

**WHAT IS YOUR VALUE? A QUALITATIVE STUDY INTO THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITAL IN AMATEUR AND  
PROFESSIONAL BOXING**

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**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION, 2005**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study was an investigation into ways in which participating in and learning within the context of sport, and amateur and professional boxing in particular, impacts on the lives of the participants. More specifically, the aim of this study was to explore ways in which body capital can lead to the development of other types of capital. The study focused on the experience of professional and amateur boxers. 18 people involved in boxing were interviewed and these interviews were combined with approximately 1000 hours of participant observation in boxing settings.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and detailed field notes recorded the observations. The data was analysed and categories and themes emerged from this data analysis. The categories were organised in a structure, process and outcome framework. The categories around structure were the dispositions and attitudes of the informants and their class position, process was around the mechanics of learning the particular skills of boxing, and the outcomes was both the boxing match and more generally ways in which participation in the sport could affect the broader aspects of the participants' lives. The theoretical framework employed was drawn from Bourdieu's theories and in particular his concepts habitus, field and capital. The

consideration of the findings against this unit of analysis facilitated the interpretation of the findings.

The conclusions drawn from the analysis and consideration of the findings are: although there is an increase in middle class involvement, which is the growth of the so-called white collar boxing, for those working class participants, participation in boxing reinforces the individual's class position. An example of this was the finding that an acceptance of being exploited is almost a pre-requisite for professional boxing.

Boxing is a skilled and challenging sport leading to the development of clear and focused skills, both physical and psychological. On one level many of these skills cannot be transferred from the boxing or fight situation. However there is much in boxing which is transferable and can enhance the individual's life: the capacity for commitment and control of emotions are some examples of this. Despite these positive features the skills did not seem to transfer to other areas and did not lead to participation in formal educational opportunities.

Nevertheless participation in boxing did add to the social capital of the individuals which led to the development of a series of networks and contacts which could clearly add to and enhance the lives of the boxers.

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