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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LEGITIMISED VIOLENCE OF BOXING

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ABSTRACT

Following its recent inclusion in The Olympic Games and Commonwealth Games, the profile of female boxing has risen. Female boxing matches have been broadcast on mainstream television and the growing presence of females in the sport has been brought to the attention of the public. This has raised the issue of society's attitude to women and violence. Historically, women who embrace violence have been viewed by society as violating the social gender norms. Previous criminological literature has focused on the extent to which such women construct such violence as a gendered practice: as an expression of masculinity and/or rejection of femininity. This study is an exploration of women's participation in the legitimised violence of boxing. Utilising qualitative, semi-structured interviews, the experiences and perspectives of six female boxers, two professionals and four amateurs, currently training in Scotland, are explored. Building on previous literature, this study addresses, in particular, the attraction of the sport to the participants, the meaning and significance of violence for those participating in the sport and the ways in which gender is experienced and made sense of in the context of the male-dominated world of boxing. It shows that, in the opinion of the female boxers interviewed, violence has very little to do with female boxing, and, indeed, that such a misconception arises through ignorance of the sport, which is portrayed as more about control, discipline and respect than violence and aggression. As regards the experience of gender, these female boxers are not participating in a sport in a male dominated world with the intention of being seen as masculine: they wish to be viewed as equals, as boxers, but always as women.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“...considered in the abstract the boxing ring is ...where the laws of a nation are suspended”
(Oates, 1987: 19).

Relevance of boxing/female boxing to Criminology

Boxing is a fascinating subject for the criminologist as it “teeters on the border between legal and illegal” (Groombridge, 2017:150) and “...considered in the abstract the boxing ring is ...where the laws of a nation are suspended” (Oates, 1987: 19). Few sports in our modern day are as contentious as boxing, sanctioning, as it does, violence and aggression through its very aims: the fundamental objective of this sport is to knock one’s opponent out, whether technically or literally, through one-on-one combat within the confines of a cordoned off space. It is a male-dominated sport, often seen as a medium to promote a macho image and to prove ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 1995).

In his book of the same name, Groombridge (2017) introduces the concept of Sports Criminology, providing a critical criminological perspective on sport and its connection and occasional similarities to crime. In doing so, he points out that “crime and sport are two of the most gendered and gendering activities in modern life” (Ibid: viii) and he reflects on the fact that, just as more crime is committed by men, so too, more professional sport is played by men than women. He goes on to observe that the assaults, violations and injuries which occur and are permitted, or condoned, in the sports arena would be regarded as criminal in ‘real’ life. He notes, in particular, that boxing always involves the concepts of harm and violence, whether legal or illegal, and as such must be of interest to criminologists. Chaudhuri (2012) opines that the continued legal sanction of boxing defies rational explanation and is only deemed acceptable because society chooses to view it as so.

She goes even further to suggest that it is the actual violence displayed within the boxing ring which is the attraction of the sport to both participant and spectator: a viewpoint which is shared by Sheard (1997), who notes that the changing rules of boxing can be seen as a reflection of how society has become more civilised. Society, however, views such violence through different lenses: whereas aggression and violence are seen as being acceptable as proof of manliness and masculinity, society deems women who embrace violence as deviant and contravening accepted social norms (Heidensohn, 1985; Lloyd, 1995). As Groombridge states: “Boxing has often been illegal for men, but always deviant for women” (2016:143).

Historically, the boxing ring has been a space in which masculinity, manliness and virility are emphasised, revered and celebrated (Oates, 1987; Wacquant, 1995; Woodward, 2006; Matthews, 2016). Nevertheless, women’s boxing can be traced back to London in the 1720s, where it took the form of prize fighting with bare hands and was a bloody spectacle (Boddy, 2013). Most participants were women from lower social classes and bouts often involved the sexualisation of these women, as they ripped at each other’s clothes or fought topless. The lure of the sport was money and status and the bouts, which were mostly held in exhibition halls and at fairgrounds, attracted large crowds and substantial betting. Although middle class women were increasingly attracted to the sport, both as spectators and as participants, as the Victorian era began, and a delicate femininity of women became the more acceptable norm, female boxing, although still occurring, became less visible as it did not fit in with the perception of how females should behave. Instead, females were encouraged to participate in boxing merely for fitness training and ‘fights’ were choreographed exhibitions. In other words, violence in female boxing was not accepted in the way it was in men’s boxing.

In recent years the sport has become more popular with women, as indicated by its recent inclusion in the Olympic Games in 2012 and 2016. This participation by women in a sport which condones legitimised violence links to existing criminological scholarship regarding society’s perceptions and

attitudes to women and violence. Violence is perceived as a gendered practice, a male preserve, and those women who embrace violence are seen as defying traditional, social gender norms as well as the criminal laws of the land (Heidensohn, 1985). Lloyd (1995) posits that, although they commit fewer crimes than men, and substantially fewer violent crimes, women who participate in violence are perceived as worse than violent men because of this double deviance: as she states in the title of her book, these women are seen as “Doubly Deviant, Doubly Damned” (Lloyd, 1995). Thus, those women who wish to participate in the sport of boxing face a twofold challenge: firstly, their attraction to such a violent sport defies society’s construct of what it is to be female and feminine, and, secondly, the controversial sport, “conceptualised as aggressive, brutal, bloody and corrupt” (Halbert, 1997:13), is seen as the domain of men, where masculinity is proven. This offers up several questions for the criminologist to explore: (i) what attracts women to the sport, (ii) the meaning and significance of violence for those participating in the sport, and (iii) the ways in which gender is experienced and made sense of in the context of boxing.

The aims of this study and the research questions to be explored

This research aims to build on the current literature on women and violence, exploring the subjective experiences of, and attitudes to, violence in boxing of six female boxers training in Scotland, and, also, the ways in which participants’ gender is experienced and made sense of in the context of boxing. Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative methodology was utilised for data collection in the form of in depth semi-structured interviews, which allowed the individual perceptions and experiences of the participants to be fully addressed. This study seeks to analyse how the female boxers interviewed view violence, in particular the meaning and significance to them of the violence in which they participate within the confines of the boxing ring, and what attracts them to this traditionally male dominated sport. It further seeks to address the issue of how gender is experienced in the sport of boxing. Thematic analysis was used to interpret

and organise the findings of this research, in conversation with existing literature and using a framework of cultural, critical and feminist criminology.

Structure and overview of the dissertation

This chapter (Chapter One) has introduced the sport of female boxing and has set out the aims and objectives of the study, situating the research in context and establishing the relevance of the sport to criminology. The following chapter (Chapter Two) comprises a critical literature review concentrating on the masculine domination of sport, boxing in particular, the contentious position of female boxers within that framework and the current criminological research position relating to gender and violence. It also focuses on the gendered experience of other females in boxing gyms. Chapter Three is the methodology section which will discuss the research design choices made and will reflect upon the effectiveness of this design and its limitations. Chapter Four will comprise a discussion of the findings: all the data collected during the course of the research process will be collated, analysed and discussed in relation to the other studies mentioned in the literature review in Chapter Two. The final chapter (Chapter Five) will contain the conclusions reached as a result of analysis of the data collected and will reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of this particular research project. The primary finding of this research is that, in the opinion of those interviewed, violence has very little to do with female boxing and that those participating in the sport do not perceive themselves to be embracing violence.

Importance and significance of this research

Much of the research into the sport of boxing has been focused on male attitudes to violence and aggression, or the way the space and body are used in the boxing ring. This research is particularly relevant in light of the growing popularity of the sport amongst women and will focus on the

attitudes of female boxer participants, specifically focusing on the violence and aggression which are seen as an intrinsic feature of this contact sport. As a result of having now been included in two Olympic Games, female boxing has received more positive media attention and female boxing matches have been aired on mainstream television. Such exposure has, perhaps, altered society's position with regard to women and violence (Matthews, 2016).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

“Boxing is a purely masculine activity and it inhabits a purely masculine world... [it is] the obverse of the feminine” (Oates, 1987:70).

Introduction

Traditionally, boxing has been seen as a male dominated sport but, with its recent inclusion in the Commonwealth Games and two Olympic Games, female boxing is becoming increasingly popular. This research seeks to explore female participation in the legitimised violence of boxing: what attracts women to the sport, the meaning and significance of violence to them and the ways in which gender is experienced and made sense of in the context of boxing.

This chapter will provide an overview of previous research and literature concerning females and violence and the gendering of sports. It will begin by highlighting the concept of the male domination of sport as a means of reinforcing male superiority and will illustrate how boxing, in particular, has been portrayed as a medium for proving ‘hegemonic masculinity’, as defined by Connell (1987). Attention will then be given to the literature surrounding women who participate in violence and their understanding of gender; within the literature relating to the subject of women and violence, females who embrace violence have been, historically, viewed as behaving in a manner unacceptable to society’s cultural expectations and standards of femininity (Heidensohn, 1985). Thereafter, previous literature relating to female boxing, noting the experience of gender in the boxing ring, will be reviewed. This chapter will conclude by explaining the significance of this research study.

The history of male domination of sport and hegemonic masculinity

Throughout history sport has been seen as a male activity, celebrating strength, power, aggression and dominance: revered as being able to turn boys into men and used to aid training for military purposes (Loy and Kenyon, 1969; Messner and Sabo, 1990). American sociologist, Messner posits that gender is a determining factor of the roles played in society and that sport was a male-dominated area because women were not encouraged to participate. Exploring the rise of sport in 19th Century Britain, he notes that sport became more popular as “the conscious agency of women provided a direct threat to the ideology of male superiority” (Messner, 1990: 204). During times of war and fighting, male superiority is assured, however, during peacetime the balance of power may tilt towards women. New ways must be found to exhibit and reinforce ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and men’s power over women: men turned to combat sports such as rugby and boxing (Ibid).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was formulated and explored by R.W. Connell, a leading theorist in the area of gender studies and the sociology of masculinity, in her book, “*Gender and Power*” (1987). Connell uses the concept to explain how and why men maintain dominant roles over women and over other more marginalised masculinities: the ideal of a tough, dominant, aggressive male being the standard to which all young boys should aspire. She notes the use of sport: “In Western countries, for instance, images of ideal masculinity are constructed and promoted systematically through competitive sport... Prowess of this kind becomes a means of judging one’s masculinity” (Connell, 1987: 149). Whitson (1990) agrees that sport continues to reinforce the idea of hegemonic masculinity today as society celebrates sportsmen who embody aggression, skill and strength, whether on the sports field or in the ring, and men’s sports attract huge investment and huge crowds, far more than female sports (Groombridge, 2017).

In his thesis exploring boxing and the sociology of violence, Matthews (2011) cites criminologist and sports sociologist, Young (2000: 391): “Only a cursory glance at the nature and organisation of sport is necessary to demonstrate that many of our most popular sports, both at the recreational and elite level, are immersed in cultures of aggression and violence.”

Noting that aggression and violence have always been linked to masculinity, Halbert (1997) posits that “the myth of men’s ‘natural inclination’ to violence” along with the way society has constructed the concept of masculinity, leads the public to consider violent sports as ‘the exclusive domain of men’ (Halbert, 1997: 13). Matthews (2016) counters this argument, suggesting that, in our modern-day society, as our patriarchal society moves forward to a place of greater gender equality, the social landscape has changed, and sport is no longer viewed as an exclusively masculine domain, although he concedes that the male domination of boxing persists.

The history of boxing: legality and violence

Although boxing has its origins in the times of Ancient Greece, when it was popular as a method for preparing young men for battle, the sport, as we know it today, has its roots in the bare-knuckle fighting of eighteenth-century England. Early modern boxing had no rules, no referees and no timed rounds: fighting continued until one man surrendered or was knocked out or, in some cases, died. It was a brutal and bloody sport, the legality of which has often been debated. Throughout the years it was viewed as an outrage and a barbaric sport, with calls for it to be made illegal, but it continued to be popular with working class and aristocracy alike (Boddy, 2013; Boxingschool.co.uk. (2018)). In 1867, the Marquess of Queensberry rules, which made the wearing of leather gloves compulsory, were introduced to regulate the sport and improve the safety of participants: these rules are the foundation of modern boxing (Woodward, 2006; Oates, 1987, 2002; Gunn and Ormerod, 1995; Groombridge, 2017). Gunn and Ormerod (1995) explore the legality of the sport of boxing and

conclude that, despite the clear concept that the infliction of harm, or the attempt to inflict harm, by one individual upon another is illegal and that this is the basis of all boxing matches, boxing will never be banned as it is too popular.

Wacquant (2004) describes the boxing ring as a place where it is socially acceptable for pent up aggression, violence and negative emotions to be let loose. Literature also shows the benefit of boxing in aiding desistance from crime in young men, perhaps through giving them a focus and a place to expend violent energy: participation in legitimate violence influencing desistance from illegitimate violence (Wacquant, 1995, 2004; Jump 2016, 2017). Boxing as a legitimised form of violence is frequently used to prove the masculinity, toughness and manliness of those who box, providing affirmation of man as an aggressor. The boxing gym is seen as a masculine domain, into which females may be admitted and tolerated, but the overall atmosphere is of a male dominated space where testosterone and masculinity are the norm. Much of the literature describes boxing gyms as having boxing paraphernalia on the walls, iconic images of famous male boxers, both real and fictional, but no evidence of female boxers is displayed (Lafferty and McKay 2004; Woodward, 2006, 2008; Matthews, 2016; Jump, 2016). Although females are allowed to participate in the sport, the boxing world is still 'the male preserve' (Matthews 2016), where masculine power and dominance is reinforced through physical aggression and violence. Lindner (2012: 465) scathingly points out that "boxing is one of the very few social contexts in which archaic notions of (physical, violent, self-contained) masculinity continue to be performed and embodied." This violence, exhibited by male boxers, is accepted by our patriarchal society as proof of what it means to be a man. However, when that boxer is female, society's attitude to women who embrace violence is not so accepting, as evidenced by the criminological literature on the subject.

Feminist criminological literature on women and violence

Although most crime, especially violent crime, is perpetrated by boys and men (Becker and McCorkel, 2011), females are just as capable of violence, but society views this as more shocking. This viewpoint is evidenced by the high-profile abuse and murder trials of Myra Hindley and Ian Brady and of Rosemary and Fred West. In each of these cases, horrific crimes were perpetrated by all of those involved, however it was Myra Hindley and Rosemary West who were perceived as being particularly evil and deemed 'monsters' (Jewkes, 2015). Females who commit violent crimes or embrace violent behaviour are perceived as having breached two laws: firstly, the statutory laws of the land and, secondly, the more fundamental 'law', constructed by society, that women are the passive nurturers and should not exhibit aggressive tendencies, as aggression is the preserve of man (Heidensohn, 1985; Lloyd, 1995). As Gill states: "Women who behave in a violent or physically aggressive manner are among the most stigmatised groups in society" (2007:416).

Lloyd (1995) points out that, although now discredited, Lombroso and Ferrero, in their book *The Female Offender 1895*, viewed women as being ruled by their biology, without agency or control over their actions and if they committed a crime it was because they were more like men than women. She further notes that Pre-Menstrual Syndrome was first offered up as reason for female violent behaviour during the 1950s. Traditionally, women who committed violent offences were viewed as 'bad, mad or sad': ruled by their biology with no autonomy. These women were seen as born bad, having mental health issues or having been victims of a situation where they lost control (Heidensohn 1985). Jewkes (2015) observes that psychiatric pleas are lodged as a defence in far more trials where the defendant is a woman: rather than this being viewed as leniency towards a woman, in fact, it leads to incarceration in institutions for longer than a prison term would have been. It would seem that society prefers to view violent women as being mentally ill rather than criminal. Conversely, where it is clear that the female offender is sane, she is viewed as a monster:

if she is committing crime with a male partner, her deviance is seen as the more extreme and she is seen by the public as the more guilty and evil of the two (Lloyd, 1995; Jewkes, 2015).

Fitzroy (2001) posits that male violence occurs as a means to control, humiliate and oppress whereas female violence is more spur of the moment, an attempt to gain power in a powerless situation and should be considered as being as the result of violence experienced as a victim. He suggests that the trigger for male violence is control and for females it is protection of loved ones or property. Having interviewed many violent women during her research, Lloyd (1995) concludes that “women’s violence comes from a place different from men’s” (p190). Lloyd suggests that it is impossible to fully understand what has caused these women to act violently when one considers the male-powered society in which they live. The stereotypical gendering in society views women as passive and men as aggressive: the social construction of masculinity being almost synonymous with aggression. According to Lloyd, man is revered as the ‘norm’, thus these women are ‘othered’ and judged according to gender bias, not on the grounds of their circumstances. The current dissertation investigates the motivation behind the interviewees’ desire to participate in the legitimised violence of boxing and their understanding and experience of gender within the sport.

James W. Messerschmidt, criminologist and Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies at the University of Southern Maine, suggests that the desire to be violent is a masculine trait according to society’s cultural concepts: violence is a gendered concept which can be seen as an expression of masculinity and/or a rejection of femininity (Messerschmidt, 1993, 1995, 2002). According to his structured action theory, social structures channel an individual’s behaviour in specific ways depending on class, race and gender relations and on that individual’s understanding of what it means to be masculine or feminine. He believes that if a male commits a crime he is ‘doing masculinity’ and if a female does then she is doing a specific type of femininity. In a gang situation, Messerschmidt (2002: 461) puts forward the view that female members were exhibiting traits of

'bad girl femininity'. This view is challenged by feminist criminologist, Jody Miller (2002a, 2002b), who posits that the hypermasculinity of the gang environment led some of the girls in her study to adopt a masculine persona temporarily and that in order to embrace this masculine identity they had to cross gender: "...they reflect gender crossing, embracing a *masculine* identity that they view as contradicting their body sex category (that is, female)" (Miller, 2002a: 443). The girls in Miller's study did not suggest that women should be treated equally, they wanted to differentiate themselves from other girls and to be seen as 'one of the guys', according to Miller (p443): "It was specifically girls' success at gender crossing that designated them as equals." Messerschmidt contradicts this view: "The evidence before me then suggested that gang girls maintained a clear sense of themselves as members of the female sex category who embraced a feminine identity" (Messerschmidt, 2002: 463). This debate between Messerschmidt and Miller is of great relevance to this research, which aims to establish the participants' perceptions of their gender in the boxing environment and their defiance of the social norms of femininity.

A recurrent theme in criminological literature is the view that, according to traditional gender roles, women are considered to be gentle, submissive nurturers (Lloyd, 1995; Heidensohn, 1985). Batchelor (2007), writing about risk-seeking in young women, notes that women are more often portrayed as passive victims in situations rather than as actively taking risks. She goes on to observe that the literature on women and violence often focuses on this victimisation or attempts to use instances of previous abuses as justification for female violence. Batchelor (2005, 2007) posits that young women's agency must be acknowledged and that their risk-seeking activities, such as violence, may be a way for them to exercise control over their lives where they can. She found that those girls who participated in violence were exposed to violence routinely in their social environment, thus violence was the norm. Batchelor challenges the concept that girls who turn to violence are trying to copy their male counterparts. She offers the viewpoint that these girls embrace violence and violent behaviour as a means of proving themselves and gaining respect in

their social situation. Many of the girls she interviewed had suffered emotional and physical traumas and exhibited tough, hard personas in an attempt to protect themselves and ensure that they were left alone. Batchelor (2007) suggests that the girls participating in violent behaviour may also be drawn to risk-taking behaviour for the adrenaline rush it brings and refers to the study on 'edgework' by Lyng (1990).

According to Lyng, edgework activities, such as skydiving and motor racing, push the participants to their physical and mental limits and involve voluntary risk-taking which can be used to achieve a sense of agency and control. He suggests that where there is no control in the home or work life, control can be taken in a risk-taking activity, especially where there is a risk of death or serious injury. It is submitted here that boxing should be viewed as an edgework activity and, as such, edgework could explain female participation in this sport where violence and risk of injury, or even death, are fundamental. Lyng's work is, perhaps, of limited relevance to girls in a gang or female boxers, because the participants in his study were all white, working males, who used, according to Lyng, their skydiving as a means to escape the limited control they had at work. However, Batchelor agrees that the theory of edgework is relevant to research into violence and women and that such risk seeking behaviour can have a positive effect on "young women's sense of self and self-efficacy" (Batchelor, 2007: 205).

Previous research has suggested that females feel guilty or ashamed after violent activity and explain it as a temporary loss of control (Fitzroy, 2001): Batchelor cites a study by Anne Campbell (1993) who found that men viewed aggression as a means of exerting control whereas women viewed it as a loss of control, for which they felt guilty. Batchelor rejects these findings as reinforcing the stereotypical, dated view that women are irrational and emotional. She reports that the girls she interviewed enjoyed the violence and were excited by it. They used exhibitions of violence to have fun, impress their friends, stand up for themselves and to gain respect. To these

young women their peers were their family: most had a disadvantaged, troubled home life and they depended on the gang for social and emotional support. They viewed violence in two ways: in control and pre-meditated or out of control, in the heat of the moment. Controlled violence was justified and enjoyable (Batchelor, 2007). In the culture of the gang, violence by females is seen as a cultural norm even though in the broader culture of hegemonic masculinity such violent behaviour challenges what is understood in terms of emphasised femininity (Messerschmidt, 2002). Batchelor advises that although the girls in her study acknowledged that violence did carry masculine connotations of 'independence, strength, emotional stoicism (and) toughness' (Ibid 215), they were not trying to be male: "Rather, they appropriated an ideology of femininity according to which the use of violence was socially sanctioned" (Ibid, 216). In the cultural situation of being in a gang, it was deemed acceptable for female members to be violent. In the same way, the use of violence is culturally and socially sanctioned in the boxing ring, but it is interesting to note that the experiences of and attitudes to female boxers are very different to those of the male boxers.

How gender is experienced in the masculine domain of the boxing ring?

In her 1997 article tracing the controversial history of women's boxing, Hargreaves writes:

"Blood, bruises, cuts and concussion, which accompany boxing's intrinsic aggression, violence and danger, are popularly considered to be legitimate and even 'natural' for men (Messner, 1992: 67), but absolutely at odds with the essence of femininity. Boxing, as Wacquant (1995: 90) argues, is deeply gendered, embodying and exemplifying 'a definite form of masculinity: plebeian, heterosexual and heroic' (Hargreaves, 1997:35).

Paradis (2012) emphasises that gender relations underpin male dominated sports and during her ethnographic study of boxing she became aware that her legitimacy as a boxer was constantly

questioned, as though she could not be a female and a boxer. This viewpoint is reinforced by Messner (2007) who struggles to accept that females, although possessing great athletic ability in other fields, could ever be viewed as being physically capable of using their bodies as “violent weapons to be used against other bodies” (2007:5) as this would be in direct conflict with societal and cultural gender norms. Similarly, in her autoethnographic study in Bridgewater, USA, McNaughton (2012) investigates how her participation in the combat sport of Muay Thai violates the gender norms by emphasising her physical capability and aggression. She observes that if a male boxer or fighter is not performing to the satisfaction of a coach, he will be told that he “hits like a girl” (2012: 6): further proof of the hegemonic masculinity of this space and of the view that females do not measure up. She notes a reluctance in the male boxers to fight her as an equal because they see her as a female rather than a boxer.

In their Australian ethnography (it is perhaps relevant to note that in New South Wales, Australia, women’s amateur boxing was illegal from 1986 until 2008), Lafferty and McKay (2004) note the inequalities in the treatment of male and female boxers and the way that female boxers are treated in the gym. An experienced, competition-winning female boxer who trained in the gym was frequently ignored or side-lined, and the females never seemed to get the prime spots for training: these were deemed to be the right of the men. In addition, Lafferty noted that the female participants, including herself, were often viewed as sexual objects rather than as boxers. Interestingly, according to Lafferty and McKay, the female boxers were annoyed with the females who came to the gym in skimpy workout clothes, as they felt it demeaned the women and did nothing to assist those females who wanted to box seriously. This, once again, raises the question, previously debated by Miller (2002a, 2002b) and Messerschmidt (2002), of whether a female must be viewed as ‘one of the boys’ or as ‘an honorary man’ to be taken seriously as a boxer. Nash (2017) points out that a female participating in such a male-dominated sport can be seen as a challenge to a male boxer’s masculinity: she experienced excessive aggression from an

inexperienced male sparring partner who punched at her viciously in the boxing ring, as though to prove his male dominance. In contrast, other researchers note that some male boxers are reluctant to fight females for fear of hurting them, viewing them as weaker, lesser and in need of protecting (Lafferty and McKay, 2004; Woodward, 2006, 2008; Jump, 2016). Carlsson (2017) realised during her research that she had initially distanced herself from her own femininity in an attempt to be taken seriously as a boxer and that she, subconsciously, belittled those she viewed as not being ‘real boxers’ (2017:946). This led her to overemphasise her femininity: training in skirts and wearing flowery boxing gloves, although as she writes: “I worried that I would not be accepted as a ‘real boxer’ if I appeared too ‘girly’” (2017: 946). The reaction from her male counterparts was initially mocking and derogatory but when they saw her knowledge and competence as a boxer, they accepted her.

What is the significance of this research?

Most of the focus of previous research into boxing has been on the use of the boxing gym as a space and the use of the body as a means to determine ability and strength. Such research has uncovered that attitudes to female boxers have ranged from dismissive to derogatory to reluctant acceptance and admiration – though this admiration seems limited and conditional (Tjonndal, 2016; Nash, 2017; Woodward, 2013). Research has also focused on the sexualisation of females in a boxing environment (Hargreaves, 1997; Jump, 2016; Nash, 2017). Paradis (2012) stresses the difference between those women who box for fitness but never spar against an opponent and those who fight in the ring; this research seeks to explore the motivation of those who choose to enter the boxing ring to fight. Violence is traditionally socially constructed as a gendered practice, an expression of masculinity and/or rejection of femininity (Messerschmidt 2002), and, whereas, Matthews (2011) explored the attitude of male boxers to violence, he interviewed no female boxers to ascertain their viewpoints. He posits the similarity between the attitude of some of those who participated in the

London riots with those boxers in the gym: the violence was exciting and caused an enjoyable rush of adrenaline.

Gill (2007) explored the attitude of female rugby players to violence on the field, emphasising that those women who behave in a violent or aggressive manner are one of the most stigmatised groups in society as they contradict the existing gender norms in society.

According to traditional gender roles, women are deemed 'essentially' gentle, submissive, and passive. Women who transgress these roles by engaging in acts of violence are therefore considered 'doubly deviant' (Heidensohn 1985), as having violated not only the law, but also the accepted norms of femininity. Over the past two decades, feminist criminologists have conducted a range of research into girls, women and violent crime, focusing particularly on the extent to which participants construct such violence as a gendered practice – e.g. as an expression of masculinity and/or rejection of femininity (c.f. Messerschmidt 2002; Miller 2001, 2002). This dissertation seeks to build on this literature to explore women's participation in boxing, a sport involving sanctioned forms of violence and aggression. There is very little existing research on women's boxing and none that utilises the theoretical insights of criminology. This research will focus on the attraction of the sport, the female boxers' attitudes to and understanding of violence and their experience of gender in the male dominated world of boxing.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

“Methodology refers to the principles, procedures, and practices that govern research”

(Marczyk, DeMatteo and Festinger, 2005:22)

Introduction

This chapter details the research design methodology and the data collection process utilised in this research study. It will firstly describe the aims and objectives of the study, thereafter it will give details of, firstly, the qualitative methods used to collect the data and, secondly, the method used to analyse this data and the justification for the use of those methods. Ethical considerations and the strengths and limitations of the particular methodology used will be discussed in terms of the practical process of this research study. The chapter will conclude with a view on the overall effectiveness of the methodology used.

Aims and objectives

This research is a theoretical and empirical exploration of female participation in the traditionally masculine world of boxing: a sport involving sanctioned forms of violence and aggression. It seeks to build upon the feminist criminological research into girls, women and violence, previously referred to and examined in the Literature Review (Chapter Two), which has focused particularly on the extent to which participants construct such violence as a gendered practice. Based on six qualitative interviews with women currently training in Scotland, as either amateur or professional boxers, it aims to explore:

- (i) what attracts women to the sport,
- (ii) the meaning and significance of violence for those participating in the sport, and
- (iii) the ways in which gender is experienced and made sense of in the context of boxing.

Research design: a qualitative approach

There are key philosophical and methodological issues to be considered in any research project and a researcher should consider his/her ontological and epistemological position: according to Crotty (1998), all research methods are based upon assumptions of truth and perceptions of the reality of the world. Creswell (2014) stresses the importance of not limiting oneself to a single type of research, but to consider which is the most suitable to answer the research question before you. The focus of my research was to ascertain the personal motivations, experiences and feelings of the women in the context of their participation in boxing. To do this I had to immerse myself in the world of boxing, thus, I favoured a qualitative research design over a quantitative approach: qualitative methods are more suited to research projects which seek to explain social phenomena and their contexts (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). My ontological position of interpretivism and my constructionist epistemological stance suited the qualitative approach, as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3):

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible...At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”

My husband has been boxing as a hobby for over seventeen years and my son has participated in the sport for five years: they both love to spar and are of the opinion that there is no point in boxing if you are not going to spar. I have participated in boxing training for over a year and thoroughly enjoy hitting the pads but have no desire to hit anyone or be hit. When considering the method to use to conduct my research I, briefly, considered taking an autoethnographic approach, which has been successfully employed in previous studies (Wacquant, 1994, 2004; Lafferty and McKay, 2004;

Nash, 2016). The autoethnographic study has been defined as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis, 2010). However, the desire to spar/fight is not in me and this, combined with the time limitations of a Masters, rendered autoethnographic research impossible. It was important to me to get the female boxers’ personal opinions of the perception and meaning of violence and gender in the context of the boxing world and to allow them the freedom to express concepts of which I may not have thought. I chose to use a qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis of these interviews to answer the research aims and objectives.

Data collection: semi-structured interviews

The use of interviews is a popular research method: these can be structured, unstructured or semi-structured. Structured interviews are more often used in quantitative research and can be quite restrictive, allowing little room for the expansion of concepts: their purpose is to answer specific research questions (Bryman, 2012). Unstructured interviews are more like conversations and may not cover the relevant issues in a research project. Semi-structured interviewing allows the researcher and the interviewee flexibility to move away from set questions to explore different ideas and concepts that flow from the interviewee’s responses. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) posit that such semi-structured interviews offer a ‘depth of focus and the opportunity... for clarification and detailed understanding’ (p37). In qualitative interviewing, every interview is different, as the researcher is more interested in the personal experiences and opinions of the interviewee; whereas in quantitative, structured interviewing the results must be more standardised, and all questions must be the same to ensure reliability and validity. When conducting a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a list of questions or themes to be covered, however the interviewee may respond as freely as they choose: they are able to be as expansive or as brief as they wish, and they may veer off on a tangent. The most positive characteristic of these interviews is that they allow for great flexibility: the same questions may not be asked in the same order, new concepts may emerge in

each interview, but generally, all the interviews will cover the same topics in a way that suits each interviewee. It also enables the researcher to raise emergent issues in subsequent interviews, that he/she had not considered originally. It is essential that the researcher be a good listener during semi-structured interviews so that no issues are missed, and any new avenue or concept may be explored and expanded upon: in my research, a ‘throw away’ comment proved to be a rich source of information. It is also important for the researcher to be non-judgmental and not to allow any personal opinions or feelings influence the interviewee. Researcher bias is impossible to eradicate completely as the semi-structured interview becomes more like a conversation than a structured interview: certain avenues may or may not be pursued, depending on the responses and guidance of the researcher. It is important not to influence the interviewee and to ensure that one’s interpretation of their responses is correct (Bryman, 2012).

In the case of this research study, the decision to use semi-structured interviews allowed me to guide the discussions without forcing the interviewees down certain avenues, to respond to what they said and to tailor the interview to suit the individual interviewee. Each interview followed, roughly, the same format, according to the intended interview questions and themes schedule drawn up in advance (Appendix D). Questions were asked regarding four main areas: personal background, involvement in boxing, attitudes to physical contact and violence and, finally, attitudes to and experiences of gender. However, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews enabled me to allow a natural flow of conversation which led to a fuller exploration of these female boxers’ individual attitudes to aggression and violence and their experience of gender in the male dominated sport.

Participants

The participants were, necessarily, recruited by means of convenience sampling: the interviewees had to be over 18, female and involved in boxing at either amateur or professional level in Scotland:

this is a very small community. As previously stated, both my husband and I attend boxing gyms and we have friends who are former professional boxers turned coaches. Through these contacts, I was able to gain access to the female boxers who participated, none of whom were known to me personally beforehand. Three participants were recruited using this process. Snowball sampling was used to recruit the other three participants. Snowball sampling is defined by Davies et al. (2011) as “the process of constructing a sample of research participants from the recommendations and suggestions of other research participants” (p354). This method is particularly useful when the social group being studied is quite exclusive and difficult to reach. After each interview I asked the interviewee if they knew of anyone else who would be willing to participate in this research study. I gave them extra copies of the Plain Language statement, to explain the research purpose, together with my contact details and asked anyone interested to contact me. In fact, in each case, I was sent their details and given permission to contact them directly. In this way, I was able to interview two professional boxers and four amateurs, who ranged in age from 19 to 37 years.

Ethical considerations

Two main ethical issues which must be considered in any research are, firstly, that no harm may befall a participant as a result of the research, and, secondly, that any consent given must be on the basis that participants have been fully informed of all information needed to make the decision as to whether or not to participate (Bryman, 2012; Furseth and Everett, 2013).

The avoidance of harm to a participant is essential and, as requested by the Ethics Committee, I advised each participant that whether she took part or not, or if she decided to end the interview for any reason, this would have no effect on her relationship with her coach/trainer who provided me with her contact details. I also made it clear that an interviewee may refuse to answer any question they did not wish to answer and that they may terminate the interview at any point.

I took several steps to ensure that fully informed consent was given by the participants. I began by verbally explaining in detail the purpose of the research, then I gave them the Plain Language Statement (Appendix B) and asked them to read it and to ask if they required any further information. I stressed the fact that their participation was voluntary, that they may refuse to answer any question, without having to give a reason, and that they may stop the interview at any point, again, without having to explain: none of the participants in my research refused to answer any of the questions and nobody stopped the interview early. I advised them that, although every effort would be taken to ensure the anonymity of participants and that pseudonyms would be used when writing up my findings, total anonymity could not be guaranteed as the Scottish female boxing community is so small and stories or phrases may be easily attributable to certain participants: every boxer confirmed that this aspect of the research did not trouble her and, indeed, often referred to each other during the interviews. Confidentiality is another crucial consideration in any research and I assured the participants that any information disclosed during the interview would be treated as confidential and all data collected would be stored securely until the completion of my dissertation at which time it would be destroyed. (Such data was stored in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer: accessible only me or by my advisor, Dr Batchelor, per the terms of the ethical approval.)

Prior to beginning each interview, I requested permission to audio record the interview so that I could later transcribe the entire conversation, thus avoiding the possibility of missing vital information. Having confirmed that the participants understood the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time, I then asked them to sign the consent form (Appendix C).

Data analysis

I utilised the method of thematic analysis to make sense of the data collected: Braun and Clarke (2006:79) define thematic analysis as being “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting

patterns (themes) within data” and note the flexibility of such a method of analysis, as it does not bind the researcher to a particular theoretical stance.

Immediately after each interview, I transcribed the recorded material in preparation for thematic analysis. It was essential to my research that the transcribing be done as quickly as possible so that the particular emotions and nuances of each interview were not lost.

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, before transcribing the interviews, I assigned pseudonyms to each: namely, Boxer A, Boxer B, Boxer C, Boxer D, Boxer E and Boxer F. I began by analysing the transcripts, reading them in conjunction with any observations I had noted in my field notes and searching for recurrent themes. As each interview was completed and transcribed, I used any information and insights gleaned to improve upon my interview technique and pursuit of specific themes in subsequent interviews. Seven themes emerged from this thematic analysis, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Strengths and limitations/practical implementation of the research

Upon receiving confirmation of ethical approval, I approached one of the boxers whose details had been given to me. Unfortunately, I quickly discovered that boxing, like football, follows a seasonal timetable and the beginning of the research process had coincided with the ‘off-season’ period. Several of the boxers had gone on holiday and were not training as often at the gyms which I had identified prior to my study. In addition, some of the boxers had taken the opportunity to go to sparring camps abroad. Combining these factors with the already relatively small number of Scottish female boxers normally available, I had to accept that I would only be able to interview six boxers, due to time constraints, not eight, as I had initially hoped.

Two of the boxers were willing to speak to me but were unable to meet me in person: in each case I conducted the interview via Facetime. I read out the Plain Language Statement and the Consent Form in full and asked them to provide verbal consent to participation, which consent was recorded as part of the interview. I also sent a hard copy of the consent form to them with a stamped addressed envelope and asked them to sign it and return it to me as soon as possible.

A further challenge which presented itself was the time-consuming task of transcribing interviews. Each boxer was passionate about her sport and combined with my own enthusiasm and interest in the boxing world, most of the interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and a half and the conversation continued after the interview was completed. This also led me to remark in my field notes that I should have kept the recorder on as relevant comments were made when the audio recording had ceased.

The sample size used in this research was relatively small, however, it successfully raised several common themes. Bryman (2012) cites a qualitative study by Guest et al. (2006) in which they advise that although they carried out sixty in depth interviews in the course of their research, after transcribing and thematically analysing twelve of them, the main themes which were ultimately discovered had already been established. I would argue that in my research, although the sample size is fairly small, the female boxing world in Scotland is small, and the participants were a good representation of this particular population. However, it would be extremely interesting to pursue this field of study with a larger sample and perhaps, even to compare, within the same study, the attitudes of female boxers and male boxers to the issues raised re gender and violence.

The most positive thing that I encountered during this research was the enthusiasm and eagerness of those boxers who were able and willing to participate. Each of them commented how much they had enjoyed sharing their love of the sport and being given the opportunity to discuss some

common misconceptions. They encouraged me to contact them at any time if any other questions occurred to me and, finally, all said that they would be keen to participate in further studies.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the methodology used in this research study. It reiterated the aims and objectives of this study and then justified the decision to use the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews to explore the research issues raised. The ethical considerations which arose during this research were discussed, together with the measures taken to satisfy these concerns. Thereafter, the method used to analyse the data obtained was explained and justified. Finally, the strengths and limitations of this research were detailed as the practical application of the chosen methodology was examined. The following chapter will discuss the findings of this research.

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CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

“Violence is not boxing, I think that control is boxing. Violence to me is people who batter their partners, that emotional loss of control as opposed to a physical action. That is definitely what boxing teaches you: that loss of control and violence is wrong.”

(Boxer C in Interview, July 2018)

Introduction

This chapter, firstly, introduces the participants and thereafter analyses the findings of the qualitative empirical research process detailed in the previous chapter (Methodology). Three areas were explored during this research, namely, (i) the appeal of boxing for participants, (ii) participants’ understanding of and attitudes to violence and (iii) the ways in which participants’ gender is experienced and made sense of in the context of the male dominated sphere of the boxing world. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six female boxers, aged between 19 and 37, currently training in Scotland. When analysing the transcribed interviews, seven themes were identified by use of the coding technique detailed in the Methodology Chapter: (i) skill and competitiveness, (ii) a chance for a better life, (iii) control and discipline, (iv) prejudice and ignorance, (v) equality and respect, (vi) female empowerment and confidence and (vii) the effect of parenthood. During the research process the issues of control, discipline and respect were raised several times in each interview. Participants were adamant that female boxing was not centred around violence but around discipline and control and all agreed that boxing had taught them that to be violent and to lose control was wrong. Utilising direct quotes from the participants to illustrate these findings, this chapter will discuss each theme in detail and will attempt to situate it within the context of previous literature in this area. It will also explore new issues raised by this research and any suggestions for future research.

The participants

Throughout this dissertation the participants are referred to by their assigned pseudonyms, in accordance with one of the conditions of the ethical approval of this research, namely that the participants' anonymity be protected as far as possible. All six of the participants are currently training and living in Scotland, two as professional boxers and four training at amateur level.

Boxer A, amateur, is a 27 year old sports therapist, working in the gym in which she trains. She lives with her partner, a professional male boxer, and has been boxing since she was 17.

Boxer B, professional, is a 37 year old Greek national, who came to Scotland to improve her boxing. She is divorced and works in security. She first boxed when she was 21 but had to stop for personal reasons. She took up the sport again at the age of 31 and says that boxing is all she thinks about.

Boxer C, professional, is a 30 year old sub-sea engineer. She enjoyed combat sports as a child, first doing a little boxing at 11 or 12, and started boxing competitively at 17. She lives with her wife in Aberdeen.

Boxer D, amateur, is 25 years old and began boxing a few days before her fifteenth birthday. She is the third youngest of ten children. Last year, she was working in a residential school full-time, whilst trying to do a college course on day release and train for competitions, she was unable to keep up with all of these commitments. This year she has decided to focus solely on her boxing.

Boxer E, amateur, is 21 years old. She lives with her partner and their 8 month old daughter. She took up boxing at the age of 17, after seeing female boxing at the Commonwealth Games on television. Competing and training with the Scotland team, she got to selection for the Commonwealth Games 2018 and then discovered she was pregnant. She has only recently returned to training.

Boxer F, amateur, is 19 years old and single. She began boxing at the age of ten when, having been suspended from primary school, her dad took her to a boxing gym in the hope that she would learn some discipline. She is determined to go as far as she can with her boxing and is currently waiting to hear if she has made the Great Britain squad.

Skill and competitiveness

When reflecting upon what first attracted them to the sport of boxing, every participant emphasised her love of sport and athleticism. Each had been sporty as a child and enjoyed physical challenges and combat sports: two had started training in the sport of Muay Thai, one had participated in karate from the age of 4, two more mentioned basketball and Tae kwon do. All admitted to being extremely competitive with a desire to push themselves and win.

This competitiveness had been a definite factor in their choice of such a physically demanding sport, but when asked, not one of the participants in this study considered the perceived violence of boxing as part of its attraction, in fact, Boxer A admitted that she had previously considered Thai boxing but “the thought of someone kicking me in the head was terrifying.” She stressed the fascination of the technical skill required to box successfully: “I have never, ever thought of it as violence. I’ve always thought of it as a skill sport.” Boxer A also expressed the opinion that this tactical, technical aspect is what particularly appeals to females:

“...it’s not just something in myself but something I see in girls overall, they technically just pick it up better. Girls don’t have the bravado that boys have that they need to prove themselves and just punch something. Girls listen.”

This viewpoint was shared by several of the other boxers. Boxer B advised that it is not instinct that rules when one is fighting “when you are boxing, it is the training that rules, that is why it is called ‘the sweet science’. It is like a chess match. It is a skill.” When asked about the attraction of the sport for her, Boxer D stated:

“What attracted me to the boxing was that it wasn’t an aggressive sport. People always think boxing is violent, but it’s no! See for me, and a lot of women will say this too, it’s the tactics, the techniques, the outsmarting your opponent, the thinking, the fitness. That’s what attracts me.”

All of the participants mentioned that pushing themselves to the limit and beyond in training, sparring and fighting was part of the attraction of the sport. The search for the adrenaline rush of boxing reflected the study on edgework by Lyng (1990) and Boxer B confirmed that if she did not box she would probably replace the adrenaline rush by “racing fast cars or motorbikes or something!”

A chance for a better life

Although every participant stressed the skill and discipline as being part of the appeal of the sport, Boxers E and F, who were the youngest interviewees in this research, mentioned that they saw boxing as their “way out” of the socially and economically disadvantaged situations into which they

had been born. Boxer E had participated in karate for years, prior to starting boxing, but it had become too expensive to continue and, in her opinion, “because it is not an Olympic sport, it is not going to take you anywhere.” She described boxing, and the opportunities for travel and competitive success, as her chance to improve her social standing, to make something of herself and gain respect. She explained that she had never been academic at school and describes herself as “the brawn not the brains!” She continued: “...I don’t feel that I have achieved anything in my life and I really want to. That’s cool, you know? Not necessarily be famous but so that people would know me.”

Similarly, Boxer F described the neighbourhood where she grew up as being rough and socially deprived and she explained that she had “got in with a wild crowd.” Her route into boxing was totally different to the other boxers: she had been in trouble at school and on the streets and was introduced to boxing at the age of ten by her father, who hoped that it would keep her out of trouble. She ‘went off the rails’ at fourteen and spent some time in a young offenders’ institution. At the age of sixteen, she decided to take her boxing seriously:

“Everyone has their own motivation, but like I said, I’ve been brought up kinda tough, but, for me, boxing got me away from all of that. It is an escape...If it wasn’t for boxing I wouldn’t like to say where I’d be – in a bad place, probably.”

Boxer F expressed her determination to use her boxing to give herself a better life and in order to do this she had moved away from the place she had grown up and distanced herself from her old friends. Boxer F’s experiences, and to a lesser extent those of Boxer E, reflect the studies of Wacquant (1995, 2004) and Jump (2016, 2017) into the benefits of boxing for delinquent youths and show that boxing may also be an escape for some young women. The experiences of Boxers E

and F also support the idea, expressed by Batchelor (2005, 2007) that such risk-seeking activities may be a way for these young women to exercise control over their lives where they can.

Control and discipline

Each participant was keen to emphasise the control and discipline involved in boxing and boxing training. The words ‘discipline, control and respect’ cropped up time and again in interview. They all agreed that, although a boxer may come across as aggressive, if that aggression is not controlled the fight will be lost. Boxer A declared: “I definitely think that if you do lose your temper and lose your control, you have lost the match. It’s all about discipline and control: using your boxing brain.” This opinion was reinforced by Boxer C who advised:

“I think that if you are a violent and angry person and you go into a boxing ring, you’ve to last quite a long time. If you have a burst of anger, it fizzles out. You cannot afford to do that when you are boxing. You do get moments when you get a bit annoyed but then you have lost control and you have as good as lost the fight... you always have to be controlled, you always have to be able to step off and turn it down, you have to be able to turn it on and off.”

All interviewees agreed that the coaches and referees were crucial to the sport: all sparring and competitive bouts were supervised and controlled, and the safety of the boxers was paramount. When asked to compare violence in the street with the violence exhibited in a boxing ring, each participant vehemently defended the sport of boxing as being totally different to street fighting. “It is violence, I suppose, but mentally, it is not,” declared Boxer B. Boxer E reinforced the idea of boxing being controlled: “...the referee can stop it, if it is going too far and one of them is not responding...” and Boxer D, describing how as a young teenager she would be pulled into street fights, confirmed the control she now has, personally: “I have much more confidence since I’ve

been boxing. If someone tried to noise me up I would walk away, I have really good self-control now.” Boxer A summed up the difference, in her opinion:

“Well, if I was to fight in the street I would have to have a really strong hatred for someone, whereas in boxing I’ve actually got the opposite. I’ve got so much respect for someone who actually steps inside ropes...I don’t look at boxing as hurting you, however, I do know that that is a risk, and that I could get hurt too, but I would never go in with the intention to hurt, kill or harm anyone, whereas violence in the street, you are going in with the full intention of hurting and harming someone.”

Boxer F echoed this viewpoint that she never enters a boxing ring with the intent to do serious harm to another person and that violence on the streets must be viewed as totally different:

“The difference between street violence and boxing violence is that it is not just violence, you are learning respect and discipline and how to conduct yourself. Going out in the street and acting like a brute, no one is going to benefit from that, no one is going to win the fight. It is totally different.”

Boxer D also advised that she preferred to use the word ‘bout’ rather than ‘fight’ when discussing boxing as ‘fight’ conjured up the wrong impression. In her words, “it’s not really a fight, is it? You’re not going in to hurt someone. You are not wanting to be aggressive. It is very controlled, not an act of violence or aggression, like a fight.”

Boxers B, D, E and F pointed out that the control and discipline that they learn at their boxing training also guides the way in which they conduct themselves outside the boxing world. The findings in this section show that contrary to previous studies, such as those by Matthews (2016)

and Lindner (2012) into male boxing, the female boxers viewed control and discipline to be more relevant to boxing than violence. Considering these findings in the context of the literature on women and violence, such as the work of Heidensohn (1985) and Lloyd (1995), it can be seen that the participants reject the concept that they are embracing violence: each boxer confirmed that violence, as they understood it, had little or no place in the boxing ring. This rejection of the idea that boxing is rooted in violence could be seen as evidence of an awareness of society's accepted gender norms; by refusing to acknowledge that they are embracing violence, in any way, the participants cannot be subjected to the censure of society for defying these gender norms. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, Campbell (1993) posits that men view aggression as a means to exert control, whereas women see it as a loss of control and Fitzroy (2001) suggests that women feel guilty or ashamed after violent activity. However, such an interpretation of the position of the participants is troublesome as it would imply an element of shame and denial about their love of the sport and, as stated by Batchelor (2007), it would remove the agency of these women. Boxer C, when asked if she was ever uncomfortable discussing her boxing, said:

“I don't think so. I've come across people who are surprised, but I would never feel uncomfortable because I am proud of my achievements. I was the first female Scottish professional, the first open champion. I've done a lot for the sport. I love to talk about this sport and everything I have done.”

Prejudice and ignorance

A clear theme which emerged during the interviews was the prejudice and ignorance surrounding the true nature of female boxing: all of the participants mentioned the fact that there is a common misconception that boxing is violent and aggressive and that any female who wishes to participate is seen as not being like 'normal' girls. This reflects the 'othering' of women who embrace

violence, as discussed by Heidensohn (1985) and Lloyd (1995), and the idea that the desire to be violent is a masculine trait (Messerschmidt 1993, 1995, 2002).

Boxer A commented that she sometimes feels uncomfortable in the female-dominated world of the hairdresser's and would be nervous to admit that she was a boxer. When asked for an explanation, she stated: "...I don't know why that's the only time I feel like that, in places like that. I am worried that they will see me as an outsider, and this aggressive stereotype." Boxer F confirmed that, in her opinion, it is females who are more judgmental of girls who want to box and, although it had never impacted on her life, she was aware that other 'girly girls' viewed her as different. The other female boxers agreed that the female boxer is often viewed as a stereotype: as butch, aggressive and gay. Boxer E admitted that, when she began training as a boxer after years of karate, she expected any other female boxer she met in the gym to be a lesbian and that one of the men (who is now her partner) assumed that she was.

"...I thought I'd go in and if there was any girls there they'd be lesbians...I mean not that that would be a problem but I thought there would be and there hasn't been, and everyone thought I was one and I'm not! So, stereotypical viewpoints!"

Boxer C had also experienced this type of prejudice:

"Ha-ha! Yes, I might shave my hair off to conform...but ...people do have this perception and because I am gay as well, people have this perception that I should be a big butch 80kg female with a shaved head and tattoos all over my face!"

It was a popular opinion amongst the interviewees that the public's viewpoint and perceptions about the violence of boxing, and the type of female who participated, were changing since the Olympic

and Commonwealth Games. Boxer D suggested that the prejudice and stereotypes arose through ignorance of the sport. Historically, female boxing was rarely seen on mainstream television, but this changed when it was included in the Olympic and Commonwealth Games and the public were able to see the skill and tactics involved, and the different types of women who fought. She blamed professional boxing for giving the wrong impression of the sport. Boxer D: “Quite a lot of pro-boxing is all about playing up. Like, you know at the weigh in, facing off and being aggressive? That’s what the audience wants, it’s no real. Most boxers are pals.”

Boxer D was, also, of the opinion that the spectators at professional boxing matches were not as interested in the female boxing bouts because they did not have a true understanding of the technicalities of the sport, “they are just there for the spectacle, so...I think sometimes they have that mindset...oh, I don’t like women boxing...but they don’t really know female boxing.” This ignorance of the true nature of the world of boxing was again emphasised by Boxer D:

“...that’s the thing, boxing has never been a place of violence. It is a safe place, where you can go, you can make mistakes and learn from it. You’ve got people around you who are looking after you, it’s a safe place. The total opposite of violence.”

Equality and respect

Following on from the discussions of ignorance and prejudice outside the ring, the participants shared their experiences of being women training and competing within such a male dominated space and, with regard to this, the words ‘equality’ and ‘respect’ were frequently used. Each had started boxing in a gym where she was, initially, the only female. Although all competitive boxing is separated into male and female bouts, training involves sparring with whoever is training at the same time, regardless of gender. All participants regularly spar with male boxers during training sessions and did not want to be treated differently because they were women. It became clear that

all the participants in this study preferred to train in casual, asexual clothing, however, in each case this did not seem to be a deliberate attempt to deny their femininity. In the words of Boxer D:

“Well, aye, I guess from the start I just wore baggy t-shirts and joggies when I was training, feeling comfortable, not really drawing any attention to myself, but that was really just my personality, not because I was a girl or anything.”

Boxers A, C and E also preferred to train in similar attire, but all agreed that there was nothing wrong with wearing pink, flowery kit, it just did not suit their personalities: all admitted to being ‘tomboys’ when younger. They all were proud to be women who box, happy to be seen as ‘one of the guys’ in the gym, subjected to all the same training as the male boxers and given no preferential treatment because they were female, but they denied ever trying to be seen as male. Comparing and analysing these findings in the context of the theories put forward by both Miller (2002a, 2002b) and Messerschmidt (2002), previously discussed in the literature review (Chapter Two), it was evident that the concept of wanting to be seen as temporarily masculine was rejected by every boxer, as was Messerschmidt’s concept of ‘bad girl femininity’ (2002: 461). The participants did not view themselves as ‘bad’ or ‘girl’, simply as ‘boxer’. Boxer B, now a professional boxer, remembered her first few months of training at a club where she was the only female training with approximately 20 men:

“I was not there to provoke, I never wear tight clothing or be girly, sexy, flirty. I was only there for my boxing. I did not want to be seen as a boy, just as a boxer. Not to meet people, not to flirt, just to box. I just needed one day to show them my boxing.”

The idea of being accepted on an equal footing was a theme which emerged in every interview: each interviewee wished to be seen as neither male nor female but as ‘boxer’. Boxer D: “I just want

to be seen as a boxer, not really as a girl or a guy, but inside the ring we are all boxers. The thing about boxing is that everyone has got that mutual respect, you know? You're a boxer- *well in!*"

Boxer F declared:

"I think that I train better and harder than the boys because I think, in the back of my head, I feel I have to prove myself *because* I am a girl! But, I don't emphasise or hide my femininity, I am not trying to be a boy. I just want people to see me as a boxer!"

However, each participant also stressed that, as previously stated, although happy to be treated as 'one of the guys' in training, they still wished to be seen as women. Boxer E declared: "Am I a tougher girl? Well, maybe, but, at the same time, I can be really, really feminine. In the gym, yeah, I'm just the same as everyone else." Boxer D agreed: "See, to be honest, in my personal way, I feel like I'm one of the guys, and I'll get involved, but, at the end of the day, I know I'm a woman." Boxer A said: "I do, in a sense, see myself as one of the guys but I like to pride myself on the fact that, if you were to come in here, you would know for sure that I was a girl!"

Each of the boxers interviewed had had experiences in the past where male boxers were either reluctant or refused to fight them. All expressed frustration at those who did not take them seriously as boxers and all had stories of going into the ring and taking a male boxer by surprise with their skill. However, all agreed that the attitude of the male boxers to female boxers varied and very much depended on the experience and skill of the male boxer: the less experienced either felt threatened and would punch wildly and fiercely or would hold back and refuse to spar properly.

Boxer B described her early experiences:

"Well, there are those boys who knew me and have no problem to box me and they respect me, but you have newer guys who don't know what to do and they are, like, 'I don't hit

women' but I'm like, 'Let's spar, so you must treat me as an athlete... you must respect me and treat me like a boxer so we both take something from this.'"

Only Boxer E had had an incident in the boxing gym where a more experienced boxer had sparred with her and had not considered her relative inexperience at the time. It was a tough spar and, although not too badly hurt, she took quite a beating and came away with two black eyes. However, she viewed this as a great learning curve and said, "I appreciated it really because he was treating me the same and giving me respect as a boxer."

Female empowerment and confidence

Each participant mentioned the confidence that boxing had brought them. The training, the discipline, the respect and the fact that those in the boxing gym in which each trained became like family, were offered as explanations for the self-confidence each boxer acquired. Boxer D:

"...the gym is so welcoming and it's like family. You're all interested in the same thing, you're all working towards the same things and you have role models there who are competing at a higher level: everyone supporting and encouraging you. You are in an environment for learning."

Several of the boxers admitted that being a female boxer gave them a feeling of empowerment: females successfully participating in a male dominated world. Boxer C, a professional and the most experienced boxer in the study, was keen that this sense of empowerment be felt by other women:

"I'm strong and strong in my mind, and I know what I want to do. I want to bring other women into that thinking...I don't look at the teenage boys and hope they can do what I do, I look at the teenage girls and think, I really hope they can do what I am doing."

The effect of parenthood

Although not originally within the remit of the research questions in this study, four of the participants raised the issue of parenthood during the interviews. Boxers B and F were adamant that they would give up boxing competitively when they had a family. Boxer F more specifically stating that she would get married and have children after she had achieved everything she wanted in the boxing world and had retired: "...you don't want to grow up with your mum as a boxer. You need to devote too much time to training and I want to be there for my kids." Boxer B agreed, "Yes, there are women who have kids and still box at a high level, but it is not for me."

Boxer A mentioned children in the context of whether or not she would allow them to box, "I wouldn't have a problem with it, but I know that my partner, who is a professional (male) boxer, would be totally against our kids doing it!"

Only one of the boxers interviewed, Boxer E, was a mother: this had been an unplanned pregnancy, just at the start of her boxing career and she had returned to training the week before the interview. She was determined to resume her boxing so that she could make a better life for herself, however, she was concerned that pregnancy and motherhood had changed her.

"The only thing that worries me is that I may have lost my bottle a bit...my body feels completely different. Also, me and (my partner) used to wrestle and muck about and get each other in a headlock and stuff. Now I'm like, don't, you'll hurt me and if he pinches me I'm like, ouch, that was sore! I think maybe she (her daughter) has made me softer!"

Discussion of findings

The first research area addressed in this study was the attraction of the sport of boxing to the participants. Each participant stressed that the skill and competitiveness involved was the most important aspect for them, the perceived violence was not a factor. Previous studies have focused on the attitude of only male boxers to the aggression and violence in the ring. This was found to be a large part of the attraction for male boxers, bringing excitement and a huge adrenaline rush (Sheard, 1997; Matthews, 2011; Lindner, 2012; Chaudhuri, 2012). The participants in this study confirmed that the sport did cause a rush of adrenaline but, in their opinion, this was as a result of pushing themselves to the limit, not because they were being violent. Boxer E commented: “Yeah, mostly girls just want to do the boxing as a sport, whereas the guys are, like, maybe aggressive.” It would be interesting to undertake research comparing the attitudes of male and female boxers to the violence and aggression to explore whether the social gender norms can be seen to influence the individual boxer’s understanding of violence, whether consciously or not.

Several of the boxers mentioned the confidence that boxing had given them and, for some boxing was seen to be a means to a better life. These findings build upon the work of Batchelor (2005, 2007) who suggests that participation in risk-seeking activities can be a way for these young women to exercise control in their lives, which are experienced as out of control, and can improve their “sense of self and self-efficacy” (Batchelor, 2007: 205). Boxer F, in particular, credited boxing for turning her life around and keeping her out of trouble. It had brought discipline and control into her life and she was determined to stay on track: this finding is in line with the research of Wacquant (1995, 2004) and Jump (2016, 2017), who observed the disciplinary benefits boxing brought to delinquent young men.

The second research question aimed to explore the participants' individual understanding of and attitude to violence. It was important to each participant that the difference between violence in the street and violence within the boxing ring be emphasised: in their opinions, violence in the street is uncontrolled, dangerous and far removed from the perceived violence in the ring, which they view as controlled and disciplined. Each participant distanced themselves from violence in the streets, advising that this was something they would never participate in, as it was dangerous, uncontrolled and there would be no referee to ensure that nobody was seriously hurt. It was interesting that Boxer D went further and refused to call her competitive boxing matches 'fights', she preferred to use the word 'bout', as she denied that boxing was an act of violence or aggression. This reluctance to acknowledge that boxing is aggressive or violent could be seen as an awareness of the accepted gender norms of society. Females participating in violent activities are perceived as unacceptable and deviant (Heidensohn, 1985; Lloyd, 1995), and by denying that female boxing has violence at its core, perhaps the participants are trying to distance themselves from the censure of society. However, it would seem that, if this is the case, it is on a deeply subconscious level, as each participant was extremely proud of her achievements and proud to be a female boxer.

The final aim of this research study was to explore the ways in which participants' gender is experienced and made sense of in the context of boxing. The participants all wished to be seen as 'one of the guys' and as boxers but, at the same time, they all wanted to be acknowledged as women. As noted earlier in this chapter, each rejected the concept that they wanted to be seen, temporarily, as masculine or as bad girls, in terms of the theories of Messerschmidt (2002) and Miller (2002a, 2002b). Whereas, Paradis (2012) noted that the male boxers in her ethnographic study struggled to see her as a boxer and as a woman, the findings of this study show that, although this may have been true for some participants when they first boxed, this is not the case now. Each confirmed that the male boxers in their own gyms accepted them fully. However, they did express the view that sometimes inexperienced male boxers or boxers new to the gym either do not wish to

fight them, because they are women, or are overly aggressive in the ring as though needing to prove their masculinity; these findings supported the experiences reported by McNaughton (2012) and Nash (2017). Lafferty and McKay (2004) noted that the boxing coach in their study would side-line the female boxers, giving priority to the men: the evidence produced by this study refutes that point of view, with all participants confirming the full support of the coaches. It is worth noting that Lafferty and McKay's study was carried out fourteen years ago and it is hoped that their findings would be different now.

Halbert (1997) and Oates (1987, 2002) expressed the opinions that boxing was a masculine sport and must be seen as the exclusive domain of men, agreeing with Connell (1987) that boxing was a sport utilised to reinforce hegemonic masculinity. However, more recent research by Matthews (2016) suggests that the social landscape is slowly changing and that there is greater equality within the sporting world and that the sport of female boxing has become more visible to the public following its inclusion in the Olympic Games and its appearance on mainstream television. The findings discussed here would seem to support this view.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the findings of the empirical research into female participation in the legitimised violence of boxing. Thematic analysis of the interviews produced seven key themes which have been explored and discussed within a criminological framework and in the context of previous literature on masculinities and women and violence: namely, skill and competitiveness, a chance for a better life, control and discipline, prejudice and ignorance, equality and respect, female empowerment and confidence and the effect of parenthood.

It has been shown that it is not violence which is the perceived attraction of boxing for the participants, but control, discipline and respect. Furthermore, the female boxers are not participating

in a sport in a male dominated world with the intention of being seen as masculine: they wish to be viewed as equals, as boxers, but always as women. Further research possibilities have been identified in this chapter. The concluding chapter of this dissertation will draw together all aspects of the research process and the results produced during this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The focus of this research project was on women's participation in the traditionally masculine world of boxing. The aim was to explore (i) what attracts women to the sport, (ii) the meaning and significance of violence to the participants, and (iii) the ways in which gender is experienced and made sense of in the context of boxing. In order to address these issues, this dissertation began with a review of the literature relating to male domination of sport, to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, and to gender and violence from a criminological perspective. Thereafter, the methodological framework of the research project was outlined and justified: the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews was utilised to explore the personal experiences and opinions of six female boxers, currently training in Scotland. Thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews produced seven recurring themes: (i) skill and competitiveness, (ii) a chance for a better life, (iii) control and discipline, (iv) prejudice and ignorance, (v) equality and respect, (vi) female empowerment and confidence and (vii) the effect of parenthood. These themes were analysed and discussed within the framework of existing criminological literature on gender and violence. As the research was exploratory and based on the experiences and attitudes of only six women, no conclusive statement can be made about the findings. However, within the limitations of this study, it became clear that not one of the boxers interviewed subscribed to the belief that boxing was, at its core, a sport of violence: rather, those interviewed declared that the sport of female boxing had, at its root, the principles of control, discipline and respect, not violence. Furthermore, each boxer stressed the fact that, in their opinion, violence in the streets was far-removed from any perceived violence within the boxing ring.

Their experiences of gender in the world of boxing were slightly more complicated: most had been the only female in the gym when they started the sport and had, initially, met with scepticism and reluctance from some of the male boxers to accept them. However, each confirmed that, having

been given an opportunity to prove themselves willing to work as hard as the men and participate in the same training, their experiences of gender within the boxing world had been generally positive. Considering previous research and theories offered by criminologists such as Miller (2002a, 2002b) and Messerschmidt (1995, 2002), the participants rejected the concept that they were exhibiting masculine traits or aspiring to be seen as male. When participating in training, sparring or competing all wished to be viewed as neither male nor female, but as a boxer, yet all were adamantly proud of being, and keen to be seen as, women within the sport.

The clearest limitation of this study lies within the size of the sample. The female boxing community in Scotland is relatively small and there was, therefore, a limited population from which to gather information. However, this population was rendered even smaller when, having received ethical approval, I attempted to contact some of the boxers. I discovered at that stage that boxing is a seasonal sport, much like football, and that my research had coincided with boxing's off-season. Several of the boxers had taken the opportunity to go on holiday or attend concentrated training camps abroad and were unable to participate in the study: this was unfortunate timing as all were keen and enthusiastic to take part. Were such research undertaken again, I would recommend that interviews begin earlier or that potential interviewees are firmly identified prior to beginning. In this study, although the snowball sampling was effective, two weeks could go by between one interview and the subsequent contact. I hesitated to contact my original interviewees too often to chase up further participants, as I did not wish to be a nuisance and risk the loss of their support. Subsequently, due to time limitations, I could only interview six women, not eight, as I had originally planned.

Of those interviewed, one was gay, one was a mother, one was divorced, one had been remanded in a young offenders' institution, one was not working, and one worked within a boxing gym environment. The different backgrounds and experiences led to data rich in diversity, however, it

would give a fuller picture if the number of those interviewed were larger to, for example, compare the attitudes and experiences of young mothers, or to ascertain whether sexuality had any effect on how gender is experienced or whether boxing had helped other young girls stay out of trouble.

One of the main strengths of this research was the use of semi-structured interviews and this, combined with my own prior knowledge of and passion for the sport of boxing, enabled me to strike up an instant rapport with each participant. As I was not sticking strictly to a list of pre-set questions, I was able to tailor each interview to suit the personality of the boxer, conversation flowed easily, and this produced fascinating, rich and relevant data.

When asked about their hopes for women's boxing, all of the participants expressed a desire to see the sport go from strength to strength, to become ostensibly more acceptable and more mainstream. Groombridge (2017) notes that there is still more interest and investment in male sports, but the participants remarked that there were now more girls and women taking up boxing and they hoped to see greater equality in investment in the future.

Although there have been many studies done concerning male boxers, there is very limited research into the world of female boxing. Further research into the effects of motherhood on the attitude to participation in the sport and research into the possible benefits of boxing as aiding desistance from crime in young women would contribute to the literature in this area.

The most significant piece of information that I am taking away from this research project is the fact that, in the opinion of all of the female boxers who participated, female boxing has more to do with control, discipline and respect than it does with violence. Boxer C, the most experienced of the boxers interviewed, summed it up perfectly:

“Violence is not boxing, I think that control is boxing. Violence to me is people who batter their partners, that emotional loss of control as opposed to a physical action. That is definitely what boxing teaches you: that loss of control and violence is wrong.”

(Boxer C in Interview, July 2018)



Ethics Committee for Non Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

NOTIFICATION OF ETHICS APPLICATION OUTCOME – UG and PGT Applications

Application Type: New

Date Application Reviewed: 4/6/18

Application Number: PGT/SPS/2017/110/MEDIA

Applicant's Name: Sandie Watt

Project Title: A theoretical and empirical exploration of female participation in the legitimised violence of boxing from a gendered perspective

APPLICATION OUTCOME

(A) **Fully Approved** *Start Date of Approval:* *End Date of Approval:*

(B) **Approved subject to amendments**

If the applicant has been given approval subject to amendments this means they can proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval, however they should note the following applies to their application:

Approved Subject to Amendments without the need to submit amendments to the Supervisor

Approved Subject to Amendments made to the satisfaction of the applicant's Supervisor

The College Ethics Committee expects the applicant to act responsibly in addressing the recommended amendments.

(C) **Application is Not Approved at this Time**

Subject to Amendments made to the satisfaction of the School Ethics Forum (SEF)

Complete resubmission required. Discuss the application with supervisor before resubmitting.

Please note the comments in the section below and provide further information where requested.

If you have been asked to resubmit your application in full, send it to your supervisor who will forward it to your local School Ethics Forum admin support staff.

Where resubmissions only need to be submitted to an applicant's supervisor.

This will apply to essential items that an applicant must address prior to ethics approval being granted. As the associated research ethics risks are considered to be low, the applicant's response need only be reviewed and cleared by the applicant's supervisor before the research can properly begin. For any application processed under this outcome, it is the Supervisor's responsibility to email socpol-pgt-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk with confirmation of their approval of the re-submitted application.

APPLICATION COMMENTS

Major Recommendations:

Minor Recommendations:

As participants will be notified about the research through someone who may be their trainer, please add note to PLS that choosing to take part or not in the research will not have any effect on the relationship they have with their trainer.

Remove the "Consent form guidance" text box from the consent form.

Please retain this notification for future reference. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact your School Ethics forum admin support staff.



University
of Glasgow

College of Social
Sciences

Women's participation in boxing

Researcher: Sandra (Sandie) Watt

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study is being carried out as part of my Masters degree in Criminology. The aim of the research is to explore women's participation in the sport of boxing. Considering the stereotypical image of boxing as a masculine sport, I am interested in exploring what draws women to participate in this particular sport and what impact, if any, participation has on their understandings of gender and violence.

Why have I been chosen?

You and the other interviewees have been chosen to participate as a result of your involvement in women's boxing.

What does participation involve?

If you agree to take part, you will be invited to take part in an individual interview with myself, Sandie Watt. Interviews will last approximately 45 minutes – depending on how much you have to say! – and with your permission will be audio recorded. Questions will focus on your views and experiences of training as a women boxing and are likely to cover: what drew you to the sport initially, what you like/dislike about the sport, the significance of physical training and contact, your feelings about using violence, and attitudes towards women's boxing (amongst your friends, family, the wider boxing community and society more generally). You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to, without giving a reason.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you decide to take part, you are free to end the interview at any time should you wish, without giving a reason.

Whether you take part or not, or if you decide to end the interview for any reason, this will have no effect on your relationship with the coach/trainer who provided your contact details to me.

What will happen to my answers?

All data that is gathered during this research project will be stored securely until the completion of the dissertation at which time it will be destroyed. The results of the research will be published by 3rd September 2018. If you wish, you may request a copy of the key findings.

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be anonymised and kept confidential. The only circumstances where I will pass on any information that you provide are if you tell me that you or someone else is at risk of harm. If I was going to do so, I would discuss this with you first.

In order to try to ensure that you remain anonymous I will not use participants' names in the final dissertation. As is standard with research of this type, I am unable to provide you with a full guarantee of anonymity because other people (e.g. peers within the boxing community) may be able to identify you from the experiences and opinions you may share, the language that you use (i.e. particular phrases) or if you discuss your participation in the research with other people.

Who has reviewed the study?

This project has been reviewed by the School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Forum.

Contact for Further Information

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me, Sandie Watt via my university email: 8637611W@student.gla.ac.uk

You can also contact my research supervisor:

Dr. Susan Batchelor
School of Social and Political Sciences, Ivy Lodge, 63 Gibson Street, Glasgow G12 8LR.
Email: Susan.Batchelor@glasgow.ac.uk
Tel: 0141 330 6167

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of this research project, you can contact the School of Social and Political Sciences Ethics Officer Jakki Walsh.

Email: socpol-pgt-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix C: Consent form



University
of Glasgow

College of Social
Sciences

Title of Project: Women's participation in boxing

Name of Researcher: Sandie Watt

Research Supervisor: Dr Susan A. Batchelor

Please tick as appropriate:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions
- I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point, without giving a reason
- I consent / do not consent (delete as applicable) to interviews being audio-recorded
- I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym
- I understand that all personal data collected in this research will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998
- I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in this study

Name of Participant.....

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher.....

Signature

Date

Women's participation in boxing

Researcher: Sandie Watt

Introduction

Thank participants for agreeing to speak to me. Describe study, why chosen, confidentiality (and its limits), interview method, seek permission to use audio recorder. Ask participants if they have any questions/ concerns about taking part in the study.

Personal background

First of all, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about your life outside boxing.

Tell me a bit about yourself, for example how old are you? What do you do when you are not boxing?

And how long have you been boxing?

How often do you train and at what level?

Involvement in boxing

Tell me about how you became involved in boxing.

What first drew you to the sport?

The training is intense and physical. Is that something that you enjoy?

When did you first spar? Can you remember how you felt (beforehand/during/afterwards)?

Have you ever boxed competitively? What motivated you to compete? Were any particular figures/role models influential in encouraging you to compete?

Tell me about your last fight. How did you feel as you waited to go in the ring? What was the result? Were you pleased with your performance?

Have you ever been injured sparring/competing? Have you ever injured/knocked out someone else? How did you feel about that? (Probe: upset, angry etc.)

Physical contact/violence

How do you feel about the physical contact and/or violence involved in boxing? (For example, is it something that you enjoy etc.?)

In what ways, if any, would you say competitive boxing differs from other types of violence – e.g. fighting in the street?

What has boxing taught you, if anything, about violence? [Probe re: aggression, discipline, strategy etc.]

Do any of your friends or family box? Have you ever fought a friend or family member – and if so, was that any different to fighting someone you don't know?

Attitudes to gender

Boxing is traditionally seen as a very male-dominated sport. Tell me about your experiences in this regard.

How do your friends and family react to your sport?

How do the men in the gym react/respond to you as a boxer?

Are women trained the same or differently from the men boxers? Have you ever sparred with a male boxer?

Outside the gym, for example at a competition, how does the crowd react to women fighting? Do you notice any differences in attitude compared to men fighting?

Has the inclusion of women's boxing in the Olympic Games in 2012 had any impact on the perception of the sport, in your view? If so, in what ways?

What are your hopes for the future of female boxing?

Closing

Go over confidentiality etc. again. Ask participants if there are any other issues that they would like to raise. Questions or concerns about taking part in the study? Thanks.

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