Counterpunching with culture: Boxers in relation to the dominant ideology

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Abstract

Numerous scholars have studied the sociological underpinnings of boxing and the boxing site; however, few studies have looked at the cultural level of boxing. This study endeavours to introduce boxing as a cultural practice that is part of a particular group’s cultural milieu. The study employs Willis’ (1977) *Learning to Labour* to engage with why working class people play working class sports. Much like ‘the lads’ in *Learning to Labour* the boxers are vulnerable to the dominant ideology. However, in contrast, their own ideology reveals that they have agency, which is performed in relation to other dominant cultural practices. The boxers create an Other (Hall, 1996/2000) and reject and separate themselves from normative cultural practice, thus deliberately reproducing their culture and place in the society.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.01 Introduction

In an email conversation with Lucia Trimbur (personal communication, March 31, 2015) I expressed concern about my thesis becoming an anecdote that failed to offer something tangible or relevant to someone, and ‘was just another case study’. She offered some advice that has been central to this thesis and to my academic outlook; she said that I should “pick a person and write to them.” This advice had a dual function: it motivated me to produce meaningful political scholarship for a person/s, and it encouraged me to find an academic home that could offer intellectual, methodological, and political support from which I could write to that person/s. In this introduction, I determine and engage with certain intellectual genealogies in order to find an academic home. I introduce the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (CCCS) and the concept of Physical Cultural Studies (PCS); and I consider the relationship between PCS and CCCS cultural studies. This leads to my engagement with boxing and the boxing literature, which eventually leads to my interpretation and use of the concept of ‘culture’.
1.02 CCCS and PCS

The foundational writings of Raymond Williams, Edward Thompson and scholars at the CCCS, together with elements of PCS, created a space for my academic work and a space where I am comfortable working. The two schools of thought are not identical, and while their agendas diverge they share much in common. Elements of the PCS framework have been taken directly from the CCCS outlook (more specifically, Stuart Hall’s perspective) and reconfigured to fit what is presumed to be required in the sociology of sport today.

From my understanding of the work of the CCCS, I am much more comfortable situating my work within its genealogy rather than with PCS. Although there is an historical and geographical displacement, the work of the CCCS represents a united force defined by emancipatory politics at its core. With PCS still finding its direction, and with me being within it and a part of its formulation, I have yet to see a politics emerging to which I am willing to attach my work. (History will judge PCS as it has judged the work of the CCCS; perhaps it will eventually be represented alongside other critical leftist academic formulations). It is necessary to briefly explain my understanding of each framework in order to express the academic politics of this work – politics that will perhaps have real world political implications.
1.03 CCCS

Richard Hoggart founded the CCCS, but Stuart Hall is considered to be the ‘father’ of Cultural Studies. According to Rojek (2003), it was Hall “who played the decisive role in establishing the field of research and pedagogy and supervising the first cohorts of students” (p. 8). Indisputably, Hall had a major influence on the legacy of the CCCS and the way in which its work and influence are understood.

Hoggart was opposed “to the pomposity and self-regard of elite culture,” and he aimed to “demonstrate that marginal and subordinate forms of cultural expression have their own validity, and are worthy of scholarly regard” (Rojek, 2003, p.64). But even with this original political dimension, it was Hall who took the CCCS down a more political route. It became a part of the neo-Marxist project under the Hall’s directorship. Sparks (1996) describes how Hall, when director of the school, invented ‘marxist cultural studies’ and shaped its characteristic features. Richard Johnson, Stuart Hall’s successor, maintained this political dimension and pushed the CCCS, and the growing area of Cultural Studies, “to constantly resist academicism, and strive to relate cultural questions to the analysis of power, and ‘social possibilities’” (Johnson cited in Rojek, 2003, p.64).

I argue that the legacy of the CCCS is an analysis of power and radical leftist scholarship, and it has inspired me since I began reading about it and reading the work of scholars associated with the Centre. Hoggart wrote that, under Hall’s
direction, the school became “a) more political and b) more theoretic” (cited in Rojek, 2003, p.66). Correspondingly, Hall's theoretical stance demonstrated the worth of theory and helped me understand the true political project and academic and political relevance of the CCCS.

The political imperative is illustrated in the following example of Hall engaging with real problems outside academia. In the late 1970s and early 1980s when the influence of the CCCS was at its height, there was a spike in incidences of HIV and AIDS the UK. Hall, in an article addressing the theoretical legacy of the CCCS, asks:

Against the urgency of people dying in the streets, what in God’s name is the point of cultural studies? What is the point of the study of representations, if there is no response to the question of what you say to someone who wants to know if they should take a drug and if that means they’ll die two days later or a few months earlier?...

I think anybody who is into cultural studies seriously as an intellectual practice, must feel, on their pulse, its ephemerality, its insubstantiality, how little it registers, how little we’ve been able to change anything or get anybody to do anything. If you don’t feel that as one tension in the work that you are doing, theory has let you off the hook (Hall, 1996, p.271).
The point of producing academically astute work is imperative but more important to the work of the CCCS was caring about humanity and making a difference in the world. It is this that appealed to me most. This position leads to a consideration of PCS and the parts of its agenda that are appealing, but still concern me.

1.04 PCS

In 2008, David Andrews provided a working definition of PCS. Power differences, social power, injustice and inequity were the concepts upon which the definition hinged. In 2011, Silk and Andrews provided a definite and more emphatic conceptual contribution to the PCS debate. They stated: “we should not be silent – the voices of the silenced, the marginalized, the oppressed, have been silent and suppressed for too long” (p.28). They willed the field to engage with the most pressing social problems of our time.

Andrews (2008) asked us not to disconnect ourselves from a “political imperative” (p.58). Silk and Andrews (2011) hoped for a “utopian research agenda that criticizes the existing order of things and uses the terrain of culture and education to actually intervene in the world” (p.11). Similarly, Atkinson (2011) argued for engaging with “the possibility/existence of better worlds” (p.135); this requires us “to take sides by advocating particular ethics and moralities” (p.142).

The aims and ideals set out by Andrews (2008), Silk and Andrews (2011) and Atkinson (2011) are honourable and should be supported and encouraged.
However, there are still important questions to be answered by PCS: what is guiding us toward a utopian research agenda, and what are the ethical and moral positions for which we are supposed to be fighting? The ethical and moral positions are unclear, and the ‘political imperative’ seemingly at the centre of PCS seems undefined.

From my perspective, the politics of PCS appear at this time to be an extension of academic liberalism. As Gouldner (1968) pointed out, in the academy “liberalism has now become a token of respectability, a symbol of genteel open-mindedness, the fee for membership in the faculty club” (p.112). Even if PCS makes us think about ‘relations of power,’ in our current period, with the Left in crisis, the generation of students and researchers who hear the message of PCS have only ever known ‘lifestyle politics’ and never ‘emancipatory politics’. ‘Liberalism’ is the result.

So with PCS addressing the means, but saying little about the ends for which it stands, I was led back to the CCCS. Under Hall’s leadership, the CCCS employed Marxist theory as a means to strive for the ideals of equality. I believe that this Marxist influence on my work is obvious.

Whatever my reservations, both PCS and the CCCS have had an impact on this thesis. They both stress the importance of engaging with societies’ injustices and the power differentials that are clearly evident. Specifically, Andrews’ work
motivated me to think about physical cultures as a site of politics. Andrews (2008) used Giroux to explain that the body and sport have become sites where certain classed, raced, gendered, and sexed bodies are celebrated and others demonized; thus, “physical culture plays an important role in, quite literally, embodying and advancing the moralizing and self-righteous tyranny of neoliberal individualism” (Giroux cited in Andrews, 2008, p.53). This intrigued me and led me away from spaces where neoliberalism was being embodied and into a site that would perhaps speak to something else.

Potentially, boxing was a site where an alternative embodiment was transpiring and a space where I could try to understand the significance of certain practices and the politics attached to them.

1.05 Boxing

Initially my understanding of boxing came from personal experiences as a teenager in England, and from the representation of boxing in the mainstream media. A number of my soccer friends were connected to boxing and had brothers or other family members who boxed. Boxing often dominated the talk in soccer changing rooms. Within my soccer circle, soccer and boxing were the two most respected sports and the ones in which most people participated. Boxing was used during fitness sessions by most soccer teams I have played with, and most pre-
seasons I would inevitably go with my team mates to a boxing gym somewhere in North-East London, using their facilities for training.

Through this early engagement, I realized that politics were at play in boxing sites. For me, it was a reversal of the *Billy Elliot*\(^1\) story. I was leaving my middle class home and engaging in practices and spaces with people whose outlook and interactions with the world were very different from my own. The boxing sites were not filled by people with aspirations to go to university, or with people who were interested in engaging in ‘high culture’. They were hyper-masculine spaces filled by men with working class backgrounds in historically working class or poor areas of London.

This class-based understanding of boxing was reinforced by the ways that boxing is portrayed in the media. In popular boxing films such as *Raging Bull, Rocky, The Fighter, Cinderella Man,* and *Million Dollar Baby,* the narratives are connected by a rags-to-riches discourse. Alongside this narrative in films, my perception at the time was also influenced by the dominance of professional boxer Ricky Hatton, and how he was portrayed in the English media. As Rhodes (2011) points out, Hatton was built up as a working-class hero through the “nature of his hometown of Manchester and the fact that he grew up on a public housing estate” (p.8).

\(^1\) *Billy Elliot* was the son of a coal miner who pursued a ballet career. He had to leave his working class town in the north of England and move to London to realise his dream.
These two points of introduction, my experiences and the media portrayals, led me to see boxing as a sporting practice closely connected to class and power relations.

1.06 Engaging with the Boxing Literature

There are numerous studies engaging with boxing’s sociological underpinnings. In Beyond the Ring, Sammons (1990) provided an historical analysis of boxing in the U.S. “that will enable us to better understand ourselves and our place in society” (p. xix). He demonstrates how boxing both mirrored and contributed to the polarizing economic and racial issues that shaped U.S. society from the 1930s to the 1980s. Trimbur’s (2013) book Come Out Swinging provides a detailed description of the current post-industrial climate for boxing in New York City’s most famous boxing gym. She shows how the survival of Gleason’s Gym depends on those who have prospered through neoliberalism, while at the same time describing the tensions as the Gym battles to hold on to its boxing authenticity.

In The Urban Geography of Boxing, Haiskanen (2012) explores several topics in an attempt to explain race, class, and gender in the sport. She examines women in boxing, the sport’s behind-the-scenes labour, economic and judicial issues from various perspectives, fight night itself, boxing in and through the lens of the media, and how boxing is connected to the political world. Haiskanen’s book is not alone in exploring boxing using several different lenses. Wacquant took up boxing as an access point to the displaced ‘underclass’ in Chicago’s South Side
ghetto. He contributed to the boxing literature with a thorough body of work that takes steps toward a model for ‘carnal sociology.’ In his book, *Body and Soul* (2004), Wacquant attempts to capture and theorize ‘the taste and ache of the action.’

The malleability of boxing as a subject has led to a plurality of topics. The attempt by academics to *discover* boxing has left us with an inconclusive body of work that has produced as many questions as it has answered. There is a disjointedness across the boxing literature: each of the four books cited above, for example, seems to stand alone, and while some of the material overlaps they do not seem to be extensions of each other. As a result, the boxing literature forms a somewhat ‘patchy’ understanding of the sport.

However, the patchwork nature of this body of literature does not detract from its quality and worth. Rather, it exemplifies a pernicious problem within sociological research: intellectual bias may lead us to construe “the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved” (Wacquant, 1992, p.39). However, one consequence of the interpretations is an uncovering of problems that need to be solved.

Underlying the interpretations in the boxing literature is a recurring theme:

Poverty, low socioeconomic status, the working class, the underclass, the poor,
and other similar constructs. These constructs form a shadow over and run through the boxing literature. Race, class, gender, pain and suffering, embodiment, masculinity, religion, crime, exploitation, and numerous other topics in boxing are all embedded in the economic struggle interwoven throughout the boxing world. It seems impossible to disconnect the economic status of boxers from the other factors that constitute their practices, decisions, and environment.

*Come Out Swinging* (2013) offers an exemplary piece of politically engaged ethnographic work. Trimbur vehemently critiques a structure and identifies a problem that needs to be solved. She interprets the practices in Gleason’s Gym, and through these interpretations intentionally “engages with oppressed populations, and makes steps towards their emancipation” (Mackie, 2015, in press). *Come Out Swinging* certainly does not stand alone in its critique of the dominant structure, but it does seem to have an urgency differentiating it from much of the boxing literature.

Trimbur (2013) shows that boxers utilize Gleason’s Gym to “respond to their social-structural position” (p.17). Within the lives of the amateur participants, boxing manifests itself as a job replicating and offering the same benefits as work. The participants often define themselves as ‘boxers’; they become disciplined and they organize their lives through boxing. This “allows [those] who have been left out of the socializations of traditional institutions to enjoy some of the benefits
that might otherwise be formed through paid labor” (p.36). Trimbur understands that boxing allows the pugilists to fill the social void left by unemployment. However, boxing arguably exacerbates the poor boxers’ struggle as it fails to replace the financial role of paid work, and so they compound the material conditions of their position. Nevertheless, boxing softens this experience of unemployment; it helps those systematically excluded by race and class to form an identity and increase their self-worth in America’s postindustrial financial capital (Trimbur, 2013).

Trimbur’s (2013) approach to analysis was useful for this research on a number of levels. Academically, it presented ways to understand boxing practices and it made me aware of the ‘use’ of boxing to those who participate. It was also useful politically. Trimbur’s (2013) analysis strengthened my initial thoughts that boxing was and is a site of class relations and power relations. However, understanding the inner workings of the gym did not marry with, or explain my original interactions with boxing, as a middle class teenager who was aware of the differences between the outlook and practices of the boxers in comparison to the other groups with whom I interacted.

In Boxing and Society, Sugden (1996) spoke directly to a cultural understanding of boxing; this brought me to the CCCS and the study of culture, and enabled a much more organic point of analysis from which to engage with boxing. Herein, this
thesis seeks to extend the cultural understanding of boxing and become an
extension of Sugden’s position. At the same time, it is also an attempt to produce a
project that could be a part of a dialectical discourse with *Come Out Swinging*
(2013), in the hope of fixing a problem that must be understood from a number of
angles that are academically different but politically united.

1.07 Sugden, Boxing and Culture

The examples below from John Sugden’s *Boxing and Society* (1996) were my first
introduction to the cultural significance of boxing, and they gave me my first
viewpoint from which to understand boxing’s cultural significance.

Following Raymond Williams (1977), Sugden understands boxing as a part of a
culture that is “produced and reproduced by people acting within institutionally
framed settings which themselves have been constructed through the meaningful
action of previous generations” (p.9). Sugden explains that boxing has always
played an important role in social formation.

One of Sugden’s (1996) ethnographies was completed in a boxing gym called the
Holy Family, in the New Lodge area of Belfast in the early 1990s. Sugden
described New Lodge as an “urban village which is physically bounded by roads,
economically defined by poverty and culturally enclosed by community division
and sectarian suspicion” (p.98). For amateur boxer John, Holy Family was a
cultural symbol of his ‘roots’ and having an “active membership of the Holy
Family allowed him to keep one foot firmly grounded in the street culture of north
Belfast” (p.110) while he was studying at Queen’s University. Here Sudgen is
acknowledging the cultural differences across the spaces John occupies and
understands the significance in the difference.

In the final chapter of *Boxing and Society* (1996), Sugden explains that a
successful boxer is required to have “deference to authority and [an] appreciation
of fairness” (p.183). “Boxing inculcates in its adherents the value system and
behavioural trappings of a ‘civilised’ society” (p.183), and Sugden explains that:

> Those who regularly call for boxing to be banned are often the same people
> who abhor the rough working-class culture which boxing, at least on an
> individual basis, seems best placed to counteract. In this sense it could be
> argued that boxing is one of the few harbingers of bourgeois civilization to
> penetrate into the heart of the ghetto experience (p.183).

The two cultural examinations described above: the significance of boxing in
John’s life, and boxing as a practice separate from ‘bourgeois civilization’,
showed me how a ‘cultural’ perspective may provide insights into understanding
boxing’s position within social formations and class practices, and help identify
“organisations of active domination and subordination, within the formations of
culture” (Grossberg cited in Andrews and Loy, 1993, p.257). It became important for me to consider what ‘culture’ actually is and what a cultural analysis could lead to.

1.08 Culture

Culture is an extremely difficult concept to define. Williams (1985) argued that culture is one of the most complicated words in the English language. He attributes this to the intricate historical development of the concept, and how it has become an important concept in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought. Regardless of this, however, there has been an attempt by those engaged in ‘Cultural Studies’ to define it by understanding how to study and articulate culture. Spencer-Oatey (2012) identified some of the key characteristics of culture:

1. Culture is manifested at different layers of depth
2. Culture affects behaviour and interpretations of behaviour
3. Culture can be differentiated from both universal human nature and unique individual personality
4. Culture influences biological processes
5. Culture is associated with social groups
6. Culture is both an individual construct and a social construct
7. Culture is always both socially and psychologically distributed in a group, and so the delineation of a culture’s features will always be fuzzy

8. Culture has both universal (etic) and distinctive (emic) elements

9. Culture is learned

10. Culture is subject to gradual change

11. The various parts of a culture are all, to some degree, interrelated

12. Culture is a descriptive not an evaluative concept

These twelve points illustrate the breadth, complexity and omnipresence of culture. Hall’s understanding of ‘cultural centrality’ is useful in order to reduce these points and simplify the perspective. Hall (1997) wrote of “culture’s centrality” and how “culture creeps into every nook and crevice of contemporary social life, creating a proliferation of secondary environments, mediating everything” (p.215). Similarly, Williams (1998) described the pervasiveness of culture, and how, in order to understand culture, the “relationships between elements in a whole way of life” must be understood (p.53). Understanding that culture is ‘a whole way of life’ means that ‘culture’ must be understood as “an inseparable part of a complex whole” (Williams, 1998, p.52).

The understanding of a culture as part of a whole leads to the position that cultural meaning is defined in relation to another, each other, and what is left out. In Hall’s (1980) understanding of culture, it is “threaded through all society’s practices, and
is the sum of their inter-relationship.” Thus, to study culture it is necessary to "grasp how the interactions between all [societies’] practices and patterns are lived and experienced as a whole” (p.60).

In attempting to define culture it became apparent that, to study it, one must recognize respective differences between cultures within a society. As Williams (1998) reiterates:

To study the [cultural] relations adequately we must study them actively, seeing all the activities as particular and contemporary forms of human energy. If we take any one of those activities, we can see how many of the others are reflected in it, in various ways according to the nature of the whole organization. It seems likely, also, that the very fact that we can distinguish any particular activity, as serving certain specific ends, suggests that without this activity the whole of the human organization at that place in time could not have been realized (p.51).

Hall (1996/2000) builds upon this understanding that cultures are in a reflective relation and uses identity formation to explain how culture is created “through and not outside, difference” (p.17). Thus, the entirety of a society and all the cultures it encapsulates are made in “relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the
‘positive’ meaning of any term -- and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed” (p.17).

In the preface to *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), Thompson introduced class culture from a similar perspective. He argued that “the notion of class entails the notion of [an] historical relationship…. And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs” (p.9).

This cultural formulation in relation to the ‘Other’ (Hall, 2000) and its manifestation arising ‘against other interests’ (Thompson, 1963) led me to consider ‘culture’ and the practices within cultures as a crucial window from which to view boxing.

**1.08 Concluding Remarks**

Establishing my genealogical home has helped me focus on the concepts and politics that I need to develop. By engaging with the CCCS and engaging with the necessary acknowledgement of the Other and power relations in culture I have laid the foundation to begin placing this study in its historical position and developing more upon culture and what it means.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

2.01 Introduction

This literature review introduces the reader to key contemporary literature on boxing and historicizes the relationship between boxing and the working class. It is related to the historical nature of Willis’s (1977) work and suggests ways in which this thesis may extend the current academic literature on boxing. This review also attempts to assess the potential of Willis's work, and cultural studies more broadly, to establish how they may provide a meaningful platform from which to engage with boxing. Thus, this review of literature is organized to consider the following themes:

1. Contextualizing contemporary academic boxing literature
2. History, sport and their impact on the rich and the poor
3. Boxing’s early inception and its connection to the poor
4. Contemporary Sociological Understanding of Boxing
5. Boxing and the Poor and Working Class
6. Contemporary Boxing Literature and Culture
7. Introducing Paul Willis and Learning to Labour
2.02 Contextualising Contemporary Academic Boxing Literature

At the outset it is important to understand our current period of history, how it is evolving, and influencing sports' sociology, boxing literature and their influence on my thesis.

Currently, the relationship between our current period of history and the immediately preceding period is provoking considerable debate. The debate materializes through the conceptualization of high/late capitalism and postmodernity (Jameson, 1991). One simple explanation is that postmodernity suggests a disconnection or detachment from modernity where “the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good” (Jameson, 1991, p. ix). Late capitalism or high modernity refers to change and evolution to the point where the economic system and the cultural structures become crystallized (Jameson, 1991).

A postmodern outlook can manifest itself in a number of ways. For example Fukuyama’s The End of History? (1989) is perhaps a quintessential piece of postmodern theorizing; he claimed that we have left our historic baggage behind, and are now entering a new period. He surmises: “over the past decade or so, it is hard to avoid the feeling that something very fundamental has happened in world history” (p.1). We have reached a stage whereby “the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy is the final form of human government.” (p.2).
However, this post ideology, postmodern outlook seems ill fitted to our time. It seems that our period may be better understood through the concepts of late capitalism (Jameson, 1991) or late modernity (Giddens, 1991). Bennett (1998) argues that postmodernists see “history setting out on a new chapter even when, objectively speaking, it may have only turned a page” (p.104).

Jameson (1991) explains the postmodern effect – which as a manifestation of late capitalism- has stopped us from thinking historically and has pushed us to a “uniquely privileged symptom of a loss of historicity” (p. x). This can result in research being lost to the pages of history before it is even written; scholarly work exists as windows in to history and not windows in to the future. Jameson (1984) argues that, in our period of late capitalism, postmodern’s most formal feature is evident “through the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense” (p.60).

A number of recent scholars of boxing have failed to engage with history, and with the effect the current period in time has had on their academic work. Arguably, a depthlessness has manifested itself in some boxing literature. To some extent Wacquant’s *Body and Soul* (2003) is one such example of postmodern work. I argue that this book, one of the best known and most cited examples of modern scholarship on boxing, is very much tied to the moment and has a lack of historicity.
Wacquant (2003) wrote long observational passages describing the boxing environment he experienced and the book culminates when he details his participation in a boxing match in a Golden Gloves Tournament. On the final page he described waking up after the fight:

Waking up the day after the fight is painful. I’ve slept like I was bludgeoned and can’t remember anything about the fight. Was I dreaming? I feel numb, psychologically drained, like a squeezed lemon left with only the withered yellow skin (p.255).

This exemplifies Jameson’s (1984) belief that we have “become incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience” (p.68) and he argues that the postmodern artefacts being created in late capitalist times are a shadow on Plato’s cave: we can no longer grasp their reality because they often have no history and no depth: they are just forms of the real world. This analogy may be extended to Wacquant’s *Body and Soul* (2003). He produced a piece of research focusing so acutely on the body, that we are left with a reflection on the boxing world rather than any real understanding of that world, the world more generally, or history.

The corporeal sociology that Wacquant produced seems to lie outside of history, even though the corporeal experience is very much within and shaped by history.
In his journal articles on boxing, Wacquant flirts with history but keeps it at a distance. This interpretation may have resulted from Wacquant’s (1995a) focus on the “actual living bodies of flesh and blood” (p.65). He claims surprise at the lack of attention the sociology of the body has given to the “concrete incorporating practices whereby social structures are effectively embodied by the agents who partake of them” (p.65). However, by investigating the flesh and blood, the result is an introspection on the corporeal response to bodily practices, not an understanding of the ‘embodiment’ of the social structures and history from which they have been constructed. The result is a body of research literature historically disorientating and void of power relations and politics.

To reaffirm this point, Donnelly and Young (1985) understand sport to be a “cultural form that is constantly being produced and reproduced in conjunction with changing social, historical and environmental circumstance” (p.20) which are embodied differently by different groups and classes.

In postmodern terms, Wacquant “closes off the past by claiming history is finished, and is, therefore irrelevant to the future. There is only the present, and all you can do is be with it, immersed in it” (Hall interview with Grossberg, 1996, p.137). As *Body and Soul* engages little with history, it “suggests a kind of final rupture or break with the modern era…. What it says is: this is the end of the world. History stops with us and there is no place to go after this” (Hall interview
with Grossberg, 1996, p.134). It is as if Wacquant considers that boxers' bodies were passive entities from which we could learn nothing. Perhaps *Body and Soul* represents another example of the masses holding a secret while the intellectuals “keep running around in circles trying to make out what it is, what is going on” (Hall interview with Grossberg, 1996, p.140).

### 2.03 History, Sport, and their Impact on the Rich and Poor

Thompson (1966) explains the importance of referring to history and not separating research from it:

> If we stop history at a given point, then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences. But if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions. Class is defined by men as they live their own history... (p.11).

Similarly, Marx explains that if an object is studied in isolation it remains a pure abstraction in space and does not develop any further... and the living world of ideas in which law, the state, nature, and the whole of philosophy consist, the object must be in its own development (Marx, cited in McLellan, 2000, p.11).
Through Thompson and Marx, we can understand why it is not appropriate to conceptualize social formations, artefacts or social practices in ‘time isolation’. We must place them within the historical process so their development can be studied in context. As history evolves, similar social and cultural formations arise in different times and places, “but never in just the same way” (Thompson, 1966, p.10) and what seems to be socially normal is constructed historically and within the context of dominant ideas, structures, institutions and behaviours (Budd, 2001).

Their arguments support the necessity to take account of historical context. Otherwise, scholars will fail to understand the relevance of our actions, cultures, and thoughts, and so fail to understand ourselves in our totality.

Sport and its fissured continuation throughout history is well-documented. Sugden and Tomlinson (2000) identify and help us to understand the extent to which sport has been used and manipulated in various ways for a number of reasons by different groups in society. They provide an insight into the historical developments of sport and trace sporting developments from the city-states of Athens and Sparta to late-modern times. In Greek and Roman times and the Middle Ages, they found the dominating sporting practices closely reflected the warlike practices of the powerful and controlling groups.
During the Middle Ages, horse riding, jousting, and sword fighting, for example, were regular occurrences at sporting festivals and even then, participation and engagement was systematized across wealth lines:

serfs, vassals and other gradations within the feudal lower orders fed off the crumbs from the master’s table; their experiences of sport and leisure were similarly dependent on their presence at the margins of tournaments and festivals organized by aristocracy and religious elites for their own gratification (Bloch, 1962).

Sports’ divided hierarchical past continued in industrialized society. Since the mid to late 19th Century, there have been wholesale changes in political and economic conditions in Canada and other countries. However, within and partly because of the industrial revolution, sport continues to affirm itself as an expression of social difference and as a marker of differentiated social status. Arguably, since the conception of sport in Ancient Greece through to contemporary, post-industrial late capitalist times, sport has been unable to remove its unwanted history of exclusion and difference. It seems that sport gives a form to the famous Marxist argument that history is the history of class struggle. Systemic hierarchies are evident in sport and they manifest themselves in a number of ways.
Bourdieu (1978) argues that sporting practices, like eating and drinking habits, can reflect social status. He illustrates that “golf, like caviar, *foie gras* or whiskey, has a distributional significance (the meaning which practices derive from their distribution among agents distributed in social classes), which, unanimously recognized and acknowledged on the basis of a practical mastery of the probability of the various classes practising the various sports, is entirely opposed to that of *pétanque*, whose purely health-giving function is perhaps not very different but which has a distributional significance very close to that of Pernod and all *strong* drinks” (p.836). Thus, Bourdieu exemplifies the class associations attached to certain sports. As with golf and *pétanque*, numerous other sports have a history and an association that may be tied to and considered alongside our understanding of the social structures of our society.

**2.04 Boxing’s Early Inception and its Connection to the Poor**

Boxing is a sport with a rich historical past intertwined with class formations and changes in history.

In 1734, Jack Broughton, a butcher from London, England, wrote down the first set of boxing rules. From these rules grew The London Prize Ring Rules, which governed the bare-knuckle era from 1838 until 1889. In 1889, these rules gave way to The Marquess of Queensbury Rules, which are the foundation of our present day rules. Prior to Jack Broughton, the original concept of modern boxing
came from James Figg who is widely regarded as the founder of modern boxing. In 1719, he set up a ‘pugilistic academy’ and billed himself as ‘a master of ye Noble Science of Defence… to teach Gentle Men the use of fists, sword, and quarterstaff’ (Greig, 1996).

Trimbur (2013), offering a sociological analysis of Figg’s pugilistic academy, discovered that

a number of texts from the 1700s and 1800s suggest that middle- and upper-class English and American men studied the sport to protect themselves from physical assault. In 1784, the author of *The Art of Manual Defence, or System of Boxing: Perspicuously Explained in a Series of Lessons, and Illustrated by Plates* complained of the ‘licentiousness,’ ‘rudeness,’ and ‘scurrility’ of the ‘lower order of society’ and their penchant for confronting upper-class men strolling the streets of London (p.119).

Greig (1996) and Trimbur (2013), by elucidating the beginnings of standardized boxing expose a recurring theme in the wider literature on sport and boxing literature in particular. They demonstrate how the ever-present spectre of class and social difference was embedded within pugilism from the outset. The early boxing lessons in self-defence were needed supposedly in order for middle and upper
class men to protect themselves from the “working- and lower-class attackers, who, it was believed, had mastered the sport” (Trimbur, 2013, p.119).

Although Greig (1996) and Trimbur (2013) connect the inception of boxing with a perceived threat from the lower social orders and offer a class based analysis, the sociological understanding of the early years of bare knuckle fighting and its evolution is unclear. Specifically, it is not evident how the working poor or poor and unemployed engaged with boxing and how they came eventually to master the sport. James Figg’s societal position and early years appear to be unknown, but numerous sources have documented social information about the second wave of bareknuckle boxers dominating the sport in the latter part of the 18th Century.

Below is a table of notable boxers who participated in bareknuckle prizefighting in England in the latter part of the 18th Century and the beginning of the 19th Century.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>D.O.B-D.O.D</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom Johnson</td>
<td>1753 – 1794</td>
<td>Corn porter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Richmond</td>
<td>1763 – 1829</td>
<td>Former slave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Belcher</td>
<td>1781 - 1811</td>
<td>Butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Cribb</td>
<td>1781 – 1848</td>
<td>Coal porter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Molineaux</td>
<td>1784 – 1818</td>
<td>Former slave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Spring</td>
<td>1795 – 1851</td>
<td>Butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Thompson</td>
<td>1811 – 1880</td>
<td>Oyster seller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Sayers</td>
<td>1826 – 1865</td>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident that these prominent bare knuckle boxers in the second half of the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century and early part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century were from the lower classes. Unlike a lot of other sports boxing seemed to have emanated from the lower classes. The earliest documentation of boxing, from James Figg’s pugilistic academy in 1719, appears to confirm boxing's genesis in the lower classes.

Evidence suggests that Sugden and Tomlinson (2000) were correct when they claimed that, since the industrial revolution, there is “little dispute that the growth of modern sports remains interwoven with the class dynamics of the time” (p.311). And evidently, since modern boxing’s early conception at the beginning of the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century, its development has been closely tied to the class developments of its harbouring country, as we see in examining the case of Canada.
In Canada, almost 100 years after Figg’s classes were publicised, the first recorded reference to ‘boxing’ was written by Englishman, Edward Talbot, in 1824 (Greig, 1996). He provides a detailed account of an illicit “barn bout” which commenced after a horse race:

When the race was over, wrestling commenced; which was soon succeeded by boxing in the modern style of rough and tumble…. Instead of fighting like men whose passions have gained momentary ascendance over their reason – which would to all intents be bad enough – they attack each other with the ferociousness of bull-dogs, and seem in earnest only to disfigure each other’s faces, and to glut their eyes with the sight of blood… (Greig, 1996, p.2).

During the mid 19th century, legal boxing matches were organised in Canada. These ‘pugilistic exhibitions’ were permitted in Western Canada, where gymnasiums and sparring rooms flourished. In 1866, the Victoria Colonist and Chronicle advertised a prizefight “between Geo. Wilson and Geo. Baker for $500”.2 By the 1880s, boxing was accepted when practiced at established gymnasiums or in pugilistic academies but for many Canadians it was still considered to be a “barbaric frontier activity” (Greig, 1996, p.3).

2 In this article it was also disclosed that these two men would go into training prior to the fight.
Similar to England, there seems to be no contemporaneous sociological understanding of boxing and its early inception in Canada. The makeup and understanding of the early day gymnasiums and sparring rooms are relatively unknown and it takes suppositions to understand their sociological underpinnings. Not until the boxing great John ‘Jack’ Johnson emerged did the social position of boxers become noteworthy. Jack Johnson was an African-American who dominated the boxing world in the early 20th century. From 1908-1915, he was the world heavy weight champion and the most famous African-American on Earth.

He was born in 1878 to Henry and Tina Johnson, two former slaves who engaged in manual labour. Johnson grew up fighting and regularly fought other boys in his neighbourhood in Galveston, Texas. He described these fights as his “first lessons in survival” (Johnson and Rivers, 2007, p.4). Johnson became famous during the Jim Crow years and the sociological and historical analyses of his boxing career focuses on the racial discrimination he fought against his entire life. Being black, he was seen as beneath white boxers in terms of status and, in The Fight of The Century, with Jim Jefferies, Jefferies fought because his fans considered him to be The Great White Hope who could prove the athletic superiority of whites (Sammons, 1990, p.37). Jack Johnson won the fight and was immortalised in the process.
The historical poor and working class connection of prominent boxers in history helps to identify boxing’s historical connection to working and lower class demographics. Boxing’s “usable past” illustrates and enables us to at least see boxing’s connection to the working poor in society (Sammons, 1990, p. xix). The immediate developments in boxing post 1719 demonstrate that social practices like boxing are historical phenomena. As both Thompson and Marx argued, our contemporary understanding can only be fully determined and understood only by recognizing something in history; not by considering it in the isolation of our time period.

2.05 Contemporary Sociological Understanding of Boxing

As noted, boxing has a historical connection to the lower and working classes and this phenomenon continued into the 21st Century. Sammons (1988), Boddy (2008), Wacquant (2004), Woodward (2004), Sugden (1996), Trimbur (2013), Heiskanen (2012) and numerous other scholars have gone in to spaces where boxing exists and emerged having engaged, on some level, with poverty/ socioeconomic status/ and or class. These themes permeate and frame the majority of the boxing literature. Below I provide a contemporary substantiation of the connection between boxing and poverty. These findings are not an exhaustive study of the subcategories within the literature on boxing and poverty, but they lay the foundations for engaging with boxing as a cultural practice.
2.06 Boxing and the Poor and Working Class

In *Boxing and Society* (1996) John Sugden provides a description of the Chart Oak community centre and its surrounding environment in Hartford, Connecticut. Sugden explains that the gym recruits its members from a housing project where buildings are in a chronic state of disrepair, unemployment is high, and where many of the families in the project are single parents “struggling to survive day to day” (p.59). Correspondingly, Wacquant (2004) describes his research setting at the Woodlawn Boys and Girls Club on 63rd Street in Chicago as “one of the most devastated thoroughfares of the neighborhood, in the midst of a landscape of urban desolation” (p.21).

Both Sugden (1996) and Wacquant (1998) give prominence to the gyms’ situations and the communities where the boxers live. Sugden explicitly explained that “it is through their early experiences in this modern ghetto that most of the current members developed an appetite for boxing” (p.62); furthermore, “learning how to fight in the streets, and developing strategies of avoiding fighting in the streets, emerge as powerful complementary motivations” (p.65). Wacquant (1998) agrees, and understands that “an intimate acquaintance with hardship is a powerful ingredient in the genesis of the fistic calling” (p.326).

Once inside the gym, the connections between the boxers and their social positions are further developed. Sugden (1996) noted that, in international terms,
boxing “recruits the children of the urban poor - those whose life chances and educational opportunities and achievements are minimal” (p.52). Similarly, Wacquant (1995b) observes:

that boxing is a working class occupation and is reflected not only in the physical nature of the activity but also in the social recruitment of its practitioners and in their continuing dependence on blue-collar or unskilled service jobs to support their career in the ring (p.52).

Scattered throughout the literature on boxing are numerous examples giving insights into the individual lives of the urban poor, and the blue-collar, or unskilled and unemployed boxers. Woodward (2004) interviewed 23-year-old Brian from Sheffield who has “been out of work for a bit” (p.10). Harry, a coach in Gleason’s Gym, was a former crack-cocaine user, fatherless and often homeless, tells Trimbur (2013) about Scott, a boxer who crossed the “US-Mexico border with his mother…. [who] works twelve-hour shifts in a minimum wage job” (p.53). Wacquant (2004) introduces us to Wayne who is a “one of the rare members of the gym who can boast having a stable and coveted job: he is a firefighter for the City of Chicago” (p.134).

However, although boxing’s connection to the poor and working class is evident and significant it is also important to note the Hollywood myth that surrounds
boxing. The perception that boxers come from the very bottom of society has largely been dispelled by the academy. Heiskanen (2012) takes us beyond Sugden’s explanation of the role of the poor environments in the making of boxers. The ‘Hollywood’ understanding that those who fight in the street simply transfer the same skills in to the ring is simply wrong. “[G]rowing up in poor, dysfunctional, and violent surrounding does not... in and of itself provide anyone with a one-way ticket to success in boxing” (Heiskanen, 2012, p.17). Wacquant (1998) dispels the myth that the Mike Tysons of this world, with alcoholic mothers, who leave school at seven and have been arrested 38 times before the age of 13, are the norm in boxing. Wacquant’s research found the successful amateur and professional boxers, those who consistently train and fight, did not emerge from the lowest rungs of the social ladder. In reality they emerge from urban households that may well be single parent and poor but often have a blue-collar male presence offering some kind of guidance; this gives a significant advantage. In explanation, Wacquant (1992) supposes that “youngsters from the most disadvantaged families are eliminated because they lack the habits and inclinations objectively demanded by pugilism” (p.232).

This brief review thus far illustrates the way that contemporary boxing literature acknowledges the poor and working class, and offers an understanding of the historical connection between boxing since its inception, and the poor and working class.
It now seems justifiable to engage with cultural studies to explain why boxing, as a social and physical practice, is so comfortable in the homes of the poor and working class. However, in order to do this and to justify this ‘cultural engagement’, it is necessary to re-engage with the literature on boxing and explain how cultural studies may help to improve our understanding of boxing.

2.07 Contemporary Boxing Literature and Culture

One possible critique of boxing literature is that it removes ‘the whole way of life’ from its analysis and engages with boxing practices in relation to specific dominant social and ideological structures such as neoliberalism. Hall (1980), tried to capture the “feeling of structure” in his work, and how the “interactions between all the practices and patterns are lived and experienced as a whole” (p 60). According to Hall (1980), “culture is threaded through all social practices, and is the sum of their inter-relationship” (p.60), by studying elements of a whole way of life we are able to study structures. Arguably, much of the literature on boxing removes boxing as an interwoven social practice and isolates it from the cultural landscape in which it operates. As a result, the boxing gym has been constructed as a kind of refuge, offering respite from the tyranny of the dominating structures rather than a location within and in relation to them.

Sugden (1996) illustrates this by describing the boxing club “as a sanctuary within the ghetto: an oasis where the vicissitudes and vices produced by urban poverty,
political conflict and violence are temporarily suspended through the ring and its traditional values” (p.190).

Mirroring this, Wacquant (2005) describes a similarly bleak role:

the gym protects one from the street and acts as a buffer against the insecurity of the neighborhood and the pressures of everyday life. In a manner of a sanctuary, it offers a cosseted space, closed and reserved, where one can, among like-minded others, shelter oneself from the ordinary miseries of an all-too-ordinary life and from the spells that the culture and economy of the street hold in store for young men trapped into this place scorned and abandoned by all that is dark in the ghetto (p.14).

With homogeneous rhetoric, Trimbur (2013) understands boxing space as a place where the pugilists can “create a range of social and economic possibilities in the gym to buffer the vicissitudes of postindustrial New York” (p.143).

As well as offering a buffer from society, scholars argue that the gym has other important functions. Trimbur (2013) found that it provided a space for the boxers to recast boxing as work and remould their bodies away from the image of failures of capitalist pursuit. Additionally, the relationships forged within the gym “focus on sociality, collectivity, and social support” (p.88) which, in the context of
Trimbur’s thesis – neoliberalism’s ascendancy in postindustrial NYC -- replaced the support of the state for the boxers.

The feeling pervading these functional interpretations of the boxing gym and the gyms’ users is one of insular hopelessness. Although it seems that boxing has much to offer — given the socioeconomic contexts of the gym and the structural barriers impinging upon its patrons -- the sport and the spaces’ functionality remains somewhat futile in the face of the dominant structures.

Through her periodization of a critique of neoliberalism and its effect on the boxers, Trimbur (2013) develops a picture of American postindustrial culture: it is one of unforgiving competitiveness and brutality, and boxing makes up a part of its social fabric. However, Jameson (1984) argues that this type of periodization has led to the obliteration of heterogeneity amongst scholars on the Left; “and it is certain that there is a strange quasi-Sartrean irony, a ‘winner loses’ logic – which tends to describe – a ‘system’” (p.57).

The boxing literature seems to illustrate Jameson’s (1984) belief that, by “constructing an increasingly closed and terrifying structure the theorist becomes the winner and the loser because the critical capacity of their work is paralyzed, and the impulses of negation, not to mention social transformation, are increasingly perceived as vain and trivial in the face of the structure they speak to”
In relation to the dominant structures the boxers are perceived as helpless, and the reader is left feeling despondent. And, although the studies engage with poor and working class individuals, they fail to see the group’s function in relation the history of class and the internal cohesive nature of the social group in relation to the other. The boxers are afforded an analysis which reveals an individual level of creativity, but the cultural level of boxing remains unknown.

When we engage with boxers and reduce their boxing participation to the level of individual benefits, or as a way to avoid having to “put up with personal submission, cultural humiliation and loss of masculine honor” (Wacquant, 2001, p.189) we see the boxer’s agency, in relation the dominant structure, removed. In its place, we are provided with heroic examples of individuals providing themselves with alternative and imaginative ways to be successful outside of the dominant structures and normative expectations. Perhaps in order to understand the cultural level of boxing, it is necessary to look beyond boxing literature.

2.08 Introducing Paul Willis and Learning to Labour

Willis (1977) provides an example of ethnographic research that goes beyond the individual and individual's actions. In the preface to a reprint of Learning to Labour, Aronowitz, speaks to the boxing literature by explaining Willis’s accomplishment:
[Willis] stressed the importance of counterculture among those who are the objects of educational manipulation, he showed how youths, through their own activity and ideological development, reproduce themselves as a working class. The mechanism is their opposition to authority, their refusal to submit to the imperatives of a curriculum that encourages social mobility through the acquisition of credentials. Thus, Willis opposes the manipulation thesis of radical critiques with the finding, based upon careful ethnographic methodology, that working class ‘lads’ create their own culture of resistance to school knowledge. Or, to be more exact, truancy, counterculture, and disruption of the intended reproductive outcomes of the curriculum and pedagogy of schools yield an ironic effect: the ‘lads’ disqualify themselves from the opportunity to enter middle class jobs. They acquire none of the middle class skills that are the intended result of faithful subordination of the three R’s (i.e., discipline preparing them for work). Instead, the students produce themselves as rebellious, ‘uneducated’ workers whose single choice is the unskilled and semi-skilled occupations found in manual labour (p. xii).

What *Learning to Labour* attempts to present

…is that there is a moment – and it only needs to be this for the gates to shut on the future – in working class culture when the manual giving of
labour power represents both a freedom, election and transcendence, and a precise insertion into a system of exploitation and oppression for the working class people (Willis, 1977, p.120).

In boxing literature, there is never the sense of boxers creating a freedom or transcending their exploitation and oppression. The boxing literature offers a contemporaneous individualistic and insular analysis, while Willis offers an historical and collective interpretation. This may be illustrated by comparing Trimbur’s (2013) and Willis’s (1977) analyses of the humour and joking that takes place in their respective ethnographic sites.

Trimbur (2013) and Willis (1977) discuss how the role of humour/joking or ‘having a laff’ plays in their respective settings. They both identify it as an important feature. Trimbur (2013) categorizes its functionality into three separate roles: the first allows banter to deepen the bonds among the gyms' users and helps to maintain an organized structure; the second pushes “the recipient so he or she should not be deterred or demoralized by a weakness of a deficiency” (p.80); and the third sees it as a call to action, a way to communally pressurize a change in behaviour.

These three functions of banter may also be why the lads in Learning to Labour use humour, and Willis (1977) even explains that ‘having a laff’ is “a multi-
faceted implement of extraordinary importance in the counter-school culture” (p.29). However, “in a more general sense, the ‘laff’ is part of an irreverent marauding misbehaviour” (p.30).

‘Having a laff’ continues with the parents of the lads and is replicated on the factory floor. Willis theorizes this ‘having a laff’ is a productive practice: where theoretical qualifications (degrees, diplomas, etc.) open doors for the middle classes on their middle class trajectory, ‘having a laff’ provides the working class boys with the skills to continue on their trajectory.

Willis’s analysis transcends his ethnographic setting and engages with history and the reproduction of social class. In most cases, the sociology of sport literature is insular, and explains sport rather than helping to explain history and class culture. In *Learning to Labour*, the classroom experience of ‘the lads’ not only helps to explain education and social class in the classroom, but it may also offer a framework by which to understand the popularity of boxing and understand the space of boxing in relation to the working class. We may be able to learn about working class practices in relation to history, and that may help to show us the future.
In order to develop this I review a theoretical framework consisting of ideology and the theories of ‘penetrations’ and ‘limitations’; both developed by Willis (1977).
Chapter 3

Theoretical Underpinnings

3.01 Introduction

This chapter explores the epistemological and theoretical structures that underpin the design, interpretation, analysis and representation of data presented in this thesis. As well as explaining the epistemology I introduce the three main concepts that frame this project and helped as I thought through and critically engaged with the data. First, I introduce my understanding of ideology and the ideological effect, which shapes, cajoles and connects with the dominant culture and cultural practices. Connected to this are the second and third concepts, the main theories that frame my exploration of the research participants, namely, Willis’ (1977) theories of penetration and limitations.

3.02 Theory

There are two points to be made to introduce the theory chapter. The first concerns my use of theory, and the second concerns the importance of outward looking theory.

Hall (1996) argued that, “the only theory worth having is that which you have to fight off, not that which you speak with profound fluency” (p.265). He described his engagement with Marxist theory as having to ‘wrestle with angels’. During his
career he examined Marxist concepts and wrestled with them until he had, in his
own mind, defeated them and developed them so that they made sense today. Hall
obviously refrained from hanging data or ideas over a theoretical framework;
rather, he ‘wars with it, until the death’, explained its faults and defeated it so that
it fits the data, the idea, or the society.

At this point in my academic career I am ill-equipped to wrestle with theoretical
angels. I have, not wrestled with ‘ideology’ and, in fact, I have avoided any kind
of confrontation with it. Perhaps in time I will be able to stop its vastness and
complexity from bullying me. I did however, attempt to wrestle with Willis’
(1977) concept of *limitations*; but ultimately I am aware that there is a convenient
fluency with my use of theory, and I am conscious of the problem of theoretical
fights too easily won.

The second point is to clarify my understanding of the difference between
intellectual theory and academic theory. At all points in this chapter I have tried to
focus on a theoretical position that could produce organic intellectual political
work, and to distance myself from the position of a theoretical discussion that
speaks only to the “metanarratives of achieved knowledges within academic
institutions” (Hall, 1996, p.275). Theory has been employed not to bring forward a
truth, but rather “a set of contested, localized, conjectural knowledges, which have
to be debated in a dialogical way” (Hall, 1996, p.275).
Again, in agreement with Hall (1996) I argue that there is “all the difference in the world between understanding the politics of intellectual work and substituting intellectual work for politics” (p.275). My point is to connect theory with intervention in a world in which it could make some difference.

3.03 Ideology

This section represents an attempt to convey the importance of thinking with ideology; ‘ideology’ insisted that I think in a certain way. I lead up to Hall’s use of ideology, and its relevance to this study, by first explaining my original understanding of ideology, which led me to Althusser and then to Hall’s important interpretation.

In my untutored view of ideology, I understood it to be a set of foundational ideas that were reference points from which other things (institutions, people, media, governments, etc.) looked to make their decisions. I understood it be evasive and formless, something that was difficult to tie down but something that had significant power and influence. Its origins, how it grew, and how it maintained itself was unclear.

However, Althusser’s (1970/2000) *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* revealed an interpretation of the importance, significance and usefulness of ideology. This provocative book was immediately arresting. Bidet’s (2014) introduction claimed that the book “confronts us with a
question that is today less than ever possible to dismiss as obsolete: under what conditions, in a society that proclaims its devotion to the ideals of freedom and equality, is the domination of some people over others endlessly reproduced?” (p. xix). This question is of upmost relevance today and, as illustrated by the boxing literature (especially *Come Out Swinging*, where the boxers are systematically reduced to having substandard life expectations), the ‘timeless inequitableness’ in society is evident.

Althusser (1970/2000) set out to explain the connection between the state and a specific dominating ideology. He explained that social problems determined by political struggles revolve around the state and “the seizure or conservation of state power by a certain class or ‘power bloc’, in other words, an alliance between classes or class fractions” (p.73). He concurred with the Marxist base and superstructure formula that understands the state as a superstructure produced from capitalist relations of production. From here, Althusser explained how the state’s ideology, which is a result of the capitalist relations of production, becomes embedded within society. He saw institutions, such as education, as part of the *ideological state apparatus* whose ideology is an extension of the state. So the institution, in this case education, adds to and extends the insertion of an ideology produced from a certain class or power bloc, the aim of which is to conserve a certain economic structure.
The ‘ideology’ referred to above is an adaptation of Marx’s concept of ideology, Marx saw ideology as an idea: a dream without a history. Althusser (1970/2000) amended Marx’s concept and affirmed that ideologies “have a history of their own” (p.175). By using Marx’s historical materialism, where history is the history of class struggle, Althusser’s ideology becomes a product of class struggle and a projection of the dominant relations of production. This results in an ideology produced by the dominant class (or power bloc) becoming the ideology of the state, which imposes itself upon the ideological state apparatus. In turn, this results in an overarching ideology produced by the base to penetrate the state and seep out in to the ideological apparatus (education) and in to society.

Althusser’s theory of institutions facilitating a particular dominant ideology formulated by the dominant class through the history of class struggle allowed me to comprehend capitalism’s grasp on history, and our current period of history. Although Althusser’s ideas have been heavily critiqued, and structuralism, especially structural Marxism, has come under significant scrutiny, these ideas allowed me to engage with the macro inspection of dominant ideologies and how they are reproduced and maintained in our society.

Because of Althusser’s belief that historical materialism creates an ideology with its own history, a translation occurs which creates an ideology that exists in relation to material existence and practices. “Ideology thus recognizes, despite its
imaginary distortion, that the ‘ideas’ of a human subject exist in his actions, or ought to exist in his actions, and if that is not the case, it lends him other ideas corresponding to the actions (however perverse) that he does perform” (Althusser, 1970/2000, pp.185-186). Consequently, if an ideology relies on social practices, it follows that individuals alive today are generating their own dominant ideology, which can be produced continuously through the history of the class struggle. This concurs with Mills’ (1959/2000) understanding that history is not made behind our backs, but rather, “people are free and that by their rational endeavors can influence the course of history” (p.181).

Engaging with Althusser (and Mills) enabled me to reconsider class relations and the role that people play in creating the dominant ideology. It was Hall (1985), however, who extended my understanding of Althusser and ideology. He humanized Althusser’s model and explained its usefulness while arguing that structuralism can fetishize ‘structure and agency’ and create an unhelpful rigid distinction between the two. Hall explained why we should avoid the trap of thinking that “history is nothing but the outcome of an internally self-propelling structural machine” (p.96) – structure and agency must be understood simultaneously since they both shape each other.

Hall (1996) argued that ideology requires you to ‘be political’ because it brings forward relations of force. In a conversation with Grossberg (1996), Hall
explained that ideology is key to understanding society. He uses the term ‘ideological effect’ to understand and enable the engagement with “the question of relative power and distribution of different regimes of truth in the social formation at any one time - which have certain effects for the maintenance of power in the social order” (p.136). In other words, ideology helps us to understand the relations of practices that determine a person’s position through their relation with the dominant ideology. In agreement with Hall, I see the importance of thinking with ideology because it has constrained me to think about domination and subordination and “relations of force” (Hall, interview with Grossberg, 1996, p.136).

Understanding the ‘relations of force’ to which Hall refers, and which Althusser introduced through the ideological state apparatus, is key to understanding ideology and the ‘ideological effect’. A crude Marxist analysis would attach the manifestation of the ‘ideological effect’ to the ‘economic’. However, with the development of Marxist theory (by Althusser, for example) it is apparent that there is not necessarily a correspondence between the economic position of the person/s and the ideology of the person/s. “There is no law which guarantees that the ideology of a class is already and unequivocally given in or corresponds to the position which that class holds in the economic relations of capitalist production” (Hall, 1985, p.94).

Hall (1996) pointed out the “untenable nature of the proposition that classes, as
such, are the subjects of fixed and ascribed class ideologies” (p. 40). It is clear that particular ideas and concepts do not ‘belong’ exclusively to one particular class and the ‘economic’. According to Hall (1985), Althusser believed that, in capitalist social formations, labour is not reproduced inside the social relations of production itself but outside of it in other domains. For Althusser, labour and class position are socially and culturally reproduced in the domain of the superstructures: in institutions such as the family and church and cultural institutions like the media, trade unions, political parties. These institutions are not directly linked with production but they have the crucial function of "cultivating" labour of a certain moral and cultural kind.

Hall (1985, p.98) understands that this need to ‘cultivate’ a certain moral and cultural behaviour is key, but he argues that Althusser failed to take into account the nuances between structure and agency – the economic position the person/s has/ve does not determine their ideology, which shapes the ‘ideological effect’. The structures may lead to similar moral and cultural behaviours but the route by which one gets there is not determined by the structures. “Structures exhibit tendencies—lines of force, openings and closures which constrain, shape, channel and in that sense, ’determine’. But they cannot determine in the harder sense of fix absolutely, guarantee. People are not irrevocably and indelibly inscribed with the ideas that they ought to think; the politics that they ought to have are not, as it were, already imprinted in their sociological genes” (Hall, 1985, p.96).
The ideology that creates the ‘ideological effect’, which creates relative power and
the different regimes of truth, is dependent on individual practices from numerous
economic positions, even if it falls beneath the dominant ideology. Consequently,
the ‘ideological effect’ is a story of struggle, determinism, and is a site of contest.
With the social formation of society dominated by a certain ideology it is
important to remember that ‘the ideological effect’ may be dominating right now
but it is continuously being recreated and shaped by ‘relations of force’ – ideology
obliged me to think of this.

In Learning to Labour (1977), Willis engaged with these ideological relations of
force. He specifically referred to an “ideological force bearing down on ‘the lads’”
(p.161), and he reached an ideological understanding of a group of working class
‘lads’ by interpreting their cultural practices. He explained how their ideologies
“forestall other perspectives and possibilities” (p.164), and through their
ideologically informed cultural practices they prepare themselves for “meaningless
work” (p.177) and “self-damnation” (p. 3). Through Willis’ (1977) ethnography
we see how the ideological struggle can mesh with social practices to create a self-
made contemporary reality. The slippery nature of structure and agency reveals
itself, and become apparent in their relationship with different ideological forces.

3.04 Penetrations and Limitations

To answer a number of questions that arose during his research, Willis (1977)
“plunges beneath the surface of ethnography in an interpretative mode” (p.119).

He developed ‘penetrations’ and ‘limitations’ as two key organizing concepts playing an important role in creating the social totality leading to the reproduction of the social conditions of a certain kind of production.

In Willis’s (1977) own words:

‘Penetration’ is meant to designate impulses within a cultural form towards the penetration of the conditions of existence of its members and their position within the social whole but in a way which is not centered, essentialist, or individualist. ‘Limitation’ is meant to designate those blocks, diversions and ideological effects which confuse and impede the full development and expression of these impulses (p.119).

In other words, the penetrations permit the working class lads to taste “freedom, election and transcendence, and a precise insertion into a system of exploitation” (p.120), but before this transpires the limitations close the door to their potential and limit their opportunities.

3.05 Penetrations

In *Learning to Labour* (1997) Willis explained and illustrated penetrations across three themes of his data: education and qualifications, labour power, and general abstract labour. Across these themes he explained how the counter-school culture and other working class cultures, profoundly critique, and are in conflict with the
dominant ideology. Regardless of the incompatibility between ‘the lads’ ideologically driven cultural practices and the dominant ideology that is ‘bearing down on them’, ‘the lads’ are required to “overcome their inbuilt disadvantage of possessing the wrong class culture” (p.128), and conform. What transpires is a conflict of interests, and ‘the lads’ character and behaviours are considered to be flawed because their cultural practices fail to allow them to conform to bourgeois expectations.

‘The lads’ seek to be themselves within their own knowable cultural world even though it exists within a foreign cultural world; thus, the penetrations occur. ‘The lads’ seek better-fitting practices than those offered by institutions. Willis explains that they look to the “cultural senses of the body – the way it walks, talks, moves, dances, expresses, displays – and their actual conditions of existence” to find a way of “being in the world with style” (Willis, 2000, p.36). There is a success in the manifestation of their cultural practices, not because of what it offers, but in “the relatedness, the energy, the excitement of [the] culture’s members as they find the most productive expressive relation to their conditions of existence” (p. 36). What transpires from these individual decisions is a potent sense of self and a personhood that ‘the lads’ can see in themselves and which, importantly, is authentic to their perception of themselves.

However, essential to the formulation of penetrations is the understanding that ideologically driven practices cannot manifest themselves properly (powerfully)
“unless and until they can be articulated to the field of political and social forces and to the struggles between different forces at stake” (Hall, 1996, p.41). These ‘forces’ are evident by the penetrations: ‘the lads’ refuse to play by rules that are not their own. They develop their own cultural pursuits and identities and so avoid the double oppression of living out subordination in the bankrupt terms of the official routes mapped out for them. “The culturally mediated forms of private reservation or withdrawn consent” highlight naked power and “cordon off some real uncolonized territory” for ‘the lads’ to call their own (Willis, 2000, p.40).

In Willis’ view, this retreat into their own territory and the rejection of bourgeois culture results in partial penetrations of capitalist expectations and at the same time reproduces capitalism’s conditions of existence – which are their conditions of existence. This clash of cultural forces leads to the reproduction of the social formation and thus limits their penetrations and their own potential.

**3.06 Limitations**

Willis (1997) understands that:

> The pure logic of cultural penetration runs straight only on the page. In reality simultaneous forces of distortion, limitations and mystification resolve this pure logic into a partial logic. In the way in which it is actually effective in the world the half-rejection and cultural penetration of the present social organization by the counter-school culture becomes an
always provisional, bare, skeptical, yet finally accepting accommodation within the status quo. It never-the-less, however, contradictorily maintains a degree of conviction of movement, insight and subjective validation in individuals even as they accept this subordination. In the present tangled knot of ideological entrapments in contemporary capitalism the most remarkable demonstration of this contradiction is that of a nascent cultural understanding of abstract labour and class solidarity amongst disaffected working class kids being delivered into a particular subjective affirmation and ‘free’ giving of manual labour power (p.145).

Willis’ ‘limitations’ are a useful analytical tool to help understand social reproduction and to explain the role culture plays in understanding why working class kids get working class jobs and the “‘free’ giving of manual labour power.” In the case of ‘the lads’, Willis reveals how they go willingly and in a celebratory manner into manual work. Their alternative cultural practices penetrate the capitalist system but, rather than “produce a refusal or radical politics” (Willis, 2000, p.41), their rejection of the normative practices, such as school and gaining qualifications, limits their social maneuverability and ties them to “the bottom of the class society” (Willis, 1977, p.147).

Although the concept of ‘limitation/s’ is a useful analytical tool, it seems that it is somewhat restricted by Willis’ use of negative rhetoric. The word limitation itself implies restriction and a lack of promise, and the rhetoric surrounding ‘the lads’”
future, the one already adopted by their fathers, is injurious. Willis (1977) asks why ‘the lads’ “all do not aspire to the rewards and satisfactions of mental labour” but rather opt for manual labour (p.147). He declares that ‘the lads’ are heading to “entrapment rather than liberation” (p.119) and, by choosing entrapment, “the gates are shut on the future” (p.120) and their working class, cultural practices “brings the hell of its own real present” (p.122).

The reasoning behind the negative formulation of ‘limitations’ is unclear. The immediate explanation for the melancholic pessimism surrounding ‘the lad’s’ futures was perhaps, because of a blinkered focus on his subject. However, the book reveals that this is not the case; different groups of English high school students are a part of *Learning to Labour*, and they offer the contrast to which ‘the lads’ cultural practices are compared. The ‘ear ‘oles’ – whose cultural practices match the school’s expectations – are portrayed as sensible and correct.

Respectively, Willis (1977) fully comprehends the ideological forces that are a consequence of the political and social field, and in doing so he reveals that perhaps the negativity surrounding the cultural practices of ‘the lads’ maybe based upon the lack of potential for economic prosperity – rather than the (in)correctness of their cultural practices. However, it remains that Willis’ ‘limitations’ are surrounded by hopelessness and fatalism.

By dialectically intertwining Hall’s (1985) question (below) to Willis’ ‘limitations’ it is possible to see further into the concept; develop its utility; and
apply it to a broader range of subjects to further explain the reproduction of social formations. Hall (1985) looks to the media to pose the question that Willis’ ‘limitations’ can help to answer. He asks:

[We need to ask] how a society allows the relative freedom of civil institutions [including classes] to operate in the ideological field, day after day, without direction or compulsion by the State; and why the consequence of that "free play" of civil society, through a very complex reproductive process, nevertheless consistently reconstitutes ideology as a "structure in dominance...

After all, in democratic societies, it is not an illusion of freedom to say we cannot explain adequately the structured biases of the media in terms of their being instructed by the State precisely what to print or allow on television. But precisely how is it that such large numbers of journalists, consulting only their "freedom" to publish and be damned, do tend to reproduce, quite spontaneously, without compulsion, again and again, accounts of the world constructed within fundamentally the same ideological categories? How is it that they are driven, again and again, to such a limited repertoire within the ideological field? Even journalists who write within the muck-raking tradition often seem to be inscribed by an ideology to which they do not consciously commit themselves, and which, instead, ’writes’ them.
This is the aspect of ideology under liberal capitalism which most needs explaining (p.100-101).

And this is what Willis’ ‘limitations’ can help with. Even though Willis’ focus is reduced to ‘the lads’ cultural level of social reproduction, ‘limitations’ offers inroads into other social groups and the larger process of systematic reproduction. Hall (1985) actually offers a way out for the unnecessary negativity surrounding Learning to Labour which somewhat restricts the use of ‘limitations’.

Hall (1985) talks of a ‘double articulation’ between structure and practice. By this he means how the given conditions, the structure of determinations, in all situations are simply the result of previous practices, and so “a structure is what previously structured practices have produced” (p.95). Deriving from this is how the reality and beginning point of both ‘the media’ and ‘the lads’ is provided to them from an historical position, which provides (forces upon) them with the starting point for a new generation of practice. Furthermore, the practices of ‘the media’ and ‘the lads’ should not be treated “as transparently intentional” as we make our own history, “but on the basis of anterior conditions which are not of our making” (Hall, 1985, p.95).

Considering ‘limitations’ through Hall’s ‘double articulation’ permits a broader application of the concept. Willis’ application of ‘limitations’ is tied to the pervading sense that ‘the lads’ cultural practices are incommensurate. However,
using ‘double articulation’, all (cultural) practices become ‘limitations’. In the same way that ‘the lads’ culture practices tie them to a position in society and reproduce a generational existence, ‘the media’ are also limited because their practices are generational and tie them to a certain ideological position.

Thus rather than seeing cultural practices as a ‘limitation’ (which they are too) the less denouncing terminology of ‘division’ may be more applicable. This permits the cultural practices of: the underclass, the working class, the petit bourgeoisie, the middle classes, and the upper class, all to be understood from a similar and level perspective – they are all provided with a history from which their practices also maintain, just like ‘the lads’.

This developed understanding of limitations was a useful way for me to consider cultural practices as something that limits and divides each group, not just the ones who were economically less prosperous.

3.07 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has outlined the overarching theoretical underpinnings that have helped me to understand the data collected for this thesis, and have driven me to think in a certain ‘political’ way. I have attempted to convey the complexity between structure and agency. Hall refers to this relation as a ‘slippery’; both are connected but often slip over one another and rarely match up perfectly and explain one another. This slipperiness is, I believe, evident in the relation between
penetrations and limitations (divisions). The penetrations symbolize the practice whilst the limitations represent the structural weight that closes off an alternative future. However, within both of these concepts, ideology manifests itself and informs the practices, which in turn produces the history. With history informing ideology, it too carries a structural weight that we seem largely incapable of escaping.

Nevertheless, within all of this complexity is the politics of ideology. The dominant and the oppressed are in a constant ideological battle that creates practices and history: and this is what ideology has forced me to consider.
Chapter 4

Methodology

4.01 Introduction

In this chapter I explain the methodology and the methods used in this thesis. The two key methods I used were participant observation and interviews. I have highlighted the four stages of participant observation that I undertook and I have explained the methodological process that took place during the interview part of the data collection. I set out the reasons for using the particular methods, their application, and how the resulting data were analysed. First of all however, this section begins by recognizing the phenomenology that cultural studies’ advocates for.

4.02 Cultural Studies underpinning Methodology

Sardar (1997) conceptualizes cultural studies by identifying what cultural studies aims to do and what it should aim to reveal; he identifies five key distinguishable areas:

1. Cultural studies aims to examine its subject matter in terms of cultural practices and their relation to power. Its constant goal is to expose power relationships and examine how these relationships influence and shape cultural practices.
2. Cultural studies is not simply the study of culture as though it was a
discrete entity divorced from its social or political context. Its objective is
to understand culture in all its complex forms and to analyze the social and
political context within which it manifests itself.

3. Culture in cultural studies always performs two functions: it is both the
object of study and the location of political criticism and action. Cultural
studies aims to be both an intellectual and a pragmatic enterprise.

4. Cultural studies attempts to expose and reconcile the division of knowledge,
to overcome the split between tactic (this is intuitive knowledge based on
local cultures) and objective (so-called universal) forms of knowledge. It
assumes a common identity and common interest between the knower and
the known, between the observer and what is being observed.

5. Cultural studies is committed to a moral evaluation of modern society and
to a radical line of political action. The tradition of cultural studies is not
one of value-free scholarship but one committed to social reconstruction by
critical political involvement. Thus cultural studies aims to understand and
change the structure of dominance everywhere, but in industrial capitalist
societies in particular (p.9).

These distinguishable characteristics provide a number of ways to connect
methodologically the research in this thesis to the genealogy of cultural studies.
Understanding culture as being shaped by local and temporary systems facilitates a cultural analysis on numerous levels. On the one hand, the dominant cultural effect can be analyzed, and on the other, the culture of something in relation to the dominating culture can be assessed. In this instance the “something” is the boxing gym. And this outward looking framework, facilitated by a cultural studies methodology is what I aimed for during the research for this thesis.

4.03 Methods

My understanding and appreciation of the data collection process has deepened dramatically since I started gathering data last year. The trajectory of my methodological learning was steep as I became more knowledgeable about data collection and the skills involved in collecting high quality data. Subsequently I learned that to collect ‘good’ data required dedication and practice, and was a skill in itself.

Ethnography is the basis of the methodology underpinning my participant observation and interviews, the two methods I used to gather evidence. They are the foundation of this research study and were employed in different ways throughout the data collection process.
Part 1 – Participant Observation

4.04 Participant Observation

Michael Atkinson and Paul Willis, both advocates of participant observation, influenced my decision to focus on ethnography and make use of participant observation, which is “perhaps the primary source of ethnographic data” (Atkinson, 2012, p.67). Willis (2000) describes his experiences and observations of fieldwork. He argued that “well-grounded and illuminating analytical points flow only from bringing concepts into a relationship with the messiness of ordinary life” (p. xi). Moreover, “having a physical presence allows you to interact and to pursue questions and issues related to your puzzle, probing and reconstructing how subjects symbolically inhabit their worlds: what are their agendas, their de-codings, their stories, their uses of objects and arte-facts” (p. xiii). With Willis (2007) especially, “experience and the everyday are the bread and butter of ethnography” (p. i). This view aligns with Geertz’s (1973), foundational observational work explaining the need for creating ‘thick description’. These examples stimulated my early understanding of participant observation.

I carried out participant observation intermittently for over a year. I initially thought I could enter the gym as a complete participant. I trained regularly to learn how to fight but as time went by, and my research aim evolved, the use of
participant observation changed. I travelled along Gold’s participatory continuum (Gold cited in Atkinson, 2012, p.67). This was not a linear journey; there were days when I was a participant-as-observer and others when I was a complete observer. Despite that, there were three distinct stages where I worked predominantly in one of Gold’s participant categories:

Gold describes four principle ways in which people perform ethnography. These participatory roles range along a continuum of involvement, from complete participant (one is fully immersed and participates in the culture), to participant-as-observer (one who participates, but not in everything), to observer-as-participant (one who moderately participates, but principally watches the culture from the social periphery), to complete observer (one who observes the culture only, without ever participating in or interacting among its members) (Gold cited in Atkinson, 2012, p.67-68).

A progression occurred through these stages for various reasons, sometimes involuntarily forced upon me (by injuries or fatigue) and other times for academic purposes, explained below.

As a result of my initial textbook understanding, I aimed for a thick description through complete participation. I trusted this would enable me to explain the everyday and facilitate an understanding of the boxing experience. However, generating a thick description may be achieved in a number of ways, and I
diverged from my original introduction to participatory observation. I was heavily influenced by the ethnographic studies I was reading (Willis, 1977, and Trimbur, 2013). They utilized participant observation in a different way from my early understanding, and subsequently my use of the method reflected this academic development.

A number of other developments led me to learn alternative methodological positions to help me enquire into how the boxers “see themselves in relation to wider and central life concerns and issues” (Willis, 1977, p. xiii), and it was the evolution of my understanding of participant observation that led me to the overall research aim. First, however, I describe my initial entry point to the gym before describing my engagement with participant observation.

4.05 Negotiating Access into the Research Site

Gaining entry into a culture or social setting is an important stage of ethnography and depending on the research setting and purpose, gaining entry may be relatively smooth or sometimes difficult. In this instance it was very easy. There were no institutional or administrative barriers, or any need for me to know the gatekeepers to provide me with access to the boxing gym space. The gym is open to anyone able to afford the $50 monthly membership fee.

I initially joined The Gym in order to complete a course requirement for Dr. Michael Atkinson’s course in qualitative methods. I googled ‘boxing in Toronto’
and found a number of gyms. I chose The Gym for both academic and pragmatic reasons.

For academic reasons I sought an ‘authentic’ boxing gym: The Gym is considered to be ‘the real thing’ (blogto.ca). It is Canada’s oldest boxing gym; and it has a very good reputation for producing good fighters. Pragmatically, The Gym was only a short bicycle ride from my accommodation, and it was by far the least expensive boxing gym to join.

Prior to arriving at The Gym, I phoned and spoke to the head coach. During this conversation I enquired about the cost and the gym’s opening times. The conversation was very brief. He simply told me the cost ($50 per month) and the opening times. He was rather unwelcoming: he made no enquiries about my motivation or boxing history, and he sounded ambivalent about the possibility of gaining a new member. Immediately, I understood that because I was ‘cold calling’ the gym I needed to be proactive and concentrate on the process of building rapport with the staff and the gym users.

When I arrived I introduced myself to the head coach. I was unsure of what exactly I was looking to study when I first arrived and told him I was studying sporting cultures in Toronto and would like to investigate The Gym and boxing. I also explained that I wanted to train to box, and that I had very little boxing experience. He listened and nodded and asked no questions. He was not
particularly interested in me or my work. He gave me a jump rope and told me to skip outside in the hallway for 15 minutes. My high maintenance expectations and sensibilities were clearly already being tested.

4.06 Stage 1 – Starting Off - participant-as-observer

March-May 2014

As noted, I travelled along Gold’s (1958) participant observer continuum. I began the participant observation as participant-as-observer: this involves participating, but not in everything. At the other end of the continuum complete immersion in the field involves being fully immersed and participating completely in the culture (Atkinson, 2012). From my academic position I was unsure if full immersion in the boxing culture was attainable. At the level of the physical boxing practices I fully participated. However, with respect to the non-boxing experiences of the boxers I was quite disconnected.

As my participation went on I realized that boxing training could not be isolated or compartmentalized from the boxers’ non-gym milieu. Increasingly it emerged that boxing was a component of a lifestyle I did not have. In connection to this ‘lifestyle’ I understood that my reasons for entering into the gym were dramatically different from the other members of the gym. I was there for academic reasons. I was there as a researcher learning to box, whereas the other boxers were drawn to the gym for a completely different set of reasons. As a
result, I could only participate as an observer because the diverging internalization of the boxing experience excluded me from complete immersion.

At the time of entry to the gym I was in a qualitative methods course, reading research such as Atkinson (2010) on fell running work and Wacquant’s boxing ethnography. Atkinson and Wacquant used participant observation in a comparable manner to realize their research objectives. In an attempt to emulate these scholars I initially engaged with participant observation in a similar fashion.

In his boxing ethnography, Wacquant (2011) explained how he sought to establish the forging of the “corporeal and mental dispositions that make up the competent boxer in the crucible of the gym” (p.82). He aimed to engage with “the potency of carnal knowledge” (p.81) and stressed “the need to expand the textual genres and styles of ethnography so as to better capture the Sturm und Drang of social action as it is manufactured and lived” (p.81).

To understand the Sturm und Drang, Wacquant focused on the corporeal dimensions of boxing. Wacquant considered the body and the senses in the hope of establishing the functionality of the gym. In Body and Soul (2004) he argued that the culture of boxing is made up of “postures and (physical and mental) gestures that, being continually (re)produced in and through the very functioning of the gym, exist only in sense and action, and in the traces that this action leaves
within (and upon) bodies” (p.59). My original aim was to engage with this embodiment of the physical practices.

With this objective I needed to train, and during this stage, I was going to the gym three times a week for 90-minute sessions from early February until the beginning of April, 2014. My field notes focused on the corporeal and sensuous experience. I would train, run home, shower, and then spend 30 minutes noting down that session’s experience. Looking back over my field notes from this stage, it was a very repetitive process without much imagination, elaboration or analysis taking place. The dominant themes included the sensuous bodily feelings from a particular session (e.g., the pain in my hands from working the heavy bag), and the boxing training regime (e.g., the boredom I experienced by being alone with my thoughts while trying to concentrate on a physically demanding task). It was unlike any other physical activity I had done before. During this period, I, like Trimbur (2013) “developed a deep appreciation for the skill and commitment necessary to be a successful boxer and the frustrating process that sharpening one’s technique can entail” (p.152). It was an invaluable experience within this ethnographic process.

The end of this two month period coincided with the beginning of the soccer season and my first reading of Trimbur’s Come Out Swinging (2013). Trimbur argues that the “dominant readings of the urban gym depend on where and how one conducts research” (p.153). In relation to this, I began to feel that my focus on
the corporeal dimensions of boxing were pinning me to a position that focused on me and my experience of boxing and the gym (much like Wacquant in *Body and Soul*). Through reading Trimbur, I began to understand that I wanted to discover the boxers’ understanding of their practices in relation to the political and economic issues in the world outside the gym. By focusing on the corporeal dimensions of the sport I felt I was unable to access that kind of phenomenology. I needed to use a type of participant observation that would enable me to locate the boxer in relation to the outside world and their view of it, rather than focusing on boxing practices in relation to the function of the gym.

However, all was not lost and this two month period of participation was extremely useful. Wacquant (1992) found that he who “pays his dues,” irrespective of their status or goal, commands the same attention in the gym. My experience was slightly different. I had paid my dues by showing that I was able to train intensely but was still largely ignored for the first few weeks. After conversations, and upon getting to know boxers who were training there and the staff, and understanding that my main motivation was for research, I became just another ‘face’ making up the gym’s membership.
4.07 Stage 2 – Settling In - observer-as-participant

May - July 2014

The second stage of research took place during the Canadian soccer season. From the middle of April, I attended soccer training twice a week and played a match at the weekends. I was relying on soccer for income, so I had to adjust my participation in the gym. I was unable to continue training as often as before, the boxing sessions were grueling and contributed to fatigue that affected my recovery for soccer. This forced me into a different position in the gym and in terms of my research methods.

I began training once a week without any intensity. I went from being cocooned in my own thoughts while training with the floor to ceiling ball, the punchbag, and the mirror, to engaging with the members of the gym from the various chairs, stools, and sitting ledges available. This shift in position and use of participant observation drastically changed the academic lens through which I engaged with the gym and its members.

It became clear that the gym and its members could be understood from a different place, although this new position brought with it certain problems. I want to be as transparent as possible about the extent of my documentation of The Gym. In agreement with Duneier (2011) about the need to create a normative practice among researchers of being as transparent as possible with regard to how we
achieved our data, it is necessary not just to explain what was documented but also what was ignored.

When I shifted my position in the gym I became closer to the competitive boxers (those who were training or had trained to fight competitively, and used the gym 3-4 times per week). During this second stage I typically arrived at the gym between 3:30pm and 4:00pm and stayed for 60 to 90 to minutes at a time. I adopted this regime because it enabled me to interact with the demographic group in which I was most interested.

Duneier (2011) addresses this singular focus, and explains that “when ethnographers don’t have to worry about hearing from witnesses they have never met or talked to, they more easily sidestep alternative perspectives or deceive themselves into thinking that these alternative perspectives either don’t exist or don’t have implications for their developing line of thinking” (p.3). With respect to this, I want to acknowledge that numerous perspectives from The Gym were ignored. The ‘boxercise’ class participants, the children, the infrequent gym users, parents in the gym watching their children, the retired gym users, the two openly transgendered members, boyfriends and girlfriends of the boxers, the boxers who just used the training for fitness – all of these were, for the most part, ignored and their positions were noted only in relation to the competitive boxers. This engagement follows, in general, the academic tradition in boxing research of the competitive boxers being at the centre of boxing ethnographies.
In defense of my decision to ignore certain voices, I felt that I was able to put “the political moment” (Gitlin, Siegal and Boru, 1989, p.238) back into my research. I was able to focus on the 15 members who fitted my understanding of a competitive boxer, and how they related to the political-social practices that followed the members from outside the gym into the gym’s space. This focus also facilitated a higher level of engagement with that group. Prior to this I felt that I was spreading myself too thinly across the space and interacting with too many people and not managing to go beneath the surface.

This kind of participant observation of the gym lasted for three months, from May 2014 until the end of July 2014. Throughout a typical session I would engage in civilities with the boxers when they arrived and then listen to and participate in conversations they had with each other and the coaches during their usually relaxed warm-ups. During their training sessions, I tried to stay out of their way and sit with the coaches. Once their sessions had finished -- usually with sparring -- there was often socializing as they cooled down, changed, and prepared to leave. Throughout this whole process I documented excerpts from conversations and noteworthy exploits on my phone. These excerpts were extremely useful when I wrote up that day’s field notes at home; this usually took me between 30 to 60 minutes.
4.08 Stage 3 – Stepping Back - non-research position

July 2014 – June 2015

Persisting with Duneier’s (2011) request to remain transparent, it is important to elaborate on an eight month period where I spent time in and around The Gym without having human research ethics approval to carry out research.

Towards the middle of July 2014, I stopped visiting the gym as a researcher; the course-based research ethics approval that covered my initial research had ended. Officially, I was now a gym member and not a researcher and I kept going because I enjoyed the very casual training sessions, and I enjoyed being in the gym space. I was not documenting anything. Obviously however, it is important to acknowledge that during this period I did acquire a more nuanced understanding of the participants in this research. During this time I felt that my relationships and position within the gym were cemented; I removed the researcher parachute (Gerrard, 1995) and tried to settle in to the gym’s internal workings.

Unlike the way most researchers attempt to become the ‘insider’ with the stipulated researcher label, from my perspective it felt as though the removal of this facilitated a more organic insider position. This insider position was sought because of the implications it would have on data I collected in the future. Key advantages include an enhanced understanding of the group’s culture, the ability to interact naturally with the group and its members, and a previously established,
and therefore greater, relational intimacy with the group (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002). These advantages became apparent as I was being accepted by the serious boxers, and inadvertently becoming friends with some of them.

I knew from my experience of playing sport, and my understanding of normative practices that tend to accompany hypermasculine environments, that I had the cultural capital to allow me to fit into the boxing environment. This proved to be true. However, ethical issues arose, and although I refrained from taking field notes, I could neither unlearn what I experienced during this period nor deny that I was maximizing opportunities in order learn more about the boxers. Nonetheless, because the gym members knew I was from the University of Toronto and in the middle of completing a study on boxing, I felt that I went someway toward negating anything that could be considered unethical. I did not feel my actions were wholly disingenuous, and I constantly attempted to behave in a professional manner that respected the rights of the research participants.

I felt my true personality became more apparent during this period. During the initial stages I did act out of character. Consider the following conversation between the manager and myself as we watched a woman walk along the corridor in the entrance to the gym during my second month there:

Manager shouts: “Hey Jennifer” then whispers to me: “Would you fuck her? She’s a bit skinny for me”. I replied “Yea same, I probably wouldn’t either.”
As with most hypermasculine spaces, the derogatory remarks made about women are appalling, but during the first two stages I felt unable to argue with, or question or criticize the members in case I was ostracized. Fortunately, during this ‘non-research’ stage I felt confident enough that if I voiced my opinions I would not be rejected by others at the gym.

My opinions on various political issues came to the fore. I could disagree with certain comments and form a surer position from which to argue about derogatory remarks. A number of boxers came to trust me with intimate stories about their families, girlfriends, boyfriends, and opinions on sensitive issues and I also entrusted them with similar opinions and stories. For me it was a much more natural experience than the two previous stages. The pressure of attempting to remember everything during the moment was removed, I was much more relaxed and a lot less ‘on the look out’ for things of interest. Inadvertently, I may have become an integrated member of The Gym and become more of an insider than I thought possible.

4.09 - Stage 4 – The Last Month - observer-as-participant

June 2015 – August 2015

Once I had received human research ethics approval, I re-established myself as a researcher. I made it clear to the gym’s members that I was back to being a researcher. I retook up positions on the chairs and stools. I wore casual non-sports
clothes, and I had my phone out to signify my role. Just before this stage I badly
injured my knee and was unable to train. This gave me an excuse not to train and it
gave the boxers something to joke about. They said I had injured my knee so that I
didn’t have to box.

This final period of participant observation lasted for about a month. I continued to
focus on the boxers and went to the gym when they were training. Since the first
observer-as-participant stage I had a much better understanding of practicing
participant observation and the necessary documentation process. As Hammersley
and Atkinson (1995) explain, “it is difficult to overemphasize the importance of
meticulous note taking” (p.179). Similar to the last observer-as-participant stage I
used my phone to document conversations and practices in the field. In agreement
with Goffman (1989), I took down field notes throughout the session and provided
a detailed account of what was said or unsaid, the participant behaviours/
interactions, and all the seemingly interesting events.

During this final stage of participant observation, I formally organized the
interviews. Ideally, I would have begun the interviews once I had exhausted the
fruitfulness of participant observation, but I was constrained to organize the
interviews because of time pressure – the two years allotted for the completion of
a Master’s thesis do not really permit extended and in-depth ethnographic
research. However, I did feel I had been in the field long enough to have gained a
solid understanding of how the gym operates and its internal dynamics. I had
listened to and been a part of some great conversations and a number of tedious ones. I had filled countless water bottles and squeezed the contents in to numerous sparring mouths. I had been put in charge of toddlers and been asked to take Coach’s dog for walks on a number of occasions. I had been to four bouts organized by Ontario Boxing, and other exhibition contests. I had spent hundreds of hours at The Gym and felt prepared to engage in fruitful interviews.

**Part 2 - Interview procedure**

**4.10 Recruitment of Participants**

The sampling procedure I adopted was a convenience or criterion purposive sample (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). As with all research studies, the researcher makes decisions about who and/or what will be included during data collection.

It was well known in the gym that I was doing research on boxing and conducting interviews. I made it clear that I would interview anyone who was interested. However, as already stated, I focused in on the competitive boxers who trained at The Gym. My time in the gym was spent with them and they were the ones I came to know best. Consequently, my interview sample was disproportionately made up of this group. The three boxers with whom I became good friends were extremely generous with their time and cooperative when it came to organizing a time and a place for an interview.

The other five interviews were more difficult to organize. I had to negotiate a convenient time to interview the boxers with whom I was less friendly. It was
difficult for the individuals in this group to find time to accommodate me, and interviews were regularly cancelled, and rescheduled; but it did feel they were keen to be involved and assist me. One of the boxers even asked me to “keep messaging, and I will get something organized”.

Due to their apparent willingness to help I felt comfortable cajoling them. It even became a running joke between two of the boxers I would meet at the gym. We would laugh and say that we would do it tomorrow every time we saw each other. I genuinely did appreciate all help and cooperation from the interviewees; I understood that they were going out of their way to help me, and I hope I conveyed my gratitude to them.

Once I had recruited and organized interviews I took an active interview approach and interviewed the boxers using semi-structured, one-on-one interviews.

The interviews were conducted outside of The Gym in a dedicated time and space. I believed that interviewing them on their own territory, or in a known and hopefully comfortable space would allow them to feel more relaxed. I explained that I could meet interviewees anywhere in Toronto at a time that was most convenient for them. This led me to fast food restaurants, private homes, and public parks.
4.11 Getting to Know Them: Interviewing The Boxers

In ethnographic work, interviews and participant observation are often utilized in conjunction with one another: it is considered to be good sociological practice (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, Denscombe, 2003). The dialectical struggle between knowing our place and having an understanding of ourselves in relation to our material needs requires investigation and interpretation. As we struggle to survive materially, we also struggle to make sense of ourselves and our place in the world (Willis, 2007, p. xiv).

It is important that the boxers themselves conduct meaning-making during the interview. In this instance my role as a researcher was to retrieve the boxer’s ‘place in the world‘ and translate it into language. To this end, I employed interviews as the second major method of data collection.

There are distinct advantages to combining participant observation with interviews. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) understand that “the data from each can be used to illuminate the other” (p.131). They explain how each method can illuminate and deepen the understanding of findings from the other method: “what people say in interviews can lead us to see things differently in observation” and vice versa (p.132). Interviews provided an opportunity for me to follow-up on, build on, and further explore some of the data that were collected during participant observation.
4.12 Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used because I wanted to have some control over the interview. This approach is also associated with the active interview approach where participants are provided with space to develop their own train of thought. The interviews involved three main themes and five questions for each theme.

I chose to interview each participant individually because one-on-one interviews were the best fit for my overall objectives. Ideally, I would have used both group interviews and one-on-one interviews but, given the limited amount of time and my judgment that the pivotal interview theme was best suited to individual interviews, I used the individual method. The pivotal theme spoke to the boxer’s position in society and his understanding of that. As well as this being a sensitive and perhaps unsettling topic, I really wanted to probe into each individual’s understanding of how they saw themselves in relation to a dominant ideology and the structures that govern us. I wanted this to remain an individual introspection rather than acquire a homogenous group understanding.

The other two themes may have been more suited for a group interview. These themes aimed to uncover the boxer’s motivations to box and what they enjoyed about boxing. It would have been interesting to understand each person’s perceived reasoning, and to see how the boxers shaped each other’s understanding of boxing. However, since these two themes were contextualized and framed by
the first theme, it would have been difficult to separate the themes across two interviews.

What I have alluded to, with the use of the active interview approach and semi-structured interviews is a manipulation of the interview to fit my objectives. Below, I have tried to engage with this issue and explain my justification for imposing an agenda on the interview and the interviewee.

4.13 The Active Interviewing Technique

Interviews are primarily concerned with maximizing the flow of valid, reliable information while minimizing distortions of what the respondent knows (Denscombe, 2003). Because of this the active interview approach has been examined closely. Holstein and Gurbrium (1995) point out that the method and those who use it are often criticized for inviting unacceptable forms of bias into the interviews “as there is far more going on than simply retrieving information from respondents’ repositories of knowledge” (p.125). However, they argue that in:

any interview situation - no matter how formalized, restricted or standardized - relies upon the interaction between participants. Because meaning construction is unavoidably collaborative, it is virtually impossible to free any interaction from these factors that could be construed as
contaminants. All participants in an interview are inevitably implicated in making meaning (p.126).

Because of this viewpoint Holstein and Gurbrium (1995) argue that any attempts to strip interviews of their interactional ingredients will be futile.

Active interviewing stems from this unavoidable collaboration. It embraces and seeks to capitalize upon interviewers’ and respondents’ constitutive contributions to the production of interview data. “The active interview eschews the image of the vessel waiting to be tapped in favor of the notion that the subject’s interpretive capabilities must be activated, stimulated and cultivated” (Holstein and Gurbrium, 1995, p.122). The aim is to produce meaning through the subject to help ‘flesh out’ the interview’s broader research purposes.

With this understanding of active interviews I attempted to activate the respondent’s stock knowledge and bring it forward in ways appropriate to my research agenda. Below is an example of how I (I) tried to get a subject (S) to explore incompletely articulated aspects of his or her everyday life.

I - Earlier you said that you didn’t enjoy your job. What did you mean by that?

S - Well you know, it’s tough. I have to get up at 3:30am drive all the way across to town, then when I’m done I have to drive all the way back. It feels long.

I - But what is wrong with getting up at 3:30am?
This one simplistic example perhaps exemplifies how I tried to encourage interviewees to engage with alternative narratives. I tried not to tell the subject what to say but attempted to give them room to explore their issues and conceptualize them in previously thought out ways.

4.14 The Interview

I interviewed eight boxers in total. Each interview took between 60-120 minutes. Before every interview started, I went through and precisely explained the information letter to them (see Appendix 1) and asked them to sign the consent form (see Appendix 2). I specifically focused on ensuring they knew they could stop the interview at anytime, not answer certain questions and retract anything they had said.

I drew from numerous questioning strategies in an attempt to go beyond what the prototypical structured, semi-structured or open-ended interview ordinarily produce. Some researchers have employed the active interview strategy by ‘playing dumb’ and uninformed (Becker, 1954), or conversely, aggressively questioning and challenging participants throughout the conversation resembling the ‘good cop, bad cop’ persona (Hathaway & Atkinson, 2003). Being aware of these strategies allowed me to respond to each participant and they were brought in to service accordingly.
Predominantly, as I knew the boxers and their characters I made use of certain strategies to fit the interviewee’s character and to match the relationship I had with them. (For example, one of my boxer-friends was political and we often argued about politics. It would have been odd to have sensitively tip toed around his politics; in his interview, I was able to confront his engagement head-on).

I used Berg’s (1995) recommendations and went into the interviews with an “outline listing all the broad categories” and then a “set of questions relevant to each of the outlined categories” (p.36). As noted by Atkinson (2012), the interview questions included in my interview guide simply acted as a potential template for discussion, and not a rigid, prescriptive framework requiring strict adherence.

The three categories were: the boxers’ relationship to boxing; their connection to The Gym; and their and The Gym’s position in society. Rather than the questions structuring the interview, the three categories structured the interviews and facilitated a thematic standardization across all the sessions.

After determining that they fully understood the ethical procedure I explained the structure of the interview; the three categories were highlighted and I gave some examples of the kind of questions they could expect within each category (see Appendix 3). From here I began the interview. Berg identifies four types of questions that should be used in interviews: throw away questions, essential
questions, extra questions, and probing questions (Berg, 1998). He also provides a framework for question sequencing and the sequence corresponds with the four types of questions. Although I take issue with the terminology of ‘throw away questions’, I agree with the principle behind it: they are used to develop rapport and make the interviewee feel at ease; in relation to the sequencing of questions they are “mild, nonthreatening questions” (Berg, 1995, p.42). This is how I began each interview and each new category.

From there I used essential questions and extra questions. These two types of questions “exclusively concern the central focus of the study” (Berg, 1995, p.37), extra questions are typically combined with essential questions and are used to build upon and gain a stronger understanding of the answers to the essential questions, for this can be achieved by rephrasing the same question. The final type, probing questions, were used to “draw out more complete stories from subjects. Probes frequently ask subjects to elaborate on what they have already answered in response to a given question” (p.38).

During this probing phase I cognitively engaged with active listening and tried to “understand the subject's own understanding of an experience without my own interpretive structures intruding on his or her understanding of the other person” (Weger, Castle, and Emmett, 2010, p.1). Utilizing an active listening approach typically led to more complex and sensitive questions and a looser more conversational interview. (This active listener approach was improved by me
using my laptop to record the interviews (as well as recording the interview); there was a slight delay between my typing their replies and the next question. This had two benefits: there was often a quick silence that was usually filled by the interviewee elaborating their answer, and it also gave me time to process their answer and reply with a ‘probing’ question.)

Once I had completed the interview, I put down my laptop, turned off the recorder, thanked the interviewee and asked them if they had any questions for me. Typically they said they did not, but two of the interviewees began a conversation with me and wanted to know more about my opinions on the things we had discussed. On the day of, or in the same evening of the interview I reread every interview and made edits whilst listening to the recording.

4.15 Data Analysis

Given that this research is an ethnographic study, one that ultimately aims to shed new light on the cultural level of boxing and Willis’s theories of penetration and limitations, analysis of the data was underpinned by principles of grounded theory. This is intended as a supplement to the theoretical frame, based in ideology and social structure, that informs the data interpretation.

As Glaser (1978) points out, grounded theory methodology explicitly involves “generating theory and doing research [as] two parts of the same process” (p.2) and this requires the researcher to move back and forward between theory and data.
throughout the processes of data collection and analysis. As a result, I was conducting fieldwork and interviews during the three phases of data collection and simultaneously trying to make sense of my collected data and how they related to my research questions and study purpose.

Contingent to this was the need to have a systemic grounded theory procedure. Because of these two factors -- reflection on data collected and continuous recognition of grounded theory -- I attempted to remain diligent while coding the data. This dualistic requirement forced me to be cognizant of grounded theory methodology during the coding phase. Researchers often make the mistake of thematically coding data in inductive studies and claiming that they have employed a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). More deductive studies are better suited to grounded theory methodology. This takes into account the theoretically sensitized researcher who s the field and engages with her/his systematically gathered data (an inductive approach assumes no theoretical presumptions).

4.16 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have explained the methods and the ethical considerations. Ethnography underpinned the use of participant observation and interviews methods; and it helped me to form a position from which to understand the structures of dominance, analysis of power, and ‘social possibilities’ that is so
pivotal to the Cultural Studies project (Sardar, 1997, Johnson cited in Rojek, 2003, p.64).
Chapter 5

Results

5.01 Introduction

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the participants in the study who were the subject of fieldwork and who were also interviewed. It provides the reader with some important background information with which to contextualize the data. The second part represents an attempt to give voice to the boxers and their views in relation to dominant institutions and their position in society. In the third part the materialization of the different ideologically driven practices are identified.

Part 1

5.02 Introducing the Interviewees

As explained in the chapter on Methods, I sought to interview ‘serious boxers’. I identified a serious boxer as someone who regularly trained and fought in competitive boxing matches. I took a rather subjective approach to identifying these boxers because this definition of ‘serious boxers’ would have included over 15 of The Gym’s boxers. The seven boxers I interviewed were the only ‘serious boxers’ in The Gym when I started boxing and fieldwork over a year ago; they fought while I was there, and they continue to fight as I write this. Numerous people self-identified as boxers, aimed for the top, but left after a month or two.
The seven boxers listed below were by far the most consistent trainers and most dedicated boxers at The Gym. I also interviewed David. David was the only ‘non-boxer’ I interviewed. He has been boxing in Toronto for almost 25 years and retired shortly before his thirtieth birthday. I got to know him quite well and he asked to be interviewed, so I courteously included him.

5.03 The Boxers

Zayan

Zayan is a 23-years-old male. He immigrated to Canada with his mother when he was 6 years old. His mother had a white-collar job in her country of birth and now works in the bakery section at a Metro supermarket. He lives with his mother and her partner in an area of Toronto that he describes as “Crackdale” (which is officially known as Parkdale). He is entering his third year at the University of Toronto. He works nightshifts as a security guard at a mall; during term time, he works two nights a week and during the holidays he takes all the shifts that are available. He has recently married his long-term girlfriend who is currently finishing her education in British Columbia. Zayan “sees himself getting somewhere with boxing,” and is currently aiming to go to the Olympic Games to represent Canada.


Stan

Stan is an 18-year-old male. He came to Canada from Central Asia when he was six years old. His parents chose to leave Central Asia because “it was corrupt and stuff and there were a lot more opportunities here.” He has aspirations to go to university and wants to become an engineer or a doctor. He lives with his parents in their apartment, which is a twenty-minute jog from The Gym. He works part time at a deli counter in one of Toronto’s markets and currently earns “around $140 a week.” His father is a full time nurse at a care home, and his mother works intermittently as a cleaning lady in buildings all over the city. Stan’s main reason for boxing is because he shares his father’s ideals “of what a man should be like” and he thinks men should “be able to protect themselves and the people they’re with.”

Harvey

Harvey is a 29-year-old male. He moved to Toronto four years ago. His mother lives in Windsor and his father (a former electric guitar player) lives in British Columbia. Last month (July 2015) he was laid off from his job selling heavy-duty machinery to construction companies, but he quickly got another job and is back working full time in construction. He has a university degree in communication studies, and is currently living in a two-bedroom apartment with a flatmate who is a heavy drug user. Harvey was a former rap artist and had some success when one of his songs became famous in his home town. He has been a disc jockey at strip
clubs. Due to his age, he sees that his boxing aspirations are limited but he wants to become a competent amateur class fighter “who can fight anyone.”

Luke

Luke is a 19-year-old male. He has lived in Toronto his whole life. He has lived in “pretty bad neighbourhoods” in the West End and changed high school three times. He left one apartment building because his mother “saw some dead bodies in the lobby.” When he was young “he began getting in a lot of trouble” and when he was 15 he was arrested for breaking and entering and was put under house arrest for two years. During this time he read a lot and has long-term aspirations of being a novelist. He was arrested again for a drugs charge when he was 17 and sent to a detention house. His parents are both teachers: his father is an elementary school teacher and his mother a high school teacher. He has been boxing for two years and wants to become a professional boxer.

Lucy

Lucy is a 25-year-old female. She was born in Toronto and grew up in a central area of the city. Her parents, who met in Toronto, both emigrated with her grandparents from Greece when they were younger. Her father works as a painter and decorator, and her mother is a beautician. She left school when she was 17 and began working in a veterinary practice. She has continued with this and plans to go to university in Europe to gain a veterinary technician qualification. She
originally began going to The Gym for its reputable workouts but became more and more involved in boxing as she continued to train there. She “doesn’t see herself boxing in ten years time,” but enjoys the workouts and the challenge the sport provides her with.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a 21-year-old female. She was born in Ontario and raised just east of Toronto. Her father works as a heavy equipment mechanic at a site in downtown Toronto, and her mother works as an educational assistant with at-risk kids. She is currently studying design and fashion communication at a university in Toronto. During the term and over the summer break, she works in events and is currently working part time for Nike and a cosmetics company at their pop-up stores. She has been boxing for over a year, and has “always wanted to box and enjoys doing things that surprise people.”

Amy

Amy is a 30-year-old female. Her parents moved to Canada from South America before she was born. Her father is a refugee and had to “flee for his safety because he was a leader in a political groups.” When she was young, she “moved around a lot, and went to 8 or 9 different schools.” She had a difficult upbringing and dropped out of high school when she was 14-years-old. She was put into a group home which she ran away from when she was 15-years-old. She was an alcoholic
during this period and was a heavy drugs user. She ended up in jail, and, at age 18, her mother paid surety for her release on the understanding that she had to live at home for a year. After this year was up she moved in with her boyfriend and became pregnant with her son. This was an abusive relationship, and she ended up homeless and living in a shelter with her son. It was at this point that she began boxing seriously – that was three years ago. She currently works at two jobs as a boxing instructor and lives in public housing. She wants to make Team Canada and become amateur Champion of the World.

**David**

David is male and almost 45 years old. He is the only retired boxer who regularly trains at The Gym. His family moved around a lot when he was younger, and he spent some time living in Virginia when he was a young child. He went through “a really dark time” in his late teens, suffered from depression, and tried to commit suicide a few times. During his depression, he “walked into a boxing gym, and the depression immediately lifted;” he has been boxing three to four times a week for the last 23 years. He has worked at a car parts warehouse for the last 15 years. He is a keen amateur photographer and now boxes to keep healthy and be in the space where he takes a lot of his pictures.

Evidently the boxers have unique stories and very different backgrounds. The dissimilarities between them added an appropriate complexity to the data. As with
most social formations there were contradictory points of view and practices, these variances did not allow for a simplistic one-dimensional categorization, and forced me to engage with the group’s sociological underpinnings from numerous starting points.

Their socioeconomic backgrounds are different, they are ethnically different, their qualifications are dissimilar and some are first generation immigrants (the list of differences could go on). However, they all have one thing in common, and that is boxing, and this in itself – the differences between them and their amalgamation in the gym, became an important factor that I have attempted to understand and explain.

**Part 2 - The Boxers’ Opinions**

**5.04 Introduction**

In this section I aim to establish how the priorities of the boxers I interviewed informed and underpinned their cultural level. I have acknowledged Hall’s (1996) opinion that the academic world often observes the “masses as nothing but a passive reflection of the historical, economical and political forces which have gone into the construction of modern industrial mass society” (p.140). In an attempt to confute this assertion I have focused on the boxers’ opinions. (The cultural manifestations of their position are absent generally but are brought forward in the second section). Using Hall’s rhetoric I hope to credit the masses
with thinking for themselves and to prove that “the silent majorities do think” (Hall, 1996, p.140), and, by knowing their opinions, it forces our understanding and analysis to pass through the masses in the hope of arriving at a better-informed truth.

This part of my results is divided by thematic subheadings because there are subject changes, however the aim is for each subsection to continue on from the one before. The first subsection concentrates on the causality of our interconnected and global world and its effect upon the boxer’s day-to-day experience. The second establishes the rejection of dominant institutions including normative education programs and typical working practices. The third focuses on the sense of defeat from conforming to the dominant institutions. The fourth looks at how the boxer’s rejection of the dominant institutions and the dominant cultural practices creates ‘them’ and ‘us’ distinction which are used as referential map to guide their practices. The fifth, and the final part, identifies the boxers and their ability to choose.

By connecting the opinions, rather than having distinct subject changes, I aimed to build a forceful montage of voices full of complexities and difference, but united through a certain position and understanding of the world, which leads up to an understanding of the cultural level of the boxers in The Gym. The boxers’
opinions did not conform to a linear process: their stories conflicted and contradicted and I hope I have represented these differences fairly.

5.05 Our Developing World and its Effect Upon our Day-To-Day Experiences

According to Giddens (1991) “there is an increasing interconnection between globalizing influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other” (p.1). The risk of global warfare, the potential for ecological disaster, the vulnerability of the global economic system, and the rise of totalitarian super-states, can be understood at the individual level, and can influence our day-to-day functions. With this interconnected global world increasingly affecting us existential questions can surface on a daily basis. The boxers spoke directly to our globalized interconnected world and raised a number of issues.

During an interview with Harvey, he played me one of the songs he had written, and it referred to our relationship with nature. Making a romantic analogy, describing humans as the Earth’s girlfriend, he graphically described how we are damaging the planet and ruining the relationship. He raps as if he is speaking as the Earth.
Here is part of a verse:

*The longer that we dated, the more I came to see,*

*That human kind don’t really love herself, or even me,*

*An I used to love the girl, I really care but,*

*She needs some lumber and I get a stupid haircut,*

*And now my house is trashed, I mean it honestly*

*She leaves her garbage all around, and smokes constantly*

After this we talked about the environment and the importance of individual responsibility. When I asked him why he thinks we have stopped worrying about other people’s problems, he replied:

*Look man what causes a kid in Thailand to be exploited and a kid in North York are very separate problems. I could rally but I can’t make a real difference, China needs a revolution, but for someone like myself I can’t fix that. Our government can’t influence that, not even the U.S. can.*

*Acknowledging the problem is one thing and having a barbeque for them at the weekend is fine but then they’re back to punching in on the Monday. We don’t do anything about it because we don’t know what to do. What it really comes down to is most of the world’s wealth being controlled by a few. They own the media, own the American prisons…*
I’m very aware of it - the 1%. Lets imagine that I’ve lost a leg. There’s a surgery I can get [to replace it] but I can’t get it, it’s too expensive, I’m not going to get it today or tomorrow so there’s no point in crying or worrying about it. I’ve got food in my fridge, I’ve got a bunch of friends, gas that’s over priced, a car that is over priced, I’m breathing air that’s keeping my body moving. At the end of the day you’ve got to spend as many of them [days] as happy as possible. I can get enraged about not having a leg but there’s no point in resisting.

Things aren’t perfect in all this but compared to history. The ability to ride a subway, we don’t have to feed a horse; our struggles are invalid. There are diseases that we don’t die from. Money is resources that should be shared with everyone yada yada yada. But when I can’t ride the subway, or buy more groceries that’s when I will start having a revolution. We do not have it as bad as we think we do. Where would the money come from to pay [for] the roads. There are certain things that have to be the way they are in the system we have created for ourselves. I am happy in as far as my needs being met. But am I going to join them rioting, fuck no, as selfish as it sounds but other than my family and my close ones, unless they get in trouble I’m OK. You could be a martyr like Guevara but is it even worth it? If you are oppressed and if we all are oppressed, then our oppressors will have something to worry about. I’m not going to join their
Giddens (1991) may argue Harvey is bringing forth an existential problem, the result of the overwhelming global interconnectedness of the world's systems. With the current systems pulling us to “the end times”, as Zizek (2011) puts it, the question has shifted so that as well as continuing to worry about nature and how to survive, as Harvey does in his song, we also, and again as Harvey demonstrates, need to engage with how “existence itself should be grasped and ‘lived’” (Giddens, 1991, p.224).

Harvey “sees no point in resisting”; “at the end of the day you’ve got to spend as many of them [days] as happy as possible.” This hedonistic outlook runs in parallel with a disconnection from the global system and the alienation of individuals from social relations by abstract systems. Harvey’s rather Nietzschean outlook is perhaps the manifestation of the ideological effect of late capitalism. This manifestation is characterized by what Harvey has spoken to, and through the profound reorganization of time and space (Jameson, 1984) coupled with “expansion of disembedding mechanisms” (Giddens, 1991) our day-to-day lives have been transformed and we have become disconnected from others by the globalized nature of our current lives, and so, like Harvey, we have become hedonistic in our outlook.

Zayan, who is a social sciences student at the University of Toronto, exemplifies
the dislocation from institutions in the interconnected global world

I’ve never voted before. It’s not that my vote don’t count, just that if it actually changed anything it would be illegal. Maybe the parties differ slightly but they’re all the same things, different heads of the same beast.

If it wasn’t for a religion I don’t know if I would have the will to live, the thing in Kenya [the massacre of 147 university students], it makes you lose faith. Canada hasn’t done anything and what can I do... I can’t do anything.

Clearly Harvey and Zayan are isolated and feel insignificant and resultantly disengaged from feeling they could make a difference. Harvey and Zayan, recognize their global connection – they both refer to other countries on different continents and they convey a sense of extreme isolation and disenfranchisement from the political system, which to them is the appropriate institution for engaging with these problems.

According to Giddens (1991) the global connection often can result in a disenfranchisement from the dominating institutions. A logical response is to seek a local base from which to understand one's self. Within a local perspective the individual becomes increasingly important. They look away from dominant institutions -- like the political and educational -- and define themselves rather
than allow themselves to be defined by the institutions (Melucci, 1989). However, the complexity of our interconnectedness arises because the self-defining anti-disestablishmentarian decisions are still made from within the dynamics of the dominant structures. This often leads to further isolation since there is a further distancing from conventional lifestyles.

5.06 Keeping the Dominant Expectations at Arms Length

Luke also speaks of his disconnection from another influential and dominant institution - the education system. Luke understands it will be difficult for him to fulfill his ambition of becoming a good professional boxer. I asked him how he was different from the other aspiring amateurs.

I don’t know, I gotta a lot heart but they got that too. We’ve all got that heart though, the same tools. I like that uncertainty, I would hate to know exactly what’s going to happen. You just gotta stay prepared. There are guys all over the world better than me.

Even though he faced an uncertain future in boxing he did not consider college as an alternative:
I don’t have anything that takes me to that path. If I wanted to go to college I would but there is nothing at college that provides me with the education I want.

Luke disconnects himself from Toronto schooling and rejects the normative societal practice, and its homogenizing effect. He rejects the education system as it fails to meet the kind of education he wants, so to self-actualize he looks to the local for guidance, and found boxing. Luke believes “he was seeking an identity” when he found boxing, for the normative expectations failed to match his outlook and “coming from a lower income neighbourhood, boxing is considered in a higher light”. Giddens (1991) understands that because we now use the local to self-actualize, “self-actualization becomes one of the dominant focuses of class division and the distribution of inequalities more generally” (p.228).

Similar to Luke, Amy’s goal of becoming Amateur World Champion seems to require her to exist “unfettered by the rules and expectations of society” (Melucci, 1989, p.123). Amy's story is complex. She did attempt to go back to school:

I was accepted in to college to do child and youth work. But that opportunity passed me by cause I couldn’t get daycare for [my child]. Everything happens for a reason, and I didn’t go for a reason. I’m trying to find something else. But I have to fit boxing in to that kind of schedule. But right
now I don’t have time… two part time jobs, I can’t go to school and do boxing. In the future it might happen.

Unlike Luke, Amy does see the state-backed education system as an eventual option, but immediately it is not a realistic platform to help achieve her goals, and so the gym provides her with the practical education she needs. Amy insists the skills learnt in the gym are transferrable, she has learnt to control her anger through boxing and learnt to be disciplined and patient:

All the lessons I learn in the ring I can take with me outside the ring. Like for example, you can find a way to achieve things and not be angry. Anger clouds your judgment and you can't make the right choices in anger. Discipline, patience, that’s what I learn about.

Through a similar experience Zayan shares what he has learnt from boxing:

The high school was mostly African Americans, black or whatever. Boxing got me out of there, it was through boxing that I learnt the importance of hard work, hard work pays off and I saw that. When you experience the fruits of your labour, when you get your butt whooped in the gym for 6 months then take coaches advice. An start to get people. I took that approach to school, if you don’t do the work you’re going to get your ass kicked in an exam or
Amy, Zayan and Luke all had to look outside of the education system and to the local vicinity for an education not offered to them (or sought by them) in the normative educating system.

These boxers’ outlooks hardly stand up to the claims made in *Learning to Labour*, (1977). Willis argues that amongst the lower classes there is an “omnipresent feeling that they know better” with “practice being more important than theory” (p.56). Some of the boxers contradict Willis's claim, they understand that they cannot fully reject the education system like ‘the lads’ do. Harvey and Zayan both have undergraduate degrees, Amy attempted to go back to college, and Stan, another boxer in the gym wants to become an engineer or go and study medicine. His parents “have pushed [him] to do something that involves university so [he] can have a stable job.”

**5.07 The Sense of Defeat from Conforming to the Dominant Institutions**

During the interview with Harvey, I described my brother's progression from high school to university and into a well-paid, stable job. Even though Harvey has a degree his response surprised me. I was expecting him to reject that predictable kind of life. He explained:
I’d much rather be your brother than Amy. The stress of not knowing if you’re doing what you love is better than the stress of feeling undervalued as a human being. I’m currently making good money $50K, $60K if I hit my targets. I also remember not being able to pay my car, and how am I going to be a person with things. I still stress though. I’d rather be a scuba diver at Club Med, live in some resort, but there is no perfect life. But for the most part there is no job you’re going to love, no one is ever going to be happy. You need to just constantly be developing.

The best job I ever had was DJ’ing at strip club and sold [stuff] to all the girls and other people and I used to carry [weapons]. I thought I was the baddest motherfucker alive. It was nice. Stupid girls liked me.... But I was stressed I was going to get arrested, I didn’t want to be a DJ in that kind of environment forever. I wanted to be able to tell you what job I did and not just say something stupid like ‘don’t worry I get money’. But as a human you need to keep developing.

It’s like The Beach with Di Caprio [a film set on an isolated idyllic paradise where everything looks perfect but it ends in disaster]; you would get fucking bored. It was too perfect it can't work. Join society and run the race.

Harvey has realized his future lays in conforming to society's expectations; this is
in contrast to Amy whose outlook is different. She explained she had turned down the opportunity to get a steady, 9 to 5 job, offering her economic stability and an opportunity to conform.

You know what, I was recently offered a job at [a high-end] food store. I went for a job interview and everything. I had to secure my son's daycare. They wanted me to work full-time. I spoke to coach about being a single mum and doing a 40-hour week and I just couldn’t do it, I had to drop that job. I couldn’t.... at the end of the day that’s a dead end job. Sure I will be making a bit more money. It’s not gonna do anything for my future, I’m gonna be miserable and have no time for boxing. I wouldn’t do it. There is no way that's [worth] the sacrifice of boxing, it’s not a priority. I can’t be working a full-time job I wouldn’t have time for boxing.

The money did not tempt Amy. She explained:

Honestly no, as long as I have what I need, I have a house and a roof over my head. And my son is taken care of, but I do want to move out of here. There are loads of stabbings and gunshots and I don’t want my son to grow up here. My ex didn’t really understand why I loved boxing, I don’t get any money for it, but that’s not why I did it. Money does give you food and a nice house, but the extra stuff doesn’t really interest me.
Pervading the data is a sense of hope fastened to the rejection of normative societal expectations in contrast to a sense of defeat, which can be established almost immediately by conforming.

During a session at the gym, Craig and Matteo were discussing Craig’s working life. Craig is 21-years old and currently working late nights at a diner in the West End of Toronto. Alberto is a real estate broker for a firm in Toronto’s downtown core. Craig was explaining how the job “was killing him” and he was “just too tired all the time and didn’t have time for anything else”. Matteo suggested Craig should go back to college to retrain as something; “I could even give you some light work in my office if you wanted?” Craig’s reply was revealing:

Thanks man, but I’m not about that life.

The conversation continued with Craig explaining his future might lie in construction because “it seems quite interesting”. Willis (1977) understands ‘the lads’ have an indifference to the particular forms of work they enter, and carry the assumption that all work is “inherently meaningless” and shares a “similarity” (p.136). Reflexively, Craig seems to engage with the type of work he wants to participate in, but the rejection of ‘that life’ means he partakes in work within certain culturally and socially defined limits.
Running through Willis’s (1977) ethnography is the constant sense of vulnerability and oppression to which the subjects are exposed. Consequently, their futures are chosen and when they follow the conventional route into the labour force they reinforce the pre-conceived expectations. In contrast, the subjects in my study regard conforming to normative labour expectations as either undesirable or a necessary evil. Boxing, amongst other practices, provides the aegis to allow them to keep a distance from the complete defeat by conforming.

**5.08 Creating a ‘them’ and ‘us’**

What transpires from this ‘distance’ is a dichotomy between how the boxers in The Gym regard themselves and their perception of other people. Willis (1977) explains the ‘them’ and ‘us’ is “a time honoured principle of cultural and social organization” (p.169). The ‘them’ and ‘us’ logic transpires in my study also.

Luke explained why he thought the poor and working class had such strong ties with boxing:

> I just think boxing draws in a lot of insecure people. A lot of hurt people from low-income families. Me being one of them, I was seeking something. I think it has a lot to do with people seeking to be appreciated.
Harvey developed this strand of thinking: he understands how being middle class allows you to be proud of yourself and where you have come from:

You can enjoy being who you are. You can be a rich kid with everything on a plate. There’s your pay off right there, you can be proud of being who you are. Proud of being the type of class you came from. The ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’.

To be a ‘have not’ and give yourself something, it’s very much a pride thing. The haves can always enjoy their life, they want for nothing, want for less than we do. [Boxing] might be the only thing we can have.

Harvey and Luke put themselves in the ‘have nots’ category, and by creating ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ categories they deliberately distinguish themselves from people like Jennifer (who they consider to be from a different group than themselves). Jennifer speaks about her coach, who she believes pushed her away because she’s a “white girl” and is categorized amongst the ‘haves’:

I still don’t think Darryl takes me seriously. He’s even scared of me, doesn’t respect me. He never texts me directly and never organizes sparring sessions for me. I think coach sees me as privileged, Steve [another coach] doesn’t.
I’m not just a rich white girl, not at all. It shows a certain side to his character he’s not as open minded and accepting.

I am very aware of how people see me in the position of being a white girl coming in to this non-white dominant space. But people don’t know me. It’s not the dominant jock prom queen environment, I’m mixed race but no one knows that. When I ran track I got called ‘Snowflake’, the black girls found out I was mixed and tried for ages to give me a nickname – ‘Latte’, ‘Cappuccino’, etc.

During a conversation in the gym, Harvey joked about being white and having a “fairly decent job” and how this made him an anomaly in the gym. The four of us – Harvey, Amy, Luke, and myself laughed. Harvey continued talking and said he “didn’t think it was a bad thing to have a decent job and box”, but, and in attempt to embed himself in the lower class boxing culture, “working long hours sucks, being back in construction is much better”.

The conversation continued, I explained how I thought the Hollywood ‘poverty stricken’ boxer is not normally the reality, and Harvey and Luke agreed. Amy did too, and she accused Samuel (an excellent and well known boxer in Ontario) of being rich: “[Samuel] is actually rich – he used to play hockey an’ everything”.

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On another occasion I wore a new pair of white trainers to the gym. I was sitting next to Steve and Darryl and they were laughing about how white they were. Darryl asked me how much they cost, so I replied “80 dollars, or something like that”. They both guffawed and shook their heads. Steve said his trainers “only cost 20 bucks”. They both distanced themselves from me, and separated themselves from the socioeconomic grouping with which they associate me.

It can be deduced that the boxers are conscious of their positions in society. Their positions are created in relation to the other, or the ‘haves’. This separation is neither produced accidentally nor fully forced upon them. It is consciously chosen.

5.09 Being Able to Choose

Giddens (1991) argues, that on the terrain of late modern life “on the level of the self, a fundamental component of day-to-day activity is simply that of choice” (p.80). In our period especially, we are confronted with a number of choices and the boxers' choices lead to a certain lifestyle. It is understood we cannot reject a lifestyle and stumble into another one; rather we are continuously asked to choose it (Giddens, 1991, p.81). Where Willis might say ‘the lads’ counter culture is class logic, which reproduces itself, Giddens would argue that boxers' lifestyles are adopted rather than handed down. He extrapolates this from his understanding that in our period of late modernity we are in a post-traditional culture and so a “plurality of possibilities” are available (p.81).
Zizek (2009) engages with this and understands that today, every choice is about determining who you are, not just your preference. The choices making you who you are materialize across a number of situations. This can be illustrated in minor, but consequential and categorical ways: what coffee you drink, what television channels you watch, and in what sports you participate.

Lucy boxes for multiple reasons:

Well I played hockey my whole life and I loved that. I grew up with two older brothers and I wanted to do what they did but I was the only one who continued that. I’ve been at The Gym for three years now. Me and James [her brother] had been working out together then he went back to the gym so I went with him. He’s been doing Steve’s workouts for three years.

Before The Gym I was training at the JCC (Jewish Community Centre), and I used to go to a Fitness centre, but I didn’t really like it there either.

And I like The Gym. I feel more comfortable there than at the JCC, I’m there to work out and learn and have a good time. JCC was also double what I’m paying, I also did jujitsu and that was $200 a month. If I was in a running club down in condo-land, I would also feel that this is a joke and they’re there to socialize.
For me I just though I'd try it [boxing]. And see if I like to fight. The Gym is cheaper and that’s great, but the workouts are harder and someone is there pushing you. That’s why I am currently doing it. It gets you in to shape. It teaches you conditioning and working hard. I enjoy how technical it is, and the mathematics behind it and reading people’s body language.

My friends ask about boxing. And ask if I can come to watch. I used to be like that with hockey, and boxing is a tough sport. I like the toughness of it; I grew up in a house full of boys.

Lucy seems to enjoy the physicality and the fact “the workouts are harder and someone is pushing you”, and she also obviously likes being associated with the “toughness of it”. Seemingly, the selection of leisure activities allows Joy to directly shape and choose who she wants to be. She is able “to continuously re-invent and re-create [her] self” (Zizek, 2009, p.64). However, this re-invention and re-creation of the self occurs in terms of choosing a lifestyle, which according to Giddens (1991) is “characteristically attached to, and expressive of, [a] specific milieu of action.” (p.83).

As the data emerge, it is becoming evident that the boxers are reflexive and evidently capable of choosing and realizing a certain level of self-actualization. They are not just dupes reacting to their various positions. However, and as
mentioned previously, the boxers are making their choices within the dynamics of the dominant structures. The ‘them’ and ‘us’, the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’ rhetoric creates a referential map from which the boxers can make their lifestyle choices – their choices are not isolated from the outside world but rather fixed to an understanding of others and themselves. Lifestyle choices thus become a decision to become immersed in particular milieu/s, at the expense of the possible alternatives (Giddens, 1991). Using Luke as a case study, we can clearly see how his opinions are at odds with the dominant narratives, and his cultural practices reflect that.

Luke’s parents are both teachers:

My dad’s at an elementary school, and my mum teaches at a Community College. Before that she was a nurse… growing up she actually stressed education so much, and she came from nothing, she went to school and did her shit; working as a maid whilst at school… my dad is very complacent an’ my mum is the opposite.

She didn’t have to go as hard as she did, she loves to learn and went to school, came from nothing and was just hungry to learn.

I asked what his parents thought of his decisions:
You know, my parents come from a different background… they look at you through their lens and their environment so its no surprise what they think of me.…..

I am just lucky I am like my mum [with a good work ethic]. I have family members in Canada and [in the Caribbean]. I grew up with kids who had a bad time. One guy called Ricky had dogs and cats all in his house, an’ his mom was a stripper and he got removed from his home. He had no bed to lie in, an’ if you have no bed to lie on you can’t dream.

Before Darryl I wanted to be a 20/20 Olympic boxer. But now I want to go pro, it might be better to turn pro and move to Detroit and I will probably need to do that before I’m 21. I’m 20 in December and by then Darryl wants me to be a seasoned open class fighter [20+ open class fights].

Sometimes I wonder how far I am going to go with this [boxing], sometimes I worry about my health, I want to keep my health. I want to keep writing long term. That scares me, to slur when I speak I might need a fucking nurse an’ shit, that’s terrifying. Have you seen them guys at the fights who can barely talk!

How has your writing been going?

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I’ve written my first novel. And its getting edited, you know fiver.com I am going through that to get it edited. It’s 190 pages. It’s a fair size. It’s about a guy with a personality disorder who is trying to fight the prison industrial complex.

I asked him what was wrong with a typical career.

I’m not going to sell my time for money. I hate that, I’m not gonna sell my life away for eight hours at a time. I don’t like the hierarchy thing. If it comes down to it there is a lot of things I would do, if I had to, right now I am really trying to work hard so it doesn’t come down that.

It is clear that Luke has chosen to follow a difficult path: his aspirations are exceptional and undoubtedly will be difficult to accomplish. By acknowledging Ricky’s situation he believes that he has a bed to lie in which means he can have dreams. To realize these dreams he needs to live an unconventional life. He trains during the day with Steve, and he earns money by being a film extra. He hates the idea of working conventional hours for a paycheck but if it the need arose he would do it. Luke’s understanding and individual aspirations are far from ordinary, but at the class level the necessary rejection of dominant expectations is an ordinary practice.
Luke’s decision to reject a particular kind of work is chosen in respect of socially and culturally defined limits. His group’s cultural level has pushed him to define himself “as the other in bourgeois culture”. He is resilient and cannot be filled with their dominant ideology “as a container is filled with water” (Aronowitz, 1981) and seems to be ‘deciding with his actions’ to consistently reject the ordinary expectations set out for him.

Luke illustrates the rejection of foreign ideologies trying to work on him; he uses another set of cultural practices and ideologies to assist him in creating a position for his own socially and culturally acceptable practices. Arguably, he understands how conforming exposes the unfair exchange that comes as a result – it extinguishes his own ideological beliefs that materialize through his own practice (Willis, 1977, p.130). Unlike ‘the lads’, and the other boxers, specifically Harvey, who has a fatalistic attitude towards his working future, Luke has a rather optimistic outlook. He hopes to be a ‘success’ and to ‘make it’ but only through cultural channels he finds acceptable: certainly not by conforming to another person’s set of rules.

5.10 Conclusion

The results in this section clearly indicate that ‘the masses do think’; they think individually and sometimes collectively and have numerous opinions and understandings of the world and their position in it. I hope the data elucidates how
their ideological outlook – which conflicts with the dominant one – is underpinned by the weight of history and is imposed upon them by an ideology that has created a cultural level that expects them not to conform.

More importantly however, I hope I have managed to convey the sense that the cultural practices are made from a position of knowledge and based on an acute principled position. So with this being the case, the emergence of their informed understanding uncovers their own “regime of truth” in a “relation of force” with the dominant truth (Hall, book, p.136).

Interestingly this alternative ‘regime of truth’ comes from the diverse makeup of the boxers who have contrasting opinions and unalike practices. Although their ideas and practices differ there is a ‘unity in their difference’. Althusser (2005) speaks to this united difference (he speaks to it in a revolutionary sense but it seems that that understanding is applicable here also) and understands that if there is:

… to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of ‘circumstances’ and ‘currents’ so that whatever their origin and sense, they ‘fuse’ into a ruptural unity”… which includes an “accumulation of contradictions”. Otherwise, “how else could the class-divided popular masses (proletarians, peasants, petty bourgeois, etc.) throw themselves together,
consciously or unconsciously, into a general assault on the existing regime?” (p.99).

It seems that circumstances and currents have accumulated here and they unite in The Gym. The boxers have the opportunity to go elsewhere but yet they unite through choice in a boxing gym.

In an extremely useful section of *Learning to Labour* (1977), Willis argues that ‘the lads’ participate in their culture in their own ways, which surmount in a number of cultural practices. He explains how the “culture says to the individual, ‘This is right for me’, [but] it can also seem to add ‘even though it may be wrong in general’” (p.167). By this, Willis means their actions, e.g. being truants and missing school, *is wrong* in the face of the dominant culture and the normative social practices, yet *it is right* because it is appropriate within their counter-school group. This position led Willis (1977) to believe “it is quite wrong to picture working class culture or consciousness optimistically as the vanguard in the grand march towards rationality and socialism” (p.122).

However, in terms of the boxers, the messiness and boundary-less culture is unsurprising as the their culture exists within a system that is not their own and with which they need to engage in order to survive. This leads to the important and concluding point that can be illustrated by inverting Willis statement above.
The boxers know their cultural practices ‘are right for them’, and ‘are right in general’. Their cultural practices ‘are right for them’ because it attaches them socially to their social and natural cultural group. Because they are aware of the exploitation, oppression and unfairness in society, and push back against it through a number of practices (consciously and unconsciously) their decisions ‘are right in general’ too. This seems to reinforce the thesis that the boxers have educated and political practices, and as a result perhaps the masses can offer a vanguard on the grand march towards socialism.

Part 3 - Manifestation of Ideologies Clashing

5.11 Manifestation of Ideologies Clashing

In the previous section I argued that the boxers’ ideology and practices are informed by an understanding of their social position and the world around them. In this section, the manifestations of the ideological breaks are highlighted, and I attempt to demonstrate clashing ideological practices.

In *The Reproduction of Capitalism*, Althusser identified historical epistemological breaks over the course of history. He explained that the effects of these breaks result in *theoretical ideological shifts*, which he goes on to develop scientifically. However, in the domain of non-theoretical ideological shifts, there are ‘ruptures’ and ‘breaks’, which are political and not epistemological (Althusser, 2005, p.13). These political ideological shifts are what Hall (Hall interview with Grossberg,
1996) refers to as ‘relations of force’ colliding; they are the result of political practice. They are not necessarily the direct result of one’s own ideology or practices, and they can stem from another ideological force and result in a clash of ideologies.

The following represents an attempt to reveal the manifestation of clashing political ideologies. Three sites of practices that are considered to be manifestations of an ideological struggle are outlined below. They include The Gym’s location; it’s internal aesthetics, and the clothing the boxers wear.

5.12 The Location of The Gym

It is important to engage with the location of the boxing gym, it’s immediate surroundings and the way that the internal space is crafted. Urban sociologists have stressed the importance of understanding the built environment because it carries great sociological significance. Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, who have provided the philosophical foundations of modern urban sociology, drew attention to the cultural processes of urbanization and its effects on social alienation and class formation. There is a strong body of research concerning the impact of urbanization on the destruction of collective and individual identities. Throughout Western history, cities have been divided internally: “certain streets or zones have always been reserved for particular socioeconomic, cultural, professional, religious, or ethnic segments of the urban
population – if not always reserved *de jure* then at least *de facto*” (GUST, 1999, p.71). Conclusively, styles of architecture and neighborhood design have created an “urban culture that has separated classes and races” (Turley, 2005, p.59).

“There are divisions between inner city and the remaining portion of the city, between the city and the suburbs, between our houses and our neighbours’ houses, and most importantly between our fellow citizens and ourselves” (Turley, 2005, p.59). This point of analysis is especially important given the evidence provided by Hulchanski (2007) showing how neighborhoods in Toronto are becoming more polarized. There are more wealthy and more disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and consequently middle-income neighbourhoods are disappearing.

Toronto is a metropolis, and its sporting culture is an urban phenomenon and, as with most urban phenomena, there are social divisions. The impact of the environment and the location of the gym emerged in as significant characteristics in this study, and Toronto’s boxing establishments offer a platform to engage with Toronto’s geo-social divides.

Jencks (1993) engages with modern metropolises and the discontinuous patterns of distinctly organised neighbourhoods, and applies terminology such as ‘identity areas’ and ‘lifestyle consumption groups’ (p.26-29). This terminology offers insights into the important underlying ideologies surrounding Toronto. It leads us away from the multicultural, melting pot rhetoric associated with the city.
Jenck’s discourse contrasts with the language of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which states that “the Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada” (Canadian Multiculturalism Act., 1985). This is an honourable ideal but often the practice does not match the rhetoric, which is often presented as a way to deny the contrasting power imbalances and divided realities of Toronto.

Commercial gentrification has occurred in Toronto (Rankin, 2008) and has inevitably resulted in businesses and services affordable to low-income people being pushed out of certain areas to be replaced by services catering to more affluent customers. Sporting cultures unsupported by business and the state are left to their own devices to operate in the affordable and available spaces. The franchised sports dominating the headlines (basketball, hockey, baseball, and soccer) have developed against the backdrop of free-market liberalism, which, as a system has created the starkest contrasts and the greatest social inequality in cities. Now every metropolis has pockets of space for the excessively rich and a more limited share for excessively poor (GUST, 1999).
The Gym is located in midtown Toronto. The street it is on is a stretch of road running east to west, near the downtown core. In the early 20th century the road’s proximity to a railroad track originally made it an important industrial manufacturing corridor. In 1911, a large machine company built its main factory close to The Gym’s present position. The factory closed in the 1990s and other industrial factories along the street where The Gym is located have largely been repurposed. However, the residues of its industrial past remain and the area still has a pragmatic and productive functionality. The Gym is embedded within a productive and heavily industrialized space.

There are two outside walls, with a window in each: one faces South and the other West. The South-facing window overlooks a neighbourhood of houses and the West-facing window overlooks an open space regularly used as a truck park and loading area. Beyond this immediate view is the sprawl of houses and industry. Another prominent boxing gym in Toronto is situated in a different area of Toronto. According to Toronto historian Garner (2002), this area has a long history connected to the working class and the urban poor, and was hit particularly hard by the Depression of the 1930’s. Garner (2002) wrote that the Depression turned the area into the worst Anglo-Saxon slum in North America. The slums and houses were razed to the ground in the 1950's and replaced by a housing development project. The area was again revitalized in the 1970's and 1980's by new homebuyers, who restored much of the neighborhood’s neglected Victorian homes. However, in 2008, a METRAC safety report found the area to be
“distinguished by a large number of rooming houses and other forms of low income housing.” They also found it to have “the largest concentration of homeless shelters and drop-in centers in Canada” (p.1).

The Gym moved to its present location because “the rent was cheap” and “because the other place was becoming too expensive” (Steve). Similarly, Gleason’s Gym, where Trimbur (2013) completed her boxing ethnography, was “forced out of its quarters by a volatile New York City real estate market” (p.10). The Canadian Government’s efforts to preserve and enhance multicultural practices has, as in other areas of cultural life, fallen short in this instance of boxing.

The Gym, as a common institution, was left at the mercy of urban expansion and the desires of real estate developers and other elites in the city. Consequently, the location of The Gym and the other boxing club is a product of the state -- federal, provincial and municipal governments with business-friendly policies for urban development. This displacement gives the boxing locations a political and social form.

Although business-friendly government policies shape how cities are organized and how resources will be allocated (Feagin, 1998), spaces can be created by contrasting groups with non-normative cultural practices. According to GUST (1999) different populations take up ideological positions in relation to other
ideologies in their surroundings. Goldberg (1994) argues that, in our period of history, ‘liberal multiculturalism’ has been discarded and is being replaced by ‘managed and different multiculturalism’. The identities of the neighbourhoods in which the boxing gyms are situated emphasize the boundaries between groups and the separation of social classes, and their accompanying different cultural practices. These developments give weight to the “cities of difference” terminology.

Turley (2004) understands “the relationships of people in cities to be shaped by the places they live, the schools they attend, the businesses they work in, and the communities they identify with in the city” (p. 37). Putnam (2001) also argues that we have become more fragmented, and have managed to create areas inhabited by similar individuals rather than collective groups. We have organized ourselves in acutely different lifestyle enclaves, segregated by many different factors including race, class, education, life stages, and so on.

David is a retired boxer at The Gym whose daily routine places him within a distinct social setting: it involves a long bus journey to where he works, a shift at the warehouse, back to The Gym, in another industrialized area of Toronto, and then home. The geographical location of The Gym perpetuates the singularity of David’s socio-economically segregated lifestyle. David describes his work:
You know, I’ve been there 15 years, but before that I worked down on the docks with Canpar [a courier service]; it’s all changed now though, I’d unload their deliveries down there. Now, in my new place it’s hard to leave with the job market the way it is. No one’s secure, but I’m more secure there than somewhere else. I get on with the guys there, I haven’t really made myself part of the community, a lot of them party together. I don’t do that. They all live near the warehouse; I don’t though, I don’t like the commute, it’s 40 minute drive each way, I bus in the city, bus back to The Gym and then back out again.

David lives in a housing complex 20 minutes walk from The Gym in an affordable rented apartment he has made “homely”. He buses 40 minutes to work each morning and then busses to The Gym most evenings; from there he walks home. David’s daily routine situates him in a distinct lifestyle enclave.

His leisure time is also spent in distinct locations:

I work six days a week, on Sunday, I just catch up on things, on Saturday’s I hit the highway ‘cause my dad’s been sick, and I spend Sunday with them doing jobs and checking up on them, seeing if they’re OK. After work I’m either at the gym or working on my photos, I train, take a few [photos] in The Gym and go to the matches an’ take photos there.
The matches take place in hotels and community centres in different locations around the Greater Toronto Area. The two Ontario Cups this year, the Golden Gloves and the Silver Gloves, were both held outside the downtown Toronto core. Unsurprisingly, Kipfer and Keil (2002) found that Toronto is being ‘culturalized’ by urban elites and new middles class segments who are gentrifying and redeveloping urban spaces for their own desires. “Festival plazas, office complexes, condominiums, “historic” districts, waterfront playgrounds, upscale restaurant strips, and entertainment centers” are becoming geo-social homes for them to culturally express themselves (p. 244); and, at the expense of this, other cultural platforms for other social classes and ethnocultural groups are being pushed to the geographical periphery.

Zayan finds himself moving between poorer and wealthier segregated enclaves. His work involves nightshifts at a shopping mall in an area that is concentrated around the Eglinton Subway station from where there is a good connection into the business hub of Toronto. As a result, the neighborhood has become attractive to young professionals and is continuing to develop and prosper.

Zayan consciously engages with the social practices he performs at Yonge and Eglinton and the University of Toronto, which contrast with the ones he practices in Parkdale and at The Gym:
I grew up in the projects. I went from living in a not very good area. I grew up in an area called Crackdale (Parkdale). A friend yesterday came to me for change ‘cause he’s a crack head. Going from there to U of T I felt like an outsider from the very beginning, I don’t belong here. I went on the open day, my mum in her hijab and all the white people in their new clothes. Every time I locked eyes with someone I felt they were questioning me being there.

Zayan also explained how he acts differently depending on where he is:

At U of T I watch the way I talk. At job interviews I can be the whitest guy you know. [Imitating a posh accent] Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir, would you like me to sit or stand up sir. Looking at me he says: you know it’s cool with you cause we’re boys, it all just depends where I’m at and who’s around.

Although Zayan understands how accents and mannerisms have class and ethnic distinctions, the geographical divides between these behaviors are clearly evident, which speaks to the divided city harbouring and segregating different social groups. At The Gym he is able to relax, and because of its location and the patrons he is not required to ‘perform’. When he greets his fellow students at U of T, there is an inhibited sense to his manner; he is aware that his slight bop (strut) and the
socialized dap (fist pump) is a much more appropriate and customary greeting for his friends in Parkdale, and his ‘boys’ in The Gym.

Zayan finds himself operating within and across different wealth concentrations and with Toronto being sharply organized and divided into areas on the basis of wealth, lifestyle enclaves are becoming a more obvious reality. With different groups; boxers and ice hockey players, for example, operating in their own separate and isolated areas, the people within them begin to become ‘different’ and ‘other’. Furthermore, these ‘lifestyle enclaves’ are formed by people who share similar social, cultural and economic private lives so the different groups also express their identity through shared patterns of appearance, consumption, and leisure activities, which further differentiates one group from another (Bellah et al., 2007, p.335).

Jameson (1984) and Hall (1991) offer a possible explanation for these separations. Jameson (1984) argues that, in face of the “vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of the city’s structure as a whole,” individuals are representationally lost in the multinational interconnectedness of our current world (p. 84). Consequently, with major reference points shifting, the centre of the world becoming more difficult to discern, with class becoming more and more difficult to establish, and with the dominant ideological structure claiming to be more fluid and less rigid, and pretending that it ‘wants to know everyone’, it becomes
difficult for individuals to establish their own identity.

The demarcations of the centre of world remain, class barriers are still there, and the historical dominant culture still exists. As a result, individuals and groups become locked in the own counter-identities with which they are familiar. They represent themselves by difference and look for guidance in insular ways. As Hall (1991) writes, “I can’t speak of the world”… and everything that is out there… “but I can speak of my village. I can speak of my neighborhood, I can speak of community” (p.35), David and Zayan can do this also. They look insularly into their distinct enclave, and use their communities as a ‘mapping device’ since this is what they know and this is what they can speak of to help them to create an identity.

5.13 Internal Aesthetics/Design of the Gym

The aim here is to develop a distinct understanding of The Gym one that distinguishes the boxers’ lifestyle enclaves from the dominant cultures. To do this, the contrasting nature of the aesthetics of The Gym is provided in relation to Toronto’s dominant sporting landscape where, arguably, “the culture of the simulacrum comes to life and the exchange-value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of use-value is effaced” (Jameson, 1984, p.66).

In the opening pages of Body and Soul, Wacquant (2004) uses a vignette written by George Plimpton in 1977 to describe Stillman’s Gym in New York City, and
applies it to The Woodlawn Boys Club where he carried out his ethnographic research. Wacquant explained that the description could be used “to describe just about any gym in America today” (p.13), and it perfectly describes The Gym:

A dark stairway led up into a gloomy vault-like room, rather like the hold of an old galleon. One heard the sound before one’s eyes acclimatized: the *slap-slap* of the ropes being skipped, the thud of leather into the big heavy bags that squeaked from their chains as they swung, the rattle of the speed bags, the muffled sound of gym shoes on canvas of the rings, the snuffle of the fighters breathing out through their noses, and, every three minutes, the sharp clang of the ring bell (Plimpton, 1977; cited in Wacquant, 2004, p.14).

Plimpton’s multisensory description accurately fits The Gym and is still applicable today. The Gym’s space and the fixtures and equipment in the gym have an historical connection. The gym’s interior speaks to history and manages to bridge a gap between the past and the present – it illustrates the passing of time rather than a break from the past. In the hallway entrance there are hundreds of photographs offering a pictorial history of the famous boxers, and past and present members of The Gym. There is a large representation of the familiar and typical 19th century gloveless boxer adorned with a big moustache and wide-legged boxing stance and long calf-length cotton leggings held up with a leather belt. The pictures continue from there until the present day and detail boxing apparel while
also portraying the different stylistic approach taken by the photographers.

The fixtures of the gym seem not just to document history but to represent history. The metal lockers are battered and deformed. Past members’ names have been scratched into the thin paint, some of the doors have been taken off and a number of locks remain fastened because earlier gym users have left and failed to come back. All of the gym equipment is heavily worn; the punch bags have been ripped and different colored duct-tape is wrapped around the bags to protect them from further damage. The communal boxing gloves have lost their shape and their colours have faded. The headgear, hanging on a rope suspended between a metal girder and a corner of the ring, is deformed from overuse. The gym has a strong bodily smell, and while it is not a bad or overpowering smell, it is a reminder of past sessions and the hard work of previous boxers.

As a consequence of this historicity, nostalgia pervades the gym’s interior, – Jameson (1984) refers to this effect as the aesthetic colonization of other generational periods. Sports’ facilities such as The Gym, and their interiors, operate as contrasting enclaves to those of the dominating contemporary sport and leisure spaces (e.g., the new Goldring Centre for High Performance Sport on the campus of the University of Toronto); the historical aesthetic creates this contrast. The Gym’s historical style is an attempt to create a historical connection, and as Jameson (1984, p.68) might argue, The Gym is in contrast to contemporary
buildings, which are incapable of speaking to history or representing our current experience.

It is difficult to understand The Gym’s style without analyzing it in relation to contemporary stylistic manifestations. One blatant evidential rejection of contemporary society is the lack of digital technology at The Gym. A crude Marxist perspective might explain how technological advancement is the result of capital rather than some primal cause of its own, but Jameson (1984) argues that digital technology now represents “the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism” (p.79). In a sense The Gym is rejecting the digitalized (or perhaps capitalistic) momentum underpinning the city.

The boxers are conscious of the gym’s aesthetics: I asked David if he would like The Gym to modernize and be like one of the new places?

I don’t think so, if it became all fancy and different in that way I wouldn’t like it. I think there is something about the timelessness of it. I’ve never been drawn to gyms like that. Oh but this one girl I was in love with her, she went to a fancy gym, I went with her for a bit; I couldn’t believe it, towels and conditioner an’ shampoo in all the showers.

Stan explained why he left karate a number of years ago. Arguably, Stan is
speaking to monetary underpinnings but the essence of The Gym’s aesthetic operates within a mindset of little means:

I left karate before that, it was really commercialized and I didn’t like that. It feels like they’re selling belts, you don’t earn them. They were thinking less about the people and more about the money – people were spending a lot of money there. It became that kind of a place.

Amy’s response, when asked about the distinct characteristics of the gym and its members, engaged with the separatist environment and The Gym’s aesthetics:

That type of thing is normal for me: always grew up with a lot of black people from different places with different cultures and poverty so for me being here is normal and moving around in these neighbourhoods is what I know. For me going to a gym in Mississauga [which to her is where rich people live] I wouldn’t feel like I belong there. I belong in [The Gym].

I like this type this kind of environment. The roughness feels more like home than somewhere that is all fancy.

For Jennifer, the aesthetics of the gym were mysterious and exotic. She engaged with the aesthetics from an external position, she views the gym as different, as if
it is foreign to her. This is in contrast to David, Stan, and Amy. Jennifer explains:

A friend recommended it, [she] said [The Gym] was super grungy. I originally went for ‘boxercise’ but that was just a way ‘in’ and I always intended on boxing. You know, everybody at The Gym goes there because of the atmosphere, no ego no bullshit, but people go there because of the grimy atmosphere.

Although for Jennifer, The Gym was ‘super grungy’, Amy, Stan and David had a much more naturalized predisposition to the environment. Rather than seeing The Gym as something worth articulating they looked from the outside and saw other gyms as fancy (David), too commercialized (Stan), and alien (Amy).

Engaging with Jameson’s (1984) analysis of the culture of late capitalism and the city complicates any simplistic implication of The Gym as simply rejecting the momentum of normative societal trends (e.g., embracing technology). Jameson (1984) argues that we have not kept pace with our new environments: there has been a change in the object (the building and its organization or aesthetics) but there has not been an equivalent change in us – the subject. Perhaps the historical aesthetic creation in The Gym is an unconscious manifestation of our lagging development. Jameson (1984) explains there is a major disconnection between the normative built environment, our time period, and ourselves. Because of the
cultural manifestation of late capitalism, our “bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and [we are] practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distancing” (1984, p.87) ourselves from the dominant capitalist culture. Arguably, The Gym’s historical aesthetic suggests an attempt to find a coordinate in time, to provide it with a social connection and an historical bearing; arguably this is an unconscious consequence of the conscious rejection of late capitalist cultural norms.

5.14 The Gym and Apparel

In numerous cultural and sociological studies the symbolic nature of clothing style is analyzed. Willis gives considerable importance to the clothes of his research participants. With both the hippies in Profane Culture (1978/2014) and ‘the lads’ in Learning to Labour (1977), he engaged with the meaning behind their commitment to a certain style. For the hippies, “clothes were another important expressive item in the bricolage of the hippy style” (p.126). For ‘the lads’, style “was seized upon… [and] the most visible, personalized and instantly understood element of resistance” (p.17). Similarly, with The Gym’s boxers, outward appearance and style carries great social significance.

In Come Out Swinging, Trimbur (2014) assessed female members at Gleason’s Gym and their stylistic preference. According to Trimbur, the women’s relation to boxing dictated their choice in clothing; the women who saw themselves as
serious boxers made “careful decisions when choosing their clothing: Diesel females wear baggy attire rather than tight fitting garb” (p.103).

There is a similar stylistic manifestation at The Gym, but my analysis of the reason behind this choice is different from Trimbur. According to Trimbur, female boxers wear baggy clothing in order to desexualize themselves in the gym space; the boxers at The Gym do it to connect themselves to their image of boxing and to disassociate themselves from those who wear tight fitting, smart and more typical sports attire – this cultural expression is also evident in the boxers non-gym wear and the symbolism associated with that style choice.

When I trained at The Gym I used to wear typical soccer training clothes. Soccer gear is heavily branded and fitted, and because of the generic style the outfits usually match in some way. One day Darryl was staring at me, he jokingly looked disappointed and began to shake his head; he said: “you look like a soccer player, you ain’t no boxer.” It was the end of a session and I was sitting next to Zayan. Zayan is a soccer fan and a supporter of the Turkish team Galatasaray S.K. He was wearing a faded and very loose fitting fake version of one of their home jerseys, an old pair of basketball shorts, and a pair of old non-functional trainers. I said to Darryl “[Zayan] is wearing soccer gear too;” and Darryl replied – “yea but you just look too clean.” Darryl was making a reference to the organization of my outfit and its lack of disheveledness, which seemed to be the distinguishing factor
between my outfit and Zayan’s.

I asked Harvey to explain the lack of fitted branded gym wear:

You know, we haven’t really got time for that. You know Craig [a gym user], well you can tell his parents are quite well off, but Luis and Ty well they don’t come from big means… anyone who is in there boasting about big means and about material possessions isn’t going to do well.

David, the retired boxer, noticed other people’s sports attire while telling me about the road races he used to compete in:

At the time I couldn’t compete. I started running races; my coach told me to.

So I just ran to High Park for a race. Everyone was wearing spandex, that was intimidating; people were decked out. I just had my pants an’ t-shirt.

Amy, never wears fitted gym clothes; she wears boxing shorts and boxing shoes and usually a TuPac (an iconic rap star who was shot dead) t-shirt or a basketball vest. I asked Amy about designer gym wear and if she “liked to look good in the gym?”

Na, you know what I like to look like a girl but I think we are brainwashed. All the propaganda in the media is to brainwash people, to make you [me the
outsider who does conform with my soccer apparel] guys robots, and want a

certain purse and we are just brainwashed to be like everyone else. I like

people who are different and unique. I wear what’s real I think, like I’m

representing. When people try to put an image on them… I dunno, I just feel

like everyone wants to look a certain way and think a certain way and I don’t

feel like that’s real to me.

It is also important to acknowledge the style of the boxers when they are away

from the gym. Their apparel is best described as inner-city street-wear that is

associated with hip-hop music. For example, Darryl wears Timberland boots and a

large silver chain around his neck with a ping-pong ball-sized silver boxing glove

attached to it. Brands associated with inner-city street-wear such as Nike Air

Jordan’s and Timberland boots are seen as desirable because of their distinct

associations.

As with ‘the lads’ in Learning to Labour (1977), the gym style and the street-wear

facilitate a differentiation from the dominant cultural styles. The gym style

disconnects the boxers from the more manufactured mainstream gym apparel. And

the clothes worn outside the gym associate the boxers with the inner-city urban

poor. The symbolic nature of these two stylistic choices embeds the boxers within

the urban poor and working class culture.
Holt (1997) argues that consumption patterns create “a type of symbolic boundary”, whereby consumption serves as a basis of affiliation with a certain type of people, and, “thus, anyone who consumes the same category or brand of object is partaking in the same meaning” (p.333); they are a part of a symbolic culture. Additionally, style assists a people “in understanding themselves as unique persons, it signifies who they are, and who they think they are” and who they want to be (Holt, 1997, p.89).

In relation to Holt (1997) and Willis, et al. (1990), the boxers’ apparel is another site of separation; it is in meaningful opposition to the lifestyles evident in the dominant sports cultures. Through the consumption of products, those products become symbolic cultural demarcation tools able to connect people with their preferred culture and what culturally fits.

### 5.15 Conclusion

Through these three themes – The Gym’s location, its internal aesthetics, and the boxers’ apparel -- a dialectic between structure and agency arises. The disassociation from the dominant culture both imposed and created through the boxers’ own cultural practices.
In the first theme, the neighbourhood’s historical connection to the urban working class, and The Gym’s location in a poorer neighbourhood, facilitates the possibility of a lifestyle enclave whereby the boxers are/can separate themselves from other groups in the city. Once inside the gym, the boxers are able to shape the gym’s features in contrast to dominant contemporary expectations. Their use of agency embeds the boxers further into their separate culture. The final theme demonstrates that fashion style is deliberate, and different consumption patterns define their particular group. Seemingly, the boxers embed themselves into their societal position by participating in non-conformist cultural practices.

The cultural hegemonic nature of late capitalism seems not to be resisted but rather used. Boxing’s historical practices and trends -- location, aesthetics, and clothes -- are used as a form of map to help create a culture offsetting rather than countering dominant cultural practices. Invisible connections such as the media (as identified by Amy) and experience, and having to move across enclaves and noticing the differences, all act as disconnectors for the boxers from the dominant culture, and allows them to know about the dominant culture so they are able to remain disconnected.

These lifestyle choices equate to a contrasting culture. In our contemporary period, this “very private experience of having personal identity to discover, a personal destiny to fulfill, has become a subversive political force of major proportions”
(Roszak cited in Giddens, 1991, p.209). As a resultant, with the boxers’ personal identities and cultural choices being made in relation to the dominant culture, they cannot simply be pushed aside. Engaging with the factors underpinning their deliberate disassociation is imperative.
Chapter 6

Discussion / Conclusion

6.01 Introduction

In the results sections, I have attempted to convey some of the cultural milieu of those who box in The Gym. Throughout the two main results sections, the ‘slippery nature’ of the relationship between practice (agency) and structure arises. The imposed ideology that transpires through policies and dominant societal expectations impinges on the boxers’ freedoms and the history of their own culture; it motivates them to adopt a certain rejectionist position. However, their agency is apparent, and this was conveyed through their understanding of their social positions and their conscious rejection of dominant expectations.

In the final chapter I begin by summarising the findings. From there, I attempt to develop the understanding of the cultural milieu of the boxers in relation to Willis’ (1977) theoretical concept of limitations. In doing this, I attempt to convey the contribution this thesis has made. I conclude the chapter by explaining my understanding of the contribution of this thesis, and by outlining the limitations of the study and proposing some suggestions for future research.
6.02 Summary of Findings

The results were divided into three parts: the first introduced the participants in the research; the second was an attempt to convey that “the silent majorities do think” (Hall, 1996, p.140); and the third proposed to illustrate where political ideologies meet and how the resulting cultural differences are manifested. The second and third sections developed eight subcategories of analysis. These are summarized below in an attempt to add to the clarity to the findings and conclusions.

The first subcategory highlighted the causality of our interconnected and global world and its effect upon the boxer’s day-to-day experiences. During the interviews, it became apparent that the boxers felt disconnected from the political system and powerless in the face of problems at both the local and global levels. Giddens (1991) argues that this disconnection can be a result of ‘disembedding mechanisms’ that have arisen through our increasingly connected and globalised world. As a result, (some of) the boxers felt isolated and powerless in the face of the global interconnected institutions and, as a consequence, detached themselves from those global institutions and concerns to the extent that they were able. Consequently, they looked elsewhere for guidance and self-definition.

This disembedding continues as the second subcategory established the rejection of dominant institutions, including normative education programmes and typical
working practices. In order to achieve their goals in boxing, Luke and Amy felt that they had to reject education and typical working practices; they sought to exist “unfettered by the rules and expectations of society” (Melucci, 1989, p.123). Their approach was not common to all of the participants; some of the boxers saw qualifications as a necessity and they had been to university or were currently in university. However, in may be that in the case of Luke and Amy, in the face of their perceived disconnection from certain institutions their local environment and its institutions became part of their identity formation and attempts to self-actualize.

The third subcategory focused on the sense of defeat associated with conforming to the dominant institutions. Eric captured this when he said that “there is no job you’re ever going to love, no one is ever going to be happy.” This was said with reference to his work as a salesman, “selling people shit,” and dissatisfied with his job because he saw it as a white-collar position. Jason, however, was more optimistic about work and his future, although he rejected outright work that he did not consider to be culturally or socially acceptable, and aimed to work in construction because he thought it might be interesting. Amy also rejected normative expectations and, rather than choosing economic stability, Amy prioritized boxing.
The fourth subcategory amalgamated and extended the first three to consider how the boxers’ disconnection and rejection of dominant institutions and cultural practices creates a ‘them’ and ‘us’ distinction, a distinction that they use as referential map to guide their practices. The ‘them’ and ‘us’ dichotomy in the gym arises through a ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ rhetoric, in which the position they adopt as ‘have nots’ allows them to see themselves as poor in comparison to everyone else.

The section concluded with a subcategory examining how the boxers’ ‘have nots’ position creates an understanding of themselves and a referential map that shapes their choices. These choices are not necessarily imposed upon them; rather, the boxers, by choosing their local environment and a particular milieu(s) are in fact choosing to be an Other. Their rejection of cultural practices allows them to separate themselves from the dominant ideology and sets of rules defined by others.

The dissimilarities between the boxers/participants is acknowledged and I have attempted to engage with the significance of their different practices (e.g., some rejecting education completely and others going to university). Their convergence in the gym exemplifies their ability to ‘choose a lifestyle’ and, arguably, the differences between them represent the understanding that an ideological
formulation is not necessarily in correlation to a certain class or economic position.

Finally, I argue that the boxers, in contrast to *Learning to Labour* (1977), are informed by a rejection of an ideology that they see as unsolicited and unfair. From this foundation, it seems that the boxers’ cultural practices are driven from a politically informed position.

In the final section of the results, I focused on the cultural practices of the boxers and how they may be seen as the result of political ideologies clashing. To exemplify this, I considered the location of two boxing gyms in Toronto, the internal aesthetics of The Gym, and the apparel the boxers wore during training and outside the gym.

The first subcategory examined the implications of the location of Toronto’s two best-known boxing gyms. As GUST (1999) explains, cities have always been organized along particular socioeconomic, cultural, professional, religious and/or ethnic lines. Toronto is no different: Hulchanski (2006) found that Toronto’s neighbourhoods are becoming more segregated and polarized, and as a result, ‘identity areas’ and ‘lifestyle enclaves’ have formed. These enclaves are arguably a result of Toronto’s commercial gentrification, which has caused services affordable to low-income people to move out of certain areas of the city. The two
gyms are evidence of this. The Gym is situated outside of the downtown core, on
the second floor of an industrial warehouse; it had to move from its previous
location because the rent became too expensive.

Similarly, another prominent Toronto boxing club is located in an area that has
polarized, and as a result, ‘identity areas’ and ‘lifestyle enclaves’ have formed.
These enclaves are arguably a result of Toronto’s commercialization; they are
aware of the enclave in which they operate and which has become most
comfortable to them. These enclaves are home to their professions/jobs, homes,
schools and leisure facilities. With the boxers operating in distinct enclaves, the
dominant cultural enclaves (that are also supported by the state) are seen as
separate and different. Through this difference, their cultural practices are formed
within and separate from others in Toronto.

The distinctions in the city may be extended into the interior of the Gym. The
Gym has a distinct historical design and aesthetic; nothing in the gym is new and
digital technology is absent. This functions in contrast with the aesthetic of the
dominant enclaves where contemporary sport and leisure spaces embrace digital
technology and cutting edge materials and designs. In relation to the dominant
leisure spaces and their aesthetics, the boxers rejected the other environments and
preferred The Gym’s: “the roughness feels more like home than somewhere that is
all fancy” (Amy).
The final subcategory considered the symbolic nature of clothing style in the gym. For The Gym’s boxers, outward appearance and style carried social significance. The boxers rejected heavily branded and tight fitting, functional training apparel because of its association with the ‘haves’. Additionally, their non-gym attire and what the boxers saw as preferable clothing embedded them into their cultural group. As well as embedding them, it created “a type of symbolic boundary” (Holt, 1997, p.333) with their apparel acting as a demarcation tool that connected them to their preferred culture, and removed and distanced them from other cultures.

These three themes demonstrate an ideological clash. Through the organization of Toronto neighbourhoods by the cultural elite, with the cooperation of the state and businesses, the location of The Gym and the other boxing club is forced upon the respective boxing communities. However, the aesthetics and design of the gym and choice of apparel may be seen as a symbolic push back. They juxtapose an enforced position and a chosen position can be seen as a conscientious choice to reject dominant cultural practices.

In this summary of the data and my analysis, I have attempted to clarify the results of this study, and to relay the complex nature of structure and agency that confronts the data at every turn. The structure and agency problem continuously reemerged and problematized an easy conclusion. However, the emergent problem
also motivated the political position taken in these concluding remarks.

The concluding remarks are embedded in the following re-engagement with Willis’s theory of limitations, and my understanding of the contribution made by this thesis.

6.03 Re-engaging with Willis’ Concept of Limitations

Willis (1977) concept of ‘limitations’ concerns the way non-conformist practices affect a groups’ social maneuverability. In the theory chapter, I argued that this top-down perspective restricts application of the concept. Using Hall’s ‘double articulation,’ I argued that everyone has a starting point that guides their practices, and it is provided on the basis of external conditions that are not of their own making. As a result, I saw limitations as ‘dividers’ and explained that everyone was divided by a set of external conditions that were not of their own choosing, regardless of where they sit on the socioeconomic ladder. This understanding levels the hierarchical nature of the theory.

With this ‘levelling,’ it can be argued that ideological positions divides people along a continuum; practices occur in relation to the dominant ideology and the dominant culture. To illustrate this argument more simplistically, bourgeois ideology may be seen as an identifier with which the boxers are in opposition. Bourgeois (and their relationship to the means of production) ideology dominates
and thus frames: the education system; ways to participate in sport; what sports to play; what clothes to wear and how to wear them; how to speak; where to live; how to work; and the formulation of the political system. The plurality of ways in which the boxers interact with each of these was apparent in the data.

Daniel is a boxer who can be placed on the continuum far from bourgeois practices. Daniel rejects the education system, he wears clothes that are particular to his ideology, he works part time to get by, he consciously rejects selling his life away “eight hours at a time,” he boxes rather than participating in a bourgeois sport, the slang he uses positions him closer to a certain culture and, by aiming to be a professional boxer and eventually a novelist, he wants to be independent of bourgeois cultural expectations long term.

Eric shows how some of the boxers are closer to the dominant bourgeois culture. He sees “no point in resisting.” He has a university education, he works for a construction business in order to receive a steady pay-cheque, and he sees conforming as a way of being happy. However, through numerous practices he also resists: his clothes; his tattoos; the music he listens to; the sport he participates in; and the way he speaks are all practised from a rejectionist position. But he does sit closer to bourgeois expectations than Daniel.
Willis (1977) argues that this deliberate separation from the bourgeois “results in deeper and more entangled entrapment within the capitalist order” (p.123) because it prepares those separated for a life of feeding off the scraps from the bourgeois table. Willis (1977) also argues that “the working class is the only group in capitalism that does not have to believe in capitalist legitimations as a condition of its own survival” (p.123). Seemingly, the boxers’ cultural practices, which separate them from the dominant ideology, support this notion that they do not believe in capitalist bourgeois culture.

However, if Willis’ limitations argument is applied to the boxers, the assumption that their rejection of the dominant ideology results in a deeper and more entangled entrapment within the capitalist order sits awkwardly within this thesis. The boxers reject certain practices and conform to others; their agency allows them to temporarily sit outside of the capitalist system – whereas complete acceptance of bourgeois culture chains individuals to normative cultural practices even more tightly. So those who look to bourgeois culture to guide their practices are in fact entrapped more into the capitalist system.

Perhaps the cultural practices of the bourgeoisie make them more vulnerable to market tyranny, but with (capitalist) ideology being dominant, the boxers who politically and conscientiously reject the dominant culture are confronted by the tyranny of the masses, just as we all are in different ways.
6.04 Contribution

I briefly consider what this thesis may contribute to the boxing literature and the academic body of knowledge, and what it may contribute to a political project. These two potential contributions can be approached through the same point: the study of culture.

In the introductory chapter, I argued that boxing is potentially a site where ‘I could try to understand the significance of certain practices and the politics attached to them.’ What may have transpired from this and perhaps this entire thesis was that I was aiming to study the underdog, or those who were most vulnerable in society. This, however, was not the case. From my initial engagement with boxing as a teenager and through the data I collected, I understood that the subjects were not people-on-their-backs, but rather people-fighting-back.

I wanted to move away from the approach that understands “sports cultures [as] far from level-playing-fields and in fact operate in significant ways to create and sustain class-based inequity” (Falcous & McLeod, 2012, p.13). I attempted to study the politics of a sports culture from a more nuanced position. A great deal of data shows quite clearly how sports are frequently involved in class and gender reproduction. That is the reason, I have argued, “why working class kids play working class sports,” and why, as so many others have pointed out, sport is a ‘school for masculinity’. But sport is much more than a social reproduction
machine and, as this study has shown, even working class athletes have agency and a ‘voice’.

By seeing the complex results of structure and agency on the boxers, in relation to their cultural position, the assumption can be made that other groups in society are also confronted with and emerge from the same complexity, irrespective of their socioeconomic position. On a macro political level, this made me realize that I was not studying superiors or subordinates but rather the structures governing their relationship. This position motivated me to understand and demonstrate that the issue is not just between superiors and subordinates; rather, it clarifies that we are all tyrannized. As a result, the political position of this thesis highlights a larger human struggle. I thus revealed my partisanship not to a faction, but to a political ideal (Gouldner, 1968).

It is important to see that the present conditions which make the poor poor (and the boxers box) are precisely the same conditions that make the rich rich (and fox hunters go fox hunting); it is not possible to remove the privileged from the oppression of capitalism (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978). To do so leads us away from a political project, and also from our role in the oppression.

It appears as though something is holding the sociology of sport, PCS scholars, and even the academy at large from giving a form to the spectre that is haunting
our research.

6.05 Limitations

The most important limitation to recognize is that this is a case study of a single boxing gym in one city; and that the research participants who went on to be interviewed represent a smaller sample of the members of the gym. Thus, any generalizations that are drawn from this small sample, and any larger political generalizations must be considered in light of the limitations of the data. However, the case study provided a revealing way to test, in a limited way, Willis’ arguments about the reproduction of working class culture in a different setting, and I believe that the data and my arguments may be suggestive for future research.

As a white male researcher, it is important to acknowledge my position in relation to the results and analysis. Along with poverty and socioeconomic status, gender and race are prominent themes in the boxing literature. These two themes emerged while I was collecting data, but they barely feature in this thesis.

Wacquant was accused of reinstating sexism into the “social scientific field in toto” (Geurts, 2005) because of the lack of consideration of gender in Body and Soul (2004). I feel that I too could be accused of being colour-blind and gender-blind because these issues were prominent in my data and yet I chose to focus this analysis on social class and class culture.
Prior to writing this thesis, I tended to take an economic reductionist approach to politics and power hierarchies. Solidarity across gender and race divisions were important (I was an active member in my local Unite Against Fascism group in England); however, the emancipation of those who suffered from racism and patriarchy was within and secondary to the emancipation of us all from our current economic structure. Recently, my understanding of this changed.

It is difficult to substantiate the concrete effects of me being white and male on this work; as McIntosh (1988) points out, whites and men are carefully taught not to recognize their own privilege and how it materializes to meet their own needs. Nevertheless, I am learning and I am moving toward recognizing my privilege.

I now better understand how some scholars produce work that is unreflexively male and white oriented; I know that there is a tendency for disciplinary frameworks and epistemologies to over-empower men and white people, and I now know that this results in a privilege that confers dominance (McIntosh, 1988).

By having conversations with equity-seeking colleagues, and engaging with material that is connected to the Black Lives Matter movement, I have become acutely aware of the importance of recognizing particular emancipations. Their causes have not been represented in this thesis but their struggle is changing people and has changed my view on economic reductionism forever. Equity-seeking groups must be represented, and I will endeavour to do so in the future.
6.06 Future Research

I wrote in the introduction that I intended this work to be part of a dialectical discourse with Trimbur’s (2013) *Come Out Swinging*. In order to achieve this, I tried to challenge the position that her work occupies, and I have attempted to be combative in my writing style. Nonetheless, I see this thesis as a complement to her inspiring book, and I hope the debate will continue.

From my current position, I am looking forward to developing my understanding of the nuances that exist within ideology, and the complexity of culture. In this work, I have exposed my current academic aptitude and my political position. I have done this is in the hope of being challenged academically, and of engaging in the struggle for a better world. In that sense, this thesis attempts to be “an *intervention* – albeit an intervention in the battleground of ideas” (Hall, 1978, p. x).
References


https://www.taddlecreekmag.com/dupont-at-zenith


Appendix 1

Information Letter

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your participation in this project. I am a Master’s candidate at the University of Toronto and my dissertation project seeks to understand boxing’s physical cultural practices in relation to macro societal changes. I am trying to understand the culture behind boxing gyms as they seem at odds with more populist physical cultures and the boxing community’s culture may perhaps be in contrast with societies dominant cultures.

The data collected and analyzed, as part of this project, will be published in a thesis and made publicly available through the University of Toronto. I also plan to publish in both scholarly and non-scholarly sources and present at academic conferences. Additionally, if you would like a copy of my research summary, I would be happy to provide you with one upon its completion.

As I have explained to you previously, your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from observation or interviews at any time and have your participation in this project cancelled. You may inform me of your desire to withdraw within six months of the completion of my research at this institution through a CSC staff member, by writing to me at the address at the top of this letter, or by informing me in person.

Furthermore, your participation will remain confidential throughout the research process: you will be identified by a fictional name in my writing, and personal details linking your statements to your identity will be omitted. I will destroy this information upon completing this research project; however, completely anonymous data (in which all personally identifiable information will be removed) may be kept beyond this date.

If you wish, my thesis supervisor, Dr. Peter Donnelly, can be contacted by email (peter.donnelly@utoronto.ca). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office by telephone (1-416-946-3273) or by email (ethics.review@utoronto.ca).

Thank you again for your participation in this research project.

Sincerely, Hector Mackie
Appendix 2
Informed Consent form

By signing this form, I acknowledge that:

I. The researcher has given me the opportunity to ask questions about the study and its procedures and that these questions must be answered to my satisfaction.

II. At any time during the study, I may request further clarification from the researcher. I can do this by contacting the researcher by phone 416-209-5150 or by e-mail at hector.mackie@mail.utoronto.ca

III. My participation in the research is voluntary and I am under no obligation to participate in the study. In addition, I acknowledge that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without explanation.

IV. I have been told that my information will be kept confidential, except where release of information is required by law. The only exception to this is the supervisor of the interviewer with whom data might need to be discussed in the analysis process. Where sharing data with the supervisor (Dr. Peter Donnelly) is necessary, for example to gain his assistance with analysis, the interviewer (Hector Mackie) will ensure that he will not have access to personal identifying information.

V. No information that would identify me will be released or printed.

VI. The possible risks and benefits (if any) of this study have been explained to me, and in no way does signing this consent form waive my legal rights nor does it relieve the researchers or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

VII. I may obtain a copy of this consent form (and the appended letter) for my records.

I, __________________________ (print name) agree to participate in the study entitled The Boxers view of a capitalist world by Hector Mackie (University of Toronto).

Participant’s signature

Contact Information:
Telephone:
E-mail:

Location
Date
I, the undersigned, have, to the best of my ability, fully explained the nature of this study to the participant. I believe that the person whose signature appears above understands the implications and voluntary nature of his/her involvement in the research procedures.

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Researcher’s signature  Location  Date

Sincerely,

Hector Mackie
Masters student
Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education, University of Toronto
Email: hector.mackie@mail.utoronto.ca
Appendix 3

Interview Guide

Throw away questions:

- How has your day been?
- How was work?
- When is your next fight?
- How are you feeling about that?

1. Relationship to boxing:

- Why did you get into boxing?
- What do you like about boxing?
- Will you continue to box in the future
- What are their boxing aspirations?
- Why they are attracted to boxing rather than non-combat sports?

2. Their relationship with Sully’s Boxing Gym:

- What is the atmosphere like in Sully’s Gym?
- Why they train there and not in another space?
- What do you like about Sully’s?

3. The boxers and Sully’s Gyms position in society?

- Why do they think boxing prospers in unequal societies?
- What does the culture of Sully’s Gym offer its members that other gyms do not?
- Do they think Sully’s Gym will be around in 50 years time?
- Do they think the culture at Sully’s Gym differs from other environments?
- Do they think Sully’s Gym is accepting of different people?