playgrounds, gymnasiums—open, closed, semi-closed—game fields, firing ranges, swimming pools, racetracks, health resorts, among others) (Armus, 2007; Gorelik, 1998; Roldán, 2012; Roldán & Godoy 2017). In the same period, some sports, such as soccer, boxing, horse racing, and auto racing became professionalized, large-scale, and profitable entertainment spectacles (Frydenberg, 2011; Archetti, 2001; Alabarces, 2002; Torres, 2013; Hora, 2014; Palla, 2018; Ullivarri, 2020; Scharagrodsky, 2020). This process of social sportification was encouraged and promoted (especially in the 1930s) by a key actor: the state.⁴

Physical and sports culture also came to be thought of in market-related terms, taking into account their potential economic benefits. Thus, the material culture of sports became more relevant (clothing, shoes, inputs related to various sports, etc.), and a market for it began to develop and diversify. The sports sections of large stores (including Gath & Chaves, Harrods, and Albion House) “democratized” access to certain sports products. New sports equipment, with different textures and colors, encouraged consumption at relatively affordable prices. In addition, the growth of the sports sections of large-circulation media were central to arousing interest in and a taste for physical and sports culture and for the accoutrements “necessary” for its practice (López, 2017). Newspapers such as *Crítica*, *La Nación*, *Última Hora*, *La Razón*, *La Época*, and *La Prensa* and famous magazines such as *Caras y Caretas*, *Fray Mocho*, *Plus Ultra*, and *El Hogar* gave more space to sports news, accompanied by the already indispensable advertisements (Rocchi, 2016). All this cemented a new journalistic profession: sports reporters, whose numbers expanded with the emergence of radio and sports broadcasts starting in 1923.

During those decades, the growth of sports consumption was legitimated epistemologically by the scientific discourse of the time: bio-medicine. New occupational groups, together with their associations, became authorized voices when suggesting, prescribing, or proscribing specific sports practices. Sports doctors, kinesiologists, and professors of physical education came

4 Various government institutions were created for the administration of physical culture: Dirección de Plazas de Ejercicios Físicos in the federal capitol (1919); Dirección General de Educación Física y Cultura in Buenos Aires (1936); Consejo Nacional de Educación Física (1937); Dirección General de Educación Física Nacional (1938); Dirección de Maternidad e Infancia (1936); in addition to the already existing Consejo Nacional de Educación, Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, Cuerpo Médico Escolar, and the Cuerpo de Inspectores Nacionales.

on the scene (Scharagrodsky, 2015; Reggiani, 2016; Scharagrodsky, 2018b) and endorsed not only sports activities under certain circumstances but also a lifestyle that was morally healthy and which included elements related to nutrition, dietetics, moral hygiene, rest and good sleep, “correct” sexuality, among many others.

In addition, certain processes related to the broader social, sanitary, and political context reinforced the importance and potential benefits of physical culture. Most importantly, concerns that arose regarding the health of populations and individuals in the interwar period drove and prescribed its consumption. Some of the factors at play included the diffusion of the discourse of eugenics and the future of the race; the battle against certain illnesses such as tuberculosis; concerns about the biological “stock” of the Argentine nation; the promotion of an active, hygienic, and outdoor lifestyle; the existence of “constitutionalist medicine”; definitions related to somatic normality as well as physical and functional abnormality; the intense medicalization of certain government policies; concerns about the declining birth rate; and fears among certain social sectors regarding what many considered sexual vices or deviations (Rochi, 2000; Nari, 2004; Armus, 2007; Miranda, 2012; Biernat & Ramacciotti, 2014; Barrancos, Guy, & Valobra, 2014; Scharagrodsky, 2018a; Reggiani, 2019).

At the same time and as never before, modern states recognized the central importance of sports in constructing identity, nationality, and an “imagined community.” In the context of the considerable “imperial” expansion of the world of sports in the interwar period (Dyreson, 2011), national officials for the first time constructed an international sports agenda. The Olympics, together with the expansion of South American championships in athletics, soccer, boxing, basketball, and other sports, were large stages upon which sports diplomacy played a fundamental role in narrating a certain Argentine corporal fiction, emphasizing and naturalizing certain traits that supposedly characterized the masculine Argentine body.

It was in this socio-biopolitical context that *El Gráfico* appeared and rapidly increased its circulation. It was created by Constancio C. Vigil, the owner of the Editorial Atlántida and founder of two other successful Argentine magazines: *Billiken*, founded at the end of 1919 and targeted at children, and *Para Ti*, founded in 1922 and targeted at women. In a market flooded by all kinds of magazines, *El Gráfico* stood out for the large quantity of photographs it contained as well as the quality and variety of these photos (Bergel & Palomino, 2000). Its front pages were a testament to a type of presentation, whose main purpose was to attract readers and convert them into steady consumers.

2. Dispersion and variety of masculine sports images

During the 1920s, approximately 73% of the covers of *El Gráfico* made references to men,⁵ but of this percentage, almost 40% were concentrated in 1919, 1920, and 1921. It should be noted that the two-year period between 1919 and 1921 had the fewest covers featuring men only of that decade but also of the whole history of this successful magazine. In 1919, approximately 60% of the covers included images or photographs of men. In 1920, only 10% of the front pages featured men and in 1921, the percentage was a little less than 30%. In those two years and a half, “the incorporation of photographs that were sensual to a greater or lesser degree, in which the female body occupied a central place” was a key element in the magazine’s “search for masculine identity” (Bontempo, 2012, p. 192). Indeed, the covers “were directed at awakening masculine fantasy” (2012, p. 198) and promoting magazine sales to men by employing photographs of well-known women from the world of entertainment that had little or no relationship with sports or physical culture.

During this period, the masculine sports scene was characterized by a series of very specific characteristics. First, the protagonists were varied and heterogeneous. They included Argentines and, especially, foreigners. Among the former were Daniel Rodríguez and Juan Carlos Gallegos, representing the field of rowing; Luis Ángel Firpo, boxing; Jorge Udaondo, auto racing; Elizardo Menéndez, long distance running; Julio Martínez Vásquez, yachting; Jorge Llobet Cullen, Abelardo Piovano and Luis Suarez, athletics; and Argentine soccer, cricket, and basketball teams. In most cases, these were athletes who had a certain level of local, but not international, recognition. They represented prestigious and wealthy sports institutions, primarily located in the Buenos Aires (Club Atlético Belgrano, Club Universitario de Buenos Aires, Club Rowing, Club Argentino, Compañía de Seguros y Universitario, Club de Gimnasia y Esgrima de Buenos Aires, Racing Club, Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes, Club Deportivo América, Club Atlético de San Isidro, Colegio Militar, Club Pedestre Velocidad y Resistencia), and at other times they represented the Argentine Republic.

Among the foreign sportsmen, some of the most well-known include Britons John Alcock and Arthur Brown, who made the first ever non-stop transatlantic flight; Stewart, who flew one of the first night flights between Montevideo and Buenos Aires; Italian Antonio Locatelli, one of the first

5 Yearly, *El Gráfico* assembled and published an average of 52 covers. The total during a decade was approximately 520.

aviators to fly over the Andes; Germans Max Holtzem and Eugen Geberth, renowned aviation acrobats; Canadian acrobatic aviator Wilmott; Italian wrestler Massetti; famous English yachtsman Thomas Lipton; Charles Paddock, US short distance runner and Olympic champion; Frenchman Georges Carpentier, the US's Jack Dempsey, and Uruguayan Ángel Rodríguez, well-known boxers; Spaniard Alonso and Australian Gerald Patterson, famous tennis players; English skier Gordon Dukes; US swimmer Norman Ross, 1920 Olympic champion; Hawaiian Duke Kahanamoku, Olympic champion and inventor of surfing; and the North Americans Richard Landon and Frank Loomis, well-known athletes and Olympic champions. The predominance of foreigners suggests the importance that was assigned during this period to internationally famous figures, as well as their role as models for projecting and transmitting modern and successful—though not necessarily Argentine—masculine corporal archetypes.

Second, and given the variety of sportsmen shown, the images of sporting situations were heterogeneous. This diversity included a plurality of spaces as well as places for sports, some of which were deliberately fabricated (rivers, the ocean, beaches, snowcapped mountains, auto racetracks, swimming pools, athletics racetracks, boxing rings, aerodromes, tennis courts, rugby pitches, football fields, cricket pitches, etc.). It also included a variety of equipment, such as outfits appropriate for each sport (shirts, sport jerseys, pants and sports socks, hats, sports shoes, boxing gloves, swimsuits, aviation goggles, automobile goggles, and so forth); balls for soccer, tennis, basketball and rugby; tennis rackets, and other items (fencing sabers, bows, netting, javelins, discs, balls for shotput) as well as medication (ointments and lanoline). Finally, there was sports technology (rowboats, ski poles, bicycles, automobiles, airplanes, boats, etc.) and specific kinesic methods (techniques and body language that characterizes each type of sporting activity).

Bodies and their exhibited kinesic, technical, and gestural contexts combined and projected different meanings and significances: strength, robustness, fortitude, muscularity, and vigor (Figure 1), motor action *in situ*, agonism, corporal dynamism, competition, and the display of energy (Figure 2), or social distinction, status, cultural capital, and economic capital (Figure 3). Although there were some covers that showed scenes of sports competition, sometimes with an audience in attendance, most of the covers portrayed deliberately created poses, gestures, bearings, movements, gazes, body techniques, apparel, and certain rules governing appearance and spatial settings, which delineated masculine corporal ideals encompassing specific and prefigured kinesic, moral, and aesthetic dimensions.

Figure 1

“Ángel Rodríguez, 27 years old; weight, 78 kilos; height, 1 meter 77, South American boxing champion, medium heavyweight, who will soon leave for France. Won 42 fights by knockouts and 2 on points.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1920.

Figure 2

“Rugby. A scene of frenzied activity that occurred during a game between the Atlético Belgrano and Universitario de Buenos Aires clubs”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1920.

Figure 3

“Sir Thomas Lipton, the brilliant English yachtsman, owner of the *Shamrock IV*, who, with his renewed participation in the ‘Copa América’ regatta, demonstrated that the blood of a true sportsman runs through his veins.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1920.

Third, this variety of spaces, sports equipment, kinesic methods, technical-sports gestures, and protagonists present some common patterns. The majority of the men shown were young, white, thin, stylish, groomed, and a certain level of social recognition, and exhibited a “healthy” appearance and a physical bearing that transmitted certain moral values related to vigor, valor, dedication, daring, character, and discipline. In addition, among the range of sports that were illustrated on the covers—wrestling, rugby, water polo, skiing, auto racing, cycling, basketball, tennis, soccer, rowing, yachting, athletics, swimming, boxing, and aviation—the last seven appeared most often, while athletics, swimming, boxing, and aviation were the four most popular. Sometimes, the representations of swimming or athletics would be accompanied by brief epigraphs (“Luis Suarez, 800 meter sprint in 2’,2” $\frac{3}{5}$,” “Abelardo Piovano, 200 meter sprint in 22 seconds,” “Jorge Llobet Cullen, shotput 12 meters, javelin 37 and a half meters”), which promoted, together with extreme physical effort, the idea of the record (Argentine, South American, or international) through numbers that synthesized the obsession for effectiveness, efficiency, and quantification of physical achievement and its

multiple and infinite possibilities (Figure 4). Slowly the universe of numbers and ciphers interpreted national masculine physical-sports success and became the unescapable data of the modern sphere of sports.

Figure 4

“New South American record holder, Luis Suarez, 800 meter sprint in 2’,2” 3/5. Abelardo Piovano, 200 meter sprint in 22 seconds. Jorge Llobet Cullen, shotput 12 meters, javelin 37 and a half meters.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1921.

Aviation merits special mention. It was one of the activities that appeared most frequently on the covers during this period. Sometimes this quasi-sport—or, in other circumstances, recreational activity or hobby—put into circulation meanings associated with extreme challenges, mortal trials, unthought-of feats, immeasurable risk, and spectacles such as, for example, those of the acrobatic aviators Max Holtzem and Eugen Geberth. The relationships between machine, technology, risk, adventure, virility, and physical challenge was one of the problematics that was most frequently exhibited and promoted on the covers of *El Gráfico* during this period (Figure 5).

Figure 5

“Circus in the air: pilot Holtzem and acrobat Geberth (on the right) who, as a result of bad weather, were not able to provide our public with the impressive spectacle of aerial acrobatics, already performed in Rosario and finally in the San Isidro aerodrome, in a private exhibition for journalists.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1921.

Finally, it should be noted that there were a few covers that exhibited a different type of masculine aesthetic and disposition than that characterized by the dominant patterns discussed above. They subverted or eroded, although sparingly, certain stereotypes as well as gender and sexual roles (Figure 6). Although there were few of these, those that did exist projected somatic fictions that favored ambiguity and the polyphony of corporal meanings and were in semiotic and visual tension with the hegemonic significations transmitted during this era.

Figure 6

“Notable snapshot of the exciting wrestling match that took place recently between Italian champion Massetti and the well-known national artist Olinda Bozán”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1919.

3. From a variety of sports scenes to the production of the first archetype of the virile Argentine sportsman

Between 1922 and 1924, the covers portraying masculine figures underwent certain changes and, at the same time, exhibited some continuities. These covers included the portrayal of a diversity of sports scenes and sports on the covers of *El Gráfico*, although some new sports were added such as Basque pelota, polo, fencing, motorcycling, parachuting, chess, and billiards. A variety of protagonists, sports spaces, materials, and specific kinesic spheres that were similar to the previous period continued to be portrayed, but new equipment and spaces were incorporated as a result of the sports that were added. Nevertheless, there were significant modifications. One of these was related to the percentage of covers portraying males, which increased significantly. Between 1922 and 1924, approximately 90% of the covers illustrated male sports. Another important change was the greater number of covers devoted to Argentine athletes rather than foreigners. However, the most significant change that occurred in this period was related to the emergence or creation of a new masculine archetype based especially on

one sport: boxing. This corporal practice, which was also portrayed in the previous period, began to predominate, though this increase in coverage did not come out of nowhere. Its raised profile was related to the notable performances of various boxers, and to one in particular: Luis *Ángel* Firpo (1894–1960), who appeared on eleven covers during this period and a total of twenty between 1920 and 1930. Quite a record for a male Argentine athlete of that period.

Even before he acquired international fame in September 1923 by being the first Argentine—and the first South American—boxer to fight for the world title against the US world champion Jack Dempsey (1895–1983), Firpo appeared on a dozen covers, more than any other athlete. In general, these covers were produced and modeled on different sports scenes: from the typical pose of the boxer (physically erect, guard raised, legs at shoulder width, left arm lifted forward and up, right arm pulled back, looking forward, expression brooding yet focused) (Figure 7) to half-body or full-body shots, the classical photomontages of two boxers confronting each other, whether body-to-body or face-to-face, the typical photographic “testimonies” of a fight (Figure 8), or the distinctive image of the boxer sitting in the corner of a ring. Most of the sports shots were taken at ringside, depicting the classical attire of a boxer.

Figure 7

“The Argentine champion Luis A. Firpo, who obtained his first victory in North America, against Maxted, must face Mc. Cann [sic] next Tuesday. If he beats him and some other heavyweights like Fulton, Miske, Weinert, or Brennan, he will have a great chance to fight world champion Jack Dempsey.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1922.

Figure 8

“The tenth round: referee Festal lowers his arm marking the tenth second. Tracey tries to get up but he is out of it. On the right, we can see his trainer, Hansen, entering the ring to lift him up and his second-in-command Culpin (at the back), ready to do the same. Our champion (Firpo) still maintains an aggressive stance.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1922.

Slowly, many covers constructed and promoted this great Argentine athlete, whose success went beyond the local and national spheres. The covers, employing short texts, underlined his status (South American heavyweight boxing champion), his triumphs abroad (in Cuba, Mexico, and, especially, in the United States), his promising career, his upcoming fight with the great world champion (Jack Dempsey of the US), as well as his acclaimed stature, strength, size, and moral qualities such as fearlessness, courage, and aggression in the ring. In addition, these covers exalted Firpo’s nationality, remarking on his belonging to Argentina, and his contribution to the glory of the nation: the great Argentine boxer, “our champion,”⁶ and so forth.

The fight between Firpo and Dempsey was a first in many ways: it was the first boxing fight for a world title between an Argentine and a North American; it marked the first time, anywhere in the world, that a representative of Argentina—imagined by the press through a variety of characterizations, metonyms, and metaphors—appeared on the covers or sports

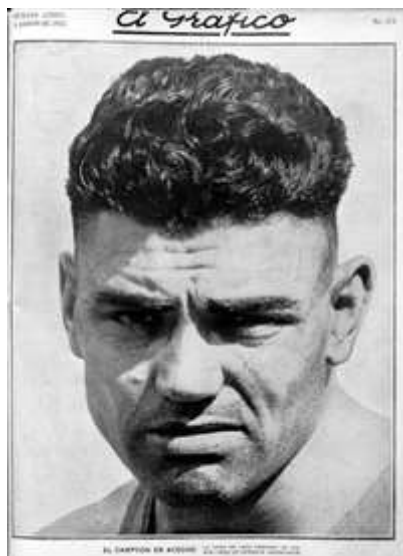
6 *El Gráfico*. (1922). El gran match del momento, edition 17.

pages of prestigious newspapers and magazines in more than 20 countries. It was one of the first sports spectacles to become a multi-million-dollar enterprise (it was the first modern bout with ticket sales worth over a million dollars⁷). In Argentina, it was the first time that a sports event was broadcast by radio (Matallana, 2006, p. 7; Ulanovsky, 1995) and the first time that thousands of people got together in small, medium, and larger cities to listen—generally at the offices of newspapers, both local and national, and at some prestigious clubs—to information coming from the United States and other countries (Scharagrodsky, 2021).

Firpo was baptized the “Wild Bull of the Pampas” by the North American press (specifically, journalist Damon Runyon). The press adopted the figure of the bull for its associations with bravura and courage, as well as with impressive physical attributes. The figure of Firpo as an authentic bull was based on his pure physical strength, represented by the enormous size of his body (larger than Dempsey’s), his rhomboid face, broad forehead, voluptuous upper body, his large chest, his stern gestures, and his abundance of energy: a clear modern masculine stereotype (Mosse, 2000). Jack Dempsey’s body, and especially his face, were the object of re-semanticization by the magazine (figure 9): it projected concentration, watchfulness, strength, anger, and a certain hostility.

7 The first modern fight to earn over a million dollars was between Jack Dempsey and the French war hero George Carpentier in 1921. On the day of the fight, there were over 90,000 spectators, the largest number attending a sporting event in the United States up to that time. The Firpo vs. Dempsey fight was witnessed by an audience of 85,000 at the legendary New York Polo Grounds.

Figure 9
“The champion lying in wait. The face of Jack Dempsey on the day of an important fight”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1923.

El Gráfico and the national press, with the exception of Argentine socialist magazines (Guimet, 2016), produced a type of masculinity conceived of as Latin (given Firpo's Italian origins) and to Argentinity specifically because of the strength, courage, impetuosity, nobility, bravery, national pride, honesty, integrity, and unequivocal gentlemanliness. This they juxtaposed against a clear Saxon representation in which Firpo's masculine attributes were associated more with technique, a certain boxing rationality, discipline, and vast experience in the art of boxing than with the essentialized quasi emotional, undisciplined, and spontaneous combative spirit of the Latin world. This was set against the reaffirmation of the fictional construction of North America as a dangerous world, where cheating, calculation, and money were the central aspects of the “heretical” country of the north⁸ (Sharagrodsky, 2021)

8 In one of the many caricatures appearing in a well-known Argentine daily, there was a drawing of a monk praying and saying: “My dear little Virgin, make the Latin triumph! Let the pride of the heretics of the North be reduced.” “Only Firpo...” (*Crítica*, 1923, p. 13).

Despite his loss in dubious and unclear circumstances,⁹ the fight gave Firpo prestige, status, social recognition, and work—both inside and outside Argentina—as well as money and national and international fame (Lupo & Del Prado, 2009; Bauso, 2003). Over the decades, he became the father of Argentine boxing and one of the most recognizable and important national sports idols during the first half of the 20th century. Slowly, Firpo was transformed into a exponent of a masculinity that was both profitable and aesthetically desirable by the feminine universe, which reinforced and naturalized hetero-sportsmanship. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, regardless of political affiliation, governors, legislators, and presidents sought out Firpo, his endorsement, and his photographic image for use in strengthening their policies or their standing.¹⁰

Although Firpo—and also Dempsey¹¹—were the most frequently featured athletes on the covers of *El Gráfico* during this period, other outstanding sports figures also appeared, albeit to a much lesser degree. Some examples include the famous Italian boxer Erminio Spalla¹² and, on a couple of covers, the Argentine swimmer Alberto Zorrilla, the Italian-Argentine Enrique Tiraboschi (who swam the English Channel), the Argentine Luis Antonio Brunetto (silver medalist in the triple jump in the Olympic Games held in Paris in 1924), the Argentine Luis Garramendy (unsuccessful attempt at swimming across the La Plata river), the well-known swimmer Romeo Maciel, and the Argentine tennis player Alfredo Villegas. Most covers concentrated on boxing first and then soccer, athletics, and swimming. Depending on the year, these sports constituted between 60% and 85% of all covers during this period.

9 The episode that was most talked about in the world of Argentine sports during most of the 20th century was that Firpo struck Dempsey and—for the first time—knocked the celebrated US champion out of the ring during the first round. Dempsey had to be helped by others (mostly journalists) back into the ring, when the regulatory 10 seconds were over. The most biting criticism of the US colonial aspect of the fight came from writer Julio Cortázar (1914-1984) in *Circe*: “The Firpo–Dempsey fight took place and in every house they cried and there was brutal indignation, followed by an almost colonial melancholy humiliation.”

10 Firpo was photographed alongside various politicians in the 1930s and 1940s. At the start of the 1950s, he participated in the promotion of the first Pan-American Games, held in Buenos Aires. He toured 15 countries in the Americas between September 26 and November 4, 1950, to promote these games, which took place in 1951. On September 13, 1954, Juan Domingo Perón, in front of an overflowing crowd in Luna Park, publicly decorated both Firpo and Dempsey with gold medals in remembrance of their historic fight (Lupo & Del Prado, 2009, p. 29).

11 Jack Dempsey was featured on the cover five times between 1922 and 1924 and was on a total of ten covers during the 1920s.

12 Erminio Spalla appeared on the cover six times between 1922 and 1924 and a total of eight times during the 1920s.

The covers continued to combine sports scenes previously prepared using photomontages as well as more “real” photographic testimonials from sports competition. The most common spaces in the sports panoramas were linked to boxing (the ring), football (the football field), athletics (tracks and others), and swimming (pools, the sea, etc.). The same was true of material culture: significant pieces of equipment from each sport were highlighted, including boxing gloves, the soccer ball, special footwear for athletics, and competitive swimsuits. The bodies and their kinesic, technical, and gestural achievements that were shown continued to fuse and define different meanings and significations: physical strength, fortitude, vigor, toughness, and resistance (Figure 10); kinesic antagonisms, corporal energy, intense physical activity, rivalry, and sports competition (Figure 11); or social prestige, good taste, elegance, grace, and gallantry (Figure 12). Though there were sports scenes depicting competitive action, most of the covers were constructed on the basis of predefined kinesic methods, which delineated and projected legitimate uses of masculine corporality during sporting activity.

Figure 10

“This good boxer with an excellent physique arrived in Buenos Aires. The former trainer of Georges Carpentier. His name is Jack Walker; he is 21 years old, weighing 71 172 kilos. Mulato. Son of an Italian and a North American; he was born in Pittsburgh, USA. By way of this magazine Walker challenges the following South American professionals: Ostuni, Casariego, Galtieri, Borneto, Sotelo, Maresca, Arregui, Viotti and Relly.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1923.

Figure 11

“Asociación Argentina Championship. Scene from the 1923 championship game between Boca Juniors and Huracan. In a small skirmish, Calomino triumphs over Nóbile (on the ground) and Federico (in possession of the ball).”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1924.

Figure 12

“Luis Lacey. Captain of the Argentine polo team which just went on a triumphant tour of England and the United States. He is considered the greatest back in the world.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1922.

As was the case during the previous period, most of the men visibilized—and, in some way, fabricated—were young, white,¹³ symmetric, energetic, clean, somewhat well known, of a certain nationality (mostly Argentines), and had a physique that introduced, transmitted, and celebrated certain moral values such as order, good behavior, dedication, and temperance. Nevertheless, in this period, the covers embarked on an arduous aesthetic and commercial task: they constructed idols, among them Firpo, who epitomized and also projected the desirable virile qualities of the day, articulated with dimensions linked to his modesty and humble beginnings. The fact that he had had a poor childhood and started work at an early age was information that was vindicated and celebrated by the press in general, in a social context in which new social sectors were being incorporated into the dynamic of consumption in general, and especially consumption related to sports.

13 Although there were very few covers with mulatto or brown skinned bodies, and such athletes were primarily boxers, *El Gráfico* was not exempt—like other print media of the time—from assessments, appreciations, or statements that associated the athlete's mulatto or black skin color with inferiority, animality, or even bad luck: “In general, it brings bad results if a black wins against a white man in any field. This triumph tends to go to his head and as a result, he becomes intolerable” (*El Gráfico*, 1924).

This new sports market began to produce very profitable popular idols and, at the same time, ones that were appealing and easily identifiable by these new upwardly mobile social sectors.¹⁴ On the other hand, celebrations of triumphs, records, and sports achievements continued to appear regularly on covers. Finally, there were still a few covers that portrayed a different type of aesthetic and masculine disposition than that characterized by the dominant patterns (Figure 13). These covers portrayed masculine bodies in which courage, strength, and physical confrontation or intense combative tension made way for the emergence of new virile and moral tones whereby intelligence, simplicity, prudence, reflection, and the meticulous study of sporting activity was vindicated.

Figure 13

“Ricardo Reti. The notable chess professional who is having great success in difficult exhibitions of simultaneous games”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1924.

4. The consolidation of certain “masculine” sports and the fabrication of national sports idols

Starting in 1925, *El Gráfico*, which had become a recognized magazine specializing in sports and physical culture, made some changes and, at the same time, exhibited certain continuities with the previous periods. It continued

14 The increase in real salaries in Argentina between 1922 and 1929 was 19%.

to portray a variety of sporting representations and sports, although some new activities were added, such as golf, wrestling, weightlifting, fencing, and ice hockey. At the same time, there remained a wide variety of protagonists, sports spaces, materials, and kinesic universes similar to those in the first period of the magazine's existence, but with the addition of some materials and spaces related to the new sports that had emerged. Men continued to completely dominate the covers. Other than in 1925—when men featured on a little more than 60% of the covers—from 1926 to the end of the decade, 90% of the covers depicted males. In the 1930s, the proportion of masculine covers was 86%. As in the previous period, there were more Argentine than foreign male body models.

At the same time, there were significant changes. One of these was related to the magazine as a cultural artefact. Starting in 1925, significant changes were made to the design of the magazine: the format was reduced (to 30 x 22 centimeters), the number of pages was increased (from 40 to 52), and, for the first time, it was printed in color. The latter made it a more attractive product, consolidating its commercial success. In 1928, around 58,000 copies were printed, while circulation “[...] reached 100,000 copies in the decade of the 1930s” (Archetti, 1995, p. 419).

However, the most significant change in this period was related to the emergence or the constitution of a new masculine archetype, emerging particularly from one sport: soccer. This regulated corporal practice, though present in previous periods, became for the first time the sport most often portrayed. Various athletes were featured and all of them were associated with an Argentine football club or the Argentine national team. Most of the players portrayed belonged to clubs in or around Buenos Aires, such as Boca Juniors, River Plate, San Lorenzo, Racing, Independiente, Platense, Vélez Sarsfield, Ferro Carril Oeste, Huracán, Chacarita Juniors, Argentinos Juniors, Talleres de Remedios de Escalada, Sportivo Barracas, Sportivo de Almagro, Argentino de Quilmes, Atlanta, Estudiantes de La Plata, and Gimnasia Esgrima La Plata. In this period, there were more mentions of football clubs than of sports institutions.

The players with the most covers included Guillermo Stábile, who in 1930 scored the first goal in the history of the World Cup; Cesáreo Onzari, considered the first player to score a so-called “Olympic goal” from a corner kick, for Huracán; Bernabé Ferreyra and Roberto Peucelle from River Plate; Natalio Perinetti from Racing Club; Raimundo Orsi from Independiente; Luis Felipe Monti from San Lorenzo; Alejandro Scopelli from Estudiantes de La Plata; Franciso Varallo from Gimnasia y Esgrima La Plata, and later Boca Juniors; Ángel Luis Bossio from Talleres de Remedios de Escalada;

and Ludovico Bidoglio and Roberto Cherro from Boca Juniors. The latter was one of the most featured.

There were many varieties of football situations depicted on the covers of *El Gráfico*: the “typical” pose of kicking, heading, or trapping a ball; a picture of a player’s face, whether a half- or full-body shot; the classic photomontages of a football player performing a complex technical move (Figure 14) or challenging another player; the typical scenes of the protagonists standing, sitting or crouching; the classical photographic “testimonies” of a game; or images of the great local football idols adjusted to the sensibilities of Latin America, Argentina or Buenos Aires¹⁵ (Figure 15). Most of the sports sequences were depictions that accentuated the face or the full body of the player. In addition, the identification of the player and the club set the tone. The photographic images and the photomontages on the covers combined different spaces: certain areas of the soccer pitch (the goal line, the corner, the midfield, among others), the stands, shots of daily life, and even images without a clear background. In addition, the ball and the attire (of the club or the Argentine national team) were part of a pre-fabricated environment and were the great signifiers of the sphere of sports. Football, as seen on the covers of *El Gráfico*, contributed to the construction and cohesion of the “imagined community” of modern Argentina and, at the same time, promoted a particular narrative regarding the abilities and potential of the *criollo* (a corporal ideal based on descendancy from Spaniards and Italians), over or against the Anglo-Saxon model: “The imaginary of the criollo style of football as opposed to the British [style] is the creation not only of the Argentine press but also the local English-language [press] that continually contrasts sets the British style, associated with tactical expertise, discipline, method, physical strength and power, against criollo virtues based on agility and the virtuosity of movement” (Archetti, 2005, p. 4).

15 Translator’s note: in the original: “acriolladas, aporteñadas y argentinizadas.”

Figure 14

“The centre-half of Racing. Andrés Stagnaro, 22 years old. Enhances his football prestige with every new game due to his efficacy and the quality of his play.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1930.

Figure 15

“1933 Championship. Varallo: Egad! If we are not careful, any one of these guys could steal the championship!”¹⁶



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1933.

Although Roberto Cherro¹⁷ and, to a lesser extent, the rest of the players mentioned were the main stars of the covers of *El Gráfico* during this period, other sports personalities appeared frequently as well. Examples included the famous cyclist Cosme Saavedra, the swimmer Alberto Zorilla (the first South American Olympic champion, at the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games), the boxer Luis Rayo, the automobile racers Antonio Gaudino and Raúl Riganti, and the motorcyclist Ernesto Blanco. Nevertheless, the athlete who received the most exposure during this period was not a football player but a genuine popular idol: boxer Justo Suárez.¹⁸ This lightweight Argentine boxer won the recognition and admiration of most of the press, “sports nationalists, and important sectors of Argentine society. Despite dying young from tuberculosis, he was considered one of the great icons of Argentine sports, since he exemplified—according to the press—simplicity, humility, boldness, courage, and practicality, with a touch of glamour, beauty, and upward mobility (Figure 16). In this sense, his very humble origins (he started working at age 9 as a shoeshine boy and a newsboy, and started fighting for money when he was 10 at festivals in Buenos Aires),

16 Translator’s note: The Spanish version, using the slang of the time, reads: “Campeonato 1933. Varallo: ¡hay que embromarse! Al menor descuido cualquiera de estos tipos se pianta la faina.” Fainá (pictured in the photo on the right) is a flatbread made of chickpea flour and seasonings.

17 Roberto Cherro was on the cover 10 times between 1928 and 1936.

18 Justo Suárez appeared on the cover 12 times between 1929 and 1931.

his popular sector roots, the color of his skin, his particular way of boxing, and his rapid social success gained him great admiration and a sense of identification with popular sectors, who empathized with his life story: “Suárez was, without doubt, the first boxer that attracted large crowds and helped to consolidate the popularity of professional boxing and increased its profitability” (Archetti, 2005, pp. 24-25).

Figure 16
“Justo Suárez and his new bride.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1930.

At this time, athletes began to appear on the covers with their wives. The notion of complementarity promoted and naturalized the place of women in certain spaces and practices. These types of covers were repeated in the following decades, featuring football players and other athletes. Undoubtedly, this type of format produced, transmitted, and promoted various gendered and sexualized meanings: the dissemination and reaffirmation of the ideal of the family as a synonym of joy and serenity (both are smiling); of corporal love or affection (the hands of the woman are resting on the shoulders of the man); the woman as a figure that sustained the masculine sports ideal; and the dissemination of the heterosexual economy of desire as the only possible option for a popular modern idol.

It is not surprising that it was a boxer who was once again pictured most often on the covers of *El Gráfico*. We should recall that after soccer,

boxing was the sport most frequently pictured on the covers during this period between 1920 and 1930, it was the sport in which Argentina won the most Olympic medals (Scharagrodsky, 2018a). Between 1925 and 1939, football and boxing dominated almost 60% of the covers. There were also many sports scenes related to auto racing, athletics, cycling, and swimming. Meanwhile, sports that featured less frequently included fencing, chess, golf, water polo, wrestling, weightlifting, ice hockey, Basque pelota, cricket, and billiards.

The covers continued to combine previously arranged sports events through photomontages, drawings, and testimonial photographs depicting sports competition. Among the most common spaces were those related to football (the pitch), boxing (the ring), auto racing (tracks, etc.), and athletics (tracks), cycling (roads), and swimming (swimming pools, the ocean, etc.). The same was true of the culture of sports equipment: some signifiers related to each sport were emphasized, such as the soccer ball, boxing gloves, and, to a much lesser extent, the machines: automobiles, bicycles, ships, planes, motorcycles and so forth. The bodies and their kinesic universes, coaches, and body language exhibited continued to fuse and define different meanings and significances: courage, ability, dexterity, talent, gentlemanliness, tactical intelligence, *criollo* roguishness physical prowess and intensity (Figure 17); stamina, tenacity, character, dynamism, and roughness (Figure 18); or social mobility, good taste, nobility, poise, good looks, and chivalry (Figure 19).

On the other hand, while there were covers with scenes of actual competitions, most portrayed male body models which reflected specific motor, moral, and aesthetic spheres. Although they were not the majority, covers depicting sports that were associated imaginarily or arbitrarily with better off sectors of Argentine, and especially Buenos Aires society—golf, tennis, horse racing, and others—circulated and naturalized a certain disposition or corporal hexis linked with social difference and a certain hierarchically superior aesthetic to that conveyed by the rest of the athletes. This reinforced sports practices and consumption that was supposedly “distinguished” or accessible to only a few social groups. The magazine at the same time promulgated and defended broadly popular sports practices in the framework of an expanding and growing market.

Bodies, masculinities, and sports. The front covers of *El Gráfico* magazine, Argentina 1920-1930

Figure 17

“Gimnasia y Esgrima – Estudiantes de La Plata. The La Plata classic was a great game with many vigorous plays such as these, in which Minella tries to take the ball away from Scopelli.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1931.

Figure 18

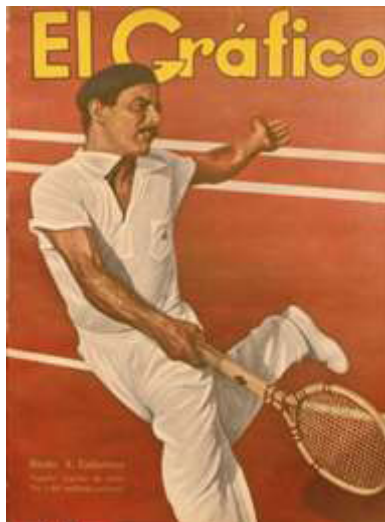
“The little bull (Justo Suárez), who has been inactive since his last fight in New York, started training a week ago in order to reappear before the Argentine public, an event that will take place next month.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1930.

Figure 19

“Héctor A. Cattaruzza. Popular tennis player, No. 1 in the national rankings.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1939.

As during the previous period, most of the men depicted were young, athletic, well-known, successful, attractive according to the dominant canon, hygienic, of a particular nationality (mostly Argentine), and had a physique that disseminated and, at the same time, strengthened certain moral values such as commitment to hard work, meticulousness in physical care, expertise in play, individual merit, the importance of popular success, and the formation of a virile character. In this period, the covers expanded the magazine's construction of various profitable and aesthetically desirable national masculine idols; as a result, they naturalized hetero-sportsmanship. Among those who featured prominently were football player Roberto Cherro and boxer Justo Suárez. Both combined the corporal and aesthetic characteristics that were generally accepted during these decades by the then massive-scale sports public.

The celebration of triumphs, records, and sporting achievements continued to be highlighted on the covers of the magazine. Finally, there are a few covers that depicted a type of masculine aesthetic and disposition that was different from dominant patterns (Figure 20), though without strongly eroding the dominant male body model. These few covers depicted masculine bodies associated with good judgement, corporal stillness, a certain tranquility, and a quasi-insipid aesthetic.

Figure 20

“Pedro L. Carrera. The brilliant Argentine billiard player, world *recordman*¹⁹ in free play.”



Source: *El Gráfico*, 1939.

In the following decades, the percentage of covers devoted to men continued to grow. In the 1940s, approximately 95% of the covers depicted men; in the 1950s, it was approximately 98%; in the 1960s, 99%; and in the 1970s, all the covers depicted men. In these four decades, although the sporting scenes illustrated included a variety of sports and sportsman, soccer became established as the popular sporting and national-modern corporal project on the covers of *El Gráfico*, and most of Argentine society seemed to have accepted this very well.²⁰

5. Final considerations

El Gráfico was one of the most read sports magazines in Argentina. In the decades analyzed here, we identified three periods. The first, between 1919 and 1921, was characterized by the variety of the masculine sporting activities depicted, which united and, at the same time, shaped spaces, materials, kinesic universes, techno-sport gestures, and protagonists. The covers extolled a dominant masculine body pattern: young men who were white,

19 Translator's note: “recordman” is used in French in relation to billiards.

20 The man with the largest number of covers in the whole history of magazine was the football player Diego Armando Maradona. He was featured on approximately 160 covers (alone or with others) during almost 30 years starting at the end of the 1970s.

thin, stylized, well-groomed, had a certain social recognition, a “healthy” appearance, effective, efficient, Argentine but with a predominance of foreigners, and a corporal bearing that transmitted certain moral values such as striving, character, valor, dedication, risk, conscientiousness, and discipline.

The second period, between 1922 and 1924, was characterized by the coexistence of various sporting situations, together with the production of the first archetype of an Argentine male athlete, based on a transnational case. In this context, and already with a very high percentage of masculine sports covers, the boxer Luis Firpo became the perfect excuse for disseminating the image of the exemplary Argentine male athlete characterized by courage, strength, motivation, nobility, fearlessness, youth, fame, a “healthy” appearance, humility, national belonging, and the emotion derived from the fictionalized Latin “heritage.”

A third phase, between 1925 and 1939, was related to the consolidation of certain sports linked in the imagination—and arbitrarily—to the deliberately fabricated masculine universe. Among these, the sports that stand out are football, boxing, and, to a lesser extent, auto racing, certain athletic activities, billiards, rugby, and aviation. The concern for featuring Argentine successes continued as well as the search for virile stereotypes that were successful, profitable, and sexually desirable such as various football players and boxers. Among these, popular idols such as Roberto Cherro and Justo Suárez were emphasized and the sports pages repeatedly focused on their two sports. The sports institutions mentioned were generally linked to football in Buenos Aires and its environs. In this sense, the bodies and their kinesic, technical, and gestural fields exhibited continued to fuse and define different meanings and significances.

Beyond the fact that during all three periods a dominant masculine pattern was promulgated, there were different types of masculine models that coexisted, complemented each other, and were transmitted through the covers: some prioritized strength, determination, dexterity, *criollo* mischievousness, and intense physical activity; and others, social distinction, elegance, status, and good taste. Without being preponderant, in all the periods analyzed, together with sports consumption that was more and more connected with middle class and popular sectors, the covers of *El Gráfico* also transmitted and disseminated certain sports practices of more well-off sectors, association with social distinction, and certain aesthetics whose tones implied a certain moral, economic, cultural, and social superiority.

It is worth mentioning that during this whole time period, the hegemonic pattern exhibited small and miniscule fissures and interstices that disturbed or diluted it, since the magazine itself presented bodies, gestures,

or sports scenes that supposedly eroded some of the characteristics, meanings, or prescriptions noted and accepted by the covers, and the referents of the sports universe. Except for these micro fissures, the covers of the magazine created a horizon of meanings and a visual experience saturated by exclusions: men who were obese, puny, sickly, elderly, “dirty” (something that was extremely common in the practice of sports), completely nude, of oriental ancestry, with dwarfism, excessively tall, very sweaty, or physically “abnormal,” who never appeared on the covers of the most important and long-running Argentine sports magazine.

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