

**INVESTIGATING HOW BOXING INTERVENTIONS MAY SUPPORT YOUTH IN
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

by

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ABSTRACT

Sport-based interventions (SBIs) are one method proven to help at-risk youth improve their lives by building relationships with positive adult and peer role models and providing a physical goal oriented activity with which to engage. This study examined boxing as a SBI intervention, looking specifically at if and how it may improve the lives of at-risk youth in Prince George and 100 Mile House, BC. SBIs have been shown to empower youth to choose differently by assisting them to develop positively (Wright, 2006; Pollack, 1998). My research focused on the sport of boxing as an intervention to assist youth towards more positive development, especially for at-risk youth living in northern British Columbia (BC), to form positive relationships, gain empowerment to make healthy choices, and decrease violent behaviours. To collect data, open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted. There were eight interviews completed with two boxing coaches, two adult boxers, who have been boxing since their youth, and four youth boxers ranging in age from 15 to 17 years old. Thematic analysis was conducted with the interview transcripts, which yielded three main findings: influence of boxing, boxing can teach life skills, and coaches' have a positive influence. The significance of this research is well-timed and important. In a northern BC community with fewer resources available as compared to urban geographies, an SBI might be a more viable option to help youth become connected to their communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Dedication	ix
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Inspiration: My Personal Reflection	3
Early Life.....	4
The Middle and Difficult Years	5
My Sober Years.....	6
Conclusion.....	8
Statement of Bias.....	10
Definition of Terms	10
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	12
Positive Youth Development Theory	12
The Five C's of Positive Youth Development	13
Youth Violence Prevention and Positive Youth Development	15
Sports-Based Interventions and Positive Youth Development.....	16
Personal Construct Counselling and SBI.....	26
The Use of Personal Construct Counselling with At-Risk Youth.....	26
Boxing as a Sports-Based Intervention	27
Chapter 3 Methodology: Qualitative Research Design.....	31
Social Constructionist Approach	31
Research Procedures	32
Recruitment	32
Data Collection.....	33
Data Analysis.....	35

Researcher Reflexivity.....	37
Ethical Considerations	41
Consent	41
Evaluation of the Research	42
Dissemination of Results	43
Chapter 4 Participant Biographies	44
Coaches: Bill & Sarah	44
Bill	44
Sarah	45
Adult Boxers: Tony and Mark	46
Tony	46
Mark	46
Youth Boxers: Robert, Willy, Heather, and Vern	47
Robert	47
Willy	47
Heather	48
Vern	48
Summary	49
Chapter 5 Results	50
Introduction.....	50
Section 1: Shared Context—Definitions	51
Definitions of Self-Esteem	52
The Relationship between Violence and Boxing	52
Section 2: The Potential Positive Influence of Boxing.....	53
Boxing Can Promote Physical and Social Health	53
Boxing Can Improve Parenting	55
Boxing May Assist with Identity Formation	55
Boxing Can Increase Self-Esteem	56
Boxing Increases Self-Esteem as Observed by Coaches/Coaching can Increase Positive Feelings of Coaches	58
Boxing Can Create a Dream.....	59

Conclusion	60
Section 3: Boxing Can Teach Life Skills	60
Boxing Can Teach Discipline.....	60
Boxing Can Teach Hard Work	61
Boxing Can Assist with Self Control/Anger Management	62
Boxing Can Relieve Stress	63
Boxing Can Help Improve Physical Fitness.....	64
Boxing Can Improve Concentration.....	64
Boxing Can Improve Mental Agility.....	65
Conclusion	65
Section 4: Coaches' Positive Influence	66
Role Model	67
Coaches' Teaching Moments	67
Challenges with Coaches.....	69
Conclusion	70
Chapter 6 Discussion, Summary, and Recommendations	71
Introduction.....	71
Discussions and Findings	71
Summary of Findings	71
Linking Research Findings to the Positive Youth Development Model	73
Researcher Reflexivity	78
Limitations.....	79
Potential Benefits of This Study.....	81
Recommendations for Further Research	82
Promotes and Offers Safety.....	83
Uses Defence as a Metaphor	83
Can Improve Impulse Control and Patience.....	84
Can Foster Mutual Aid	85
Implications for Social Work Practice	85
Summary and Final Thoughts.....	86
References	89

Appendix A	Information Letter / Consent Form For Parents	95
Appendix B	Information Letter / Consent Form For Adult Boxers.....	100
Appendix C	Information Letter / Consent Form for Adults-Coaches	105
Appendix D	Semi-Structured Interviews for Boxing Coaches.....	110
Appendix E	Semi-Structured Interviews for Adult/Youth Boxers.....	111

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Coded Data	36
Table 2 Themes that Emerged from the Data Analysis	51

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Esther Moyah, for her example she has been in my life. Watching you raise us children and attend university has been awe-inspiring. I could not fathom how hard it would have been to continue your education and raise a family on your own. You are my inspiration! Your dedication and fortitude gave me strength to move forward in my life and education. I would also like to thank my Heavenly Father for His supportive guidance through my education and life.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Adolescence is the time in human development where a young person's main objective is to find their identity and place in their world (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016). Sometimes searching for how they fit in their world can lead youth to make choices with dire consequences, such as delinquency issues with anger management, and mental health issues. Youth that struggle during their adolescence are often referred to as 'at-risk youth' (Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Nois, 2012). These youth are at risk of unhealthy relationships with their family, school, potential employers, and the justice system, which may lead them to be disconnected from society. This disconnection can lead youth to have negative self-perceptions and low ambitions; they may have the belief they cannot succeed in life (Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Nols, 2012). If they continue on this path, it may lead them to struggle to achieve their goals when they reach adulthood.

In conjunction with this growing body of research about youth at-risk, social work researchers are increasingly exploring strategies to assist youth to improve their lives by helping them increase their self-worth, decrease violence, learn to feel successful in school, learn how to communicate effectively, develop coping skills, and learn self-discipline (Kinnevy, Healey, Pollio, & North, 1999; Wright, 2006; Pollack, 1998). Sports-based Interventions (SBI) are one way social workers can creatively connect with at-risk-youth. SBIs offer youth a safe place where they can grow and develop (Wright, 2006). The mentorship offered to young people by coaches and SBI workers can help them learn essential cognitive and emotional skills (Richardson Jr., 2012).

One area that some youth may struggle with is anger management and this can lead them to be at-risk. SBIs have been used to teach youth anger management skills (Wright, 2006). A review of the literature on this topic suggests that youth violence may be due to a number of factors. Predictors include: (1) when violence is entrenched in local culture; (2) inadequate resources that perpetuate learned helplessness and contribute to youth violence; (3) when there are no healthy adult role models; and (4) a loss of cultural identity (Affonso et al., 2010). Olate, Salas-Wright, and Vaughn (2012) found combination of these four themes predicted a higher incidence of violence among rural youth in Hawaii. Predictors of violence for at-risk youth in their study included “low future orientation, empathy deficits, educational difficulties, delinquent peers, gang membership, and lack of social supports” (p. 394). There are also social structures that may add to the risk factors that predict violence. Pollack (1998) and Hymel and Bonanno (2014) found that virulent role models can inadvertently steer young men and women towards becoming violent and influence them to make choices with grievous consequences. These young men and women may have family, friends, or caregivers, who influence them to believe that violence is acceptable and normal under certain circumstances. The predictors of violence among youth in these studies indicate the importance of healthy role models and creative interventions that can be utilized to help deter youth violence and improve their lives.

The focus of this study is on the sport of boxing and if it can be used as in intervention to work with at-risk youth. The focus of the literature review is on SBI and the ways these interventions work with young people. The literature reviewed on SBI is important because it shows some of the same elements that would be common in a boxing intervention. The purpose of this research was to implement a qualitative study to explore the lived experiences of boxing coaches, former or current adult boxers who have been boxing since their youth, and current

youth boxers. More specifically, my research question is *Can a boxing intervention assist at-risk youth to improve their lives and if so, how?* I have found minimal research on this topic in a Canadian context.

Inspiration: My Personal Reflection

In this section of my thesis, I attempt to bracket my experience as a boxer so I can more objectively focus on the experiences of the participants. Bracketing, as stated by Creswell (2013), is when the researcher “sets aside, their experiences, as much as possible to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (p. 80). I begin this by describing my own personal experiences which led to my research, being careful to bracket out my “views before proceeding with the experiences [of the participants]” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

I am passionate about this topic because I have firsthand experience. Included in this study are my own experiences with the sport of boxing. Creswell (2007) commented that qualitative researchers “recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they ‘position themselves’ in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (p. 21). I believe that boxing coached properly, can help youth forge a more positive identity and improve self-confidence as they learn essential life skills. Boxing has taught me about who I am by helping me recognize my strengths and weaknesses in the ring and in life.

When I was a teenager, and someone would ask me what I wanted to do when I was older, I am sure I never responded by saying that I wanted to be a social worker who counsels children and youth. I am also sure that I would not have said that my main dream is to become a registered clinical social worker. When I was in high school, my hopes and dreams were focused

on the desires of my youth, which was to be a professional football player or an RCMP officer. Fast forward 20 years, and now my hopes and dreams are focused on my desires of 20 years of life experiences that have helped me define myself and what I hope to accomplish in my life. In the last 20 years I have lived a life that has been full of heartache and pain, but also great successes and joy. I have been through many ups and downs, and one of the down periods nearly cost me my life. In this section, I will discuss my personal narrative and how my life experiences have informed my desire for my research. I will first relay my experiences growing into a young man and how some of these experiences have informed my practice. I will then give my personal experience of addiction and recovery and how this has shaped me and my desire for my education and research. Last, I will give an account of my boxing experience and how this experience has shaped my desire for my research.

Early Life

Some of the contributing factors for my desire to counsel children and youth have come from my early years in life. In the first five years of my life, I witnessed my father and mother separate. My mother left my father because he assaulted her physically when he was drinking. When I was four years old, I witnessed a horrible outburst of violence where my father nearly beat my mother to death with a frozen fish. My father's actions are forever etched in my mind. Because of my father's violence in the household, I was forced to learn to live without a fatherly influence and positive male role models. When I was a young boy, I felt lost and confused because my father was absent. I often wondered what life would be like if he was in my life.

Another factor that contributed to my desire to become a child and youth counsellor is that my mother was also an alcoholic during the first seven to eight years of my life. However, I have witnessed my mother overcome her drinking problem, go back to school and get a

university education. It is from my childhood experiences that I learned to empathize with children and youth who are struggling with issues related to their parents' drug and alcohol use, or domestic violence, or needing to survive without one or both of their parents. I also know what it is like to grow up without a positive male role model by not having anyone to look up to. I would like to be a strong role model for the children and youth with whom I work. I believe that children and youth need positive role models that help them achieve their very best, whatever that may be.

The Middle and Difficult Years

Ages 15 to 29 were some of the hardest years of my life. During this time, I began binge drinking and using drugs and by the time I was 25 years old I had become an addict. When I was an addict, I lost my job, eventually lost my apartment and ended up living on the street. I call this *the darkest time of my life* because I was so completely engulfed in my addiction that it seldom if ever looked like I was going to recover. I know that my family felt that it was only a matter of time before they would be planning my funeral and on a few occasions I felt the same way. When I was an addict, I felt that there was no way out and I felt hopeless. I often wondered if I was ever going to live a drug-free and sober lifestyle. I knew that I wanted to change my life, and I knew that if I did not change that I would surely die.

During the time I was on the street, I noticed that many youths who were on the street did not have any family. Most, if not all of them, were in the care of the government and had lived in foster or group homes. I often felt sorry for them because I felt that their problems far exceeded what I was going through. I knew in my heart that I became an addict because of my own irresponsible choices. I know that I did not mean to become addicted to drugs and end up homeless but it happened, and it was my own fault. However, some of the youth I met on the

street were on the street because they did not have any family, or their parents were addicts and they did not have any other place to be. Some, if not most, were sick of living in their group homes and decided to take matters into their own hands and fend for themselves on the street. I often empathized with these youth because I felt that they have not been treated fairly in life and that the despair they felt in their lives was not of their own doing.

My Sober Years

When I reached the age of 29, I knew that I needed to make changes. I did not want to turn 30 and still be caught up in addiction and heading down the wrong path. However, I did not know how to change. I gained my sobriety when I obtained a copy of *The Book of Mormon* and read it. This book helped me to understand who I am, why I am on the earth, and where I am going after I died. It assisted me by filling a huge spiritual void that my life was desperately missing. By the time I finished reading the book I was a completely different man and did not want to go back to the lifestyle I was living. I wanted to go back to boxing, the sport I fell in love with at 19, and that's exactly what I did. I went back to the boxing gym and began training again. Also at this time, I met my beautiful wife who has been a great source of strength in my life. We have two wonderful boys who make me realize the importance of living life to the fullest. They wake up each day filled with wonder and awe of the world in which we live. I remember during the darkest periods in my life I dreamt of a life full of happiness and joy. Today, I am living that life and am truly grateful for all that I have been blessed with. The combination of my family, faith, and desire to box gave me new hope for my future and strength to continue in my sobriety. I knew that as soon as I gained my sobriety, I wanted to help others and give back to society. My addiction, my recovery from my addiction, the experiences I had

with the homeless youth, my family, and my faith in combination have given me a new desire to help others make positive changes in their lives.

When I finally became sober, I knew I wanted to make a difference in the lives of street youth. The knowledge that I gained from these experiences directly impacted my decision to go back to school and become a social worker specializing in working with children and youth. I wanted to work with many different issues ranging from addictions to behavioural needs. My experience with my addiction and witnessing youth who did not have many people to depend on has directed my choice of education and research. This research is born out of my own suffering, as well as the suffering I witnessed street youth endure.

My desire in my social work practice is to help at-risk youth gain the necessary life skills to assist them in making better choices. I hope one day in the future to combine social group work with boxing to help at-risk youth gain healthy productive life skills. I believe that boxing can assist youth to change by helping them gain a new identity, increase self-esteem and learn life skills. Boxing is a sport that can teach its members to face their fears and push themselves beyond what they believe possible. It can help build positive relationships with their coaches and peers, which can enlighten their lives with new found friendships. Boxing can be used to help adolescents strengthen their capacity to build trust through the mentorship provided by their boxing coaches. It is through this mentorship that youth can learn various skills related to boxing and life. Most, if not all, of the boxers I know hold high regard for their boxing coach because of the support given in the gym and in their lives.

I often tell people that boxing has taught me a lot about life, such as being determined to reach a goal and the blessings that come from hard work. I also find that my experiences with

boxing can be used as metaphors to guide my life. For instance, when I was about 20 years old, I had my seventh fight. In the last round, I injured my left shoulder and could not use my left arm. I continued fighting with my right arm and ended up winning the fight. Despite the adversity I faced during this fight, I persevered, as my coach taught me, and was able to win. I can relate this to living by not giving up when life becomes challenging. I know that I may be faced with adversities and if I do not give up on myself, I will come out a victor and learn and develop new strengths about who I am. I feel that even if I did not win that fight, I would have still felt good because I did not give up and I persevered through adversity. My social work practice goal is to learn how to assist at-risk adolescents gain new life skills that will alter their thoughts and actions positively and provide them a healthy role model. I believe that youth are our future and should be offered the emotional and behavioural guidance they need to succeed. I combine my life and school experiences to build relationships with the youth with whom I work. I know that by doing this, I can make a real difference in their lives.

Conclusion

I have lived a life with many experiences that have informed my practice and have further developed my desire to research the experiences of boxers and coaches to better understand how boxing may help youth improve their lives. I have relayed some of my life experiences to date that have combined to help me identify what I want in my education and what I want to do in my research. All of the experiences in this personal reflection contribute to my desires, hopes and dreams, and strengths to assist at-risk youth in making healthy changes in their lives.

My personal experiences with boxing combined with my life experiences have lead me to the subject of this thesis, my research question, and choice of interview questions. The

interpretations of the data have been guided by my own personal and historical experiences with the sport of boxing (Creswell, 2014). When I first started graduate school I was unsure about what to research. I came across a research article written by Wright (2006) called “*Keep it in the Ring: Using Boxing in Social Group Work with High-Risk and Offender Youth to Reduce Violence,*” and being a former boxer I was excited about the possibility of researching boxing. Wright (2006) listed ten attributes of effective boxing groups, with which I resonate because of my experience through boxing. These will be discussed in Chapter 2. Because boxing changed my life I decided to research if other people had the same positive experience with the sport as I did. As a Child and Youth Mental Health Clinician, I work from a strength-based perspective so researching about the benefits that boxing may provide its members seemed congruent with my professional identity. Heinonen and Spearmen (2010) declared that social workers who view their clients from a deficit perspective is poor social work practice. “Practice that uses a deficit model not only is inconsistent with the ideology and values of social work but also is sometimes counter-productive” (Heinonen & Spearmen, 2010, p. 226). In keeping with my social work values I decided to examine the benefits of boxing as a researcher rather than the criticisms or how it may not have benefited some people. Additionally, since there has been research that has focused on the negative aspects of boxing, such as, risk of chronic brain injury and increase of anti-social and violent behaviors (Loosemore, Knowles & Whyte, 2007; Stiller, J. W., et. al., 2014; Endresen, I. M., Olweus, D., 2005), I chose to explore the benefits of boxing in this study, grounded in my life experience. I also wanted to open a dialogue that may lead to more research on the potential positive aspects of boxing. I have found that boxing has taught me vital life skills. My ultimate goal for this research was first, to determine if boxing was a positive

experience for other youth and second, uncover ways in which people and communities can use boxing as a creative way to connect with youth.

Statement of Bias

I am aware that my positionality of being a former boxer reflects a bias that favours boxing as a positive endeavour that has many potential benefits and this certainly coloured my approach towards the study of boxing (Marlow, 2011). I additionally recognize that being a person who identifies as male affords me tremendous privileges in this patriarchal world, while identifying as Indigenous has created barriers, and openings, throughout my life, which also impacts my perspective of boxing and the research process I undertook. While I attempted to take precautions to limit biasing the findings, my positionality situates my perspective and approach to this inquiry in a way that possibly inflates the positive aspects of boxing and ignores negative ones.

Definition of Terms

Every youth may be *at risk* of something; however, there are some youth that are more likely to be exposed to and engage in violence. Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, and Nois (2012) referred to at-risk youth as “socially vulnerable youth”; this refers to youth that have an unstable relationship with their families and society, meaning they lack attachment and may feel disconnected at broader social levels. In a related study, Olate, Salas-Wright, and Vaughn (2012) investigated the risk factors associated with violence and delinquency and stated that “the general consensus is that a risk factor is any individual, social, or environmental factor that increases the likelihood of a negative outcome, in this case violent behaviour” (p. 386). For my thesis, *at-risk youth* will be defined as vulnerable youth who have individual, social, or

environmental factors that may negatively affect their lives (Barker, 2003; Olate et al., 2012; Haudenhuyse et al., 2012).

The concept of *self-esteem* is often used to describe how a person feels and thinks about themselves. Walker and Knauer (2011) described self-esteem as “a person’s evaluation of themselves or their attitude towards themselves” (p. 727). They believe that generally people are motivated to try to reach a higher level of self-esteem. Self-esteem “is often presented as a unified and simple dimensional concept, [however] it is actually far more complex, multidimensional and dynamic” (Walker & Knauer, 2011, p.728,); for example, a youth’s positive influences in life can lead to better self-esteem. Barker (2003) defined self-esteem as “an individual’s sense of personal worth that is derived more from inner thoughts and values than from praise and recognition from others” (p. 388). In each of these descriptions of self-esteem, there is an underlying theme of how one feels about themselves, whether positive or negative. My definition of self-esteem combines these descriptions.

In my thesis, one area I investigated is how boxing may help reduce violence in at risk youth. Barker (2003) defined *violence* as “severe and intense exercise of force and power, usually resulting in injury or destruction” (p. 1030). Walker and Knauer (2011) stated that violence is any behaviour intended to harm or hurt someone. In my research, violence will be defined as outwardly focused behaviour that is used with the intent to hurt someone physically or verbally. Other extreme and specific forms of violence include interpersonal violence, brought about by anger or rage (Walker & Knauer, 2011). Self-inflicted harm is excluded from my definition of violence for the purpose of this study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Minimal research has been conducted on the sport of boxing as a sports-based intervention (SBI) to help youth develop skills needed to improve their lives. This literature review begins by first reviewing the Positive Youth Development model. Second, I discuss the prevention of youth violence by focusing on strengths instead of deficits. Third, I review literature on different SBI and their impact on youth participants. The last section is about the sport of boxing and how it can help youth decrease violence, improve their self-perception, and help them become connected to their communities. The purpose of this literature review is to bring an understanding of how adolescents may struggle and what can be done creatively to assist in their development.

Positive Youth Development Theory

The Positive Youth Development model, which was developed by Lerner et al. and adapted by Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula (2016), will be used to show positive ways young people can develop. This theory takes a strength-based view of adolescence and moves away from human development theories that focus on deficits. Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, and Nakkula (2016) affirmed that Positive Youth Development (PYD) “assumes that a developmental system can work to promote positive outcomes rather than focusing on avoiding negative or undesirable behaviours” (p. 100). Lerner et al. ascertained that attaining healthy development in adolescence is dependent on meeting certain competencies or constructs (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016). These competencies assist adolescents to gain the fortitude, critical thinking, and social connections necessary to achieve their life goals (Chung & McBride, 2015). This model is predicated on the idea that young people are in possession of positive traits and these traits can be developed and strengthened which will aid them in adulthood.

The Five C's of Positive Youth Development

The PYD model includes five constructs and are referred to as the Five C's. They include "competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring or compassion (Chung & McBride, 2015, p. 193). Competence "refers to one's ability in social, cognitive, academic, and vocational arenas" (p. 193) and how young people view themselves in each area (Iachini, Bell, Lohman, Beets, & Reynolds II, 2016). Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula (2016) further elaborated how the competence construct relates to when young people become aware of their social, emotional, and intellectual abilities and are able to "develop and pursue [their] goals and desires" (p. 105). The key objective for the competence construct is when a young person becomes aware of their surroundings, aware of their choices available to them, and aware of the people around them (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016). When a young person becomes conscious of how to interact in their social, cognitive, academic, and vocational areas they begin to develop positively and are able to look at themselves realistically and "think critically about [their] position in these domains in relation to those around [them] and relative to [their] social status in society" (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016, p. 105). Confidence refers to an adolescent's positive self-perception or "the internal sense of overall positive self-worth, and self-efficacy or one's self-regard" (Chung & McBride, 2015, p. 193). In this construct, adolescents that have a higher self-perception of who they are as a person and how they are accepted by others can more readily adapt to changes in their development (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016). Connection is the positive bonds a young person has "with people and institutions that are reflected in mutual exchanges between individual, and peers, family, school, and community" (Chung & McBride, 2015, p. 193). Caring, or compassion, is about displaying empathy for others. Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, and Nakkula (2016) combined the concepts connection and caring together. As youth

learn to navigate being in relationships with others on a day to day basis and have positive role models they internalize and emulate the compassion they receive. Character is described by Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula (2016) as a young person developing their awareness of societal and cultural rules, how these rules work, and the decisions to interact within the rules or to make a critical decision to respectfully work against them. There is also one more construct that has been added in recent years and it is contribution, which “refers to the act of contributing positively to self, family, community and ultimately, civil society” (Chung & McBride, 2015, p. 193). The Five C’s theorizes that young people’s healthy development “occurs if the strengths of youth are systematically aligned with encouraging, growth-promoting opportunities in the institutionalized experiences the youth encounter” (Chung & McBride, 2015, p. 193).

Young people’s development is greatly fostered by the development of the Five Constructs. The more an adolescent builds on their strengths in each construct, the more the protective factors are developed. This helps them move toward their goals and discourages behaviours that do not align with these goals. Edberg, Clearly, Andrade, Evans, Simmons, and Cubilla-Batista (2016) remarked that the basic premise of PYD is that the more competencies a youth can develop and “the more assets they can access in their social environments, the less likely they are to engage in risk behaviour, even when exposed to risk” (p. 490). In this model, when an adolescent interacts with their environment and has positive role models that help them feel successful, they are more likely to develop traits that positively assist them in their lives. Positive Youth Development is a human development model that focuses on young people’s strengths and nurturing those strengths to arm them with foundational competencies as they move through adolescence and into adulthood. This model offers an alternative to previous deficit-based models (Erikson, 1968), in terms of both conceptualizing adolescent development

as well as working with adolescents, which, in turn, can assist young people to recognize and utilize their own capacities to manage challenges.

Youth Violence Prevention and Positive Youth Development

Zeldin (2004) stated that an effective preventive program aimed at reducing youth violence promotes youth involvement in community. “Involving youths in community, it is argued, is an effective strategy for preventing aggressive behaviour, but more broadly, for helping [adolescents] acquire the competencies, confidence, and a sense of belonging necessary for a successful transition into young adulthood” (Zeldin, 2004, p. 624). This aligns with the constructs in PYD model listed above. Zeldin commented that prevention models aimed at reducing youth violence need to incorporate positive youth competencies, which will help decrease youth interpersonal violence and other anti-social behaviour. Interestingly, Zeldin (2004) reported that some youth programs aimed at reducing violence and other anti-social behaviour are focused on youth deficits. These programs may actually incorporate gender role stereotypes and other false realities of youth in the way they shape their programs and policies. Zeldin (2004) indicated that youth violence prevention programs should not be designed on negative assumptions that all youth will exhibit “resistance to authority, internalizing, conflict with parents, identity confusion, risky behaviours, and conformity to negative assumptions” (p. 625). Consequently, the policies that aim to help at-risk youth and the public perceptions of youth are often intertwined (Zeldin, 2004). This could mean that youth programs that are created to reduce violence may in fact be forming policies from the misconceptions of youth. Zeldin (2004) argued that “policy [that] focuses on preventing violence and other risky behaviours may ultimately serve to reinforce faulty societal assumptions about adolescents while diminishing the focus on promoting youth development and building community among residents” (p. 627).

Because the structures in society continue to “operate largely on the principle of containment, [policy] is not organized to respond in a preventive manner to the most frequent manifestation of youth violence—that which occurs among acquaintances in local communities and schools” (Zeldin, 2004, p. 626). Violence prevention programs for ‘at-risk youth’, which structure programming based on youth deficits, may inadvertently contribute to youth violence. Instead violence prevention programs should be aimed at involving youth with their communities and perceiving youth from a strengths-based perspective. A paradigm shift is required to make this work successful.

Sports-Based Interventions and Positive Youth Development

The next section is based on Sports Based Interventions (SBI) literature and how practitioners used SBI to work with at-risk youth. The studies described here show SBI can be used for different purposes, such as reducing crime, anti-social behaviour, or violent behaviour. One significant finding demonstrated in these studies is how youth formed trusting relationships with coaches and SBI workers. The transformative relationship formed with coaches and SBI workers combined with playing sports with others (Pollack, 1998) helped youth make positive changes to their lives, such as, learning anger management skills, improving self-discipline, and assisting them to achieve a higher self-perception.

Sports-based interventions (SBI) can be used creatively to work with at-risk youth. In D’Andrea, Bergholz, Fortunato, and Spinazzola’s (2013) study, they investigated the use of SBIs for traumatized girls in residential treatment. They called the SBI ‘Play to the Whistle’ and used ‘Do the Good’, which is a trauma-informed sports curriculum specifically designed for adolescents in a residential treatment. They studied the impact SBI had on girls in residential treatment. D’Andrea, Bergholz, Fortunato, and Spinazzola (2013) stated that girls in residential

treatment often have severe behaviour problems stemming from trauma that can negatively affect their lives. “Their emotional, interpersonal, and behavioural problems often prevent them from engaging in ‘normal’ teenage activity” (p. 739). D’Andrea et al. (2013) queried if using a SBI for girls in residential treatment would affect the well-being of trauma-exposed girls and assist them to develop skills by interacting with peers and adults in a sports setting. Their inquiry was ground in past studies that have documented that “physical activity in general, and team sports in particular, have the potential to help at-risk youth develop increased self-efficacy, improved peer relationships, better physical health, and more goal directed activity” (D’Andrea et al., 2013, p. 740).

The Do the Good (DtG) curriculum was investigated to gauge its effectiveness when working with female participants in residential treatment. DtG was developed “as an adjunct to routine mental health services provided in residential treatment for adolescents with histories of severe emotional and behavioural problems” (D’Andrea et al., 2013, p. 741). DtG model was designed to adhere to the guidelines for Evidence Based Practices in Psychology (EBPP) and used three evidence based treatment models in its design and implementation, which are: Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), and Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT). The ARC framework was used in the DtG curriculum by guiding its players “to build competency, self-regulation and strong player-team relationships” (D’Andrea et al., 2013, p. 741) by building attachments with peers and adults (D’Andrea et al., 2013). This is consistent with one of the key principals of Positive Youth Development called connection, which refers to the positive bonds formed with peers, adults, and institutions “that are reflected in exchanges between the individual and his or her peers” (Iachini, Bell, Lohman, Beets & Reynolds II, 2016, p. 44). The ARC framework used in DtG

capitalizes on the PYD construct of connection by helping build attachments of youth with program leaders through the playing of sports (D'Andrea et al., 2013). Iachini, Bell, Lohman, Beets & Reynolds II (2016) stated that “the interactions between youth participants and program leaders are critical for maximizing positive youth development” (p. 44).

The PCIT model used in DtG assists the coaches to improve their communication strategies with the youth “to reduce oppositional and out-of-control behaviour” (D'Andrea et al., 2013, p. 740). The authors stated DtG uses what they term as live action coaching to achieve the PCIT goals. The three main goals of live action coaching are: first, “providing specific, behaviourally-anchored expectations to children; [two] devoting positive attention to children during play; and [three], providing concrete, specific praise for positive behaviour” (D'Andrea et al., 2013, p. 740). The PCIT curriculum “provides player and caregiver (i.e., coach) goals and structure to not only create a successful recreational atmosphere, but to work in conjunction with the therapeutic goals of each of the players” (D'Andrea et al., 2013, p. 741).

The last evidence-based model used in DtG is Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) (D'Andrea et al., 2013). Skills of mindfulness, emotional regulation, elements of distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness are used in DtG in a few different ways. Mindfulness skills are used on the basketball court “where players are encouraged to be aware of their emotional reactions and use them in service of their goals” (D'Andrea et al., 2013, p. 741). The DBT skill of emotional regulation is used “where players have to find ways to persevere despite frustrations ... where positive reinforcement and re-defining goals and successes are used to de-escalate tensions” (D'Andrea et al., 2013, p. 741). Distress tolerance elements are used in ‘play to the whistle’, by teaching players to continue playing even when they make mistakes until their coach signals them to stop (D'Andrea et al., 2013). The last DBT skill, interpersonal

effectiveness, is used in DtG curriculum by teaching players “to take responsibility for action, provide leadership and coaching to one another, and support and praise one another” (D’Andrea et al., 2013, p. 741). The DBT skills listed above can assist youth by acquiring and developing the PYD construct called competence. Competence “is the positive view of one’s actions in domain-specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, vocational” (Zarrett & Lerner, 2008). The DBT skills in the DtG curriculum gives youth in ‘play to the whistle’ a chance to develop the PYD construct of competence by their interactions with each other and coaches. Through the connections made with other peers and adults youth can become aware of the intents and actions of others so that they may learn how to be responsible within relationships in pursuit of their goals (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs & Nakkula, 2016)

D’Andrea et al.’s (2013) study revealed positive results from playing trauma-informed sports. The combination of the treatment therapy and SBI in the residential treatment “had a significant positive impact on behaviour and mental health in a diverse sample of adolescent girls across six residential treatment settings” (D’Andrea et al., 2013, p. 747). The authors highlighted that the results had a meaningful clinical impact on the participants’ mental health, which can start a conversation on the possible benefits of SBI. D’Andrea et al. (2013) were unclear how precisely DtG assisted girls to improve different aspects of their mental health. They queried a few possible explanations. First, the physical exercise the participants received while taking part of the program, helped regulate some of their hyperarousal symptoms by learning to distress. Second, the coaches’ communication styles were therapeutic for the players, therefore, “providing them with the incentive and capacity for self-regulation” (D’Andrea et al., 2013, p. 747). Third, the adolescents in the program were given a chance to socialize and be leaders among their peers (D’Andrea et al., 2013). D’Andrea et al. (2013) concluded that

physical activity can improve the wellbeing and mental health of its participants. Furthermore, sports have been successfully incorporated to teach life skills to adolescents, in the way of leadership and social skills (D'Andrea et al., 2013). An important aspect of sports is how “specific coaching behaviours seems to be a significant factor influencing the degree to which sports lead to positive youth development” (D'Andrea et al., 2013, p. 740). A limitation of this study is that it is based solely on girls, so the findings cannot be generalized to boys. Another limitation is that there was only one evaluator that was present for the games and therefore likely missed some interactions between each of the players and coaches (D'Andrea et al., 2013). A strength of this research article was how they used evidence based models and incorporated them with the SBI. This facilitated the opportunity for youth to develop PYD constructs of competence, connection and caring.

Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, and Nols (2012) stated that “sports present a very powerful tool for engaging socially vulnerable young people in an organized context, which offers an opportunity to work with them” (p. 472-473). The connections that are formed by coach and players in a sporting activity can create trusting relationships that foster empowerment in youth (Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Nols, 2012). Sports-based intervention (SBI) can assist young people who are struggling with issues related to their mental health, such as, anxiety, depression, violent behaviour, and low self-perception. (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012). In addition, the coaches in an SBI can aid adolescents to learn about structural factors that affect their lives and can support them to confront and make changes to these structures (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012). Sports can be used to engage young people in many different issues, such as “education, employment and training, community leadership, and healthy lifestyles” (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012, p.472). The training they receive can aid them throughout their lives and give them

necessary tools for adulthood. Sport-based interventions are facilitated in “settings where young people are physically safe, personally valued, morally and economically supported, personally and politically empowered and hopeful about the future” (Haudenhuyse et al., 2012, p. 473). The supportive environment an SBI provides can create an environment in which the youth can flourish and develop.

Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, and Nols (2012) queried the possibility that SBI need “more well-defined interventions with easier-to-follow outcomes” (p. 473). This is because they believed that SBI are often not clear on how they positively effect at-risk youth, “which reduces the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes” (Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Nols, 2012, p. 473). However, they argued that having an open-ended approach when working with youth assists SBI workers and coaches to develop a trusting relationship with them and having external predefined outcomes might hinder the flexibility and spontaneity required to form relationships with youth. They worried that a SBI with predefined outcomes might “reinforce processes of social exclusion” (Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Nols, 2012, p. 475). Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, and Nols (2012) additionally stated that one model that “might provide a practice-based framework for nurturing relationships with young people in [SBI]” (p. 474) is the Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model. This model provides “a set of values (for example, responsibility for others, leadership), and strategies to work towards such values (for example, reflection time, leadership opportunities) that could be fostered through [SBI] for youth” (Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Nols, 2012, p. 474). In 1991 Munchmeier as cited by Haudenhuyse, et al. (2012) suggested that adding biographic, institutional, and political competencies to SBI might be another way to have defined outcomes that could be measured. Biographic competencies includes the way coaches work with youth in

a sports setting that “could give opportunities to young people to find out about who they are (for example, identity development, and self-worth)” (Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Nols, 2012, p. 477). Institutional competencies means that coaches and SBI help youth by “finding access and making use of social institutions and services (for example, school, career services, sports clubs)” (p. 477). Political competence is about adolescents becoming aware of policies that impact them and “identifying and challenging processes of social exclusion” (Haudenhuyse, Theeboom, & Nols, 2012, p. 477). This article importantly identified research gaps for SBI and what could be added to them to help their interventions become well defined. It also suggested that SBI do more for at-risk youth by including more psychosocial perspectives in their design and implementation.

There are many programs aimed at using sports to reduce crime, but research on the benefits and effectiveness of sports is poorly supported. Nichols (1997) argued that producing hard evidence on the effectiveness of SBI at reducing crime is difficult because there can be a number of different factors involved that can be attributed to the reduction in criminal behaviour, such as, SBI attract certain youth who are less likely to reoffend. This researcher suggested that there needs to be more well defined and clear evidence that SBI work to reduce crime. One recommended method is how SBI can use a cost-benefit analysis to show that sports-based crime reduction programs do save society money by reducing crime. Nichols (1997) provided a list of rationales for why sports-based crime reduction programs might reduce crime: first, meeting youths need for excitement; second, helping youth obtain good physical fitness; third, helping youth increase their self-esteem and sense of control over their lives; fourth, assisting youth to develop cognitive competencies; fifth, mirroring good role models; and sixth, offering a chance for youth to gain employment. SBIs could help youth increase self-esteem, self-concept,

physical ability, and social competence, and move to an internal locus of control (Nichols, 1997). Youth who access sports-based crime reduction programs are on a conscious path of personal development which helps reduce their criminal behaviour. One of the limitations of this article was the focus on teenage boys and young men, and the exclusion of girls and young women. Another limitation is the lack of discussion of the value of role models in SBI. SBI would be impossible without coaches and SBI workers who work with the youth. One of the strengths of the article was how SBI can help youth increase self-esteem and give them a sense of control over their life.

There are many violence preventative programs that aim to help at-risk youth improve their lives and reduce crime rates. For example, Hartman and Depro (2006) investigated the effects that midnight basketball leagues in America have on reducing urban crime rates. These inner-city neighbourhood basketball leagues run between 10 pm and 2 am for youth that are 17 to 21 years old. The authors queried whether or not cities with midnight basketball leagues “have broad community-level effects in crime” (Hartman & Depro, 2006, p. 182). In the early 1990s, cities with midnight basketball leagues claimed to have up to a 30% drop in crime rates. Hartman and Depro (2006) indicated that the initial results were far-fetched and not scientific, as there were no control groups and no definitive results that could be attributed specifically to the midnight basketball leagues. They decided to research the effects of midnight basketball leagues using quantitative methods to determine whether these leagues do indeed reduce crime. Their (2006) work revealed that the cities with midnight basketball leagues boasted a 5% decline in crime rates compared to those without midnight basketball leagues. Hartman and Depro (2006) concluded that midnight basketball leagues can offer youth an opportunity to participate in sports and assist young people to feel more connected to their communities especially when combined

with other outreach services, such as life skills training, conflict resolution, drug prevention, educational counselling, and job training, may create preventive measures to reduce violence and crime.

Sports-based intervention has shown evidence as a positive force for adolescents and young adults to aid them to learn life skills like self-discipline, facilitate an opportunity for them to meet role models, and distract them from peer pressure to engage in street life by giving them a healthy activity to do (Hartman & Depro, 2006). Midnight basketball leagues provide a “sense of community solidarity and trust that serves as a buffer against the individualistic and antisocial sentiments and behaviours that otherwise contribute to crimes against property and the community at large” (p. 192). The findings of this study indicate that there is a possible correlation between these leagues and positive change in youth’s behaviour. For instance, Hartman and Depro (2006) explained how drops in crime in cities may be due to “popular, high-profile programs like midnight basketball leagues [and how this] might send a more positive, proactive message to community members, one that puts a new emphasis on community outreach and builds trust, commitment, and solidarity” (p. 192). Hartman and Depro indicated that there needs to be follow up studies completed “to determine more precisely whether these effects [drop in crime rates] are the result of public policy reforms and innovations or more fundamental demographic shifts” (p. 191). As with the previous article, one limitation is this study’s focus on young inner-city men ages 17-21 and the exclusion of women and other at-risk youth. Another limitation is the focus on young men of color who live in inner city neighborhoods and the attribution of the responsibility of crime rates to them. There’s an underlining assumption that the rise in crime rates are due to inner city, poor and people of color.

However, this is simply an assumption and there may be other possible demographics responsible for crimes.

Richardson Jr. (2012) explored the impact of supportive coaches in players' lives. This longitudinal study followed male African-American youth from an inner-city neighbourhood in New York City for three years. Richardson Jr. examined how successful relationships are formed between youth and coach and found that coaches act like social fathers, mentors, and role models to black male youth and that this relationship assisted them to stay clear of gangs and helped them learn vital life skills. The coaches served as facilitators to help adolescents prepare for their lives and help them transition to adulthood. In a similar study about the relationships that coaches can build with young people, Wright (2006) claimed that when youth feel valued by their coaches or adults in general, this results in the capacity to form lasting relationships, which will assist them in their quest to change. "When something enters [adolescents' lives] that wakes them up and helps them feel they belong, have a purpose and are believed in, they can finally feel they matter" (Wright, 2006, p. 172). Richardson Jr. echoed the same point and found that the coaches in his study were able to "fill the void left by the absence of conventional black role models" (p. 189). The coaches built a trusting relationship with the young male black youth, which was an important element in their change process. As in other research, young women were missing from this study. A strength of the article was the discussion of the trust built between youth and coach. This research demonstrates that this is an important element in the youth changing process. Many of the boys in this study said how much they appreciated their coach and the time spent with them.

The research highlighted above demonstrated how different types of group work with at-risk youth can have a positive effect on improving their lives. Pollack (1998) argued that the

competition of sports alone will not help adolescents build character, but the act of playing the sport with others can help increase self-worth, build identity, and assist them with expressing their emotions; evidence has linked this to a decrease in violence and improvements in their lives (Wright, 2006). From this literature, common findings included that sports and SBIs provide adult mentorship, help reduce violence, develop life skills, and increase self-esteem. In addition, the act of playing sports with others can build trusting relationships between participants, coaches, and/or SBI workers. The combination of life skills taught and positive relationships built empowers youth to make lasting transformations and learn needed skills for the development into adulthood. Although these studies and findings are not specifically about boxing, many of the elements found in these sports and SBIs are common in boxing as well. Therefore, there is potential for boxing to have these same positive effects for at-risk-youth. This is relevant to, and serves as a foundation for, this thesis research.

Personal Construct Counselling and SBI

Sports play a potent role in fostering young people to change behaviour and improve their self-image to think more positive about themselves. Resilience factors also add to an adolescents' desire to change. The next section includes the use of personal construct counselling in group work with at-risk-youth and discusses research on boxing related to SBIs.

The Use of Personal Construct Counselling with At-Risk Youth

Truneckova and Viney (2007) indicated that using personal construct psychology can help enhance the group process, which, in turn, assists at-risk youth to reduce violent behaviour and build life skills. They stated that “personal construct counseling is grounded in the process of creating meaning, and the goal of counseling is the restructuring of meaning” (p. 450). In this model of group work, the focus is on relationships between group leaders and group members, so

that group leaders can understand how group members view their world and construe meaning from these views. The researchers used three phases in their group model to assess the effectiveness of personal construct group work:

[Phase one] explored the differences in the content and structure of the construing of adolescents who participated in group work and those who did not. [Phase two] demonstrated the perceived effectiveness of the group work for adolescents, their parents, and their teachers. [Phase three] inquired into the processes of personal construct group work with adolescents. (Truneckova & Viney, 2007, p. 452)

The results of this study suggest that personal construct group work is effective at helping troubled adolescents gain new skills. All three phases of the research showed preliminary evidence that the personal construct group work model was effective in helping the youth studied to develop positively. One of the key findings indicated that forming a therapeutic relationship was central to adolescents working effectively in the group: “The clinical implications are that participants in group work need to understand that relationship development and interpersonal behaviour play an essential role in determining the efficacy of adolescent group work” (Truneckova & Viney, 2007, p. 457).

Boxing as a Sports-Based Intervention

A review of the literature showed that there was minimal research on the specific use of boxing as a medium to help at-risk youth improve their lives. In my search in 2014, I used the UNBC library database, Academic Search Complete and looked up key words of youth, boxing, and violence. I also completed a general search of databases. The article called *Keep it in the Ring: Using Boxing in Social Group Work with High-Risk and Offender Youth to Reduce*

Violence, was the only article that focused on boxing and working with at-risk youth in a group setting. In Wright's (2006) study, she created a social youth group that took place after school that included teaching boxing. Wright (2006) examined how boxing and social group work can be combined to help high-risk youth reduce violence in their lives. Wright (2006) stated that engaging youth in "boxing groups gives kids the necessary exercise for a healthy body, encourages good nutrition, and builds self-worth—a lack of which lies at the root of violence" (p. 150). Social group work combined with boxing forms a type of violence prevention that aims not only to reduce violence but also offers a path towards a positive self-identity, higher self-esteem, trusting relationships with adult mentors, new and lasting friendships, respect from peers and family, and a safe place for youth to grow (Wright, 2006).

Wright (2003) discussed her first experience facilitating an activity-based group. At first Wright did not see the therapeutic properties of the group, however, after the group had ended she witnessed how it help the participants grow, and consequently helped her grow at the same time. She "found that sewing club or boxing or climbing or any activity—properly framed, structured, and paced—can be a powerful conduit for personal growth and clinical impact" (Wright, 2003, p.112).

Wright (2006) argued, however, that "boxing groups . . . offer . . . a dynamic, innovative and engaging approach to services for high-risk older youth involved in violent acts" (Wright, 2006, p. 153). In addition, self-esteem is built through the combination of playing sports and building relationships with adults and peers (Wright, 2006). Through interactions in the boxing gym, participants learn from their peers and coaches, which provides multiple role models to emulate. Wright (2006) stated that a boxing group has 10 attributes that contribute to adolescents feeling more confident and assisting them to move forward with less violence in

their lives. Boxing groups can: (a) provide group members with a new identity, (b) promote and offer safety, (c) provide discipline, (d) use defence as a metaphor, (e) improve impulse control and patience, (f) develop the ability to focus, (g) teach commitment and offer meaning, (h) teach and provide respect, (i) relieve stress, and (j) foster mutual aid (Wright, 2006).

Wright (2006) ascertained that young people learn new skills when they take part in strength-based programming, which helps them to feel successful and promotes a feeling of accomplishment. Boxing coached responsibly facilitates self-confidence and helps them gain a more positive sense of identity and this combination has the power to change behaviour, particularly violent behaviour (Wright, 2006). Wright also specified that a combination of boxing and social group work in the form of an afterschool group is an effective means of helping at-risk youth develop into successful adults. “Youthful offenders engaged in social group work exhibit higher self-esteem, better problem-solving abilities, less recidivism and better support networks” (Wright, 2006, p. 151).

When a young person learns the art of boxing, they are taught many skills that will enhance their abilities in the ring. Wright (2006) described one of these skills as *defence*: in the ring, a boxer is either blocking or ducking the punches that are thrown at him/her. Wright explains, for example, how the boxing skill of defence can be used as a metaphor to aid at-risk youth to control their anger and to process change. One of Wright’s participants described an incident at school which resulted in detention, and he almost missed boxing. His peers in the group reminded him that he did not use the metaphor of defence and instead became angry at his teacher. Through such metaphors, youth are taught to effectively manage their anger and use emotional defence. Wright suggested, “Metaphors help to heighten the cognitive understanding in the learning process and help to relate to members’ lives outside of the group” (p. 159).

Duffy (2006) indicated that in a group setting, “metaphors can enlighten group work practice” (p. 248) and when used appropriately they assist as a way to explore feelings, help people see different angles to puzzling situations, help participants develop self-awareness, and enlighten group workers. Group facilitators can work “to make associations, to explore the meaning of the image in relation to the group that it signified, to consider relevant theory, and to develop practice alternatives” (Duffy, 2006, p. 249). Duffy (2006) cautioned that metaphors are time-bound, context specific, and can vary from culture to culture.

Conclusion

This literature review discussed many elements that are important to this thesis. The Positive Youth Development Model was introduced to explain positive ways young people can develop. This model looks at the strengths youth possess instead of examining their deficits. The Five Cs, as discussed in PYD, affirmed that when youth develop the constructs of caring, character, competence, confidence, and connection they are better equipped to face the challenges of puberty and adolescence. The discussion about SBIs was to show the many elements that they have in common with a boxing intervention. These elements are important because they are the foundation for this thesis. An exploration of how the skills learned in boxing, which share some of the same elements with SBI, can assist adolescents to explore their feelings, create self-awareness, bolster self-confidence, and learn life skills is needed to start a conversation on the possible benefits of boxing for young people.

Chapter 3 Methodology: Qualitative Research Design

An exploratory qualitative research design was used for this study. Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding “the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). In my research, I wanted to capture the lived experiences (reality) of the participants and, as Creswell (2013) suggested, I used emergent qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis to discover these experiences. Qualitative research methods were utilized to give a deeper understanding of how boxing affected the lives of my participants. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research design and methods of this study. The research question was: *Can a boxing intervention assist at-risk youth to improve their lives and if so, how?*

Semi-structured interviewing was used to engage my participants’ subjective realities, the complexities of the issues discussed, and understandings about what may lead to the creation of new programs that take into account this research, thus evoking change. One of the main goals of this study was to understand if and how engaging in boxing can positively impact youth-at-risk. In this chapter I will discuss epistemology, a social constructionist approach, researcher reflexivity, ethical considerations, consents, research procedures, data collection, data analysis, and research evaluations.

Social Constructionist Approach

Social constructionist theory acknowledges that people co-construct reality and gain knowledge from this experience through social interaction. “Knowledge is therefore constructed within cultural, historical and local contexts through the language used to interpret social experiences” (Payne, 2005, p. 58). This theory assumes that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Research is then developed by

the subjective meanings of the participant's experience of the research topic (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) explained that the goal of qualitative research is to study the opinions of the participants and how they can add meaning to the research.

Research Procedures

Recruitment

I purposefully used a key-informant sample by selecting two boxing coaches that I previously knew to participate in this study. Creswell (2014) described purposeful sampling as a way to choose participants “that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 189) within qualitative research. Key-informants in qualitative research are “well informed, are accessible, and can provide leads about other information” (Creswell, 2007, p. 243). I asked both coaches if I could come to their boxing gym and present my proposal to their boxing classes. After I presented my proposal, I gave all the boxers who wanted to participate a research consent letter and an informational boxing poster about the research project. Participants included, boxing coaches, experienced adult boxers, and youth boxers. For this study, age criteria for youth participation ranged from 13 to 18 years old. “According to scholars in the field of human development, adolescence is the stage in the life cycle that occurs between 12 and 21” (Warley, Coatta, Harris, Enoki, 2013, p.67). However, for this study the adolescent ages were picked to be below the age of majority according to the British Columbia Provincial Government, which is 19 years (BC Laws, 2017). The ages of adolescence and adulthood can vary from culture to culture and even from family to family and, therefore are not universal (Cote & Bynner 2008). For this study, participants were chosen based on the age of majority and boxing experience. If parents of the youth participants agreed their child could participate, I asked them to call me so we could set up an interview time. I coordinated a time

that worked for both the boxing coach and the participant. Some of the interviews took place after their boxing class was finished and others before it began. I had trouble recruiting the last youth boxer in Prince George so I had to look in another community. I wrote an addendum to broaden my research area and was approved to find my last youth boxer in the town of 100 Mile House, BC. I talked with the boxing coach, and he contacted a young man to see if he wanted to participate. I traveled to the boxing gym to meet this young man and he decided to participate in the study. I gave him the research poster and consent forms to take to his parents. The 2 adult boxers were chosen because of their extensive boxing and life experience. I was able to work with two adult boxers, one from each gym, who have been actively involved in boxing since before the age of 19 and are still boxing. By including boxing coaches, experienced adult boxers, and youth boxers, I believe that I incorporated a diversity of data sources that helped me understand the personal impact of boxing from differing perspectives (Patton, 2002).

Data Collection

The interviews took place in participants' boxing gym. I wanted to provide a familiar setting for each of the interviews and interview them in their boxing context. At the start of the interview, I informed each participant of the interview process. The two boxing coaches and two adult boxers were given the consent letter a week previously and brought their signed form the day of their interview. The four youth boxers were given their consent letter when I presented my proposal to their gym. If they chose to participate, they called me and set up a time to interview and then brought their signed parental consent letter. At the start of the interview, I informed each participant that I needed to audio record their interview. I showed them the audio recorder and explained I would transcribe their interview then delete it and use a pseudonym in the final write-up. I ensured they were comfortable to proceed with the audio recording and

obtained permission. I also presented each participant with a list of free and fee-based counselling resources in Prince George and 100 Mile House, BC, that they could access if they felt they needed to see a counsellor to further discuss any issue that unexpectedly arose in the interview.

Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the perceptions and opinions of the participants regarding their boxing experience and they also enabled room for “probing for more information and clarification of answers” (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 330). I developed a semi-structured interview guide. The combination of interviews and demographics allowed me to gain a deep understanding of my participants’ experiences: this in turn allowed me to write thick descriptions for the research results. Guba and Lincoln (1982) indicated that a thick description assists readers in gaining an understanding of the participants and helps them make judgments on the context of the material and whether they can transfer this information to their own setting. Patton (2002) stated that a thick description is used “in such a way that we can understand the phenomenon studied and draw our own interpretations about meanings and significance” (p. 438).

I completed eight face-to-face semi-structured interviews, each approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length. I used interview guides composed of open-ended questions (see Appendix D and E). The purpose of these interviews was to explore how boxing affected participants’ life experiences. Patton (2002) discussed how “the interview guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (p. 342). This guide helped to identify topic areas to discuss and explore, which illuminated the participant’s views on how boxing helped them improve their life (Patton, 2002). The design of these interviews was emergent, which means that as a researcher, I was open to “adapting inquiry as

understanding deepens and/or situations change: the researcher avoids getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness and pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge” (Patton, 2002, p. 40). My job as a child and youth mental health counsellor prepared me for the interviews. I was able to use counselling skills such as empathy, active listening, open-ended questions, and sharing information during the interviews. In the interviews, I wanted the participants to feel safe and comfortable, which is another reason I chose to meet in their boxing gym. The environment of the gym also helped the participants draw from their emotional connection to their experiences related to their time spent at the boxing gym. The interviews lasted from 47 min to 110 min. After I had finished each interview, I journaled about the experience, how I could improve my interview skills, and any impressions I had of the participants’ stories (Marlow, 2011).

Data Analysis

I audiotaped all interviews and transcribed them word for word. I then performed qualitative thematic analysis by using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six stages of thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail [and] interprets various aspects of the research topic” (p. 79). Thematic analysis can be seen “as a foundational method for qualitative analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Thematic analysis is flexible and can be used within different theoretical frameworks. As mentioned above, I used Braun and Clarke (2006) six stages of thematic analysis to analyse the data. The six stages are: familiarizing myself with my data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Below I

will describe how I actualized and implemented the six stages of thematic analysis in this research study.

I transcribed all the interviews and then performed Braun and Clarke's (2006) first stage of thematic analysis, which is familiarizing myself with the data. I first read through each transcript twice, the second time using a pencil to pre-code by underlining and circling words and phrases that seemed important to me. As I read, I also wrote an initial code of ideas in a journal, which assisted me in the coding process. In the second stage, generating initial codes, I read through the transcripts again and this time wrote in the margins words that stood out for me and created some initial codes. I then went through each participant's transcript and wrote all the initial codes I had in a Word document and then copied and pasted each data extract under each initial code. I did this by creating a table (see Table 1) with the headings of: data extract and initial codes.

Table 1 – Coded Data

Data extract	Initial Code
there wasn't really a reason behind it. It just kind of, like, wanted something to do and didn't really like team sports, and boxing was good. It really just came out of the blue one day. I decided "oh I should join boxing"	Talked about wanting to try boxing out of the blue Didn't like team sports
this was the only one we know of. Well, actually I knew of this one because I was in cadets for awhile, but I didn't really like that. and always seen them boxing down here, and so, I was like "a there's a gym here"	Knew of the gym because of cadets
well, I don't know, before boxing, I don't know, I was a lot like shy. Definitely not anymore, I'm a lot more outgoing. Always talking to people now, but at this point in life boxing is not a huge part of it, but it definitely was for those, for those 2 years.	Talked about he was shy before boxing and now is more outgoing Boxing helps with shyness
definitely was, definitely was. It was, like, what I thought about when I woke up. What I had to do. Like, I didn't even focus on school for awhile, like, it was wake up and go to boxing	Talked about when he was boxing competitively that was his focus Boxing and commitment
I just think like being around here with people and	Talked about how boxing helped not be so shy

like actually going like head to head with them. Like, you learn a lot more about someone when you actually fight them I think.	Being around people Learn a lot from fighting people
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This helped in organizing the beginning of a thematic map without me having to decipher the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In some cases, a data extract had more than one code. In the third stage, searching for themes, Braun and Clark (2006) suggested looking over the initial codes and organizing them into broader themes. I did this by reading the initial code and then, in a different Word document, writing down the different themes that emerged. I then copied and pasted each data extract under each theme. For example, when the participants talked about what boxing taught them, such as discipline and self-control, I grouped these initial codes under the main theme “boxing teaches life skills.” In the fourth stage, I reviewed the document again and created another Word document called grouping themes. In this section, I looked over the initial themes, noticing how some subthemes could be combined. In the fifth stage, I created a new Word document and an outline of my themes and their definitions. I organized the placement of the themes in the final write-up. The sixth and final stage was the write-up.

Researcher Reflexivity

My position and particular interest in this topic of research are subjective: they are anchored in personal experiences. It is important for qualitative researchers to identify their positions as a way to acknowledge their personal standpoints and be aware of how their personal location impacts the research in both positive and negative ways. This identification assists with separating their views from those of their participants (Creswell, 2007). I have firsthand (and very personalized) knowledge of what boxing can do for an individual who has a desire to change. It helped me gain a new identity and self-confidence, as well as learn life skills. These

experiences may be similar to the participants of this study; however, what could be different is what I have learned and used from the sport of boxing today. I have been retired from boxing for about 8 years and the most important skill that I have held on to is my need and desire to be physically fit. My hope for this research was that it may reveal ways in which boxing has benefited others, specifically at-risk-youth. However, I should note that my boxing experience and my vision for my research is my own and that the results of my research and own boxing experience may never be replicated (Creswell, 2014). I should also mention that I do not believe that the sport of boxing is for everyone and there will be some people who may not like boxing or learn any skills from the sport.

The topic of boxing and what it can do for youth is close to my heart. I love the sport of boxing and my passion for it had the potential to positively and negatively impact the research during data collection and analysis. Creswell (2014) described how researchers “personal background, culture, and experiences hold the potential for shaping their interpretation, such as themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to the data” (p. 186). I recognized that my love for boxing could bias my interpretation of the data, which was challenging. One way I ameliorated this was I focused on the participants’ stories and only include accounts that incorporated their personal testimony on how boxing affected their lives using their words.

Reflexive journaling helped me to be aware of my interviewing process and become aware of my subjectivity. After the interviews, I wrote about how I could improve my interviewing. I worked to keep my purpose in interviewing at the forefront of my mind. I reminded myself the purpose of the interview was to learn about each participant’s experience rather than help them as I do in counselling interviews. This also included being aware not to lead the participants to answer my questions the way I *hoped* they would. For example, in

Tony's interview I asked him if he thought boxing was a violent sport and he responded yes.

With this response and I almost tried to redirect his answer. This is what I wrote:

“During my interview with Tony, he called boxing violent and I almost tried to redirect him to change his answer because of my bias in believing boxing is not a violent sport.

However, his answers are valuable to my thesis and I should not try to steer participant's responses towards my bias.”

Journaling also helped me develop thoughts and impressions I could work on for the next interview. I did my best to remain objective and let the participants' answers guide the research, which is why it was so important to be reflective during this part of my research. In my journal I wrote: “When I would listen to the recorded interview I noticed that I would ask a question and if the participants did not answer the way I hoped I would ask the question in a different way.”

What I learned from this action was my need to focus on the participants answer and use my active listening skills so that I could capture both their responses and their voice. I also jotted down impressions that would help me in my data analysis.

It was wonderful to interview each participant and hear how boxing affected their lives and to hear the coaches' perspectives on the youths they have coached and examples from their own personal lives. Their perceptions came from their own subjective social experience about boxing and their stories helped inform this research. Social constructionism is a world view that looks at the subjective meanings of individuals' experiences and how the researcher relies “as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). The researcher interprets the participants' views on the subject being studied through their own “personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (Creswell, 2014, p.8). It is important to note that my interpretations of the participants' stories flowed through my own background and

experience with boxing with the intention “to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (Creswell, 2014, p.8), or in this case how boxing may have assisted participants in their lives.

I knew some of the participants, and therefore, experienced a dual role. One of the coaches and I worked for the same agency. I also used to work out in her gym. I knew three of the boxing participants on a superficial basis. The other coach I knew from my professional boxing career. I believe the semi-structured interview questions helped me to remain objective because the questions asked were subjective to the participants boxing experience. I also critically reflected on this during my journal writing. An example is when I interviewed Sarah, one of the boxing coaches, I made sure to stay on topic and ask questions that were specific to her own boxing experience. The methodology along with social constructionist theory helped me to focus on my participants’ lives and on their experience of boxing, and helped me avoid imposing my experiences on to them.

For one interview, I tried one experimental question outside of the semi-structured interview guide. I used boxing trivia questions to help the participant feel more comfortable, but it did not work. The participant did not know answers to the trivia question, so I stopped asking him about boxing trivia. This was a good lesson for me as a researcher not to make assumptions about pre-existing boxing knowledge of students in the field. However, it became an enjoyable opportunity to talk about and share my knowledge about the boxing legend George Foreman.

To be reflective in writing is an important element in qualitative writing. This is the time to explain how potentially my “bias, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status (SES) that shaped [my] interpretations formed [during this] study” (Creswell, 2014, p. 187). Creswell (2007) also stated that “all writing is ‘positioned’ and

within a stance” (p.179) and how “all researchers shape the writing that emerges, and qualitative researchers need to accept this interpretation and be open about it in their writings” (p. 179). In this reflective section, I hoped I revealed my biases and historical experiences that positively and negatively shaped the interpretations and writings in this study (Creswell, 2007). Throughout this process, I used reflective journaling to keep me grounded and aware of my own personal bias, which helped me to focus on the personal experiences of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure the ethical treatment of the participants, I completed the online Tri-Council Ethics course, which assisted in furthering my knowledge of ethical research practices with human subjects. I have included in this thesis the Participant Information and Consent Forms. These forms outline the methods I used to protect the participants’ data (see Appendixes A, B, and C). Each participant was given a pseudonym to help protect their identity. I used this pseudonym in my final write-up. Moreover, I protected participant anonymity by omitting any identifying features that might give the participant’s identity away. This project represents a minimum level of risk to participants, because of the nature of the study. The interviews ask about a sport that people usually do for fun, so it should be easier for participants to talk about. The research is about the benefits of the sport, so the interview process encouraged focus on the positive aspects of participant’s experiences with boxing.

Consent

Each participant was given a consent/information form to sign and read before they took part in this research study. It was required of the adolescent participants to have their parents’ permission and signature on the form as well. Marlow (2011) stated that it is important in research for participants to have informed consent, meaning that the participants fully know their

role and any consequences they may endure by participating in the study. “Informed consent should include information about the nature, extent, and duration of the participation requested and disclosure of the risks and benefits of participation in the research” (Marlow, 2011, p. 108). In the consent form I included my introduction as well as a brief explanation as to why I am asking them to participate. I included in the form what would happen in the study, which included; asking questions pertaining to their boxing experience, potential length of interview, that the interview will be recorded, and potential harm to them if any. The information letter and consent form also included the possible benefits of taking part in the study and that their identity would be protected along with the steps to ensure this. The form also stated that the time of the participants was completely voluntary and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time. I also mentioned in the letter that all of the forms and information would be kept in a locked safe place until the thesis process is complete and then it would be destroyed. All the above mentioned inclusions on the form was added so that each participant and the parent(s) of the participants knew exactly what the study was about so they could see that there would be no deception involved. Creswell (2014) stated the informed consent form “acknowledges the protection of human rights” (p. 96).

Evaluation of the Research

I established the dependability of my study by using audit trails. According to Guba and Lincoln (1982), an audit trail “delineates all methodological steps and decision points and . . . provides access to all data in their several raw and process stages” (p. 248). The audit trail makes it possible for an external auditor to “examine the processes whereby data were collected and analyzed, and interpretations were made” (Guba, 1981, p. 87). Member checks were used to help strengthen the research and give it credibility. Guba and Lincoln (1982) explained that

member checks determine the accuracy of the findings by having the participants look over their transcripts and interpretations to determine if they are accurate. Member checks were completed throughout the research study. After the transcriptions had been completed, I contacted seven of the participants via email and asked them to look over their transcript to check its accuracy. I mailed one of the participants their transcript and then called him to obtain his thoughts on its correctness. Member checks keep data credible and assist in the accuracy of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Dissemination of Results

The research findings produced through this study will be shared with participants of the study. I believe participants should have an opportunity to see the results of the study in which they participated. I will share chapters five and six with the participants and let them know that I will send them a copy of my thesis if they want it. I can also let them know that a copy of my thesis will be available through the UNBC library. Finally, I would like to present the results of my research at a conference or Indigenous community event to help bring awareness of the potential benefits of a boxing intervention.

Chapter 4 Participant Biographies

I interviewed eight research participants: two boxing coaches, Bill and Sarah, two adult boxers, Tony and Mark, who have been boxing since their teens, and four current youth boxers, Robert, Willy, Heather, and Vern, whose ranged in age from 15 to 16 years old. The names provided are pseudonyms I created to preserve participants' anonymity. It was a privilege to interview the participants and hear their stories about how boxing has influenced their lives. The coaches I interviewed were both from Prince George and have more than 80 years of coaching experience between them. I obtained the participants' biographies from my understanding and observations during our discussions during the interview process. It was wonderful hearing their stories and exploring the profound effect they had on the lives of the youth they have coached.

Coaches: Bill & Sarah

Bill

Bill is a Caucasian man who lives in a northern city in BC. He is originally from Nova Scotia. He recently celebrated a 50th wedding anniversary with his wife; they have two sons. He is 70 years old and has been coaching boxing for 50 years. He also runs an auto body shop. Bill coaches boxing for the love of the sport.

Bill's family always loved boxing. Some of his earliest memories are of him and his brothers gathered around the radio listening to boxing fights. He also said his older brother would set up a ring in the backyard and invite the kids in the neighbourhood to practise boxing there. Unfortunately, his family later split up, and he and his siblings were put into foster care. They stopped boxing at that time, and it wasn't until Bill was 20 years old that he was able to rekindle his love for the sport. There was a local fighter in Nova Scotia that was a professional

boxer, and Bill let him use his auto body shop to train. After he was done work for the day, he would clean his shop and set up a boxing bag and watch this pro fighter train. Bill and his brother would spar with the pro boxer and train with him. This pro fighter asked them one day if they wanted to fight on an upcoming boxing card. Bill said no, but his younger brother said yes. Bill's younger brother got knocked out in that fight and got paid a total of \$10. Bill's younger brother lost his next three fights, and no one wanted to train him, so Bill started to train him. His younger brother went on to win his next 19 fights with Bill as his trainer. Bill's younger brother boxed for ten years from 1967 to 1977 and won the Canadian Junior Lightweight title and Canadian Lightweight title, and fought some of the best fighters in the world. One remarkable fact about Bill is he only had one pro fight. It came much later than it does for most fighters, 13 days before his 52nd birthday. He said he always wanted to have a boxing match, but he was too busy with work, family, and training other boxers. When the opportunity finally presented itself, he took it. He fought a man half his age, 26 years old, in Edmonton, Alberta. The fight was called a draw and Bill decided to retire undefeated. Bill is a man who has spent most of his life giving back to other people and in the 50 years he has been with his wife, they have never taken a holiday. Bill is a remarkable boxing coach and the young men he trains have tremendous respect for him.

Sarah

Sarah is a wonderful coach and a woman who gives back to her community. She is a Caucasian woman who is over 60 years old. Her occupation is a youth worker. Most of the youth she has worked with have much respect for her. She holds a Level 5 national coaching certificate, and she holds a master level in Kung Fu. She has been coaching boxing for 31 years. She is currently the coach at a Youth Centre Boxing Club. When she started coaching at the

youth centre in 1993, she taught Kung Fu, kickboxing, and boxing. She said that back then she would start coaching at 4:30 p.m. and would not leave until 11 p.m. About 100 people attended the classes each night. Now she mainly coaches boxing and kickboxing.

Adult Boxers: Tony and Mark

Tony

Tony is an Indigenous Cree man from a northern BC city, where he has lived his whole life. He is 27 years old and has been boxing on and off for the last nine years. In ten fights, he has only suffered one loss. Tony's coach says he is a gifted and talented boxer with a lot of natural ability. Tony recently came back to the gym after about a one-year break. He is doing his best to stay in the sport he loves. He lives with his six-year-old daughter, whom he raised by himself until recently when he reunited with her mother. Tony had a difficult upbringing as he was raised in and out of foster care. Tony said that it was his uncle that influenced his decision to start boxing. When his uncle stayed over he boxed with him every night. Then his cousin Nate inspired him to come to the boxing club. He loves boxing and dreams of becoming a world champion after he gains experience boxing as an amateur. He hopes to move his family to a larger city where he can pursue his dreams of boxing and maybe try mixed martial arts.

Mark

Mark is a 25-year-old Caucasian man who has been boxing on and off for the last ten years. The longest break he took from boxing is one year. Mark's dad boxed when he was younger, and this inspired him to box. Mark knew his future coach from church and respected him as a boxing coach. He asked Mark to come to the gym one day. On reflection, Mark believed his coach saw potential in him and his boxing abilities and gave Mark and his dad

tickets to an upcoming boxing card. After Mark had watched the card, he knew that he wanted to try boxing. He started boxing when he was 15 years old in October 2005 and had his first boxing match in January 2006. Mark has the most experience out of all the boxers I interviewed. He participated in 42 amateur fights and one professional fight, which ended in a draw. He is currently attending university in an urban Canadian city and hopes one day to pick up the sport of boxing again.

Youth Boxers: Robert, Willy, Heather, and Vern

Robert

Robert is a 15 year old Caucasian boy and is currently in Grade 10. He started boxing three years ago. Robert used to be in cadets, and the boxing gym is held in the same building, so he had some familiarity with the club. He recounted that he woke up one day thinking “I want to learn how to box,” and he simply joined the gym. He has two fights, and his record is one win and one loss. He recently decided to take a break from competitive boxing and focus his time on power lifting. He decided during his last competitive fight that his heart was not into boxing anymore. However, he still loves to go to the boxing gym because he loves the cardio workout.

Willy

Willy is a 16 year-old Indo-Canadian and has been boxing for the last two-and-a-half years. He started boxing because he wanted to learn how to defend himself after he was assaulted by another youth. His dad told him that he knew a guy who owned a boxing gym and brought him to the gym. Willy decided to try boxing and stuck with it because he was good at it. When I interviewed him, he had only two boxing fights and was training to have a third the following weekend. Willy’s record is 0-2. He feels that he should have won his second fight,

but his opponent won because he was the hometown boy, a common and often accurate objection in the boxing world. Now he feels more confident going into his third boxing match and believes if he listens to his coach he will walk away with the win.

Heather

Heather is a 16 year old Caucasian girl. She has a small frame, standing about 5-foot-2 and weighing around 105 pounds. She refers to herself as “toothpick weight.” Heather has lived in a BC northern city her entire life. She does both kickboxing and boxing and hopes to one day become a professional kickboxer. She does not have any sanctioned boxing fights, and when I interviewed her, she was training for her first fight in March 2016. She always wanted to learn how to fight and decided one day to try boxing. Her mom looked for the local boxing clubs and made contact with the coach. She now loves boxing and has decided to look for a career that would fit with her boxing regime. Heather wants to become a therapist because they can make their own schedule and then she can continue to box and become a professional fighter.

Vern

Vern is 16 years old and trains in northern BC city. He has been living in this city for the last eight years. He describes himself as flexible and athletic, playing many other sports alongside boxing. He loves to play hockey but is not playing competitively anymore. He is a local hockey referee, and he loves to ride his bicycle, run competitively, and kayak. He started boxing in September 2012 because of a friend. His friend told him about a new boxing club in town, and that friend wanted him to come with him to check it out. Vern fell in love with the sport of boxing. He is currently in Grade 11 and would like to go as far as he can refereeing hockey and double as a home appraiser. He described himself as an introvert who loves to read, have quiet time, and slow down whenever he can. He likes to read various types of books and

has taken an interest in psychology. He reported he is the type of young man who would avoid all conflict. Vern has a total of three boxing fights with a record of two wins and one loss. He won his first fight by technical knockout (TKO).

Summary

No matter their age or how many years they had been involved in boxing, all of the participants said that boxing profoundly affected their lives in one way or another. The two boxing coaches had over 80 years of coaching experience between them, and each had sacrificed countless hours to the sport they love. They started in boxing in different ways, but both say how they enjoy seeing the fruits of their labour, watching young people grow and develop in boxing and their personal lives. One coach was strictly a boxing coach and the other one coached different disciplines, but each stated they could not picture their lives without the sport of boxing. I also interviewed two adult boxers who have been boxing since their youth. Each of these participants had different life experiences, one having been brought up in foster care and the other from a middle-income family. However, both of these boxers commented how boxing had helped them in many different ways. The last four participants are the youth boxers, whose ages range from 15 to 16 years old. Each of these participants started boxing for personal reasons, and all of them said that boxing is a great influence in their lives. All of the participants indicated that the relationships built with each other and their coaches have helped them tremendously which is why they stayed with boxing and learned its lessons.

Chapter 5 Results

Chapter Five highlights the results of the interviews, which were conducted for the purpose of finding out what influence the sport of boxing had on the lives of the participants. In this chapter I have identified patterns and themes. I then put like themes together into categories. In this chapter I will elucidate the profound effect boxing had on the participants I interviewed.

Introduction

Section 1, Shared Context and Definitions, is devoted to the participants' shared views and definitions of the themes: self-esteem, resilience, violence, and their view of whether or not they believe boxing is a violent sport. Section 2 is called The Potential Positive Influence of Boxing. This section is about the influence boxing has had on the lives of the participants. Section 3, Boxing Can Teach Life Skills, will explore how the skills learned in boxing can be translated into skills used in life. This section also includes the coach's perspective about how boxing can impart youth with specific life skills, such as discipline, perseverance, and hard work. The last section, Section 4, is called Coaches' Positive Influence. Section 4 is about the profound relationships between coaches and boxers and how they help each other make positive changes in their lives. See Table 1 below for themes and subthemes.

Table 2
Themes that Emerged from the Data Analysis

Definitions	The Potential Positive Influence of Boxing	Boxing Can Teach Life Skills	Coaches' Positive Influence
Definition of Self-Esteem	Boxing Can Promote Physical and Social Health	Boxing Can Teach Discipline	Boxing Coach/Role Model
The Relationship between Violence and Boxing	Boxing Can Improve Parenting	Boxing Can Teach Hard Work	Coaches' Teaching Moments
	Boxing May Assist with Identity Formation	Boxing May Assist with Self Control/Anger Management	Challenges with Coaches
	Boxing Can Increase Self-Esteem	Boxing Can Relieve Stress	
	Boxing Can Increase Self-Esteem Observed by Coaches/Coaching can Increase Positive Feelings for Coaches	Boxing Can Improve Physical Fitness	
		Boxing Can Improve Concentration	
	Boxing Can Create a Dream	Boxing Can Improve Mental Fitness	

Section 1: Shared Context—Definitions

In this section, the participants shared their beliefs, knowledge, and opinions about some of the topics discussed in this study. This was an important part of the study because I wanted to highlight the participants' views on the subjects discussed. The themes that arose shed important light on the participants' insights. Since this study's theoretical underpinning is social constructionism and how people gain knowledge from experience by their social interactions (Payne, 2005), providing their definitions of the topics discussed adds an important piece to the research data.

Definitions of Self-Esteem

The coaches, adult boxers, and youth boxers all defined self-esteem correspondingly in that boxing improved their confidence. Most of the participants defined self-esteem as positive self-perception. One participant stated that self-esteem is having a confidence allowing one to be comfortable with oneself. A coach described self-esteem as a feeling of achieved success. Vern, one of the youth boxers, described self-esteem as a positive feeling. He stated that the only true measure of self-esteem is “when you wear it.” What I believe Vern meant by “wearing” self-esteem is the way in which individuals are able to portray confidence by taking pride in, and ownership of, their self-perception and expressing themselves unabashedly. Self-esteem was described similarly in all the participants’ responses, and the basis of their definitions would be that self-esteem is a positive self-perception, which helps them develop the confidence to achieve their goals.

The Relationship between Violence and Boxing

Each of the participants was asked to describe their definition of violence. I asked them this question to understand their perceptions about the relationship between boxing and violence. It is remarkable how similarly each of them described the word violence. Their compiled definitions are as follows: one coach described violence as someone who gets into an altercation and then uses a weapon to hurt another person intentionally; the other coach voiced her definition of violence as an act with an intention to do harm or any type of abuse in its many forms. Violence was defined by one of the adult boxers as an attack on someone out of hatred or jealousy. In the boxers’ descriptions of violence salient features were: one, an action done to someone else out of anger, and two, an intention to hurt another person.

All but one of the participants said they thought boxing was *not* a violent sport. Those that described boxing as non-violent described it as a mental sport, an art, a way of life, or a competition. The main intention of a boxer in the ring is not to hurt the other person but to outscore them, make them miss, and outsmart them. One of the coaches said that he did not think boxing was violent unless you have a fighter who is not following the rules and is sneaking in illegal moves. Another coach said that boxing is not any more violent than any other sport. Robert stated that the sport of boxing is violent, but it is not violence. I appreciated Robert's response, and I thought it rather profound. In his statement, he indicated that there is a difference between "violent" and "violence." Robert meant that when an act is classified as violence, there is an intention to harm that is usually fuelled by anger, whereas an act perceived as violent is an activity where people can be injured or hurt by each other in the process, such as playing a sport, however, that is not the objective.

Section 2: The Potential Positive Influence of Boxing

The participants were asked what the sport of boxing meant to them. There were several themes that came from their responses, which are described below.

Boxing Can Promote Physical and Social Health

All of the participants overwhelmingly indicated how boxing has improved different parts of their lives. Participants spoke generally and proudly about their experiences with boxing, stating their lives would be much different without it. Some of the boxers explained how boxing helped move their life forward. When Tony discussed his boxing experience, he testified that boxing means everything to him because it helped give him a better lifestyle.

A number of participants spoke about boxing helping them to abstain from drugs and alcohol. To be the best one can be, boxing requires dedication and commitment. The boxer needs to be in their best physical shape and must be mentally strong. Boxers should live their lives in a healthy manner. Sarah, one of the coaches, discussed how she believes boxing helps youth to make better lifestyle choices and through these decisions and daily routines, they are able to create a healthy standard of living. She said the following: “Sometimes they need to learn, hey, I could do this whether it is boxing or if it’s completing Grade 12 or if it is staying on a straight and narrow path and not using drugs or alcohol.”

By comparing their lives to the crowd of people with whom they previously socialized, the two adult boxers, Tony and Mark, revealed that boxing changed their lives. Tony commented that before boxing, he used to drink and party. When asked about his life before boxing, he responded, “You know, drinking.” Soon after, he explained that his life is different now. He stated:

[Boxing] changed my life for good, with all the bad people in my life, you know? They did their thing and [boxing] got me out of there, took me out of there. I know who I am because I am not an alcoholic or a drug addict because of boxing.

Mark, another adult boxer, echoed this point. Like Tony, Mark explained that before boxing, he socialized with a group of friends that influenced him to smoke cigarettes and consume alcohol. He described his time before boxing and said, “Just smoking, drinking, and being a typical kid.” And now that he has been boxing for a few years, he has moved away from that type of lifestyle and continued on a path of growth as an individual with like-minded people. He commented:

I don't know where I would be if I never stumbled upon boxing. I would probably still hang out with the same idiots I used to hang out with. Partying all the time. I see a lot of them and . . . they haven't really grown a lot since high school. I mean, I don't want to be living that life. So, as soon as I started [boxing] it changed a lot for me. It gave me focus. I started hanging out with more people that I would call my true friends.

Mark believes that boxing helped him make positive changes and allowed him to gain focus in his life. He also went on further to say that, "If you're boxing and trying to succeed, you don't have time to smoke and party and it just doesn't go hand in hand at all."

Once the participants committed to boxing and decided to pursue it further, it helped them to better focus on the training and attain the level of commitment the sport of boxing demands. This new focus instilled a desire to live both a physical and social healthier lifestyle. The result was they felt better about themselves.

Boxing Can Improve Parenting

Only one participant talked about how boxing improved his parenting. However, it was significant enough to highlight in this section. Tony testified boxing helped him learn how to be a better father and raise his daughter by assisting him in structuring his life. He was able to use the skills he learned in boxing and apply it to his life, which additionally helped him develop his parenting skills. It also gave him hope for a better life. He explained, "If I didn't have boxing I don't know who I would be. I'd probably be a lot different person."

Boxing May Assist with Identity Formation

Four of the participants described how boxing has helped them form a new identity and because of this, their friends and family now respect them and are proud of them. Heather's

friends were especially proud of her for joining boxing because it is an intimidating sport and she had the courage to try, even though she is a small girl. This caused Heather to feel that she “is part of something awesome” and exceptional. Vern’s parents were proud of him too, but it’s his grandparents who spoke about it the most, ““Oh my goodness, my grandson is a boxer. He’s done this.’ Yeah, they’re quite proud of me.” Robert’s peers at school thought he was a “pothead,” but his reputation changed once he started boxing. He believed their opinions changed because he became a dedicated athlete and sportspeople do not drink or do drugs because it gets in the way of their goals. Boxing assisted the youth by altering the way others perceived them and, in turn, they began to see value in themselves and feel valued by their families and peers. This is consistent with the study by Wright (2006).

Boxing Can Increase Self-Esteem

As a result of an identity shift, the participants stated that boxing helped them create a more positive self-perception. They all credited their boxing experience with helping them attain a higher self-worth. They described how boxing helped their mood and, as a result, their perspectives about themselves improved, which meant they broadened the possibilities of who they are and what they imagined they could be, do, and have. The participants were able to think more positively about themselves, which gave them more confidence to accomplish both their goals within the sport and their life in general. Robert explained how sparring with an older and more experienced boxer helped him believe in himself. He testified at numerous times during our interview how sparring with Bobby, an older more experienced boxer, helped him gain confidence in the boxing ring. He explained that sparring with Bobby was one of the hardest things he ever did. Subsequently, he was not as nervous going into his first competitive match because his previous sparring experience fostered the belief he could succeed. Sparring with

Bobby made him “less scared of everything else.” Heather also confirmed her increased confidence when she said, “When I can go in the ring and fight someone and know I can do that, it makes me feel that I can do anything.” It takes tremendous courage for an individual to enter a boxing ring knowing that they will get hit. For Heather, stepping in the boxing ring aided her to face her fears, which made her feel like she can accomplish anything. Willy and Mark explained how winning a boxing match cultivated a desire to be successful in life endeavours.

A few of the participants reported that how boxing helped them overcome shyness and feel more confident in front of others. One of the reasons Heather joined boxing was to overcome her shyness. She said:

My mom and my brother and me, we’ve always be working on [me being less shy], to never give up and keep pushing me, so that I can keep growing and becoming more confident in myself and now [because of boxing], I’m way more confident in myself.

Vern also discussed how becoming a boxer has helped him learn how to be less of an introvert:

Socially, I’m a just an awkward wreck, but boxing has kind of lessened that. It’s gave me a great deal of confidence. I can walk into a situation and I have the confidence in myself that I can handle myself and handle the situation.

It is interesting that these introverts would choose boxing as an outlet to boost their confidence. These findings reveal that for these participants overcoming fears and adversities helped them boost their confidence and aided them to conquer their self-doubts.

Boxing Increases Self-Esteem as Observed by Coaches/Coaching can Increase Positive Feelings of Coaches

The coaches reported that they witnessed countless youth they mentored become more self-assured through the process of boxing. They also testified how assisting the youth reach their desired goals helps them, as coaches, to feel good about themselves. Both coaches highlighted that it is a reward to observe the youth they coach develop into more self-assured boxers and people. Bill described how he witnessed the demeanor of youth change by winning a boxing match. He declared:

When I take a kid that has no confidence in himself and doesn't think much of himself and train him for a fight and he goes in and fights good and wins the fight . . . just seeing how he feels about himself after that you know he has a whole different feeling about himself. [The youth] gets self-esteem from that, and it gives them confidence. On the other hand, I feel good about it. I feel good about what I helped that kid accomplish. To me, that's the most rewarding thing, seeing the kid that even himself thinks he can't do it, and then he does it.

Sarah had similar recounts of the youth that she has coached:

For me it was . . . like I guess you call it a sense of pride, a sense of accomplishment. Knowing that the young person achieved what they wanted to. They reached their goal, and now they know they can do more. They know they can set a goal for themselves and they can reach it, just knowing you've helped them get to that stage in life. For them to realize, "Hey I can do this, I can have what I want." It's a reward in itself, but it's the thing of seeing that person accomplish what they want, whether it's the golden gloves or

becoming a professional boxer, or being on the national team, or going in and doing that one fight, that one bout, and never fighting again, just that they did it. They did what they wanted to do.

The coaches' observations point to the notion that boxing can assist with bolstering self-confidence by encouraging adolescents to form goals in their life and then achieve those goals with the mentorship of their coaches. Both Bill and Sarah discussed feeling a sense of pride and accomplishments observing their boxing students set a goal and achieve what they desired. Many mentors or coaches are invested in their students' desire for success because they feel valued by contributing to young people achieving their goals. This perpetuates further self-confidence and motivation to continue to coach and in their coaching abilities increase. The success of their students encourages their success in their role as a coach.

Boxing Can Create a Dream

Many of the participants joined boxing because it gave them a dream to follow. One of the participants, who did not have any sanctioned boxing matches yet, decided this year that she wanted to start fighting competitively. She wanted to become a professional kickboxer and described her dream. "I guess in general with life it just gives me a purpose and something to dream about, go towards." Tony stays in boxing because he dreams of being a champion. "It's my dream to become the champion of the world," he asserted.

Boxing is a demanding sport with strenuous workouts, and it requires a lot of dedication and commitment. The participants who want to pursue boxing as a career and dream of being a champion show fortitude and dedication to their sport by the time and energy they give to it.

Conclusion

Boxing helped all of the participants create change, helping them achieve life goals, helping them abstain from alcohol and drugs, and assisting them to become more confident and self-assured people outside the ring. When the participants were asked about how boxing influenced their lives, they all responded with unique answers corresponding to a similar theme. Each one explained how their lives have changed because of the sport. Four of the participants talked about how boxing has given them purpose and an identity. The coaches talked about their uplifting experiences as mentors and how assisting the youth in accomplishing their boxing goals fostered their own sense of worth. Boxing helped participants feel a sense of success and completeness

Section 3: Boxing Can Teach Life Skills

The coaches and pugilists were asked whether or not they believed the skills they learned in the boxing gym could be used in their life outside the ring and were asked to elaborate. The participants were also asked if they believed if it was possible that boxing skills can transfer to be life skills. All participants reported that they believe boxing skills do transfer to life skills. This section is broken into the following subthemes: Boxing Can Teach Discipline, Boxing Can Teach Hard Work, Boxing Can Teach Self Control/Anger Management, Boxing Can Relieve Stress, Boxing Can Improve Physical Fitness, Boxing Can Improve Concentration, and Boxing Can Improve Mental Fitness.

Boxing Can Teach Discipline

Five boxers talked about how they learned discipline from joining boxing, and how that discipline helped them persevere through the trials and tribulations of both training and life in general. When Tony described how boxing assisted him, he testified: “[boxing] helped me with

everything in my life. With discipline, with timing, when to go to work, and it helped me in every way of life.”

Mark explained how the sport helped him achieve discipline in diet and physical routines: “You learn a lot about scheduling to like you have to get your workouts in at the right time, you got to eat at the right time.” Mark and Tony learned that success in boxing requires commitment through discipline and routine.

Sarah, one of the boxing coaches, also confirmed that she witnessed young boxers learning discipline from boxing.

You know when you come in you have to do your routine, you got to stretch, you got to skip. There is a pattern for each class and this is set. [Boxing helps] them to learn how to structure their lives. I think a lot of the stuff we do in boxing does help them teach life skills.

On the other hand, Sarah also commented that she witnessed youth attend her boxing gym only a couple times and then decide not to come back because they do not like the structure in the gym. She explained the following:

Boxing is really challenging the discipline side of it. We’ve had street fighters walk in here that were going to try boxing and then when they discovered ok there was technique in this, there is routine involved in this and there is structure, so they didn’t stay.

Boxing Can Teach Hard Work

Boxing requires boxers to push themselves physically beyond the limits of what they think is possible. Five of the participants talked about how boxing taught them to work hard.

The participants discussed how going to the gym regularly and enduring the pain of working hard will help them reach their boxing and life goals. Heather explains that boxing gives her a sense of perspective and helps her to persevere through the trying times. She said the following:

Sometimes, when I have bad sparring days, I will get discouraged, but I don't let it keep me down. I just think, well, I'm here to learn, I'm here to grow. It's OK because everybody has those days and everybody feels sad. Just keep moving and keep believing in yourself.

She also highlighted how boxing helped her to push herself further than she ever expected to go:

Like, say you want to only do 10 push ups, you have to push yourself to do 20, and you have to keep pushing yourself, to mould yourself to what you want to be and to know that you can be the best that you can be.

Boxing Can Assist with Self Control/Anger Management

Self-control was an important attribute boxing fostered in participants. Mark described an incident when he exercised great self-control, something he credits to his time in the sport. He was at a party, and two men were harassing his girlfriend. When he intervened, they wanted to fight, but he chose to walk away. He said: "You have to just be the bigger man. [They] ended up getting kicked out because security saw them pushing me."

Mark discussed how he believes boxers do not need to go looking for trouble. In his interview, he said that he believes that boxers do not have the time or energy to look for fights because boxing provides such an intense workout. Vern relayed how boxing helps him in hockey. He is no longer scared to deal with conflict on the ice. When there is an altercation between two hockey players, he can keep his cool because of his experiences in the boxing ring.

Heather described what she learned about self-control when she discussed her sparring experience:

I'll get frustrated, right, and then I will drop my hands, literally. And then it just won't work. I get hit in the head. I try to remind myself when I'm in the ring. I'm like cool as a cucumber, don't get frustrated. You're supposed to get hit in the head, it's boxing, ok, you just got to move your head, keep your hands up, don't drop them, keep cool, relax, and just keep going.

In her interview, Sarah expressed how she witnessed the youth that she coaches learn anger management from taking her boxing class. She talked about a young man who had just started boxing, but since he started, his negative behaviours at his own place of residence have decreased. This young man can have a violent temper, according to Sarah, and he sometimes cannot control it. Since coming to the boxing gym, Sarah commented that she has not heard of any anger outbursts occurring.

Boxing Can Relieve Stress

Almost every participant said that going to the boxing gym helps them with stress relief. Mark explained that when he misses a few days of boxing, he can feel his stress build up. "You have a bad day at work, you go pound the punching bag. After, you're done and you're exhausted, you're not even thinking about it [work] anymore." Mark illuminates one of the benefits that some of the participants experienced. Heather echoes that point, from a mental health perspective: "I like working out, it just clears my mind and it makes me feel good."

One of the boxing coaches, Sarah, discussed how she teaches her boxers to de-stress by asking them to "leave it at the door." If they want to pick that up [stress] on the way out, they

can, but Sarah says most of the boxers do not. Angry kids come to her gym and leave feeling less angry and less stressed. Regular exercise can be a positive outlet that can be beneficial for our well-being and mental health.

Boxing Can Help Improve Physical Fitness

All participants agreed boxing is a demanding sport and it requires a person to be in top physical condition. Vern compared boxing to military training, attesting that the workout is very intense and is mostly based on conditioning, which helped him improve as a long distance runner: “I can go further. I can go faster because I’ve been pushed beyond what I thought possible. So, now I take that out into the track.” Other participants commented how being in better physical shape helped them realize the importance of physical activity and how this helped them feel better about themselves. Heather’s sentiments expressed the participants’ testimony when she said, “It’s made me feel just better about myself, just more, like, physically better about myself, I feel healthier.”

Boxing Can Improve Concentration

Interviewees agreed that boxing can help them improve their focus. Training for a fight teaches them to concentrate their efforts into their training regime. When Robert is training for a fight, training is the only thing on his mind. “It was what I thought about when I woke up.” However, in this same statement he said that he struggled focusing on school when he was training for a fight. Robert’s account demonstrates that even though boxing helped him to learn to focus on his training it took his concentration from other important aspects of his life, like school. Heather described how boxing helps her to focus on what she desires, which is to keep boxing. Mark focuses on his coach’s words and puts them to work in the next round. He

described how in the ring, “You can’t let your mind be drifting off and thinking about this and that.”

Boxing Can Improve Mental Agility

Mark and Willy explained that boxing is a mental game and a boxer needs to be more mentally than physically fit. They believe boxing is 80% mental and 20% physical. Boxers are always thinking about their next move in the ring. “The timing, like moving around, dodging, footwork, you got to know what to do.” Vern highlighted, “Something that’s underappreciated in boxers is that we are mentally fit.”

Conclusion

The participants agree they have acquired foundational life skills from boxing training. Everyone talked about discipline. It is through being disciplined that the participants strengthened their mental capabilities. Many of the participants believed they need to be in top mental shape and that results from being in good physical shape. This means that boxers need to regularly practice their craft by going to the gym and training daily, running daily, and eating healthy. It was evident from the boxers’ and coaches’ responses that many of them learned the value of hard work, self-control, and anger management from their boxing training, how boxing is a great way to relieve stress, and the importance of being in good physical condition. The participants can carry the knowledge they received from boxing, such as a good work ethic, perseverance, and the knowledge of physical fitness with them after they are finished boxing, which can help them be successful at whatever they choose in life.

Section 4: Coaches' Positive Influence

Participants consistently reported feeling respect and appreciation for their coaches. The boxers and coaches were asked to describe their relationship with each other. This section will be broken up in three subthemes: Boxing Coach/Role Model, Coaches' Teaching Moments, and Challenges with Coaches.

Boxing had a positive influence in the participants' lives in many ways. From the coaches' perspective, they witnessed firsthand, over years, the effect boxing had on the youth they coached. Bill stated he believed that "boxing plays a vital role in society" by helping troubled youth make positive changes, such as building confidence and helping them achieve their greater life goals. When asked about what boxing means to him, Bill said, "Boxing is a way of life" and added he is rich because of the people he has met in his years of coaching. He said the following:

I know what boxing can do, I've seen it. I've got kids who went through my boxing program that are firemen, school teachers, lawyers, accountants. And some of them, maybe, at that particular time they were boxing, if they never got to boxing they might never [have] ended up where they are at today.

Sarah believed boxing is an opportunity to help youth become involved so they can learn sportsmanship. She witnessed many adolescents under her tutelage learn the skills to create a brighter future for themselves. For Sarah, boxing meant to empower children to exceed beyond their present social and emotional functioning and making choices that align with their goals. She stated:

I have seen kids walk into the club with their head hanging down. They all come for their own purpose, whether it is to learn how to protect themselves, whether it is to compete, or whether it is to get in shape. But they all walk away with a good feeling about themselves and with the thought, “Well, if I could do this [boxing], I could become a lawyer, I could be a dentist, I could be a judge if I wanted to.”

Role Model

Every participant commented on how much they appreciated their coach and how much they respect them for their time and dedication to the athletes. When Tony was asked to reflect on his coach, said: “I love her, you know, she’s everything, man, she’s one of a kind. I think she’s a good lady, she’s a great lady, she’s a good coach.” Mark described how his boxing coach treats him like his own son and that he only cares about his best interests. Vern concurred, “He’s not just a coach, but he is also a father figure.” His coach instilled in him the determination necessary to succeed in boxing, and in life.

Coaches’ Teaching Moments

The respect a boxer has for their coach can help them to learn, grow, and develop in the boxing ring, as well as in life. For example, Mark explained how his coach taught him that the worst enemy one has in the boxing ring is oneself, meaning that a boxer has to overcome his anxieties, fears, and doubts to become a better boxer. This teaching moment also assisted Mark in job interviews. By overcoming his fears and negativity in the ring, he was more confident in both interviews and the ring. Vern’s coach supported him when he was feeling depressed and gave him guidance on how to deal with challenges outside the ring. When Vern was being bullied, his coach helped him understand that violence is not the only answer and showed he can choose to disengage or walk away. He told him to “be the bigger man.” Vern took his advice.

This moment showed Vern that his coach cares enough about him to listen to him when he is in need and that he does not need to engage bullies.

As a coach, Bill wanted his boxers to fully devote themselves to the sport, which meant they jog every day, diet, and live clean. By saying this to his boxers, he is teaching them to try their best, have perspective, and work hard. He told two of his professional boxers, “In the beginning, there are an awful lot of sacrifices, and the [boxers] that can make the sacrifices the best are the ones that end up on top.”

Bill explained that he teaches his boxers to conduct themselves in a manner that can be respected, such as behaving in a way that will not bring dishonour towards themselves, their coach, or their boxing gym, such as, being disrespectful to other coaches, boxers, and boxing officials. He stated, “I tell the kids they’re a winner even if they don’t win. It’s how they conduct themselves. That’s what matters in boxing and matters in life.”

According to Sarah, one of the most important things she taught her boxers is that in her gym everyone is equal: “Everybody gets the same respect, and I think that is one of the greatest things. If they walk away knowing that, and that they can advance in life, it is the greatest gift that we could give them.” Sarah also mentioned she teaches her boxers the meaning of compassion. She tries to eliminate a potential barrier to some families by not asking for club dues from families that cannot afford them, saying:

With our club, people pay club dues, but the people that cannot pay club dues, they are still welcome. Because I feel everybody has the right to be involved in sports and to try new things. When we start shutting doors on people, it’s just like we’re sending them down the wrong path. We are not helping them. We’re not showing compassion, we’re not helping their confidence.

Sarah shows compassion and selflessness and teaches her boxers what it means to truly care. She explained how she often goes above and beyond her role as coach in the boxing gym. Her boxers will come to her for advice about difficult issues in their lives. When this happens, she talks about how she needs to listen to them and be supportive and not give them the answers they want to hear, but help them to make their choices. She asserted: “But not making the decision for them. You’re letting them decide and you’re not judging them, which is very important.”

Another teaching moment of Sarah’s is what she tells boxers if they lose a boxing match. She tells them they have already won just by stepping into the ring, by doing something very few people have the courage to do. She said: “You’ve won when you’ve stepped in. Your hand may not have been raised, but you’ve still won by stepping in the ring. And tomorrow is another day. There will be another bout.” By telling her boxers what a great accomplishment it is to step in the boxing ring, she is acknowledging their great courage.

Challenges with Coaches

When I asked the youth boxers if there were any limitations, challenges, or barriers between them and their coaches, no participants reported any. However, after more probing, two disclosed challenges. Robert explained how his coach told him that she would only focus on the things he is doing wrong in the boxing gym. He sometimes felt like his coach only focused on the negative, and that can be overwhelming at times. He declared: “For a while there it felt like I wasn’t doing anything right . . . it just felt like I’m not really achieving anything.” Mark told the story of one of his amateur boxing matches and how he struggled to make weight for his fight. He did not cut weight properly and ended up having no energy for his fight. He said he did not feel like himself and was not boxing well. Mark reported:

[My coach] told me after the first round, “What the hell are you doing, you better pick it up, or I am going to stop the fight!” Second round, I was not doing so good either and, you know, I just had no legs. I think I just was too big for that weight at the time, or I just did not really prepare to make the weight right. So, he threw in the towel in the fight.

He stopped it in the second round and I was really mad at him for a couple of days.

This is a difficult circumstance for a boxer, and Mark disclosed this disagreement was a barrier in their relationship for a time. However, after some personal reflection, Mark came to a different realization: “He was only trying to look out for my safety. It takes a while to understand that, but once I did, I definitely got over it.” Each of the participants worked through challenges with their coach and going through the struggle together later created a stronger bond between them.

Conclusion

All of the participants respected their coaches. They appreciated the time their coaches spent teaching them the art of boxing, as well as the many life lessons. Each coach in this study went above and beyond their duties as a coach. They built trust with each of their boxers by showing them love, compassion, and patience. The trust built between coach and boxer helped foster a place for young boxers to grow and develop into confident fighters and people.

Chapter 6 Discussion, Summary, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter highlights an overview of the findings of this thesis. The first section, *Discussion and Findings*, provides linkages between the Positive Youth Development Model and my research findings. This is followed by the sub-section *Researcher Reflexivity*, where I reflect on my choice to ask participants questions pertaining to boxing and violence. The sub-section *Limitations* is where I talk about my bias and how it may have positively and negatively affected this study followed by the *Potential Benefits of This Study*. *Recommendations of Further Research* examines how boxing can potentially be used in further research studies with sub sections: Promotes and Offers Safety, Uses Defence as a Metaphor, Can Improve Impulse Control and Patience, Can Foster Mutual Aid, and Implications for Social Work Practice. This is followed by Summary and Final Thoughts.

Discussions and Findings

Summary of Findings

The focal point of this research was to explore how the sport of boxing influences the lives of the participants, specifically the lives of coaches and youth boxers in two northern BC communities. Additionally, the relationship formed between the boxing coaches and boxers was explored. Results of this qualitative inquiry suggest that a combination of life skills learned from the sport of boxing and the encouraging relationships built with boxing coaches helped to foster growth in the lives of the participants. There were eight participants: two remarkable boxing coaches, two exceptional young adult boxers, and four awe-inspiring youth boxers, all of whom assisted in revealing some beneficial aspects of boxing through their stories while addressing the

research question. Each combined theme spoke to the participants' experience of how boxing became an influential part of their lives. The subject of this research project, boxing, can be controversial as it can be difficult to comprehend how this sport can help improve the lives of its participants. It is my assumption that boxing has a reputation of being violent in many communities, and if this assumption holds merit, individuals could jump to the conclusion that boxing only teaches violence, or is a violent sport. Most participants in this study did not believe boxing is a violent sport: rather, they saw it as a sport that assisted them in their learning of life skills such as discipline, hard work, self-control, stress relief, and anger management. It also helped them abstain from drugs and alcohol, facilitated an improvement in their self-esteem and their ability to overcome shyness, helped them build character and identity, and aided them in developing a relationship with their coach, which is instrumental in the development of all the strength building skills listed above. Without a strong coach, participants could not learn the skills necessary to succeed in the sport.

The two boxing coaches interviewed have over 80 years coaching experience between them. Both coaches revealed the significant benefits boxing has had in the lives of the youth they coached over the years. The two adult boxers, who have been boxing since their youth, added their understanding of how boxing helped them in their lives. These two boxers are likely near the end of their boxing careers and provided anecdotal support for boxing positively influencing their lives. The four youth in this study are at the beginning of their boxing careers, and each of them explained the benefits they already received from joining boxing. Wright (2006) proposed that those who dedicate themselves to the sport of boxing can “gain a sense of mastery and pride” (p. 150) for their achievements in the sport, as well as help build the self-esteem and self-worth needed for behavioural change.

Linking Research Findings to the Positive Youth Development Model

In this study, the sport of boxing was researched to find whether or not boxing can help youth improve their lives. Positive Youth Development (PYD) was used as a model in chapter 2 to show how young people can obtain healthy development through the art of boxing. PYD is grounded in the notion “that every young person has the potential for successful healthy development as well as the capacity for positive development” (Chung & McBride, 2015, p. 193). Looking at the development of youth through a PYD lens fosters seeing the strengths that youth possess. Chung and McBride (2015) stated that PYD “critiques the common research practice that only measures the problem behaviours of youth and fails to examine the positive behaviours youth also may exhibit” (p. 193). Without the use of this lens one might only focus on deficits and deficiencies how young people are not succeeding in terms of generalized uncontextualized developmental benchmarks (Chung & McBride, 2015). The PYD framework theorizes there are five constructs that assist in the healthy development of young people (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016). These constructs are known as the Five C’s, which are: competence, confidence, character, connection and caring (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016). Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, and Nakkula (2016) asserted that adolescents who develop these constructs will interact with their environment productively, which will assist with their development. Listed below are some of the participants’ testimonies on how boxing assisted them to develop the PYD constructs of competence, confidence, and connection.

Chung and McBride (2015) proclaimed that competence refers to a youth’s ability in their social, cognitive, academic and vocational domains. Under the cognitive competence, Chung and McBride (2015) described competence as youth’s “cognitive abilities, such as, decision-making and problem solving” (p. 193). For some of the youth in this study, boxing

assisted in their decision-making and problem solving abilities. For example, participants reported that boxing enabled them to abstain from drugs and alcohol by offering a disciplined activity that required their full attention. They became devoted to the pursuit of their boxing training and goals. Peer pressure to drink and engage in drugs combined with an identity struggle can lead youth to experiment with drugs and/or alcohol, which may lead to dependency, health, and other life issues in adolescence and adulthood. In his interview, Tony described how boxing created a new path for him to follow that provided an escape from using drugs and alcohol. He no longer wanted to socialize with friends that relied on alcohol and drugs and instead he became focused on attaining his life and boxing goals. This example demonstrated that once a person becomes dedicated to boxing, they have an opportunity to focus on lifestyle choices that can lead to becoming a better boxer and human being. Their boxing experience was the catalyst for this improved cognitive competence where it was only through and after boxing that they chose a new preventative action that aligned with life goals to remain healthy and succeed in the boxing sport.

Some of the participants in this study discussed how boxing helped with their social competence. Social competence refers to adolescents' "interpersonal skills, such as, conflict resolution and management" (Chung & McBride, 2015, p. 193). Tony and Mark described how boxing helped them manage their anger. Mark expounded in his interview that his boxing coach taught him and all the boxers in his gym to walk away from street fights. In this study, boxing helped participants gain self-control and learn to manage their anger, which helped develop their social and cognitive competence (Chung & McBride, 2015). They credited boxing as a medium that assisted with impulse control. An important finding that adds to the literature is how boxing

can facilitate youth in their emotional regulation. It can also be used a violence prevention method to help youth learn anger management strategies.

PYD theorizes that one way adolescents develop in a healthy manner is to have opportunities to feel successful. Many of the participants in this study indicated that they had an increase in confidence because they were pushed physically and mentally beyond what they thought was possible. Every boxing practice and match provided an opportunity to feel successful. Chung and McBride (2015) described the PYD construct of confidence as the “internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy or one’s self-regard” (p. 193). Nichols (1997) indicated that young people who play sports can increase their confidence through physical fitness. In this study, the participants affirmed this. The participants’ reported feelings of accomplishment. The boxing gym workout is known to be one of the most physically demanding cardiovascular exercises compared with other workouts. Boxing training requires tremendous endurance that is built through these weekly workouts as well as daily cardiovascular exercise such as jogging. The weekly and daily physical exercise can help adolescents with their self-perception because they are taking care of their physical health, which is deeply connected to their mental health. When they feel better physically and mentally, adolescents are in a better position to make positive changes in their lives (Nichols, 1997). The development of self-esteem and confidence is important in adolescence as during this time youth are struggling to find out who they are and how they fit in their world (Nichols, 1997). This new found respect will aid them in moving into adulthood with a stronger sense of identity (Wade et al., 2007).

Boxing assisted the participants in this study to improve their self-perception by encouraging them to face their fears. Many of the boxers stated how sparring and boxing

competitively were frightening because their opponent would strike them back. This meant that they had to face the fear of being hit, and whenever a person faces their fears, and the outcome is better than they expected, their confidence and self-worth increase. Robert stated many times in his interview how sparring with an older and experienced boxer gave him confidence in his competitive matches because he felt a feeling of accomplishment by overcoming his fears. He said that nothing compares to sparring with Bobby, and this made him less fearful of everything else in boxing and other areas of life.

Many of the boxers in this study stated how they loved boxing because it is an individual sport. They enjoyed the individuality because everything they achieved in the boxing ring was through their own effort, and this made them feel good about their accomplishments. This feeling of success helped them improve their self-perception and confidence. Nichols (1997) implied that adolescents who play individual sports “are more likely to have a higher internal locus of control in their personal efficacy sphere” (p. 185). The extreme workout paired with facing fears increases how adolescents’ view themselves and helps them feel like they can accomplish other life tasks. The young participants were able to connect the relationships built in the boxing gym to how they felt about themselves. Mark had the following to say about his success in winning gold at a boxing tournament:

So I won gold in my weight class in the tournament, which was 126 pounds. And it was a great weekend all in all. I just knew I loved boxing then. After that trip I thought boxing was the best sport in the world. Yeah it was just, you see all the hard work paid off at that moment and I think that was my first time really feeling that, cause you don’t really get that feeling in team sports as much because I mean it takes a whole team to

sync together well to win championships and be victorious, but it was definitely great, I loved it, ha. I loved every second of it [winning his boxing tournament].

The connection construct in PYD means that youth are able to form positive relationships and bonds with coaches and other social organizations (Chung & McBride, 2015). The combination of increased self-worth and their coach's shared wisdom assisted the boxers in overcoming many of their struggles both in and out of the boxing ring. The boxer participants held high regard for their boxing coaches and in their interviews elucidated how they were able to build a trusting relationship with them, which strengthened their relationship ties to each other and fostered a fertile place to develop and grow (Nicholson, Collins, & Holmer, 2004; Chung & McBride, 2015). The boxing coaches were exceptionally supportive in their coaching sphere and helped their boxers learn and develop different characteristics about themselves. Many of the boxers said the boxing skills taught by their coaches helped them learn the combined skills of discipline and hard work, and to abstain from drugs and alcohol, focus, reduce and relieve stress, increase physical and mental fitness, and develop anger management skills. Chung and McBride (2015) stated that an important part of the connection construct is how "both parties contribute to the relationship" (p. 193). By encouraging young people through their supportive interactions and helping them feel honoured and valued, the coaches in this study were able to be positive role models, which helped the young boxers feel like "they belong, have a purpose, and are believed in" (Wright, 2006, p. 172). The character construct described in PYD includes "interpersonal skills, valuing diversity, personal values, and social conscience" (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016, p.108). In this study, the participants were able to develop relationship skills and social conscience through supportive relationships with their coaches and

peers. They both took more responsibility for their actions, such as, walking away from a fight, and cared more for another and worked harder to give positive encouragement to each other.

Researcher Reflexivity

When I created the questions for the semi-structured interviews, I thought it was important to ask the participants their definition of some of the topics we would discuss. The subjects that I wanted them to define were self-esteem and violence. Since we would talk about the participants' social experience, I wanted to have their combined definitions of the subjects listed above included in the research process. I hypothesized from my own experience and conducting the literature review that the participants would discuss how boxing has helped them feel stronger and more proud, believe that they can accomplish their goals, and essentially have more positive self-perception. It was validating and enjoyable to hear the boxers' and coaches' stories on how boxing helped them to improve their lives. All of the participants elaborated that pushing themselves physically and mentally beyond what they thought possible helped them to believe in themselves and helped them increase their self-esteem.

I asked participants to define violence for two reasons. The first was to ensure that I had a clear understanding of their perspectives as it may be different than mine. All of the participants expressed that they defined violence as any action towards someone with the intent to hurt them physically and mentally. The second motive was to find out if they believed the sport to be violent. The combination of the definition of violence paired with the participants' opinion about whether or not they thought that boxing is violent was intended to open a dialogue about the relationship between violence and boxing in light of boxing stereotypes. Most of the participants did not perceive boxing as violent because the intent is not to harm, rather it is to outmaneuver and strategize. Reflecting on this part of my inquiry, I found seeking participants

input valuable to shed light on boxing as a sport whose other benefits outweigh being physically harmed.

Limitations

Creswell (2014) stated that the results of qualitative research should not be generalized to other people who were not part of the study. This study took place in two northern British Columbia communities, and together there are only four boxing gyms. There are fewer boxing gyms in the north than in the lower mainland, and because of this, the results are limited. Moreover, the findings of this study may not be generalized to other communities that may not have a certified boxing coach, but some of my findings may be of interest to other coaches and youth in a variety of other sports in surrounding or comparable communities. A future study could be done to explore smaller northern communities and Indigenous communities to see if other sports may also help at-risk youth increase their self-esteem and decrease violence.

One limitation to my research is that of generalizability because of the small and lack of random sampling and the location of the research in small and northern communities. A future quantitative study on the effects of boxing for at-risk youth could incorporate a larger and random sample population size in a bigger city to see if boxing can help at-risk youth. My personal bias and experience about what I believe boxing can do for a young person wanting to change may also be a limitation. I tried to take every precaution by engaging in researcher reflexivity. I kept a journal to document my process as a researcher and man who has experienced the benefits of boxing through a very difficult time. I chose a qualitative study because there is very little information and research on using boxing as a sports-based intervention (SBI). I am hopeful that exploring the opinions and beliefs of boxers in this study will help open the door to further research on using boxing as an intervention for working with

at-risk-youth.

Another limitation for this study is how I only looked at the benefits of boxing instead of its drawbacks. In this study the participants had positive experiences with boxing. Nevertheless, this might not be the case for every person who has tried boxing. There is the possibility that for some boxing creates problems. An example from this research is even though Tony expressed how much he benefited from boxing he still felt guilty for not spending time with his young family because he was devoting most of his time to training. However, understanding that boxing may have benefits opens up the possibility of encouraging future research into boxing as a SBI for at-risk-youth.

Another limitation of this study is how I could have explored more about some of the problems with boxing. For example, I could have asked questions that include if the participants feared getting a concussion; or have they every experience any racism or sexism in the boxing gym; and, or what they had to give up for boxing. I believe these questions would have captured challenging aspect of boxing that I am missing in this investigation. Another question I would modify is when I asked participants what boxing meant to them. I would now ask what they loved about boxing and what they did not like about the sport. This would have given more opportunities to reflect on what the participants did not like about boxing. However, I chose to focus on the benefits of boxing because of the limited research of using boxing as a SBI.

Limitations of thematic analysis can occur as a result of poorly conducted analyses, inappropriate research questions, a broad range of data, and the “limited interpretive power beyond mere description if it is not used within an existing theoretical framework that anchors the analytic claims that are made” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97). I tried to address these potential pitfalls by following Brain and Clarke’s six step method of thematic analysis and using

the PYD model to anchor my findings. I also used member checks to strengthen the research and give it credibility. I received guidance and assistance from my thesis supervisor with regard to interview questioning, data analysis, and appropriate naming of themes. My supervisor also assisted by helping in the context of summarizing different themes and data analysis.

Potential Benefits of This Study

There are many potential benefits to this study. First, the youth had an opportunity to share their experiences. Potential benefits to the community include the development of a boxing intervention (BI) in rural and remote northern communities, including Aboriginal communities. There are many communities in Canada who may benefit from a boxing intervention that may assist their youth's development. The use of data from this research can help them build an intervention of their own. The participants in this study indicated that a boxing intervention provided a disciplined supportive context to increase self-worth and improve different aspects of their lives. This is consistent with Wright (2006). I also hope to use the results of my research to advocate for at-risk youth so they may have more programs aimed at building self-esteem. The results of my research may also be used to aid youth-serving organizations, schools, parents, and local MPs learn about the potential powerful effect of BIs and how they can be used to teach violence prevention. I am hoping my research can assist me with the plans I have to apply for funding for the use of a boxing SBI combined with a social group to help at-risk youth decrease violence. However, the results of qualitative research, such as this cannot be generalized to every youth who boxes. Creswell (2014) commented that the intent of qualitative research "is not to generalize findings to individuals, sites, or places outside of those under study" (p. 203). This research, nonetheless, has the potential to start a

conversation about how boxing may be beneficial to youth, thus prompting further research on the subject.

Recommendations for Further Research

The sport of boxing is an interesting research topic. There are various approaches to research one can take with the sport. I agree with Wright's (2006) suggestion, which is to combine group work with boxing to reduce violence with high-risk offender youth. This group would serve as a type of violence prevention program that aims to help youth to learn how to box and aids them in their personal growth. These two purposes may help youth decrease violence, increase their own self-perception, gain role models, and build strong, positive relationships with each other and their families. I would like to conduct more research by combining an SBI (any sport can be used) with an afterschool group that takes place before the sports practice. I aspire to implement an afterschool group, using the PYD model, that will teach youth life skills from boxing, crime prevention skills, and other important information pertaining to their development. The combination of the afterschool group and boxing can have a powerful impact on the youths' lives (Wright, 2006). The 10 attributes of boxing groups developed by Wright (2006) can help youth gain a positive self-perception. My participants cultivated these characteristics. A further study can investigate how the listed attributes above assist young people in their lives. "What better way to achieve such self-awareness than through association with peers in a group doing something together, the natural modality for adolescent identity formation" (Wright, 2006, p. 172). Listed below are some areas for further recommendations, which offer further exploration on the possible effects of boxing interventions.

Promotes and Offers Safety

The boxers in this study reported that they felt welcome when they came to the boxing gym and that the environment was non-judgmental. This meant that they felt safe enough to make mistakes and learn about boxing and how to improve their skills. The safe atmosphere is an important part of boxing. Without the feeling of emotional support and care, it would be more difficult for the pugilists to reach their goals because the sport demands that its participants face their fears and push beyond what they thought possible. This supportive atmosphere fuels each boxer's drive to succeed. Similarly, Wright (2006) explained how reciprocity in her boxing social group was the foundation of the group. It is through a sense of safety that members feel secure enough to be themselves and support each other in their quest for achievement (Wright, 2006). A further study could explore how feeling secure in sports settings can help adolescents feel vulnerable enough to make mistakes and learn to develop their talents.

Uses Defence as a Metaphor

Wright (2006) explained how she uses metaphors in her boxing/social group to augment the youths' learning. Boxing metaphors helped students understand and develop anger management skills that they could relate to and use in their everyday lives. Wright (2006) used the boxing skill of defence as a metaphor to teach her boxing/social group how to manage their anger. In the boxing match, a boxer needs good defence skills to stay safe in the ring. This means that they need to keep their anger under control so that they are able to think clearly and make their opponent miss and not get hit by slipping under the punches. A strong principle of anger management is for one to avoid anger when someone is purposely or not purposely offending them. She was able to teach her group how anger was a type of letting the defence

down and not slipping the punches. The youth in her group were able to effectively use the boxing metaphor of defence in their everyday lives.

Many of my participants could not think of any boxing metaphors they used for their lives. This is most likely due to that fact that they were not taught how to use their boxing skills as metaphors. A recommendation would be to explore the use of boxing metaphors and how they can be used in violence prevention and anger management.

Can Improve Impulse Control and Patience

Boxers learn the art of patience and how to control their impulses when they train in the gym. It takes patience because these skills do not come naturally. The boxer has to practice them over and over until they become comfortable and confident to use the skill. For example, the jab is one of the most used punches in boxing and if used effectively, it can assist the boxer in controlling his opponent. However, the jab is thrown with the non-dominant arm, which at first feels very awkward. It is beneficial to new boxers to become proficient at throwing the jab until it feels natural and automatic. All of the basic boxing skills must become second nature in order for boxers to react quickly during the stressful situation they will find themselves in during the match.

Boxers to practice all of the fundamentals before they get a chance to spar. One of the fundamentals a boxer needs to learn is to be in control of their emotions in the ring as well as during training. Another is learning how to throw their punches accurately and correctly. If a boxer is not under control or is throwing their punches wildly, they could hurt themselves (Wright, 2006). Once a boxer learns to master the fundamentals, they get to step in the boxing ring and learn how to spar. Sparring is the ultimate reward for the boxer because this means they

have successfully proven to their boxing coach that they have learned the fundamentals and are ready to put them to the test (Wright, 2006). Wright (2006) stated that it takes a lot of patience for the boxer to be considered mature enough to spar, which teaches the boxer the value of fortitude. An area for further exploration would investigate how delayed gratification can be taught in a boxing intervention to teach patience and improve young peoples' impulse control.

Can Foster Mutual Aid

There are many layers that encompass the relationships built in the boxing gym. These relationships can help youth navigate social engagement outside the ring. They build friendships with their fellow boxers by encouraging one another and supporting each other through words of praise and elements of regard (Wright, 2006). Their boxing coaches serve as role models that give encouraging words of advice that transcend the boxing gym to their lives beyond. The combination of these relationships can help youth gain a new light on life, which gives them strength to move forward and accomplish their boxing goals and gain a new perspective on how to reach their life goals. A further study could investigate the ways that relationships in a boxing intervention or other sports-based interventions may improve adolescents' lives.

Implications for Social Work Practice

The social work profession is guided by a code of ethics and principles that assist the social worker in their work. The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics provides the guide for social workers in Canada. There are six values used by the CASW (2005): a) Respect for Inherent Dignity and Worth of Person; b) Pursuit of Social Justice; c) Service to Humanity; d) Integrity of Professional Practice; e) Confidentiality in Professional Practice; and f) Competence in Professional Practice.

Under the first value Respect for Inherent Dignity, the last principle states that social workers uphold the right for people to be free from violence and the threat of violence (CASW, 2005). Using group work intertwined with boxing works to uphold this CASW principle by serving as a violence prevention program. The findings of this study may be useful to social workers or human service workers who are interested in boxing as a SBI to develop confidence and reduce violence.

The sixth CASW (2005) value, Competence in Professional Practice, states that social workers assess the social needs of existing and new problems and encourage creative and transformative approaches to help alleviate these social issues and help contribute to the knowledge base of the social work profession. Boxing provides a creative means to increase self-confidence, reduce violence tendencies, improve concentration, foster discipline and provide motivation to pursue life ambitions. Helping professionals may be interested in this inquiry that contributes to this growing knowledge in the literature.

Summary and Final Thoughts

In conclusion, boxing served as a medium for the participants in this study to gain new perspectives regarding who they are and how they fit in their world. Each of them claimed that boxing was influential in identity formation and goal attainment or achievement. The knowledge the participants gained from boxing came through their own social experience. Each of them shared important stories about how boxing impacted their lives. One of the theoretical foundations of this study was social constructionist theory, which states that people create their reality through their social interactions; this assists them in expanding their knowledge about themselves and the world in which they live (Payne, 2005). One can clearly see that the

participants in this study expanded their knowledge about who they are and where they want to go through their social interactions in the boxing gym.

Each boxer spoke highly of their boxing coaches and the life lessons they learned from them. One of my favourite stories was from Mark, who spoke about how his coach taught him to walk away from street fights and not get involved. This lesson helped Mark to not let his reactive emotions be in charge of his actions. This is a great example of how a social interaction in the context of boxing led to the construction of new knowledge. The boxers also talked about how the relationships formed with the other boxers supported them to try harder and keep moving forward with their boxing goals. By being supportive of each other and gaining respect for each fellow gym mate, the participants created a friendly environment free from judgment, which fostered a desire to succeed. I particularly enjoyed Tony's report about how he loved his coach. I believe Tony's sentiment towards his coach was shared by all the boxers in this study. Through the love of coaching, boxing, and the care for their boxers, the coaches were able to assist them to become more confident boxers and human beings.

Boxing, for me, has been life changing. I stand with all the participants in this study and share the opinion that I do not know what life would be like if I had never joined boxing. It is hard to imagine my life without it because the sport has become a part of who I am. Trying to imagine my life without boxing is like trying to imagine my life without my arm. It is woven into my being and will forever be a part of it. Now, I have been retired from the sport for 7.5 years and I still try to go to the boxing gym once a week because I know it helps relieve stress. I still try to jog three to four times a week because I learned that being in good physical condition helps me to feel better about myself. I know in the future I want to become a boxing coach because I know what boxing can do for someone who has the desire to commit to it. I also want

to become a coach because I would like to be a role model for youth in my community who may be without structure and positive regard in their life. I have learned much about who I am from boxing. I have faced my fears in the ring and this has increased my confidence and resilience tremendously.

Social work programs can teach adolescents life skills. I believe that we need more sports programs, like midnight basketball leagues, to draw in youth, work with them where they are in life and teach life skills, conflict resolution, substance abuse prevention, and education and job training (Hartmann & Depro, 2006). I proposed above that a further study would incorporate boxing and a social group to teach youth skills that they can use to help better their lives. Just like the midnight basketball leagues, the boxing/social group is a creative way to work with youth at their emotional and cognitive developmental level utilizing something that interests them. In this study, I researched how boxing can improve people's lives. There was no added social group, but one factor that made a difference in the youth's lives was their caring and supportive boxing coach. Because of their coach and the skills they taught them, all of the participants expounded that boxing, in many ways, supported them to improve their lives in multiple ways.

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Appendix A Information Letter / Consent Form For Parents

Title of Study: “Investigating how Sports-Based Boxing Interventions Support Youth in Northern British Columbia: A Qualitative Study”

Who is conducting the study?

Student Researcher: *Trevor Moyah*

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Purpose of Project

The research conducted is for my graduate degree in social work and it is a thesis which is a public document. This project may be published in an academic journal. The information provided throughout the project will be used to help identify if there are any benefits of boxing interventions. The age ranges for the youth of this study are 13y to 18y old. Any reports of this study made available to participants or sent to a scientific journal for publication will contain information that reflects group results and not information about specific individuals.

Why is your son/daughter being asked to participate in this study?

I am exploring how the sport of boxing may help young people feel better about themselves and improve their lives. For this project, I had a discussion with the coaches at Sholin Boxing and Spruce Capital Boxing Gym about my research and they gave me permission to come in before the boxing class to invite young boxers to participate in my research project. Your son/daughter has choose to participate. As you are the parent, I am asking for a consent form to be signed for

your son/daughter to take part in my research project. It is also necessary to request an informed consent from each person that wishes to participate in the project. Please read the information below. If you and your son/daughter agree to the statements and your son/daughter is willing to take part in my project, please sign the form at the end of this document.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may choose freely whether your son or daughter can be in this study or not. If they volunteer to be in this study, they may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Any information they have provided up to that point will also be withdrawn and securely destroyed, unless they explicitly consent to their information being retained and analyzed. Your son or daughter is free to refuse to answer any questions that make them feel uncomfortable and still remain in the study. The investigator may also withdraw your son or daughter from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

What happens to your son/daughter in the study?

If you say yes to your son or daughter participating in this study, he/she will be asked interview questions about their experience with the sport of boxing. The interview will take place in the boxing gym and your son/daughter will be asked 8 guided interview questions. The interview should approximately take 60 to 90 minutes long. The interviews will be audio-recorded

Is there any way that participating in this study could harm your son/daughter?

The success of this research will be based on your daughter or son's participation in the research process. There are minimal risks or discomforts associated with their participating in this study. Some of the questions I ask may seem sensitive or personal. Your son/daughter does not have to answer any question if they do not want to. I acknowledge the fact that the topic we will be discussing might be a very sensitive one, so there is low risk that a participant may need emotional support; referral could be made to the UNBC Community Care Centre on 1310, 3rd Avenue Prince George, Intersect Youth and Family Service Society, 1294 3rd Ave, Prince George, BC(250) 562-6639, and The Aboriginal Child Youth and Wellness Program 1600 - 3rd Avenue (3rd Floor), Prince George, BC V2L 3G6 Phone (250) 564-4324.

What are the benefits of participating?

Through this interview, your daughter or son may have the opportunity to learn, become aware of his/her strengths, and discover his/her unused potentials. Participation in this process could be empowering.

There are many potential benefits to this study. All the participants will have a chance to share their experiences, thereby contributing to Canada-specific data.

How will your son/daughter's identity be protected?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with your son or daughter will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. To keep what your son/daughter share confidential he/she can choose an alternative name for him or herself. Several steps will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the information they provide. All information received will be stored on a secure University computer server. The audio record of the interviews will be stored on a password protected computer. Only the researcher directly associated with this study and his supervisor Dr. Indrani Margolin will have access to this information for the purposes of analysis and conducting the study. The written consent forms will be kept at my home office in a locked cabinet. Any reports of this study made available to participants or sent to a scientific journal for publication will contain information that reflects group results and not information about specific individuals. Data will be retained for a period of 5 years post publication in a secure place, after which time it will be disposed of in a secure manner.

Study Results

The final results of this study will be given as a final report to the participants of the study and may also be published in journal articles and books. You have a choice to leave me your mailing address and I can mail you and your son/daughter the final report if you so wish. I would also share the results of this study at a research conference if I was asked to present them.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions about what we are asking of you, please contact the student researcher or supervisor. The names and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or by e-mail at reb@unbc.ca.

Participant Consent and Withdrawal

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your [for example, employment, class standing, access to further services from the community center, day care, etc.].

CONSENT

I have read or been described the information presented in the information letter about the project:

YES NO

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this project and to receive additional details I requested.

YES NO

I understand that if I agree to participate in this project, I may withdraw from the project at any time up until the report completion, with no consequences of any kind. I have been given a copy of this form.

YES NO

I agree to be recorded (*if applicable*).

YES NO

Follow-up information (e.g. transcription) can be sent to me at the following e-mail or mailing address (*if applicable*):

YES NO

Signature (Parent):

Name of Participant (Printed):

Signature (Youth):

Name of Participant (Printed):

Date:

Appendix B Information Letter / Consent Form For Adult Boxers

Title of Study: “Investigating how Sports-Based Boxing Interventions Support Youth in Northern British Columbia: A Qualitative Study”

Who is conducting the study?

Student Researcher: *Trevor Moyah*

University of Northern British Columbia

Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

moyah@unbc.ca and/or (250) 250-617-2197

Supervisor: Dr. Indrani Margolin

University of Northern British Columbia

Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

Indrani.margolin@unbc.ca and/or (778) 988-5117

Purpose of Project

The research conducted is for my graduate degree in social work and it is a thesis which is a public document. This project may be published in an academic journal. The information provided throughout the project will be used in my research to help identify if there are any benefits of boxing interventions. The age range of the adults in this study are 19y and older. Any reports of this study made available to participants or sent to a scientific journal for publication will contain information that reflects group results and not information about specific individuals.

Why are you being asked to participate in this study?

I am exploring how the sport of boxing may ~~ean~~ help young people feel better about themselves and improve their lives. For this project, I had a discussion with the coaches at Sholin Boxing and Spruce Capital Boxing Gym about my research and they gave me permission to come in

before the boxing class to invite boxers to participate in my research. As you are a boxer, I am asking for a consent form to be signed for you to take part in my research project. It is also necessary to request an informed consent from each person that wishes to participate in the project. Please read the information below. If you agree to the statements and are willing to take part in my project, please sign the form at the end of this document. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may choose freely whether you want to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Any information you have provided up to that point will also be withdrawn and securely destroyed, unless you consent to your information being retained and analyzed. You are free to refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable and still remain in the study. The investigator may also withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

What happens to you in the study?

If you say yes to participate in this study, you will be asked interview questions about your experience with the sport of boxing. The interview will take place in the boxing gym and you will be asked 8 guided interview questions. The interview should approximately take 60 to 90 minutes long. The interviews will be audio-recorded.

Is there any way that participating in this study could harm you?

The success of this research will be based on your participation in the research process. There are minimal anticipated risks or discomforts associated with you participating in this study. Some of the questions I ask may seem sensitive or personal. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. I acknowledge the fact that the topic we will be discussing might be a very sensitive one, so there is a low risk that a participant may need emotional support; referral could be made to the UNBC Community Care Centre on 1310, 3rd Avenue Prince George, Intersect Youth and Family Service Society, 1294 3rd Ave, Prince George, BC(250) 562-6639, and The Aboriginal Child Youth and Wellness Program 1600 - 3rd Avenue (3rd Floor), Prince George, BC V2L 3G6 Phone (250) 564-4324.

What are the benefits of participating?

Through this interview, you may have the opportunity to learn, become aware of your strengths, and discover your unused potential. Participation in this process could be empowering.

There are many potential benefits to this study. All the participants will have a chance to share their experiences, thereby contributing to Canada-specific data.

How will your identity be protected?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified as yourself will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission and to keep what you share confidential you can choose an alternative name for yourself. Several steps will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the information you provide. All information received will be stored on a secure University computer server. The audio record of the interviews will be stored on a password protected computer. Only the researcher directly associated with this study and his supervisor Dr. Indrani Margolin will have access to this information for the purposes of analysis and conducting the study. The written consent forms will be kept at my home office in a locked cabinet. Any reports of this study made available to participants or sent to a scientific journal for publication will contain information that reflects group results and not information about specific individuals. Data will be retained for a period of 5 years post publication in a secure place, after which time it will be disposed of in a secure manner.

Study Results

The final results of this study will be given as a final report to the participants of the study and may also be published in journal articles and books. You have a choice to leave me your mailing address and I can mail you the final report if you so wish. I would also share the results of this study, if I was asked to present them at a research ~~at~~ a conference.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions about what we are asking of you, please contact the student researcher or supervisor. The names and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or by e-mail at reb@unbc.ca.

Participant Consent and Withdrawal

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your [for example, employment, class standing, access to further services from the community center, day care, etc.].

CONSENT

I have read or been described the information presented in the information letter about the project:

YES NO

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this project and to receive additional details I requested.

YES NO

I understand that if I agree to participate in this project, I may withdraw from the project at any time up until the report completion, with no consequences of any kind. I have been given a copy of this form.

YES NO

I agree to be recorded.

YES NO

Follow-up information (e.g. transcription) can be sent to me at the following e-mail or mailing address):

YES NO

Signature (**or note of verbal consent**):

Name of Participant (Printed):

Date:

Appendix C Information Letter / Consent Form for Adults-Coaches

Title of Study: “Investigating how Sports-Based Boxing Interventions Support Youth in Northern British Columbia: A Qualitative Study”

Who is conducting the study?

Student Researcher: *Trevor Moyah*

University of Northern British Columbia

Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

moyah@unbc.ca and/or (250) 617-2197

Supervisor: Dr. Indrani Margolin

University of Northern British Columbia

Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

Indrani.margolin@unbc.ca and/or (778) 988-5117

Purpose of Project

The research conducted is for my graduate degree in social work and it is a thesis which is a public document. This project may be published in an academic journal. The information provided throughout the project will be used to help identify if there are any benefits of boxing interventions. The age range for the adults in this study are 19y and older. Any reports of this study made available to participants or sent to a scientific journal for publication will contain information that reflects group results and not information about specific individuals.

Why are you being asked to participate in this study?

I am exploring how the sport of boxing may help young people feel better about themselves and improve their lives. For this project, I have sought you out personally because you have many extensive years as an experienced boxing coach. I believe that your experience will add a positive dimension to the outcome of my research.

As you are a boxing coach, I am asking for a consent form to be signed for you to take part in my research project. It is also necessary to request an informed consent from each person that wishes to participate in the project. Please read the information below. If you agree to the statements and are willing to take part in my project, please sign the form at the end of this document.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may choose freely whether you want to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. Any information you have provided up to that point will also be withdrawn and securely destroyed, unless you consent to your information being retained and analyzed. You are free to refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable and still remain in the study. The investigator may also withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

What happens to you in the study?

If you say yes to participating in this study, you will be asked interview questions about your experience with the sport of boxing. The interview will take place in the boxing gym and you will be asked 8 guided interview questions. The interview should approximately take 60 to 90 minutes long. The interviews will be audio-recorded.

Is there any way that participating in this study could harm you?

The success of this research will be based on your participation in the research process. There are minimal anticipated risks or discomforts associated with their participating in this study. Some of the questions I ask may seem sensitive or personal. You do not have to answer any question if you do not want to. I acknowledge the fact that the topic we will be discussing, might be a very sensitive one, so there is a low risk that a participant may need emotional support; referral could be made to the UNBC Community Care Centre on 1310, 3rd Avenue Prince George, Intersect Youth and Family Service Society, 1294 3rd Ave, Prince George, BC(250) 562-6639, and The Aboriginal Child Youth and Wellness Program 1600 - 3rd Avenue (3rd Floor), Prince George, BC V2L 3G6 Phone (250) 564-4324.

What are the benefits of participating?

Through this interview, you may have the opportunity to learn, become aware of your strengths, and discover your unused potential. Participation in this process could be empowering.

There are many potential benefits to this study. All the participants will have a chance to share their experiences, thereby contributing to Canada-specific data.

How will your identity be protected?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified as yourself will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission and to keep what you share confidential you can choose an alternative name for yourself. All information received will be stored on a secure University computer server. The audio record of the interviews will be stored on a password protected computer. Only the researcher directly associated with this study and his supervisor Dr. Indrani Margolin will have access to this information for the purposes of analysis and conducting the study. The written consent forms will be kept at my home office in a locked cabinet. Any reports of this study made available to participants or sent to a scientific journal for publication will contain information that reflects group results and not information about specific individuals. Data will be retained for a period of 5 years post publication in a secure place, after which time it will be disposed of in a secure manner.

Study Results

The final results of this study will be given as a final report to the participants of the study and may also be published in journal articles and books. You have a choice to leave me your mailing address and I can mail you the final report if you so wish. I would also share the results of this study, if I was asked to present them at a research conference.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions about what we are asking of you, please contact the student researcher or supervisor. The names and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or by e-mail at reb@unbc.ca.

Participant Consent and Withdrawal

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your [for example, employment, class standing, access to further services from the community center, day care, etc.].

CONSENT

I have read or been described the information presented in the information letter about the project:

YES NO

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this project and to receive additional details I requested.

YES NO

I understand that if I agree to participate in this project, I may withdraw from the project at any time up until the report completion, with no consequences of any kind. I have been given a copy of this form.

YES NO

I agree to be audio-recorded.

YES NO

Follow-up information (e.g. transcription) can be sent to me at the following e-mail or mailing address:

YES NO

Signature (**or note of verbal consent**):

Name of Participant (Printed):

Date:

Appendix D Semi-Structured Interviews for Boxing Coaches

- 1) How long have you been coaching boxing? And what does the sport of boxing mean to you?
- 2) I am interested in knowing your definition of self-esteem? Violence?
- 3) Can you tell me a success story of a youth that you have coached? Why is this person a success to you? What make them stand out compared to other youth that you have coached? I am interested in learning about the relationships or connections you have made with the youth that you have coached?
- 4) What can you tell me about the limitations, challenges, and/or barriers the relationships you have formed with the youth you have coached?
- 5) Do you believe that the skills learned in boxing can be used as life skills? If so how? And can you give an example from your own life? If you don't think they can, can you give me your reason why they cannot?
- 6) In what ways has boxing influenced your life? Has this sport helped you in your development? If so, how? And if not can you explain why?
- 7) Do you believe that the skills learned in boxing can be used as metaphors in a life? If so, can you give me an example? And if not can you give me an example?
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Appendix E Semi-Structured Interviews for Adult/Youth Boxers

- 1) How long have you been boxing? And what does the sport of boxing mean to you?
- 2) I am interested in knowing your definition of self-esteem? Violence?
- 3) Can you tell me about your boxing coach? Is this relationship important to you? What makes them stand out as a coach? I am interested in learning about the relationships or connections you have made with your coach(s)?
- 4) What can you tell me about the limitations, challenges, and/or barriers to the relationships you have formed with your coaches?
- 5) Do you believe that the skills learned in boxing can be used as life skills? If so how? And can you give an example from your own life? If you don't think they can, can you give me your reasons why they cannot?
- 6) In what ways has boxing influenced your life? Has this sport helped you in your development? If so, how? And if not can you explain why?
- 7) In what ways do you believe that the skills learned in boxing can be used as metaphors in life? If so, can you give me an example? And if not can you give me an example?
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to tell me?