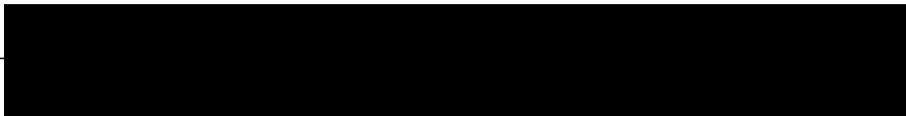


COURSEWORK COVER SHEET

Date: 31/03/2023



Module: Investigating the Social World

Article of choice: Singh, A. (2022) Fighting with race: complex solidarities & constrained sameness. *Identities*, 29(3), pp. 301-319.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2021.1953785>

Word count (including all footnotes, references and appendices): 1,500

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Question 1

What is the main research question? State the research question in your own words, and then briefly describe the methods used in the article and explain the underlying epistemological and/or ontological stances (positivism and/or constructivism/interpretivism).

You do not need to know the methods well, but you should pay close attention to how the author(s) explain their research design and methods.

The main research question in the article 'Fighting with race: complex solidarities & constrained sameness' (Singh, 2022) is whether members of an East London Muay Thai Boxing gym can transcend constraints of imposed social categories of race, as well as gender, to produce new, solidarity-based identities as fighters. The author draws upon the concept of Bourdieu's habitus, post-colonial literature contravening essentialist notions of racial categories, and literature highlighting egalitarian sporting relations, to ask if socially constructed identities can be vacated and superseded by fighter identities, amid a backdrop of hostile ethno-nationalist discourses in the U.K.

The methods used in the article are qualitative, and uniquely multiple. The first qualitative method is ethnography, consisting of the researcher's prolonged, immersive contact with members within the Muay Thai gym. The second qualitative method is semi-structured interviews, comprising of in-depth, and informal, conversations with gym members. The third qualitative method is regular participant observations inside and outside the gym, all described as "deep hanging out" (Singh, 2022, p.305). The combinations of these qualitative methods provide tools for comprehensive perspectives, and rich, complex insights to answer the research question. Consequently, the author uncovered nuanced layers pertaining to vacations and reinforcements of racialised and gendered identities that may not have been possible with a single qualitative methodological design.

The underlying epistemological and ontological stance in this article is constructivist. This posits there is no objective truth beyond our experiences; reality is constructed by our

experiences, discourses, and meanings are attributed to the social world. Constructivism is underpinned by qualitative methodology, where the researcher is not independent of the researched, and research does not aim to explain underlying mechanisms of social phenomenon. This article meets these criteria for three reasons. Firstly, the article discusses literature that contravenes essentialist, colonial notions of racial identity, to reframe identities as fluid and capable of being transformed, in accordance with a constructivist stance whereby racial identities are socially constructed. Secondly, this theoretical standpoint underpins the author's research question of whether the category of race can be overcome by fighter-based identities within the site of the Muay Thai boxing gym, reinforcing the notion that identities may be subject to deconstruction/reconstruction, depending on shifting social experiences, discourses, and ascribed meanings. Thirdly, the researcher was not independent of the researched; as a Muay Thai fighter and trainer at another gym, he was connected to participants with parity, familiarity, openness, and rapport. The ethnographic methodology employed necessitated these factors to allow for explorative, thought-provoking data, as opposed to providing mechanistic explanations of observed phenomenon. These factors contrast with positivist approaches whereby researchers acquire evidence through objective quantitative data collection and analytical methods, independently of the researched, to explain underlying mechanisms and define truths. Singh's (2022) adoption of a constructivist epistemological and ontological stance is reinforced by his reflexive acknowledgement of his positionality as a researcher of colour focusing on race in an ethnically diverse Muay Thai Boxing gym. This aligns with constructivism and the researcher's immersion with the researched, and acknowledgement of his own subjectivity.

Question 2

Summarize the key theoretical claims in your own words. Identify and explain the nature of these claims (i.e., paradigm and/or approach), as well as the alignment between the theory and empirics (i.e., induction, deduction, and/or abduction) in the article.

*Keep in mind that some scholars treat **theory as paradigm**, using their theoretical claims to reveal the mechanisms that explain how different factors or variables work together to produce the outcome of interest (like Nunn). Some, in contrast, prefer to treat **theory as approach**, focusing on speaking to a broad theoretical framework without trying to specify a set of mechanisms or dynamics (like Meyer).*

The key theoretical claims in this article are as follows. Firstly, in the introduction, the author claims that there are historical and scholarly examples of solidarities and unity between people of different racial groups, that serve as crucial countenance to divisive narratives of racial disunity that perpetuates ethno-nationalism in the U.K., for example with the 2016 Brexit vote. The second key theoretical claim is that identities, including that of race, are socially contingent, and therefore, essentialist notions of racial identity are subject to contestation, with the possibility that they can be vacated. A third key theoretical claim, based on the methodology and findings of the study itself, is that the solidarity and bonding between the Muay Thai gym members' sharing of the principles and experiences of training and fighting, along with the group's diversity, permits a context where race is temporarily removed of its significance as a social construct. Therefore, the author draws upon postcolonial theory pertaining to the flexibility of identities in the face of fixed, imperially informed impositions of ethnic identities, to build on literature pertaining to convivial relationships in sporting contexts. With incorporation of a racial conceptualisation of Bourdieu's durable habitus, Singh theorises how the specific sporting location of the East London Muay Thai Boxing gym offers scope to transcend socially contingent racial categories, albeit temporarily.

The nature of these key theoretical claims represent theory as approach, whereby the author elucidates that there are different ways that we can view the social world (i.e., categories of race and gender as socially contingent, as opposed to essentialist), and that certain factors (i.e., transcendence of such categories in certain spaces) are worthy of our attention. Theory

as approach is suited to the rich, in-depth qualitative methodological research design employed in this article. Regarding the alignment between the theory and empirics, the author uses an abduction framework in the article. As opposed to induction, which uses observations to generate theory, or deduction, which uses observations to assess theoretical predictions, abduction uses observations to challenge, refine, and develop existing theories and evoke current literature, rather than generalise findings.

The use of theory as approach, and the use of an abduction framework, are both evident through Singh's analysis of existing theoretical literature pertaining to non-essentialist frameworks of racial and cultural identity in a U.K context, such as Hall's new ethnicities model, as well as theoretical literature pertaining to convivial bonds in sporting contexts, such as work by Wacquant, and Bourdieu's concept of habitus. These existing theories are developed by Singh, whose research additively contributes to the literature, rather than changing or reframing theoretical debates. He uses existing theory as impetus to develop the non-essentialist perspective on social identities and convivial connections in the specific sporting context of the Muay Thai boxing gym. Therefore, the article brings to the fore existing theories to shed light on social phenomenon; specifically, the ways in which racial identities may be temporarily escaped in certain localities, yet ultimately, they remain constrained due to pervasively embedded societal structures.

Question 3

Are the findings valid and/or significant? What is the scope condition? Can/should the authors extend their findings to a different case, such as a country or a city? Why or why not?

You can discuss the validity of a research finding in many ways, but our discussion on causality in social research can be a good starting point. Make sure you include a concrete alternative case in your response.

These findings are valid and significant because the researcher achieved his aims of contributing to the theoretical field. Singh (2022) used multiple qualitative research methods (ethnography, semi-structured interviews, observations) to build on existing theories, and provide rich, holistic insights into how socially contingent racial categories may be temporarily escaped by fighters in an East London Muay Thai Boxing gym. Such findings would not have been possible with interviews alone, or with quantitative methods.

Regarding the scope condition, the article is not directly comparable to other conditions and the author should not extend their findings to a different case, such as a country or city. Singh acknowledges that the temporary transcendence of imposed racialised and gendered identities occurred in the specific, heightened convivial space of the East London Muay Thai Boxing gym, a location atypical to everyday situations. The findings are explicitly situational and socially contingent, so do not offer external validity or generalisability.

It could be argued the destabilisation of racialised identities within an ethnically diverse locality such as the gym may bear relevance in similar convivial sporting localities, in super-diverse, Global North cities, with similar political conditions to London. An alternative case to increase the scope condition of similar research to other contexts might be supplementary use of quantitative methods, such as questionnaires measuring gym members' racial or gender identity salience in the gym compared to other locations, and statistical analysis of differences to serve as a replicable tool in different contexts. However, this would signify an entirely different study. Generalisations about this article's findings would require de-contextualisation,

which is antithetical to the context-specific, complex qualitative methodological design and constructivist approach of Singh's research. Singh draws attention to specific social phenomena and does not make generalisations to other contexts, in accordance with a constructivist epistemological and ontological stance. The scope condition in terms of comparisons to other contexts is not relevant to the research, and nor does the author want it to be. This qualitative research was focused on the nuances, and psychosocial complexities of a specific group of people in a specific location at a specific time. The purpose is not to extrapolate to other cases, but to shed light on this case to challenge how we might consider social categories, the conviviality of such spaces and the possibilities for solidarity-based identities, as well as potential constraints of such possibilities.

Overall, the findings offer alternative ways of considering identity, connections, and social constructs. Singh poses questions and potential areas of focus at the end of the article; how complex solidarities offer examples of the instability and contingency of imposed racial categories, and might serve to counter to divisive, racially charged narratives around ethnicity and the 'other' in U.K. politics. Rather than defining truths, establishing causal relations, or offering generalisability to other contexts, the article offers scope for further research and theory development, corresponding to an abduction framework. The author should not extend their findings to a different case or location, and they would not wish to do so.

References

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FINAL GRADE

72/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Q1: Good job, but be concise. No need to include the title in your response. Please explain why this multi-method research is "unique." Do you mean that all multi-method social research is unique? 72

Q2: The first two claims you mentioned are the preconditions for Singh's main claim, which is the third one you have. You provided the definition of abduction (putting the definition at the end of the paragraph is not ideal), but you did not fully explain why Singh's work is abductive. The final paragraph is very confusing and what you wrote is not clear. You need to be more specific about how Singh's work refines the existing literature. Based on your response, it's not clear how Singh's work relates to the works of others or generates new theoretical insights. 68

Q3: Excellent! 75

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