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Abstract
In this ethnography of Full Contact, a San Francisco Bay Area boxing gym, I use Bourdieu's theory of practice to illustrate how 'rules of the game' shape people's perceptions, interactions and positions (*capital*). First, I show how the unwritten, unspoken rules of boxing as a field (its *doxa*) impact readings of bodies and bodily capital, readings that then have an impact on micro-level interactions and hierarchies at Full Contact. Second, I show the micro-level consequences of *hysteresis* – delays in the realignment of *habitus* and field that result from change at the field level – on social interactions and hierarchies. Gender is at the core of my analysis, for it is both a fundamental part of my and others' *habitus*, and a symbolic trait of significance in the hypermasculine *doxa* of boxing as a field.

Keywords
bodies, Bourdieu, boxing, gender, habitus, social change

In the middle of March 2008, I broke my shin training in Thai kick-boxing, but nevertheless fought my first amateur fight two weeks later. I won the fight, but between my hopes to continue fighting and I stood a sore, swollen, blue leg. I was devastated.

To console me, a good friend gave me Wacquant's (2004) *Body and Soul*, an ethnography of a South Side Chicago boxing gym inspired by Bourdieu's theory of practice. I decided to start boxing, and to study the 'manly art' through a woman's eyes. I asked: how do bodies matter for social interactions in the boxing gym? More

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specifically, how is the gendered body perceived, and how does it enable or limit the development of pugilistic capital for women?

In this article, I use Bourdieu's theory of practice to illustrate how 'rules of the game' shape people's perceptions, interactions, and positions (*capital*) at Full Contact, a San Francisco Bay Area boxing gym. First, I show how the unwritten, unspoken rules of boxing as a field (its *doxa*) impact readings of bodies and bodily capital, readings that then impact micro-level interactions and hierarchies at Full Contact. Second, I show the micro-level consequences of *hysteresis* – delays in the realignment of *habitus* and field that result from change at the field level – on social interactions and hierarchies. Gender is at the core of my analysis, for it is both a fundamental part of my and others' *habitus*, and a symbolic trait of significance in the hypermasculine *doxa* of boxing as a field.

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Bourdieu's theory seeks to bridge the gap between individualistic and structural theories of human behaviour (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Grenfell, 2008; Laberge and Kay, 2002; Maton, 2008). This theory sees individual practices as the result of a mutually defining relationship between agents' learned dispositions (*habitus*) and social positions (capital) within a specific context (field). Each one of these concepts – *habitus*, capital and field – would deserve a discussion of their own (see Grenfell, 2008). Here I limit myself to a brief overview of the Bourdieusian concepts of *doxa* and *hysteresis*.

Every field has its own practical logic – its own *doxa* – a set of 'pre-reflexive, shared but unquestioned opinions and perceptions' which determine the '"natural" practice and attitudes ... of the social agents in the field' (Deer, 2008: 120). It is through a process of construction and embodiment of this *doxa* that agents develop a specific *habitus*: a feel for the games that are played in the fields they navigate (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Laberge and Kay, 2002; Maton, 2008). The alignment of *habitus* and *doxa* in a field allows agents to be like 'fish in water': unaware of the game, they see the world as meaningful.

Both field and *habitus* are flexible and evolving structures; they are historical entities with a past, a present and a future. Yet fields are disembodied and exist outside the body; meanwhile, *habitus* is

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embodied, inscribed durably in the body. As a result, fields and *habitus* may not change at the same speed, such that the in-sync *habitus* of agents in a field at time t_0 may be out of sync at t_1 after the field's *doxa* has changed. The 'inertia' of *habitus* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 130) creates conditions of *hysteresis*: a misalignment between *habitus* and *doxa* that makes agents feel out of place and out of sync, or makes them be perceived as such.

Under conditions of *hysteresis*, writes Hardy (2008: 132), the 'symbolic capital of any individual is not only open to transformation, but is continuously fluctuating in response to changing field position[s] and changing field structures'. Resulting changes in *habitus* participate in the restructuring of the field, in a 'continuous process of change'.

Bourdieu has been accused repeatedly of determinism (see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 135ff., for a discussion). His conceptual apparatus, however, emphasizes internal struggles for power within and across fields. As noted by Albert and Kleinman (2011), although fields have their own internal structures, they are not wholly independent of external constraints and forces. Boxing as a field has been undergoing tremendous change, partly based on the growing participation and inclusion of women in sports over the course of the 20th century (Fields, 2008; Paradis, 2010). This inclusion, I argue, has changed the *doxa* of boxing, and redefines the types of capital valued within it, yet it may not have changed the *habitus* of all its inhabitants. In short, boxing and boxers may be experiencing gender-related *hysteresis*, and my study was conducted at a privileged time one when the field's rules are changing.

Bourdieu and Gender

In the Bourdieusian tradition, gender is seen as an essential part of someone's *habitus*, and as a critical determinant of someone's cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2001 [1998]; Laberge, 1995). The gendering of the *habitus* is a process of internalization of externally defined social practices. Gendered practices and learned schemes of perception and appreciation define masculinity and femininity differently, reinforced by a set of symbolic dichotomies: man/woman, inside/outside, strong/weak, active/passive (Bourdieu, 2001 [1998]; Laberge, 1995). Writes Bourdieu (2001 [1998]: 55): 'The masculinization of the male body and the femininization of the

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female body . . . induce a somatization of the relation of domination, which is thus naturalized'.

The female experience of the body is for Bourdieu (2001 [1998]: 63) 'the limiting case of the universal experience of the body-for-others, constantly exposed to the objectification performed by the gaze and discourse of others'. In contrast, masculinity exists in the 'permanent tension and contention, sometimes verging on the absurd, imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances' (2001 [1998]: 50). This manliness must be 'validated by other men . . . and certified by recognition of membership of the group of "real men"' (2001 [1998]: 52). Men's domination of women is a defining feature of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Messner, 1988), of which boxing is but one face.

The social order defined by participation in fighting sports sanctions a certain conception of masculinity (Bourdieu, 2001 [1998]), and defines the legitimate boxer as fearless, strong, courageous; someone with heart; the alpha male. That boxing is a 'quintessentially masculine space' (Wacquant, 1992: 234, cited by Lafferty and McKay, 2004: 250) is critical for understanding it as a field. The relative scarcity of women in competitive boxing, combined with the hypermasculine nature of the trade and its mythology, make gender highly salient in the boxing gym (Boddy, 2008; Hargreaves, 1997; Jefferson, 1998; Lafferty and McKay, 2004; Oates, 1987; Wacquant, 2004).

Famed writer Joyce Carol Oates, writing in the late 1980s, provocatively noted that boxing excludes women just as childbirth excludes men, and that:

> raw aggression is thought to be the peculiar province of men, as nurturing is the peculiar province of women. (The female boxer violates this stereotype and cannot be taken seriously – she is parody, she is cartoon, she is monstrous. Had she an ideology, she is likely to be a feminist.) (Oates, 1987: 73)

This masculine and mysogynistic *doxa* shapes the capital associated with different bodily and attitudinal characteristics that bear capital. Women have been boxing and fighting in the United States for over a century (Hargreaves, 1997), but the first fully sanctioned boxing fight among women didn't happen until 1993 (Boyle et al., 2006). Are women who box still monstrous? Is their gender held against

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them, its (highly negative) symbolic value trumping their pugilistic capital and limiting their trajectories in the field?

Hargreaves' (1997) history of women's boxing and overview of the different images associated with women pugilists has highlighted the precarious space women boxers inhabit, at the intersection of sexual fetish, strength, femininity and sporting ability. She writes:

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

'At first glance,' then, according to Hargreaves, women boxers' embodiment of this form of masculinity 'blurs traditional male and female images, identities and alliances, and thus the character of the sport'. Yet, as she argues, the popular appeal of 'non-combat boxing' among upper middle-class women undermines women who box being taken seriously, while conventional images of femininity are preferred by 'promoters and boxers alike' (1997: 45).

A later ethnography by Lafferty and McKay (2004) has shown gendered power structures in an Australian boxing gym. The head coach in that gym expressed a protective, paternalistic relationship to the women in his gym when he said: 'If they [women] do want to box at least I know I'll look after 'em properly and I'll do the right thing' (Lafferty and McKay, 2004: 263). His male boxers confirmed the belief in 'natural bodily differences between men and women' which constructs muscular and aggressive women as 'deviant'.

Full Contact: A San Francisco Bay Area Melting Pot

Full Contact is a relatively small boxing gym in the San Francisco Bay Area. This project was initially intended as a study of Full Contact's women. In negotiating entry with Coach, he assured me that there were many women – my size and smaller – with whom I would be interacting and boxing regularly. There was in fact only one other woman boxer at Full Contact: Julia. I thus turned partly 'inward' to document my own bodily experiences with boxing.

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Every sociological account is a construction. Regardless of the authorial voice they take, sociologists handling qualitative data have to actively weave together empirical materials into a narrative. If, following Ellis (2004), we define autoethnography as a written connection of the personal with the cultural and social, then the following is both autoethnography *and* reflexive ethnography. The ethnographic 'I' is always explicitly present in my analyses, following a tradition of ethnographers who reacted against 'realist' sociology, and instead favoured the contextualization of interactions and the positioning of the researcher within the research field (Spry, 2001).

To study the gendered boxing body across fields and *doxai* required the documentation of my interactions with the non-boxing world as well. My identity as a boxer permeated every aspect of my life: my diet, my work schedule, my sleeping needs, and also my social interactions *outside* the gym. The high status of male boxers outside the gym (Sugden, 1996; Wacquant, 1995b, 2004) could not be assumed to hold true for women, and the reactions of family, friends, colleagues and strangers, which ranged from 'You're too beautiful to box!' to 'Kick ass, Woman!', seemed worth recording.

Full Contact is a microcosm situated within a particular time in the history of boxing and of women's inclusion in sports. Therefore, the data presented in this article are analysed for their potential to illustrate the *doxic* component of boxing, but also to explore, when applicable, the consequences of the misalignment between the changing boxing *doxa* and individual *habitus*.

While vignettes were often edited or re-written for clarity, I tried to stay true to the original fieldnotes as much as possible. Conversational lines, when noted verbatim, are identified with single quotations ('like this'); lines based on recall are not. All names are pseudonyms. Comments and feedback from informants on this article's contents were included with permission.

Data were collected following ethnographic fieldnotes guidelines found in Emerson et al. (1995). I visited Full Contact 64 times between 9 June and 23 October, logging close to 200 hours of training and observation. Fieldnotes were written within a 24-hour period of every visit. I collected some 150 pages of typed notes on the way people talked about their and others' bodies; the way people reacted to my body; and the way bodies and bodily practices influenced

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people's positions, interactions and practices. I have since continued boxing, training at four different boxing gyms in California and Canada, and totalling six amateur fights.

Stepping In

According to US Census 2000 data, Full Contact is situated in a racially diverse, lower middle-class suburb. The Census track where it is located had a median annual income of $61,450 (compared to $85,619 for the County), and its racial composition is 51.4% white, 30.1% Latino/a, 12.1% Asian, 2.9% Black or African American and 3.5% other races. These numbers can be compared to 69.1% white, 12.5% Latino/a, 3.6% Asian, and 12.3% Black or African American in the general US population (US Census Bureau, 2000).

Unlike bigger gyms, Full Contact is the home of only one coach ('Coach'), who is also its owner, and about 70 members. Records on members are not kept, receipts are not given for monthly dues, and the only paper trace members leave is on a waiver form Coach makes them sign on their first visit. Many members have been coming for years; 'new meat' (Fussell, 1991) comes at a rate of three to five people per month, and people drop out at about the same rate. The larger part of the clientele is male (in a 6:1, male to female ratio), and white (a 5:3, white to non-white ratio). Members are aged between 14 and 45.

There are two different 'types' of members at Full Contact: competitive boxers and those whom I will call 'non-boxers', in a 1:6 ratio. Competitive boxers are thus a minority, and their training sponsored partly by non-boxers' fees. Boxers ('the real thing') have a greater volume of symbolic capital than non-boxers ('the fake thing'), and most of them do not mingle or train with non-boxers. Only certified boxers are allowed to spar, as per California regulation.

Coach's boxers are all amateur boxers, although professionals come to use the facilities for training and sparring. A few of them are nationally ranked, some are up and coming, and some, including myself, are beginners. Most of Coach's adult boxers are white, and their ages range from 22 to 31. Coach's male boxers fight at weights ranging from 145 to 201 pounds, although a male Japanese boxer fighting in the 105-pound division trained temporarily with us over the course of his English immersion programme. Next to Julia, the

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only other female boxer at Full Contact, I looked and felt like a monster (13 August 2008, fieldnotes): 20 pounds lighter than I, and maybe 3 inches shorter, she fought three weight categories below mine. Interestingly, then, I was simultaneously the heaviest female boxer in the gym and lighter than every competing male boxer, fighting at 138 pounds.

Classes for non-boxers are led by Coach, Julia or Adam (a heavy-weight boxer), and include boxing moves and bag work. A subgroup of non-boxers include those whom I call the 'hopefuls'. They are a small group of men who are waiting for Coach to notice their boxing talent and give them a chance to box. Some of the hopefuls are working hard to get in shape and lose weight so that they can compete; others are the boxing equivalent of the 'village idiot': young men with no athletic skill who still have high hopes for fame.[1]

Set in a transformed warehouse, Full Contact is packed with 12 heavy bags (both sand and water bags, all in perfect repair), 2 speed-bag platforms (but only one speed bag), a full-size elevated ring, stationary bikes, weights and a range of workout instruments such as skipping ropes, cones, steps and medicine balls. The cement floors of the gym are covered with shock-absorbing surfaces of one kind or another: carpet, artificial grass, or padded rubber. Boxing posters crowd most available walls. Artifacts from the 1960s cohabit with month-old tournament posters. Coach's own fighting pictures and trophies are lost among others. Throughout my stay, there were only two mentions of women on the cluttered walls of the gym: one on a poster for a state-wide event, which noted that women and children would also be fighting; the other on an event poster where the 'California Ring Girls' logo is featured among sponsors.

There are no changing rooms or showers, and only two small bathrooms. One is labelled with a co-ed sign, and the other with a women-only sign, although men do use it when the co-ed bathroom is busy. Most women change in the bathrooms; most men come in their workout clothes or change in front of everybody, stripping to their boxer shorts. Between the bathroom doors sits a small bench, under which two electronic weight scales lie.

In line with Wacquant's (2004) observations about the Woodlawn Boys Club, little information about private lives is exchanged in the gym, and current events that are not sports-related rarely surface. It takes time to learn explicitly about people's jobs, origins, education,

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etc., yet visual clues such as people's clothes, gear, cars, etc., betray their financial means: blue-collar jobs for most men; white- or pink-collar jobs for most women.

I visited Full Contact six days a week for four and a half months. I left the office at 3 p.m., arrived on my bicycle from the train at 4 p.m., got changed and worked on my own (jump rope, shadow boxing, bag work) until the 5 p.m. class. I would then work out with non-boxers for an hour (cardio and plyometrics), and continue working with Coach, Julia, or other boxers until 7 p.m. (on the mitts, in front of the mirror, or sparring), when I would leave to catch the train. Twice a week, for the last two months, I helped coach the youth boxing programme, which consisted of about 12 youth from the neighbourhood. I thus totalled close to three hours of gym time with every visit, interacting with the full range of members: boxers, non-boxers, youth and Coach alike.

Doxa, the Ideal-typical Body and Symbolic Capital

Wacquant (1995a) notes the variegated ways through which boxers acquire and accumulate their capital. He describes the way boxers 'conceive of, care for, and rationalize ... the use of their body as *a form of capital*', and how they transform '"abstract" bodily capital into *pugilistic capital*' (1995a: 65). In Wacquant's (1995a, 1995b, 1998, 2004) accounts, the body of boxers is a learning machine, an instrument, a weapon and, crucially, something boxers invest in.

Yet the body is also something that is on display and whose surface matters. 'Boxers', Wacquant (1998: 334) writes, 'are exceedingly conscious of their outward appearance and want to look trim, taut and "hard".' These aesthetic traits are important not in and of themselves, but because they are seen as an indication of 'the instrumental readiness of the fighter' (1998: 335). The fusion of the 'aesthetic and pragmatics of pugilism' allows boxers to invest in their appearance without being 'feminized' (1998: 336; for similar concerns in bodybuilding, see Fussell, 1991; Jefferson, 1998; Klein, 1993).

Beyond gendered prescriptions and segregation (Fields, 2008; Welch, 2004), sport subfields often have implicit blueprints that define what I have called the ideal-typical body of the skilled practitioner. These blueprints allow gatekeepers such as coaches, recruiters

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and even the press to quickly evaluate the body of hopeful practitioners, and thus their legitimacy as athletes. In boxing as in other sports, these blueprints are a reflection of *doxic* schemes. The taut, hard body and the focused, aggressive mind are seen as prerequisites for a boxing career, even as the reality of the sport is otherwise.

Indeed, the many weight classes allow for a wider range of body sizes than is typical in other sports (Wacquant, 1995a). Boxing champions range from 101 pounds to more than 260 pounds. Especially among 'the rank and file, the "preliminary" boxers, club fighters, prospects and contenders, journeymen and opponents, trial horses and bums, who constitute the overwhelming majority of practitioners' (Wacquant, 1995a: 490), variation across fighting bodies is immense. From tiny and wiry to huge and fat, boxers come in all sizes, shapes, and forms. Regardless, athletic 'specimens' (8 August 2008; sidenotes) who fit the widely available ideal-typical image of the professional boxer one sees on posters – muscular, lean, dark, and fierce; think Muhammad Ali or Mike Tyson – command a lot of attention from everyone.

I argue that net of skill, someone with the field's ideal-typical bodily characteristics valued by the field will rank higher on the social hierarchy of that field *because* their bodily appearance directly maps onto beliefs about field-specific ability – onto the field's *doxa*. In the case of boxing, pugilistic capital will be perceived to be higher among boxers with the blueprint bodily traits than among those without. The ideal-typical boxer possesses greater symbolic capital than the non-ideal-typical one; s/he is thus more likely to receive attention from coaches and peers, to obtain favours, get feedback, and will likely be given more opportunities to grow. Theo is a case in point.

Theo is Back!

I had been a member of Full Contact for three months when I first met Theo. I first saw him on the train. His hair had grown into a large Afro, but I immediately recognized him from his shirtless pictures on the gym's website, posters and flyers. When he got up to get off at the same stop as me, I overheard part of an animated conversation he had with a train employee: 'Do you play soccer?' He was wearing long, knee-high white socks. I heard Theo answer: 'No, I'm a boxer' (fieldnotes, 11 August 2008; 32nd visit). My intuition was confirmed.

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Over 6 foot tall, about 200 pounds, handsome, in his early 20s but with a thick beard, a strong jaw line and the body of a very committed athlete[2] – he had very visible eight-pack abdominal muscles which he showcased by walking around shirtless – he stood out so much at Full Contact that he was the only boxer a straight male friend of mine mentioned after his visit (fieldnotes, 9 October 2008; 58th visit).

When he walked into Full Contact after me that day, the whispers began: 'Theo is back!' 'Theo is back!' Coach and Theo had a long conversation as soon as Theo got in the gym, after which they both worked together in the ring. Theo kept his street shoes on: an action that had resulted in severe reprimand earlier. Boxing shoes, we were told, were a sine qua non for getting in the ring.

Upon noticing Theo, Ahmed, a non-boxer, told me: Theo is back. He looks fit; he's probably been working out (fieldnotes, 11 August 2008; 32nd visit). As she joined us for stretches, Gloria, a non-boxer, noted that Theo was back. When she arrived to teach the 6 p.m. class, Julia also noticed that Theo was back. For two and a half hours that day, there was a 'Theo' buzz throughout the gym. Theo is back! Theo is back! I heard people say everywhere around me.

However, as I watched him skip rope, shadow box, or work on the mitts with Coach, I was not impressed, as I did not see the boxer I was expecting from either the body or the hype. He skipped slower than Bob; looked less focused than Vlad; his moves were not as fluid as Yasu's. He did not hit as hard or as fast as Jack, a boxer his size; and he was nowhere close to Mark's skill level. All of these guys were regulars, showed more obvious skill on at least one significant level, but none of them were on promotional material the way Theo was. Mark confirmed my intuition when I asked for his thoughts on Theo as a boxer: Coach thinks he's great, he said, but 'I personally don't think he's a boxer', he has 'muscle, but they are *beach* muscles'.[3] Did others agree with him? Jack did, he added, and so did YouTube videos (10 January 2009, fieldnotes).

What, then, accounted for Theo's clout in the gym? It wasn't his bubbly personality, which in the case of Jack translated into a sort of charming goofiness; it wasn't his centrality among the coaching staff, which made Julia and Jack well known. The buzz around him, I argue, was built upon the symbolic capital attributed to his body in the boxing gym, a symbolic capital aligned with boxing's *doxa*. He

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fit the 'ideal-typical' boxer perfectly – lean, muscular, dark, fierce-looking – and coasted upon his projected pugilistic and symbolic capital.

Gender and the Ideal-typical Body: Hysteresis

Theo is not the only Full Contact member who benefited from field-specific symbolic capital. I also did. I am tall, muscular, lean and attractive,[4] just like Theo. I have the 'right' body for a boxer, as a referee with an international-level reputation noted when I fought in Quebec: long arms, wide shoulders, narrow hips (12 June 2009; fieldnotes).

My bodily capital, even if it unequivocally reads as 'woman', signalled 'fighter' to others at Full Contact, even before they saw me fight. One of the most vocal boys in the youth programme championed me as a 'Muay Thai fighter' among his peers, and I was often asked for tips on throwing kicks, elbows and knees as I coached the youth programme. Mark asked me if I had been a professional Muay Thai fighter before joining the gym (fieldnotes, 14 July 2008; 19th visit), and upon my return from a two-week holiday Stephen, a middle-aged non-boxer with whom I had never spoken, asked:

I (fieldnotes, 12 September 2008; 41st visit)

S: 'Where have you been?'
E: 'My sister got married, so I spent two weeks back home.'
S: 'I was wondering whether you had gone pro or something.'

Despite my beginner status, both Mark and Stephen assumed that my skill level was high enough to be that of a professional (female) kick-boxer – someone who could earn money off of sport – before they saw me fight. Overall, my bodily traits serve me well in boxing, even though they were sometimes a liability. Witness this interaction between James and I:

II (fieldnotes, 24 June 2008; 9th visit)

I get in front of the mirror and start working. I am concentrating on my stance, on keeping my back straight, on punching while keeping my core tight, without leaning. I feel like I'm getting a feel for this. James is changing behind me. I can see him in the mirror, but I concentrate

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on my task. . . . He shouts at me; there are a lot of people and noise around:

J: *Bleh-bleh-bleh bleh.*

At first I don't understand what he says. He speaks in a way that I find hard to understand.

E: 'Pardon?' I ask, without turning around to face him, looking at him in the mirror.
J: 'You still wanna fight?'
E: 'Yes.'
J: 'It always makes me laugh when a *girl* wants to fight.'

I turn around, face him; he's standing up, taller than me. Bigger than me.

E: 'Why?'

There is defiance in my voice, and probably in my stance too. I am standing tall, looking at him straight in the eye. I am trying to act tough. I am scared to death. I wonder if he's going to punch me. Or if I'll punch him first. Do fights ever break out in the gym?

J: 'Don't see that too often.' And he starts laughing.

I turn to the guys behind him, who may have heard something. Yet I avoid everybody's eyes. I try to get back on task, but can't. I am torn between the need to say something more and the need to write the interaction down so that I don't forget his exact words. I battle my impulse to run to the bathroom to cry, and run to my notepad instead.

Before this one interaction, I did not know James's name. We had spoken once, a few days earlier, when he asked whether I was going to fight, or whether I was 'just workin' out' (fieldnotes, 20 June 2008; 7th visit).

After this second interaction, as I was leaving the gym, Coach noticed that I looked upset. When I told him about the incident, and the tall guy who had made those comments, Coach struggled to identify James. Further descriptions made us agree on the culprit, but Coach expressed his surprise, for he had seen James support Julia. Coach told me he would speak with James immediately, that he considered this behaviour inappropriate, and that Full Contact should feel like a second home to everyone.

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James, according to Julia, is someone who does not believe women should box. As the oldest boxer in the gym, James's reaction may have been the result of *hysteresis*: his *habitus*, developed over 20 years of training when boxing's *doxa* was hypermasculine, was maladapted to women's presence in competitive ranks. James responded differently to Julia and me, however. She was teased; I was aggressively approached, potentially because of our differing dispositions and positions at Full Contact. Julia is an attractive, petite, short woman of colour with a body softer than mine. She was always smiling, plays a nurturing role with non-boxers through teaching, and signalled heterosexual femininity with her make-up and her engagement ring. Because my gender and sexuality are more ambiguous, James may have perceived me as a greater challenge to male domination (Messner, 1988, 2002). My feminine masculinity (Halberstam, 1998) was read by James and others in the gym as an indicator of my pugilistic capital. To James, this was an irritant; his *habitus* apprehended my body, and saw it as contradicting his understanding of the gender game and of boxing as a male preserve.

Context Matters: The Body Across Fields

Bourdieu notes how the idea of 'body image' – one's subjective perception of one's body – fails to acknowledge the critical role that social structures play in this subjective perception, ignoring the importance of the 'schemes of perception and appreciation inscribed in the bodies of the interacting agents' (Bourdieu, 2001 [1998]: 63). These schemes of perception, according to some social psychologists, make the experiences of women athletes sometimes contradictory, a source of 'gender conflict'. Perry and Marsh (2000: 70), for example, write that:

> Athletes must develop their bodies in order to exert force in their competitive environments. For most sports, that requires a physique that is strong, powerful, and lean. These concepts of force, power and strength are atypical of the societal stereotype for women. In many cultures, women are regarded as submissive, nurturing, and demure. Women may perceive that these are desirable traits in attracting partners and establishing relationships. If the female athlete accepts this image of women, there is the potential for role conflict to develop.

The above section on the ideal-typical, gendered body illustrates others' perception of my bodily capital at Full Contact; the following two vignettes illustrate my relationship to my body across fields.

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Dancing/Fighting Body

III (26 July 2008; sidenotes)

I go out dancing with some friends in the Mission. I am the last one in line as we make our way to the patio. As I walk past him, a man steps in and grabs me by the shoulders. He is shorter than I am, wearing a Hawaiian shirt, cargo shorts and a hat. He exclaims: ‘Oh my god you look so fit!’ before turning to his friend and asking:

M: ‘Doesn’t she look fit?’

His friend (a woman) concurs, smiling shyly behind him.

M: ‘What’s your workout?’
E: ‘I box.’
M: ‘Awesome! That’s so great!’

I laugh, look to the floor; it is quite embarrassing.

IV (11 October 2008; sidenotes)

Monica and I decide to go together to see fights in San Francisco. She is wearing a black tank top, revealing awesomely muscular shoulders, blue jeans that sit low on her hips, and brown flip flops. I am wearing my favourite jeans, my cowboy boots, and my red spaghetti-strap tank top. The doorman let us go through for free, telling us that – rather than asking us whether – we’re fighting tonight. It feels funny, but I am quite proud. People look at us constantly, as there are very few women at the event, and certainly none who are so visibly muscular. I am smiling, happy to be there, standing tall, feeling muscular and strong.

Pictures of my body invalidate the hypothesis that it had changed significantly between July and October 2008, and my continuing discomfort with comments about my muscularity outside of a sporting context belie a shift in my relationship to my body.

Instead, these experiences suggest that the woman athlete’s evaluation of her bodily capital may be deeply contextual, and field specific, rather than a matter of body image or role conflict. My feel for the different games played in each field makes me feel like ‘fish in water’ in sporting contexts, but like ‘fish out of water’ in contexts where I perceive a different relationship to and evaluation of female muscularity, such as a dance club. The woman athlete’s relationship to her body is

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fundamentally relational, contingent on the schemes of perception and appreciation of bodily traits and their symbolic capital within a field.

Sparring, Hierarchies and the Body

In American culture as elsewhere, the body is maintained and transformed through a range of bodily practices and modifications (Brumberg, 1997; Crossley, 2004; Featherstone, 1982, 2000; Featherstone et al., 1991). Woodward (2008: 542) notes that '[b]oxing bodies are saturated by disciplinary techniques and are highly regulated and self-disciplined through a set of routine practices and mechanisms'. While boxing is an individual sport, boxers develop collectively, in deep connection with their coaches and their training partners, and it is commonly said that a boxer is only as good as his or her sparring partners.

Sparring defined two sets of hierarchies at Full Contact. The first one was strictly implemented by Coach, as he was the gatekeeper to 'boxer' status, and selectively allowed boxers to spar. Only 10 of the gym's 70 members met Coach's pugilistic standards. From merely boxing, Coach's selected boxers could identify with the noun, not just the verb. 'I box and I am a boxer' is different from 'I box, but I do it for fitness.' One fights; the other works out.

Although the main goal of sparring is to develop the pugilistic capital necessary to do well in fights (Wacquant, 2004), it also serves other functions: it serves as a test and confirmation of within-gym hierarchies. If some see sparring as 'fighting that no one ever sees' (18 July 2008; notes, interview with Chelsea), it is in fact a display of skill that coaches, boxers and non-boxers alike watch closely. At Full Contact and in every other gym where I trained, people interrupted their workout to watch sparring sessions, or at least positioned themselves to be able to watch them while training, especially when the gym's top boxers were in the ring, or when an outsider was visiting for a sparring session.

Sparring reinforced or challenged hierarchies in three main ways. First, Coach's management of sparring reinforced a skill-based hierarchy. He chose the match-ups, and assigned roles: the weaker boxer plays offence; the stronger, defence. Coach's system labelled who was expected to be the stronger boxer. Second, while there are no points, judges or official 'winners' and 'losers' in sparring, onlookers evaluate who has the upper hand: who is beating up whom; who is

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out of shape; who is making serious progress; whose nose bleeds. This appraisal defines within-gym hierarchies through an unofficial ranking of boxers. Both of these mechanisms increase status via sanction or display of pugilistic capital.

Third, initial observations of (male) boxers' shirtlessness suggest that they (probably subconsciously) choose to keep their shirt on based on their evaluation of their aesthetic bodily capital compared to their opponent's. With regard to shirtlessness in the ring, Full Contact boxers can be divided into three main categories: those who always take their shirts off, those who sometimes take them off, and those who never take them off. The two heaviest, most muscular boxers were part of the first category, and showed off their bodies; the skinniest and fattest boxers were part of the third category, and hid under a shirt. Among the second category, Boxer A's behaviour appeared to depend on his opponent's muscularity.

Although these data are preliminary, they do suggest that boxers are, at least at a preconscious level, aware of the bodily *doxa* of boxing. Accordingly, those who could display a hard, muscular, taut body did; boxers with lower levels of aesthetic capital displayed it when their opponent's was even lower than theirs; and those at the bottom of the bodily hierarchy – regardless of their boxing ability – never took their shirts off while sparring.

Gender and Sparring: Hysteresis

Sparring is a critical part of boxing training: it allows the boxer to put to use the skills s/he learned through shadow boxing, bag work and work on the mitts with a coach. Two main factors play against women's ability to learn through sparring: the *doxic* belief that boxers must 'pay their dues', and women fighters' relative scarcity and dependence on their coaches.

First, Boyle et al. (2006), in their analysis of Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby*, take issue with her coach Frankie's (Eastwood) dominance. Early on, he tells her: 'If I take you on, you don't say anything. You don't question me. You don't ask why. You don't say a thing except maybe, "Yes Frankie." And I'm going to try to forget that you're a girl' (Boyle et al., 2006: 106). I was served a similar rhetoric when, during my 13th visit, I complained about the speed at which my training was going: 'Coach tells me that he's

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particularly tough on the rookies. They work really hard, get little playtime, he says, adding: "I will neglect you." He continues: You need to show dedication and commitment' (fieldnotes, 2 July 2008; 13th visit). This part of the boxing *doxa*, in which a boxer needs to 'pay his dues' to earn respect from coaches, can be compounded in women's case by their unwillingness to ask and lower sense of entitlement (Babcock and Laschever, 2003).

Second, the fact that there are so few women in boxing means they have few women to spar with. Historically, women have sparred with men, but, as noted above, Lafferty and McKay's (2004) ethnography showed a protective, paternalistic attitude of the main coach toward the women in his gym, which translated practically in his 'avoid[ing] placing them in the ring with less experienced men for fear they might not control their punches' (2004: 263), and instructing all boxers to go easy on the women. Similarly, a Thai kickboxing friend claims one of my coaches told him that he thought I was 'too pretty to fight' (15 June 2010; sidenotes). Cultural beliefs about women's need for protection and the importance of their looks may lead coaches to prepare their women boxers inadequately: not providing them with enough ring time, or with ring partners that challenge them and help them get better.

In gyms where coaches are devoted to and have had several successful women athletes, I received a lot of one-on-one instruction and was given lots of time in the ring; in others, I was dismissed and accused of neediness. *Hysteresis* is thus highly visible in sparring: beyond access to other women as sparring partners, it depends on the coaches' *habitus* and their understanding of boxing's *doxa*.

Collective Weight Management and Bodily Capital

While the expression 'pound for pound best fighter' tries to write skill across weight classes, weight so fundamentally shapes boxing styles and stakes that weight talk is an unavoidable component of the game. As Oates wrote, 'Like a dancer, a boxer "is" his body, and is totally identified with it. And the body is identified with a certain weight' (1987: 5). The *doxa* of the field thus defines a certain relationship of boxers to their weight: it must be constantly monitored, the body disciplined to 'make weight' (Wacquant, 2004; Woodward, 2004).

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At Full Contact, individual boxers' fighting weight was widely known and discussed. Boxers and non-boxers alike interacted around weight, sharing their attempts to lose, maintain or gain weight. Yet the deeply gendered relationship of men and women to their body can shape weight-related practices and influences their pugilistic and symbolic capital.

'I Can See It, Man!': Non-boxers and Weight Watching

If weight is critical in boxing, it is also a major preoccupation in the broader American culture (Bell and McNaughton, 2007; Brumberg, 1997; Dworkin and Wachs, 2009; Paradis, 2011; Rothblum and Solovay, 2009). Thus, while boxers are 'legitimately' preoccupied by their weight, they are not the only ones at Full Contact to talk about it. Note, for example, the following interaction:

V (fieldnotes, 23 June 2008; 8th visit)

> Ahmed and Raid arrive as Peter is doing sit-ups on the bench. Loudly, Ahmed asks Peter how he's doing with the weight loss. 'I can see it, Man!' he adds. Peter says that he hopes he lost 5 pounds, that he'll weigh himself at the end of the month. He started his diet at the beginning of the month. He was 165, he says, wants to drop down to 155, and then to 140. Ahmed insists: I can see it. It shows.

These men feel comfortable discussing their weight openly, and losing weight appears as a very legitimate goal that commands support. There is no 'invisible fat man' (Bell and McNaughton, 2007) at Full Contact (or in any other gym I trained at), and weight loss often features among reasons people join boxing gyms in the first place (see also Crossley, 2006). Ahmed lost weight by attending Full Contact's boxing-style classes, and showed sympathy for Peter's weight-loss goal. In this case, sharing weight-loss goals helped non-boxers build their bodily capital in the form of a muscular, lean body through encouragement from their peers.

Gender and Public Weigh-ins: Hysteresis

My experience at Full Contact suggests that weight management among boxers is a bonding opportunity akin to that just described for Ahmed, Raid and Peter. Indeed, boxers buzzed around the gym's two electric scales before competitions, mimicking the procedure for

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official weigh-ins: stripping to their underwear while others looked over their shoulders, cheering them on and keeping tabs on their progress.

Julia and I never participated in the public weigh-ins at Full Contact, even though I stripped comfortably to my bathing suit for the Quebec Golden Gloves in May 2009, and for a San Francisco local fight in October 2009. Across four boxing gyms and over three years of training, I have never seen a woman strip in public for *unofficial* weigh-ins. Instead, women use a range of tactics: they weigh themselves at home, take the scale into the bathroom as they change, or weigh themselves fully clothed and subtract pounds for clothing. Until 14 July 2008, I had elected to weigh myself at home. That day, however, an interaction between Mark and I changed my attitude:

VI (fieldnotes, 14 July 2008; 19th visit)

Mark is weighing himself again. I ask, smiling:

E: 'Good news?'

He remains silent.

E: 'Bad news?' [Silence] 'News?'
M: 'How much do you weigh? I bet you're heavier than you look.'
E: 'I'm huge!'
M: 'You're huge?' [Smiling, ironic.]
E: 'Oh. Yeah.'

Mark makes a motion inviting me to step on the scale. I step on it. We're both looking. 146.8, with my pants, sports bra, t-shirt, hand wraps, shoes and socks.

M: 'You're probably 142. This scale makes you heavier than you are. I weigh 188 on this one, but 182 at home.'
E: 'Interesting . . . '
M: 'Are you fighting soon?' [Very friendly, smiling.]
E: 'Hopefully!'
M: 'Is it your first time . . . ?'
E: 'I did Muay Thai before.'
M: 'That doesn't count, it's all about' [and he makes as if he's throwing a knee with his left leg.]
E: [Laugh] 'I had a first fight there . . . '
M: 'Pro?'
E: [Laughing] 'No, not at all. Amateur. But I loved it. That's why I'm here.'
M: [Smiles.] 'Alright.'

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We get back to work.

By first claiming loudly 'I'm huge!' I voiced the 'appropriate' gendered response to weight: culturally, we believe that women are (and should be) self-conscious about their weight.[5] Stepping on the scale made me vulnerable in front of a boxer with high pugilistic and symbolic capital; in doing so, I also signified my acknowledgement of the weight imperatives of the field. Not only was I paying my dues in hours spent at Full Contact, I was willing to overcome my 'feminine sensitivity' about my weight to play the game. Mark and I bonded over this moment, got started on regular boxing-related conversations, and remained in regular contact after we both left Full Contact for other gyms. In participating in this field-specific ritual, I got acknowledged *as a fighter* by a fighter, and extended my symbolic and social capital. A 'real man' confirmed my masculinity, if only for a moment.

Bodily Processes and Pugilistic Capital: Hysteresis

Biologically driven bodily changes have bearings on one's level of bodily capital. Ageing, for example, affects appearance and shapes the way people perceive and interact with others. Wacquant (1995a: 82ff.) notes how boxers deplete their stock of pugilistic capital through injury, fatigue and loss of sensory acuity. In the boxing gym, a woman-specific bodily change often goes under the radar: periods. Women's periods seem to conflict with the weight-class system of boxing, especially among lighter women who fight in 5-pound-wide weight classes.

VII (fieldnotes, 5 August 2008; 29th visit)

I saw Mark and a few youth weighing themselves today in preparation for the State Championships. Julia and I are supposed to drive down together, but she tells me that it is unlikely that she'll be able to make weight because of her period. With a sad smile on her face, Julia notes how men never have to worry about their period; they don't have to worry about added water weight before fights.

Every boxer except for Julia made weight and fought at the State Championships. Coach decided that it was not safe for Julia to fight above her usual weight class, as some very powerful boxers were listed to fight at 125.

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While women's weight management is undoubtedly more complex than men's, some women fighters have come up against this discourse that posits women as victims of their periods. In a FOX News interview, Tara LaRosa, a professional mixed martial artist, said that she 'was absolutely mortified, horrified' when she heard of the recent weight mishaps of professional fighters Gina Carano and Cristiane Cyborg Santos, which were blamed on 'female problems' (FOX News, 2009). This type of discourse, she argued, sends professional women athletes years back, and makes women fighters 'look terrible'.

Similarly, Monica, my sparring partner and friend, responded thus to a previous version of this article:

VIII (13 January 2009, sidenotes)

> I hate to be critical of Julia, but give me a break – we all have to make weight when we have our periods at some point or another and we all do it, it is not impossible by any means and water weight is the easiest kind of weight to lose. It sounds to me like she was looking for an excuse to get out of fighting . . . you cannot be a fighter halfway, either you're going to do it and you do whatever it takes to do it or you're going to be a fitness boxer, it's very simple.

Julia's exclusion from the bonding rituals of weigh-ins may have had consequences for her ability to manage her weight, regardless of whether or not she was trying to avoid fighting. I also know that *I* personally failed to support her, even as I noticed her gain weight in the few weeks before the Championships. On such a small frame as hers, an extra 5 pounds was visible in the way her clothes fit.

Did I stay quiet because I did not want to add to the social pressures placed on women to be thin (Brumberg, 2000 [1988]; Germov and Williams, 1996; Seid, 1988)? Because I felt shame for noticing changes in her body, for 'checking her out' and violating the ethnographic ethos which recommends keeping a certain distance from 'informants' (Dennis, 2000)? Or because I somehow despised her failure to meet one of the fundamental demands of boxing by gaining weight? One thing is clear: she lost more than a fight that week; she lost symbolic capital with Coach and the other boxers for failing to meet boxing's *doxic* prescriptions for weight management.

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Conclusion: Squaring the Circle

In this article, I used Bourdieu's theory of practice to illustrate how the practical logic of boxing as a field – specifically as it pertains to bodily aesthetics, weight, and gender – impacts people's positions and practices in the boxing gym. I showed how the body is invested socially: it is perceived by self and others, via learned dispositions; it is worked on and partly remade through social practice; it can be the centre around which interactions revolve; and its biological rhythms produce events understood by agents differently based on their *habitus*.[6]

Boxing has become more welcoming of women, and in 2012 women will box at the Olympics for the first time. Yet the hypermasculine mythology (Boddy, 2008) of boxing has not fully been displaced by egalitarian beliefs. The Bourdieusian concept of *hysteresis* proved to be a helpful intellectual tool to identify and discuss moments where the *doxa* of boxing as a field is misaligned with the gendered *habitus* of the agents within it.

Acknowledging the role that bodily characteristics play in structuring social spaces violates our Cartesian sensitivities (Paechter, 2006). Yet, as I tried to argue in this article, the body centrally matters for social interactions, and participates in the legitimation of certain actors in social space. Bourdieu's framework as used in this article allows analysts to include the materiality of the body in their social accounts without essentializing. Indeed, Bourdieu's framework is dynamic, enables researchers to focus on both similarities and differences, and provides insights into contexts and bodily hierarchies.

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Notes

1. In each of the four gyms where I trained there was at least one such 'village idiot'. Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby*

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featured just such a character in the person of Danger Barch (played by Jay Baruchel), a skinny white boy who looks like a fool and gets a serious beating midway through the movie. Boxing gyms are often safe havens for such people, who are seen as harmless and can make themselves helpful by filling water bottles, cleaning up or simply entertaining.

2. A reviewer stressed Wacquant's (1995a: 71) claim that boxers are not supposed to lift weights. My experience training with professional and Olympic-team boxers has shown me otherwise. The point I am making here is independent of the factual accuracy of Wacquant's or my understanding of boxers' relationship with weights. Theo's body was worthy of continuous display in the gym; he was literally a 'poster child', and credible as a boxer.
3. Here Mark implies that Theo's musculature has little pugilistic value, but is the kind of musculature someone parades on the beach to impress the ladies.
4. Thanks to Wolf-Dietrich Junghanns for highlighting the role attractiveness plays. See also Rhode (2010).
5. My fieldnotes illustrate this anxiety: I wrote down every item of clothing I was wearing, aware of their upward influence on the scale's reading.
6. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer who so succinctly summarized my contribution.

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