

This is an Authors' Accepted Manuscript of a chapter published in the book *Figurational Research in Sport, Leisure and Health* edited by Dr. Philippa Velija and Dr. Dominic Malcolm.

**On (Not) Becoming: Involved–Detachment and Sports 'Violence'**

Dr. Christopher R. Matthews

School of Science and Technology, Nottingham Trent University

Email: [Christopher.matthews@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Christopher.matthews@ntu.ac.uk)

## **On (Not) Becoming: Involved–Detachment and Sports ‘Violence’**

**Christopher R. Matthews**

### **Introduction – Elias and the production of knowledge**

Debates focusing on the balance between researchers’ closeness or distance to their field of study have a long running history. For example, critics of the Chicago School’s early adoption of immersive qualitative research methodologies claimed they were breaking down an important distance between researcher and participant. These initial arguments were usually couched in the dichotomous comparison of objectivity vs subjectivity. And while the debate has shifted since these early forays, there is still a requirement for researchers to explore the position they occupy in relation to the people they are attempting to understand. Maier and Monahan (2010: 2; emphasis in the original) capture this well when they suggest that:

One of the greatest challenges that qualitative researchers face is *getting close* enough to respondents to develop the strong interpersonal connections needed to gather deep, meaningful data without *getting too close* or becoming so intimately involved with respondents that the researcher’s capacity for dispassionate inquiry or analysis is compromised.

Some may suggest that a truly dispassionate inquiry is neither possible nor desirable within qualitative research, but the idea certainly provides a useful point of departure when considering the strengths and weaknesses that underpin so called ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ methodologies. Specifically, it is the boundaries and borders within and between these dichotomic positions that, Gilbert (2001: 12) suggests, ‘must be negotiated and renegotiated, [as] an ongoing part of the research process, as a balance is sought between the dangers and benefits of being too far in or too far out of the lives of the researched’.

My ethnographic engagement in boxing has required me to repeatedly search out and reflect upon the dynamic and changeable positions that I have occupied in various research settings. Over the course of almost ten years of collecting data on boxing, formally interviewing over 250 boxers, coaches, officials and parents, training in more than ten gyms for extended periods of time and attending countless others for visits, I have become accustomed to considering the multitude of ways that I might be trusted/untrusted, welcomed/feared, respected/ridiculed and heard/ignored within pugilistic spaces. Alongside these ways in which people have responded to me as a researcher are a set of personal processes whereby I might interpret/misinterpret, expose/obscure, clarify/complicate, embody/disembody, remember/forget. This length of time, combined with my repeatedly shifting level and type of involvement inside boxing gyms, has

provided me with a variety of subjective positions from which to see, consider and explore the sport.

In fact, it appears that such spaces are fertile grounds from which academics have considered, critiqued and reconsidered (de Garis 2010; Matthews 2015; Paradis 2012; Wacquant 2005) what Kath Woodward (2008: 547) calls the 'interrogation of situatedness'. The amount of research conducted on boxing that draws to varying degrees on immersive research methods suggests that something draws academics to explore such worlds using their bodies as tools for data collection (Matthews 2015 for a detailed discussion around this point, also see Channon and Matthews 2015; de Garis 2000, 2010; Fulton 2011; Halbert 1997; Heiskanen 2012; Jump 2015; Paradis 2012; Sugden 1996; van Ingen 2011; Wacquant 2004; Woodward 2006). Further, the closeness that accompanies such embodied methodologies encourages most academics to reflect upon what this might mean for the knowledge they produced.

My own approach to this process is largely informed by the work of Elias, and particularly his assertions about the generation of human and scientific knowledge. Within this chapter, I focus on Elias' understanding of 'insider' or 'outsider' research as an unequal and dynamic balance or blend between involvement and detachment, and how this has provided an important anchor point for my explorations of sports 'violence' (See Matthews and Channon (2017) for a detailed discussion of how sports 'violence' is defined).

### **Involvement and detachment and involved-detachment**

Elias' (1956; 1987) twin concepts of involvement and detachment have provided scholars with a dialogical device with which to explore the means by which we generate understanding of the world (Maguire 1988; Mansfield 2004; Matthews 2015; Mennell 1992; Rojek 1986). While the original work contains a number of empirical and philosophical issues that have been rightly critiqued (Rojek 1986), the basic premises upon which Elias builds his argument provide a solid platform from which to think through the coproduction of knowledge and researchers' positionality (Dunning 1992; Kilminster 2004; Mansfield 2004; Matthews 2015; Mennell 1992).

My first way into these ideas was via an illustration that Elias (1987: 45) developed based on the fate of the fishermen in Edgar Allan Poe's story *The Maelstrom*:

One may remember that the fisherman, while they were slowly being drawn into the abyss of the whirlpool, for a while still floating, together with other pieces of wreckage, around the walls of its narrowing funnel. At first, both brothers – the youngest had been lost in the storm already – were too overcome by fear to think clearly and to observe accurately what was going on around them. After a time, however, one of the brothers, so Poe tells us, was able to shrug off his fears. While

the elder brother cowered helplessly in the boat, paralysed by the approaching disaster, the younger man collected himself and began looking around with a certain curiosity. It was then, while taking it all in almost as if he were not involved, that he became aware of certain regularities in the movements of the pieces that were being driven around in circles together with the boat. In short, while observing and reflecting he had an 'idea'; a connecting picture of the process in which he was involved, a 'theory', began forming in his mind. Looking around and thinking with sharpened attention, he came to the conclusion that cylindrical objects went down more slowly than objects of any other shape, and that smaller objects sank more slowly than larger ones. On the basis of this synoptic picture of the regularities in the process in which he was involved, and recognizing their relevance to his own situation, he made the appropriate move.

This allegory is used by Elias to demonstrate an essential element of scientific knowledge; that is, the ability to see the world from a relatively detached position. As Dunning (1992, 249) suggests, 'one of the preconditions for the growth of modern science, [Elias] suggested, was an increase in specific (but later widening) groups in the socially instilled capacity of their members to exercise self-distanciation and self-restraint'. This understanding is important in a broad ontological and epistemological sense and also provides a foundational position from which to develop one's personal approach to conducting specific research projects.

The key here is the relative dimension between such reflexive attempts to understand social interactions and behaviours, and the necessary involvement that researchers must obtain in relation to their field of study. As Elias (1987, 16, my emphasis) argues, 'In order to understand the functioning of human groups one needs to know, as it were, from the inside how human beings experience their own and other groups, and *one cannot know without active participation and involvement*'. While active participation can take many forms, participatory ethnography being but one example, it is impossible to conduct social research without some degree of involvement. As such, Elias' approach is one means of considering 'how to achieve 'valid' knowledge of society whilst investigating it from within' (Kilminster, 2004, 26).

Mansfield (2007) refocuses these arguments by drawing attention to the political, personal and emotional dimensions of ethnographic research within sport. In aligning involvement and detachment with standpoint epistemology associated with feminist scholarship she argues that, 'Involvement is a necessary requirement if ethnographers are to be able to understand the realities and identities of the members of different sports groups, to make that which seems strange become familiar' (Mansfield 2007: 124).

My personal experiences of conducting such research (Matthews 2014, 2015, 2016) lead me to agree with Mansfield's argument. And in drawing further attention to the realities of such involvement, her work can help those who read Elias' work as

maintaining dichotomous distinctions between inside/outside, close/distant and involved/detached to move beyond such simplistic assessments. Mansfield (2007:126, emphasis added) continues:

Striving for an appropriate involvement-detachment balance includes a capacity for reflexivity, an ability to critically examine one's own passions and personal interests throughout the research process. Involvement-detachment should be thought of as an ever-changing balance of emotional involvement-detachment with topics, theories and methods of research. Working with *involved-detachment* represents my feminist interpretation of Elias' theory of involvement-detachment...

This 'disciplined, qualified exercise in "self distancing"' (Rojek 1986: 256) enables researchers to attempt to manage some of the weaknesses that accompany their emotional, personal and political investment in research settings, while also highlighting, without fetishizing, the methodological strengths of occupying a relatively involved position.

My own reflections on involvement and detachment within my research on boxing have largely focused on the possibilities and limitations that accompany embodied research strategies. Here I have argued that the body, like all other research tools, is at once effective and fundamentally flawed (Matthews 2015). Specifically, I describe the manner in which my able, male, heterosexual body provided relatively easy access to a world where certain men dominated in number and symbolism. Yet, in so doing, my body also acted to partially cast in shadow a series of behaviours, experiences and interpretations of life within this space. In reflecting on this process, as Elias (1987) has it, by taking a 'detour via detachment', I was able to highlight how my relatively involved and embodied position shaped the knowledge that I co-produced during this project (Matthews 2014; 2015; 2016).

By attending to the ways in which my body might shape knowledge production I drew on the alignment between embodiment and involvement. Without wishing to falsely abstract humans from the figurations they form, we can see that our bodies are our main means of being and acting within the social world, of being *involved* in it, and as such, they provide us with a means of accessing, sensing and experiencing. This bodily involvement is the basis from which we can explore, interpret and understand the world in a more or less detached manner. Yet, as Elias notes, this dynamic process changes and varies across history, cultures and within groups and between individuals. As Mennell (1992: 161) puts it, 'The balance of involvement and detachment seen in normal adult behaviour varies between different groups. Within those groups, it varies from one situation to another. It may vary greatly between different individuals in similar situations'. As such, it is

incumbent on researchers to accept the realities of this process and attempt to consider them in relation to their work.

Hence my focus on exploring how my body, and with it the 'insider' position I took within my ethnographic work on boxing, shaped the balance between involvement and detachment (Matthews 2015). In particular, I use Elias' writings to help me think through how my embodied involvement in gym life shaped the data that I was able to collect and how I experienced and interpreted it. In so doing I attempt to produce a level of critical detachment from the world of boxing that I have become so personally enthralled by. In what follows, I will build upon the argument I developed in this earlier work by exploring the insights that have come from a deeply involved process of 'becoming' a boxer.

### **On (not) becoming: involvement with 'violence'**

While I was deeply embedded in a boxing gym collecting data, I recall my Ph.D. supervisor, Joseph Maguire, telling me that I should 'enjoy this time because once you get your first academic post you won't be able to research like this again'. Of course, he was correct; as the day-to-day realities of academia dominated my work life I have not been able to focus in such a concentrated manner on research. However, I am fortunate in that while I started out training for boxing as a means to explore the sensory and emotional landscape of sports 'violence', I have continued to be involved in the sport as an end in itself. Indeed, the same excitement and joy that I tried to document in my Ph.D. thesis continues to be a central fixture of my life as I have continued to box. This most recently culminated in me moving from regular training and sparring into competitive boxing and taking my first three amateur boxing bouts. I am now proud to say that I have a rather unimpressive boxing record of one win and two loses.

At times during this period I have made conscious decisions to stop doing formal ethnographic research and instead simply enjoy the process of learning to box. As a result, boxing has become far more for me than a setting for sociological research; it has become one of my favourite leisure activities, a place to find distraction from work and peace of mind, my means of getting and staying fit, a way of making new friends and an opportunity to push myself mentally and physically. I have tried to remove the inquisitive, critical researcher's lens through which I had previously seen the sport. In its place I have been able to develop a less conscious engagement, which nevertheless has resulted in an embodied fascination with understanding, deconstructing and learning the 'manly art'. This is an often selfish and self-motivated immersive involvement in a world of excitement, challenge and personal growth which stands in stark contrast to the *relative* emotional flatness of my day job.

Although my early research methods in boxing had involved a long term embodied engagement, I now found myself occupying a different space whereby I was often boxer first and ethnographer conducting research in boxing a very distant second. In choosing to shift my immersion in this manner, I moved from a relatively detached position that I had found to be useful in ensuring I completed my thesis and subsequent publications, towards a more deeply involved engagement with the sport. The reality here is that, as Elias reminds us, this is not a dichotomy, but a dialogue between such positions. As I attempted at times to 'not do ethnography' and to become fully immersed in boxing, the reality was that, as Elias (1987) points out, some level of detachment is a hallmark of all human social life. And while I might have had some success in 'switching off' what C. Wright Mills (1959) calls the sociological imagination, I was repeatedly drawn to consider and reflect on my experiences inside and around the ring.

The resulting shifts in my relatively involved position gave me access to a series of dramatic, challenging and thought-provoking events that might otherwise have remained hidden to me. I had previously used my own embodied understanding of the 'cooperative competition' that is often the hallmark of sparing to help develop a paper exploring definitions of sports 'violence' (Matthews and Channon 2017) and to consider how sports 'violence' can be experienced as a caring process of mutual development (Matthews 2014). Now, as my training became more directed at competing, I was immersed in a different set of experiences that enabled me to gain a personal and embodied insight that I had previously understood mostly in relative abstraction. The following data extracts from my personal diary shed some light on this process:

I knew going in to tonight's sparing that it was going to be tough, that was the point, it was a test to see if I could stand up to hard sparing. This was one of the final tests I had to pass if I wanted to fight. I went in [the ring] with a really keen lad who'd had 20 odd fights. He took it steady at first, but eventually he landed a right hand straight through my guard. I ducked into the shot and as I rose up from it I noticed someone had come into the ring. As I looked over to see what was happening I realised there wasn't anyone in the ring at all, but there was a large grey rectangle in my peripheral vision. It was similar to when you crack the screen of your laptop and one side of it goes blank as its no longer getting a signal. I remember thinking to myself 'that's brain damage then', before refocusing on surviving the round. Luckily the big grey rectangle didn't hang around for too long. (July, 2016)

Not once during the spar did I consider stopping despite interpreting this grey shape as potential brain damage. Three months later, after my first competitive fight, I wrote:

The shot landed on the left side of my body, on the tip of a rib. The pain was brutal. I'd taken a bunch of shots to the body in the past, but nothing had landed quite like this on the bone. I fought through it and was hoping the pain might pass, but eventually he caught me again in a similar spot and I knew I was in bother. I

managed to get through the round, but stepping out for the next I knew I was compromised. I had to keep my man off me by catching him with power as he came in looking for my body again, but that meant opening up my defence to some degree. [Coach] psyched me up and I came out and gave it a go, but no sooner had I had a little success he caught me again and my body started to shut down, there was no 'dig a little deeper', no 'keep on fighting', there was only my body saying cover up and don't get hit there again. Eventually after I started taking heavy shots to the head as I lowered my guard to protect my body the ref stepped in and the fight was done. The pain didn't pass; it stayed with me and haunted any small movements I made with my body, including breathing. People came over to hug me and pat me on the back; each produced a wince and groan. (Oct, 2016)

These experiences came as I transitioned from someone who had done long term ethnographic research in various boxing subcultures to someone who boxed. Put another way, as my involvement in this social world shifted, I became a boxer (see Paradis 2012 for a similar discussion). This process opened my senses to experiences that I had previously understood vicariously by reading academic research about sports injuries and athlete's embodiments of damaging norms associated with performance sport. Of course, I could tell my students all about research which explores concussion in sport and offer explanations as to why athletes' might put their bodies on the line with regularity, but now I understood these topics in the most personal and embodied way; I had *felt* brain damage.

This process opened up a new set of experiences for me to explore during my research. And it gave me examples that I could use during chats and interviews to help draw out similar experiences in others. While the embodied language does not necessarily transfer well into a traditional way of presenting academic data, the insight these experiences have helped me to further explore concussion and injury in the sport. For example, during recent periods of formal data collection simply telling my own story to boxers and boxing officials has resulted in them providing their own vivid recounts of similar processes. My immersion has provided a personal basis from where I can access the pain, fear, weakness, embarrassment and aggression that often remains hidden 'behind stage' (Goffman 1959) when boxers talk about their most challenging experiences in the ring. Now when interviewing I am able to share the emotional and physical experiences of forsaking my body and my body forsaking me. And in so doing, I have gained insight into boxers' similar experiences, which have often remained uninterrogated in research on boxers' lives (See Woodward (2006) for a notable exception).

A further way of understanding this world was opened up to me as I progressed into my second fight. The following liminal experience forever changed the manner in which I could interact with boxing:

It's a close fight, but he's landed the cleaner shots. I head back to the corner for the last time and [coach] sits me down. After checking on me, he catches my eye to make sure I take in what he's about to say, he leans in, 'it's time to be a right cunt na'. I laugh thinking back about it, but it wasn't a laughing matter at the time. This was the moment I finally grasped the difference between sparing and being in a fight. This was the moment when I felt differently about boxing, this was the moment when I realised that I had to try and hurt my opponent. As I got off the stool I knew I was going to march forward and hunt him down, I was going to try to land hurtful shots, that I might get hurt in the process and this was OK. The bell went and it wasn't like the cooperative competition I had fallen in love with during sparing; there was nastiness now, a different intent to what I was doing. In that one moment I had opened up a completely new way of experiencing my opponent and the sport. (Dec, 2016)

This data extract draws out a key moment within a long term learning process that I had to go through in order to get some limited success in competitive boxing. I lost this fight on points, but in the final round I almost stopped my opponent. Up until this point, despite years of training and sparing in boxing I had never tried to actually hurt anyone.

After going through this experience, I had a personal insight into boxing that helped me to develop a new strand to the formal research that I do within the sport. From this point onwards, I had an embodied and intellectual appreciation for a side of boxing that helps me explore the process of preparing boxers for the potentially harsh reality of being in the ring. During a long conversation that drew on the experience described above I recorded 'John', a boxing coach from South Yorkshire, telling me that:

You're not doing your job as a coach if you don't push someone close to the edge a couple of times before they compete. We all get it, we're not sat here watching people out of their comfort zone enjoying it, but we 'ave to get people to experience the edge that there is in a fight. Tech[nical] sparing is great, conditioned sparing helps, but if that's all you do you'll get some kid coming at you trying to take your 'ed off in a fight and you'll not be ready. So, I know what you mean about looking after people in the ring, but if you don't take things up to the line you're at risk of putting someone in [a fight] who ain't ready, they not be aware of what its like to 'ave someone proper coming after you. Some of these lads don't need it 'cus they've 'ad 'ard lives already and they get it, but someone who's not used to properly fighting, like you, needs to have that. That steel sharpens steel thing. The key is to make sure you're doin' it safely as possible, but it's never not gonna have risk involved as that's the poin t... But you know what's worse? Puttin' a kid up in front of an hundred people, his friends and family and he's not ready.

Previously I had largely considered such hard sparing as an unnecessary brutal burden on young fighters' bodies. In drawing on my own my embodied knowledge of 'getting ready' for someone 'coming after me', I had guided the conversation with John towards an area of boxing culture and interactions with 'violence' which is seldom discussed, and

of which I was not previously sufficiently aware. By sharing my embodied understanding of this process with John he could be more certain that I would not misinterpret his comments as offering blanket support for sparing hard or violence.

Through becoming involved in the competitive side of amateur boxing I had a tangible shift in the way that I could understand the experience of taking damage and learning to inflict damage. During this process the dramatic and challenging experiences that I recorded while attempting to 'not do ethnography', encouraged, if not forced, me to become aware of a different way of seeing the world. As Elias (1987: 45) notes of the fisherman 'while observing and reflecting he had an "idea"; a connecting picture of the process in which he was involved, a "theory", began forming in his mind.' The shifting pattern of immersion helped to mark out the previous boundaries of my involvement in boxing. This was an 'involved-detachment' (Mansfield 2007) that rather than reducing my ability to see the world of boxing from a critical and relatively detached viewpoint, provided useful access points to an experiential world that had largely remained hidden from view in my previous research.

When considered in this way, the process of becoming a boxer helped me to critically see my own positionality. Yet, Elias' work ensures that the false dichotomy between involved/detached, becoming/not becoming, insider/outsider is systematically broken down. And although it certainly appears that in important ways I had become a boxer, in fundamental ways I certainly had not.

While speaking with one of my coaches about issues of identity he told me that 'once you've boxed, you're boxer'. The simple clarity of this phrase stuck with me and after I had competed in my first few bouts I reflected upon it in relation to my own self identity and noticed that I could draw on new social scripts when entering boxing clubs. I was no longer simply a researcher who trained and spared a bit, I could now be a competing boxer who also did research. For me, boxing has contained various unique experiences, which while not completely unknowable from 'the outside', certainly contains elements that are somewhat resistant to articulation. Having access to this array of dramatic experience that accompany stepping in the ring to fight another person in front of a crowd makes many of those who have done the same feel like they share in some rarefied understanding of both the sport and themselves. It is such experiences that boxers often understand as producing an unspoken bond between themselves, and it is this process that acts to provide some existential and ontological meaning to the notion of becoming a boxer.

Yet, although I have literally become a boxer in perhaps the most important way, there is also an essential distinction here that Elias helps us to consider and maintain.

Despite undertaking this journey, I am not a boxer in a fundamental sense. If you put me in a ring I'll look like a boxer, my sweaty hand wraps and old gloves have the hallmark smell of a traditional boxing gym, my nose has a flatted numbness to it from repeatedly getting punched and I have an engrained set of physical responses to various attacks and combinations which are employed in boxing, yet this distinction lies at the heart of an appreciation for the problems that can lie at the foundation of employing immersive research methodologies. Take the following extract from my personal diary after my first fight:

It's early in the afternoon and I'm sat in a restaurant on the beach in Biarritz drinking beer with friends after three days of teaching at the University of Bordeaux. It's 20 or so degrees in October, the sun is shining and while my ribs still hurt and my face still has some marks on it from the fight, it's hard to see how my experiences match those of other amateur boxers. I can identify with being a boxer, my involvement in boxing has helped me understand the lives of boxers in more detail and I can legitimately claim to be a boxer, but there remains an essential distance from my life and the lives of those who I research. This is most starkly felt in situations like this, as I sit with colleagues casually chatting about research, with no financial worries, in the glorious sun, nursing my body back to health, while nursing a glass of the local brew. (Oct, 2016)

Such reflections are essential if we are to understand the presence of power dynamics and differences in positionality that inevitably shape our research. And while it might be simple to take the most obvious social signifiers and claim that I have become a boxer, it is clear that my privileged position as a full time academic ensures that there is always a distance, a level of detachment, from the social realities that face the majority of those who box. Indeed, in personal discussions with Elias Paradis who has conducted similar research (Paradis 2012), we have each reflected at various times about our ability to simply withdraw from boxing at the drop of hat, with our bodies, brains and social identities intact.

So, while I used the previous extracts to highlighting how my immersive research has helped me to experience a side of boxing in a manner closely aligned to that of boxers, it is essential that I and other researchers accept the limits of this involvement. Previous critiques (de Garis 2010; Stoller 2005; Zussman 2005) and counter-critiques (Wacquant 2005) focusing on this very point have been debated around Wacquant's (2004) research on boxing. The key here is not in debating the presence of such differences, but to acknowledge the shape they take and the ways they frame and limit the research that is produced during such work. The extract above is used to provide a dramatic illustration that highlights the potential distance in positionality between me and those I research. Once such an understanding is secured, it should ensure that researchers interrogate

what this difference means in terms of the manner that data is generated, interpreted and represented.

### **Concluding remarks: doing a detour via detachment**

There are many ways of being involved in research settings. Most projects contain some level of positional shift whereby the researcher not only becomes more or less immersed in the lives of the people they study, but also the manner of this involvement often changes. It is within these dynamic and usually organic processes that the boundaries and borders between so called 'insider' and 'outsider' research can be explored and negotiated. Elias' (1987) work offers a useful way to consider this process in dialogue rather than dichotomy and it has helped me to more adequately explore the world of boxing and sports 'violence'.

In this chapter I have highlighted how Elias' work considering the production of human and scientific knowledge has acted as a foundation from which I have attempted to produce a relatively valid academic understanding of boxing. In particular, my reading of Elias has helped me to understand the strengths and accompanying weaknesses of immersive methodologies. I have argued that in reflecting upon the positions that one occupies within research settings it is possible to produce rich and detailed understandings of the social world without fetishizing such knowledge as essential, definite and certain. In striving to adopt involved-detachment it is possible to understand the contingent nature of such knowledge and appreciate the fundamental degree of detachment that is embedded in academic research. Moreover, this encourages scholars to theorize the implications of situated perspectives: without embodied knowledge of an experience, it might be harder to ask certain questions, which loom outside of the researcher's sociological imagination.

My own means of doing a 'detour via detachment' has involved two main processes. Firstly, I grasped the basis of involvement and detachment using Elias' work in combination with Woodward's (2008) discussion of the interrogation of 'situatedness'. These two works provided me with philosophical and conceptual tools that helped to begin to appreciate how my own relative subjectivity and positionality was tied up with the process of doing research. Secondly, I spent time considering the practical side of exploring the world of boxing. As time passed and my immersion shifted both in terms of the degree and type of involvement, I have occupied different positions from which to think about this process.

The messiness of conducting such research projects, and the manner in which they might be weaved into one's life away from formal studies, means that providing a

clear 'how to' do a 'detour via detachment' is challenging and potentially problematic. The unique requirements of different research projects resist the simple production of prescriptive methodological bullet points. Indeed, when postgraduate students ask me for such advice, I send them back to Elias' original writing as a means of producing their own reflexive appreciation and practical understanding of these ideas. However, I have provided the preceding extracts from my personal diary and interview transcripts in order to shed light on this broader process. My hope here is that such dramatic illustrations might help to bring Elias' work to life in the light of contemporary social science. Finally, building on this I hope readers might be able to use these examples as metaphorical ways into their own exploration of how and in what ways they may undergo similar and different processes in their own research.

### **Acknowledgments**

An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the University of Toronto. My thanks to Professor Paradis and her colleagues for their thoughtful questioning which helped develop my analysis. Thanks also to the editors for their insightful comments.

## References

- Channon, A.G. and Matthews, C.R. (Eds.) (2015) *Global perspectives on women in combat sports: Women warriors around the world*. London, Palgrave Macmillan.
- de Garis, L. (2000) 'Be a Buddy to Your Buddy'. In Jim McKay, Michael Messner and Donald Sabo (Eds.) *Masculinities, Gender Relations and Sport*. London: Sage.
- de Garis, L. (2010) Sometimes a Bloody Nose Is a Bloody Nose: Play and Contest in Boxing, Wrestling, and Ethnography. *Sport in Society*, 13, 935-51.
- Dunning, E. (1992) Figurational Sociology and the Sociology of Sport: Some Concluding Remarks. In E. Dunning and C. Rojek (Eds.), *Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing 'Process': Critique and Counter Critique*. London, Macmillan, 221-285.
- Elias, N. (1956) Problems of Involvement and Detachment. *British Journal of Sociology*, (3), 226-252.
- Elias, N. (1987) *Involvement and Detachment*. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Gilbert, K. (2001) Introduction: Why are we Interested in Emotions? In K. Gilbert (Ed.), *The Emotional Nature of Qualitative Research*. Boca Raton, FL, CRC Press, 3-15.
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York, Anchor.
- Fulton, J. (2011) 'What's Your Capital Worth?' – The Development of Capital in British Boxing. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 8(3), 193-218.
- Halbert, C. (1997) Tough Enough and Women Enough: Stereotypes, Discrimination, and Impression Management Among Women Professional Boxers. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 21(1), 7-36.
- Heiskanen, B. (2012) *The Urban Geography of Boxing: Race, Class, and Gender in the Ring*. London: Routledge.
- Jump, D.L. (2015) *Fighting for Change: Narrative accounts on the appeal and desistance potential of boxing*. Doctoral Thesis, available: <https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/uk-ac-man-scw:253851> accessed 1 July, 2017.
- Kilminster, R. (2004) From Distance to Detachment: Knowledge and Self-Knowledge in Elias' Theory of Involvement and Detachment. In S. Loyal and S. Quilley (Eds.), *The Sociology of Norbert Elias*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 25-42.
- Maguire, J. (1988) Doing Figurational Sociology: Some Preliminary Observations on Methodological Issues and Sensitizing Concepts. *Leisure Studies*, 7, 187-193.
- Maier, S.L. and Monahan, B. (2010) How Close is Too Close? Balancing Closeness and Detachment in Qualitative Research. *Deviant Behaviour*, 31, 1-32.

- Mansfield, L. (2007) Involvement-Detachment: A Balance of Passion and Reason in Feminisms and Gender-Related Research in Sport, Tourism and Sports Tourism. *Journal of Sport and Tourism*, 12(2), 115-141.
- Matthews, C.R. (2014) Biology Ideology and Pastiche Hegemony. *Men and Masculinities*, 17(2): 99-119.
- Matthews, C.R. (2015) Being Nosey – The Body as an Effective by Flawed Tool for Research. In I. Wellard (Ed.) *Researching Embodied Sport – Exploring Movement Cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Matthews, C.R. (2016) The Tyranny of the Male Preserve. *Gender and Society*, 30(2), 312-333.
- Matthews, C.R. and Channon, A. (2017) Understanding Sports Violence - Revisiting Foundational Definitions. *Sport in Society*, 20(7), 751-767.
- Mennell, S. (1992) *Norbert Elias: An Introduction*. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The Sociological Imagination*. New York, USA, Oxford University Press.
- Paradis, E. (2012) Boxers, Briefs or Bras? Bodies, Gender and Change in the Boxing Gym. *Body and Society*, 8(2), 82-109.
- Rojek, C. (1986) Problems of Involvement and Detachment in the Writings of Norbert Elias. *British Journal of Sociology*, 37, 591-607.
- Stoller, P. (2005). The Presence of the Ethnographic Present: Comments on Loic Wacquant's Body and Soul. *Qualitative Sociology*, 28-2, 197-199.
- Sugden, J. (1996) *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- van Ingen, C. (2011) Spatialities of Anger: Emotional Geographies in a Boxing Program for Survivors of Violence. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 28, 171-188.
- Wacquant, L. (2004) *Body and soul: Notebooks of an apprentice boxer*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Wacquant, L. (2005) Carnal Connections: On Embodiment, Apprenticeship, and Membership. *Qualitative Sociology*, 28(4), 445-474.
- Woodward, K. (2006) *Boxing, Masculinity and Identity: The 'I' of the Tiger*. Routledge, London.
- Woodward, K. (2008). Hanging Out and Hanging About: Insider/Outsider Research in the Sport of Boxing. *Ethnography*, 9(4), 536-560.
- Zussman, R. (2005). The Black Frenchman. *Qualitative Sociology*, 28-2, 201-207.