



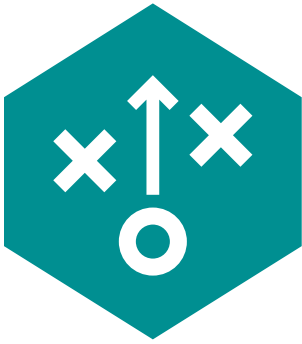
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JOHN FULTON

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A Situational Analysis of Boxing

John Fulton,¹ University of Sunderland, UK

Abstract: This study, undertaken in North East England, examines the way in which discourses around masculinity are reflected and reproduced in amateur boxing. With the decline of heavy industry, young men have had to seek other ways of expressing their masculinity. Boxing clubs provided a setting in which the hegemony of masculinity in the area could be practiced. A more inclusive environment began to develop in boxing clubs, however, and young men had to find alternative methods of expressing their masculinity while maintaining hegemonic control. One of the means by which they did this was to use boxing in an entrepreneurial way.

Keywords: Hegemony, Ethnography, Masculinities, Situational Analysis, Boxing, Discourses

Introduction

This ethnographic research took place over an eight-year period. The initial study explored the development of capital in amateur and professional boxing. On completion of that study, I continued my ethnographic endeavours and became interested in the increasingly changing dynamics in amateur boxing clubs. I re-analysed the data using situational analysis, a three-stage analysis process involving the drawing of maps to facilitate the exploration of networks of relationships and the positions that people can take relative to the variety of discourses that shape perceptions and behaviours (Clarke 2005). I was specifically interested in the ways in which masculinities could be reproduced in and through the boxing club.

Boxing is a long-standing tradition in North East England, and as such, the boxing club was part of the landscape. The strength of the industrial North East once gave men economic domination. Now, the heavily industrial North East of England is almost non-existent. There is more part-time work in service industries, which was traditionally viewed as women's work, and this has changed the male-female dynamics and traditional models of masculinity. This article explores the ways in which the dynamics of the boxing club reflect wider societal changes. The boxing club was, when the study commenced, an almost exclusively male environment, and was seen by many as an important feature in the socialisation of boys into manhood. The boxing setting enabled one way of expressing masculinity. This position is increasingly challenged, however, by the presence of women, gay, and transgender individuals, and, in this context, Muslim groups for whom boxing had a very different meaning. In keeping with current neoliberalist discourses, boxing could also be used in an enterprising way, which could be a means of expressing masculinity.

Literature Review

In the past fifteen years, there have been several geographically and theoretically diverse ethnographic studies on boxing, each of which provides meaningful insights. The settings vary and a mix of boxing activities has been considered: amateur, professional, and the emerging middle class involvement, or so-called "white-collar boxing." While taking very different perspectives, the studies all explore masculinity either implicitly or explicitly (De Garis 2000; Woodward 2006; Lafferty and McKay 2004; Fulton 2011; Paradis 2012; Dortants and Knoppers 2013; Trimbur 2011, 2013; Beauchez 2016 Heiskanen 2014; Matthews 2015; Jump 2016; Sacha 2015).

¹ Corresponding Author: John Fulton, GRS, Edinburgh Building, Graduate Research, University of Sunderland, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, SR1 3SD, UK. email: john.fulton@sunderland.ac.uk

A recurring theme is the boxing gym as a space in which masculinity can be reproduced. The atmosphere of a gym is overwhelmingly masculine (Wacquant 1992). Boxing gyms in particular, are a space in which patriarchal notions of masculinity can be performed in an unrestricted manner (Matthews 2015). The role of the coach is central to many of the studies, and particularly the ways in which he sets the tone of the gym (Wacquant 1992, 2004). Discipline is instilled in participants through the establishment of the training regime (Sacha 2015).

Boxing as a sport is highly racialised and, as such, the intersectionality of class, gender, and race is explored in many of the studies, particularly those carried out in the US where particular racial groups tend to be represented in the gym (Trimbur 2011; Heiskanen 2014; Sacha 2015). Sammons (1990) considered the history of boxing and focused on the highly racial nature of boxing in the US. Burdsley (2007, 613) studied the British Asian boxer Amir Khan and the structuring of his media representation around the dominant discourses of “race, masculinity, citizenship and belonging.” A study of boxers in the French immigrant community explored boxing as a way to manage the position as “other” in French society (Beauchez 2016).

The representation of the lower socio-economic (male) groups in boxing is another recurrent feature through the generations. For instance, earlier studies explored the socio-demographics of boxing and found that boxing was overwhelmingly a working-class sport (Weinberg and Arond 1952; Hare 1971; Sugden 1987). It represented a way out of the ghetto and, as such, could be viewed as a positive force and one that could bring about order and structure in a young boxer’s life (Sugden 1996). While a variety of ethnicities can be found in boxing, its reproduction of a white working-class masculinity, constructed around the importance of (blue collar) work, has been acknowledged (Rhodes 2011). White people see themselves as having no ethnicity and establish a binary of “whiteness” and “other,” resulting in an increasing recognition of the construct of whiteness, and in particular the notion of “poor white trash” in the US (Webster 2008), or “chavs” in the UK (Nayek 2003; Jones 2012). “White trash” are positioned in opposition to the decent hard-working traditional working class, and were defined by Murray (2004) as the underclass, characterised as living off benefits, with high rates of illegitimacy, and crime. Traditionally, boxing has been associated with the working class and the discipline of work.

In many ways, boxing reflected traditional male industrial work, in particular the ways in which the physicality of boxing are reflective of the capital of the working class. Repetitive actions are very much part of boxing. The continually repetitive actions were a way of instilling discipline and self-regulating the individual, with the boxers working away at hitting the punching bags and speed balls, and at shadow boxing (Wacquant 1992). Boxing brings a strong discipline into a participant’s life, but there is always a danger that they will stray from the path and revert to undisciplined behaviour. Discipline and disciplined performances were, in the Foucauldian sense, a way of disciplining and regulating the body. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) discussed how the rhythmic, co-ordinated movement in eighteenth-century factories instilled a structure and discipline into society. This requires hours of work against the punching bag, repetitive shadow boxing, and sparring (Wacquant 1992).

Wacquant (1992, 2004) theorised his ethnographic study from a Bourdionian perspective. His work was influential in that many subsequent studies also focused on the habitus in the context of combat sports (Paradis 2012; García and Spencer 2013). The habitus is the disposition of the individual and as such it is a fusion of individual characteristics, class position, and past experiences, and it dictates the ways in which the individual interacts with the world. It represents the interaction of structure and agency (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The focus on the practice of boxing is typified by Wacquant (1992, 221): “the social production of the pugilistic habitus as embodied practical reason thus suggests the need to place the socialised lived body at the centre of the analysis of social action.”

The enactment of boxing requires a fusion of manual dexterity, rigorous preparation, commitment, and courage. Boxing goes well beyond an automatic response but is a fusion of the

mind and body, which results in a particular action (Wacquant 1992). This embodiment is very much in the sense that the body does not represent mere physicality but is a representation of culture and society, with the physical dexterity, physical disposition, and psychological factors of the boxer. Even to talk of integration is to negate the holism of embodiment (Csordas 1999). The idea of embodiment is a recurrent theme in the literature.

It is important to distinguish between amateur and professional boxing. While there are obvious similarities between amateur and professional boxing, there are also clear differences. Amateur boxing focuses on the scoring of points through body blows. The so-called knock-out punch is also much less common. In amateur boxing, “knock out” refers to the boxer being outclassed or slightly dazed rather than an actual knockout punch being delivered. Eitzen (1989) discussed the *raison d’être* for mature sports. People choose to participate in a sport for enjoyment. The process is as important as the outcome, and importantly, the rewards are from enjoyment and personal fulfilment rather than being external (Eitzen 1989).

The influence of Bourdieu is very strong in many boxing studies; however, some studies are taking an alternative approach and exploring discursive practices and how these are reflected in sport. Examples include an examination of the archaeology of fitness (Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007), and the use of bio-techniques in modern dance (Green 2002). An example in boxing is the examination of the discursive practices in a boxing gym (Dortants and Knoppers 2013). Trimbur (2011) explored the ways in which coaches buy into wider anti-racist and inclusive discourses and how their practice is often guided by self-help, neo-liberal discourses around perseverance, and the belief that determination will get one ahead.

Society is dynamic rather than static. Although there are commonalities between situational contexts, there are also clear differences and, as postmodern theory recognises, no grand narrative (Lyotard 1979). One cannot generalise across space and time. One should expect situations and meanings to change. Boxing is thus situated socially in time and place, which is reflected in more recent research. Differences in values and practices may reflect ecological geographical differences as well as temporality. For example, a recent ethnographic study found much greater awareness of gender and racial equality issues (Dortants and Knoppers 2013) than did Lafferty and McKay (2004), who reported on the strategies used by coaches to reproduce hegemonic masculinity. This study attempts to explore the ways in which wider societal discourses are reflected in sport.

Masculinity

In masculinity studies, and the work of Connell (1995) in particular, the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been influential. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as “the configuration of gender practices which embody the currently accepted answer to the pattern of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 1995, 77). The concept of hegemony derives from the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and denotes the process by which the views of the dominant class are accepted. It has been argued that the use of the term in masculinity studies has been separated from its Marxist roots, and that when addressing hegemonic masculinity, while having been enthusiastically adopted as a key concept, many analyses fail to consider underlying structural inequalities and their reproduction through hegemonic masculinity (Scatamburlo-D’Annibale and McLaren 2003; Bairner 2007). Gramsci defined power as belonging to a specific power group, which they enforce on another group (Pringle 2005). The centrality of class in shaping the experiences of individuals and collective groups (Marable 2001) has been not always been considered when discussing hegemonic masculinities (Bairner 2007), nor has the intersectionality where race, class, and gender interact, which can produce a certain kind of masculinity.

An alternative approach to gender stems from the work of Foucault (1972), who argued that discourses are fundamental in directing both knowledge production and shaping modern institutions and society. The term *discourse* is common and arguably overused (Alvesson and

Karreman 2000); for instance, it can be used as a verb to indicate ways of communication or as a noun indicating how discourses can influence and shape our reality. Importantly, Foucauldian discourses are not part of some predetermined plan, but rather arise unexpectedly, can be contradictory, and are both messy and changeable; the positions people take are fluid and can be determined by individual and collective circumstances (Clarke 2005).

Other authors have developed these ideas, particularly in association with the concept of performativity (Derrida 1982; Butler 1993; Callon 2007). The idea of performativity stems from the work of Austin (1962), who, in differentiating between types of statements, maintained that illocutionary statements created performance. Callon (2007) discussed economics and, in this context, the performativity of discourses, the way in which the discourses in economics are translated into rules and practices; that is, how discourses can shape our thinking and determine our actions and behaviour at both an individual and societal level. Butler took this a step further; she discussed performativity in the context of gender and argued that discourses through performativity create gender. Once biological sex is assigned at birth, the child is expected to, and is thereby encouraged to, perform a gender role (Butler 2006). This is not a conscious performance but rather a part of the self. Importantly, performativity does not merely reflect but creates the subject. Following Butler's conceptualisation of performativity and the ways in which gender is created through repetitive and reiterative acts, one can conclude that discourses on masculinity can shape how people act and relate to others as men.

One can argue that discourses of a strong dependable, hardworking type of masculinity, valued in a geographical area, create a hegemonic masculinity that is valued and reproduced because of its economic power. The boxing club was one of many agents that reproduced the hegemonic masculinity of the area. This is not to say that the club was central to the lives of the male population, because while popular, not all young men were boxers, but the repetitive act of boxing training was an instrument that could reproduce a solid dependant masculinity. The repetitive nature of factory work and gymnastics was discussed in *Discipline and Punish*, and it was concluded that this repetition could instil a discipline in the participants (Foucault 1977). It is this that is captured in boxing, the regularity and the repetitive nature of the training instilling discipline and reliability associated with solid dependable masculinity.

Hearn's hegemony of men is an analysis of men's struggle to maintain dominance in a world where in some areas patriarchal society are increasingly challenged (Hearn 2004). Hearn examined and maintained that there is a hegemony of men instead of hegemonic masculinity, and by this he meant that "masculinity becomes a configuration of practical aspiration or cultural ideals that legitimises masculine domination" (Hearn et al. 2012, 595). The emphasis is on men as a social category, and how dominant practices are legitimised by society. Patriarchy is changing, but these changes will not happen overnight, and the position of men is evolving. Men no longer have automatic hegemony, and the maintenance of domination requires negotiation, so that in contemporary society, masculinity is fluid and cannot always be expressed in one particular way (Johansson and Otterno 2015).

While not writing in an explicitly Foucauldian tradition, Hearn (2014) does provide a useful theoretical explanation and recognises that there is a drive for masculine dominance within the diversity of masculinity and its subsequent expression. Men have to position themselves in a flexible and fluid way against the conflicting discourses. Matthews (2015) developed the notion of the fluidity of masculinity, and in doing so, he used the term *pastiche hegemony*, taken from Jamieson (1991), to illustrate that men can vary their expression of masculinity depending on the setting, and rather than one particular approach, men draw from a variety of cultural scripts (Mathews 2015). He also emphasised the agency and reflective ability that men have in managing these scripts (Atkinson 2011; Archer 1996).

I have examined three theorisations of masculinity in contemporary society; hegemonic masculinity (Cornell 1995), masculinity created through discourses (drawing on the work of Foucault), and the hegemony of men (Hearn 2004). These three approaches, while stemming

from different positions, are not necessarily conflicting, and their main difference lies in the use of power. Hegemony stemming from Marxism sees power as belonging to the (economically) dominant class and is used to keep the less dominant class in a subordinate position. For Foucault, power is diffuse and capillary-like, and is created through discourses and discursive practices. Men can use their position in society to retain power and this can be done in a flexible way depending on the situation (Pringle 2005; Hearn 2004).

One can, therefore, argue that the discourse that created hegemonic masculinity, that is the masculinity valued as that of the strong skilled hard-working male, maintained its dominance because of the economic power it commanded. The discourse that creates hegemonic masculinity is being increasingly challenged by changes in society, including the demise of heavy industry and challenges by women to the male economic position. Collectively men wish to maintain their dominance and develop different strategies to do so (Hearn 2004). Examining the discourses that reproduce masculinities is therefore an appropriate focus for this study, and as such can facilitate an examination of the positions that individuals can take against these discourses.

Methodology

My particular setting, a boxing club in a city centre in the North East of England, which I intended to be my main observational site, offered structured classes to businessmen working in the area and hosted an amateur boxing club. I attended the structured class and obtained a feel for the mechanics and training regime of boxing. At this time, I also participated in light sparring on an infrequent basis.

The manager/owner of the club asked me if I would represent the club as an official with the Amateur Boxing Association (ABA) in England (now England Boxing). Each club was expected to provide an official if they wanted to run tournaments. This necessitated initial training as a judge. Each amateur boxing match had at least three judges present at each bout, and they independently scored the match. Further training was required to be a referee or an official in charge, which enabled the individual to run the boxing tournaments.

When I undertook the training, I had to study the rules of amateur boxing, which culminated in an examination based on the ABA rules, as well as scoring bouts under supervision. I passed this course and the period of supervised practice and was appointed as a boxing judge. This allowed me access to all the tournaments, and while I continued to spend time in the club, I attended tournaments at least once each week. This gave me access to officials, coaches, and boxers, relationships that allowed me both access and insight into the clubs in the area.

In the early stages of the study, I also carried out interviews with eighteen key respondents, who were officials, coaches, and boxers, selected on theoretical rather than representative principles (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Nevertheless, they did include a range of people involved in boxing and representatives of the various roles available in the sport. This gave me insight into boxing, and as I progressed with my study, informal conversations replaced the more formalised interviews.

This analysis is based on Clarke's situational analysis (Clarke 2005). Clarke is a grounded theorist who developed grounded theory along constructionist and postmodern lines, incorporating insight from Foucault. Clarke's work was not intended to provide a methodology for Foucauldian theory; nevertheless, it does provide a means of identifying discourses and establishing the positions of people relative to discourses. The methodology emphasises the "messiness" of the world and the contradictions that are often inherent in discourses and the positional stances that people adapt relative to these discourses (Clarke 2005).

There are three stages involved in the process of situational analysis, each involving the exploration of relationships among the key players through a series of mapping exercises (Clarke 2005). First, the key players are identified in the field; this includes both people and inanimate objects. The focus is very much on the individual perspective. Following this, the social world and the factors that can impinge on this social world are explored. This allows the discourses to

emerge. The final stage involves the establishment of the discourses and the positions people take against these discourses.

The researcher has an embodied presence and therefore needs to determine a role for themselves that should be appropriate in terms of both the research and the particular physical characterises or the embodied stance. At the time of my study, the boxing scene was male-oriented, and while there were female officials and some female coaches, they were the wives of established officials; and the female coaches looked after the junior boxers and therefore took on a maternal role. Reflecting the northeast demographics, there were very few non-Caucasians and certainly none among the officials. My own position was that of a white male and I was accepted as such. I was also sponsored by a boxing club, which gained me unquestioned access to the setting. I was past the age of being a boxer (at the time of the study the upper age limit was 35), and I was younger than the majority of the other judges but generally fitted into the age group. The other issue was social class; I was clearly middle class. Until I became well known, I was often mistaken for the medical officer, although not in speech (I have a regional accent), and my bearing is not really different from the rest of the officials. I was required to wear a uniform and merged into the environment. In other words, I managed my performance as judge in a way that was not disruptive.

Participation is at the core of ethnography; however, boxing studies raise an interesting question, which is whether participation requires taking up boxing? The argument for doing so is that a person cannot really understand the phenomenon without having been punched on the nose, although this can be more of a device to validate the author and draw the reader in (De Garis 2010). Woodward (2008) considered this question and phrased it as an outsider/insider dichotomy, arguing that by standing slightly outside the situation, someone can view things through a different lens and gain fresh and different insights.

I found that on first entering the field I was very much an outsider, and my presence as new and unsure of myself, asking naïve questions, was obvious. Rather than a dichotomy or binary, I found my position as an insider was fluid and changing, sometimes in the course of a tournament. At times, I would be accepted and very much part of the set up, and then I would question someone, disagree with another official, or question a rule, which would then shift my position. As the study progressed, I became both accepted and a key part of the tournament. I was very much an insider, so my presence was never obtrusive. The issue for me was in maintaining a degree of reflexivity and not becoming caught up in the mechanics of the actual role, and worrying about infringements of the rules to the exclusion of collecting data and theorising.

After a year or so, I was asked to undertake further training to be an official in charge, and this allowed me to run the tournaments. It allowed greater access to boxers, coaches, and other officials. It also meant I knew the rules in detail, and through watching and scoring a number of matches, I gained considerable familiarity with the sport. This also gave me a certain objectivity and allowed opportunities for informal and informative discussion. However, I became too good at my role as an official, and the actual activity took over. Rather than being reflective of the social forces, I became more concerned with the mechanics of the activity. When I met people who claimed to know me from the boxing matches and I had no idea who they were, it was time to stop.

Setting

The North East of England is a former heavy industrial area. Most heavy industries were closed in the 1980s and 1990s. Traditionally, most of the mining areas and urban industrial districts had a boxing club, and although the industry had gone by the time of the study, the boxing clubs remained. Reflecting the ethnic mix in the North East of England, those involved in the boxing clubs were mainly white working-class men and boys. The region in the past thirty years had undergone many changes. The jobs available to previous generations were no longer there. The

effect on the people in the area has been well documented (Nayek 2003; MacDonald and Marsh 2005; MacDonald 2009; Shildick et al. 2010). The proliferation of call centres and the associated poor wages has been highlighted (Jones 2012). The heavy industrial work gave a strong sense of identity to the young men in the area, and when this work was no longer available, they had to seek other ways of establishing their masculinity. Nayek (2003) discussed the positions that young men could take and differentiated between the “real Geordies,” who sought to establish the hegemonic masculinity traditional to the region and the socially excluded “Chavs.” If one were to categorise the young men taking part in boxing, they would be the “real Geordies.” This is an important issue, as it was not the so-called underclass, but the dependant and reliable youth who were the participants. There were people who had been in trouble who were involved in boxing, but the clear majority were of the solid and dependable variety (Nayek 2003, 2006).

There were eighty-one boxing clubs in the Tyne Tees and Wear area (at the time of this study). While there was a homogeneity about the clubs, there were also very clear differences. At one end of the spectrum, an amateur boxing club was involved in championships at the national level and had many boxers going forward for championships and becoming professional boxers. Other clubs operated at the local level and had many more boxers in the junior ranks. All clubs operated on a similar regimen, which involved fitness training and sparring, and the development of skills. The differences were in the emphasis given to the boxers. A typical boxing club is in a working-class area with a predominance of social housing, and the coaches are usually either former amateur or professional boxers. Junior boxers outnumbered the senior boxers. At around sixteen, many fell off the boxing trajectory, and those who remaining were defined by ability and staying power.

Results

My role as an ABA official allowed me to come into contact with the boxing clubs in northeast England, and this account is an overview of the position of the clubs. The boxing clubs reflected changes in the area where the male economic power had been eroded and skills other than industrial work were valued. In the course of the study, the clubs moved from being bastions of hegemonic masculinity to a more inclusive environment, as demonstrated by the less marginal role of women, an increasing presence of ethnic minority groups, and the toleration of alternative masculinities.

Inclusivity

The homogeneity of amateur boxing was threatened by many outside forces and, as a result, amateur boxing, reflective of societal discourses, was becoming increasingly inclusive (Anderson 2010; Channon and Matthews 2015). Amateur boxing rules were very clear and focused, and clearly defined the sport. They outlined the ways punches should be delivered, the parts of the body they should be delivered to, and exactly what a foul was. Professional boxers were not allowed any part of the amateur scene and were not even allowed in the dressing room of an amateur boxer. Martial arts, such as karate and judo, were not considered a threat to amateur boxing, although they have been around for some time. Kick boxing arrived recently, and this was regarded with great suspicion. I remember being told that one of the boxers was “from kick boxing,” and the same boxer told me that he found it hard not to kick his opponent. Mixed martial arts also arrived on the scene and became increasingly popular in the area. Some of the slightly older boxers went into the more lucrative mixed martial arts.

When I commenced the study, female boxing was comparatively rare. Approximately one in a hundred bouts was between two women or girls. It clearly made the officials and coaches uncomfortable, and it was a relief when the bout was over and the “real” business of boxing could return. Female boxing became increasingly popular and is now mainstream. Things have greatly changed. From being a white working-class sport and rigid in its rules and orientations,

amateur boxing was, while retaining its structure, becoming much more open and diverse. While some clubs retained the white working-class ethos, the boxing scene was becoming more flexible and aware of outside forces, and their actual and potential effects on amateur boxing.

Other types of masculinities were becoming evident; for example, there had been relatively few openly gay boxers in both professional and amateur boxing, and I observed that questioning masculinity and using terms like “big girl’s blouse” and “queer” were a method of control. If a young boxer behaved in a way that was not fully approved by the coaches, the use of such terms (albeit in a semi-jocular manner) was a means of establishing control. Towards the end of my study, numerous incidents demonstrated the shift that was taking place.

At the weigh-in, one of the boxers had obviously manicured fingernails, and the official (Alf) at the weigh-in said “for goodness sake people will think you are gay.” Another official looked at him aghast and signalled his colleague to stop this line of conversation. Afterwards, Alf said to me “that lad is gay, and I was mortified. I would never have commented if I had known he was gay.” Alf epitomised the traditional values of both boxing and the masculine values of the area. I expected a tirade against homosexuality and comments on what was boxing coming to, but it was not being gay that was the issue, rather that his remark might have been interpreted as homophobic and given offence.

A boxer from one of the clubs was a female-to-male transsexual, and while commented on, this was totally accepted. He had been rejected by his family, and comments made to him showed a high degree of empathy. While I almost certainly came across him at the tournaments, I could not identify him, nor was he ever pointed out to me. While these were only two incidents, they were indicative of a shift towards a more inclusive environment.

The increasing number of women in boxing also challenged the traditional status quo of amateur boxing. When I commenced my study, there were few women involved, and they were mainly the wives and girlfriends of the officials and coaches. The women tended to play minor roles, usually as physicians’ assistants, whose main job was to maintain the records of the boxers. Towards the end of my stint, they were also referees and officials in charge and played an increasingly major role. Similarly, in my first four or so years at the tournaments, there were very few bouts with female boxers, and when they took place they were positioned as the first bout. When they were over, there was a collective sigh and an attitude that, as one of my fellow officials put it, “now we can get on the real business.” Again, towards the end, female boxers were allowed to compete in the Olympic Games and I noticed that female boxing was being taken much more seriously. There was one particularly good female boxer from a club in the region who achieved championship status, and this did much to raise the status of boxing. There was no longer a collective sigh at the tournaments, and the bouts between female boxers were treated with the same seriousness as bouts between male boxers.

The clientele of the boxing club was predominantly white working class, and throughout the study many young men from different ethnicities joined the clubs. There was one club that exclusively included young Muslim men, and while they followed the rules of amateur boxing, their understanding of the sport was tied to their faith; on speaking to those involved in the club, I was informed that “in the Qur’an wrestling is one of the sports which is advocated which is akin to boxing, that is why we are keen to promote the sport.”

Masculine Values

The changes outlined in the preceding section required the young men to position themselves against discourses on masculinity, and this positioning could be fluid and changeable. Mathews (2015) described a “pastiche hegemony” and the boxing club as a space where physical skills should be developed; he described it as a section of the gym that was an all-male enclave. Boxing in the North East reflected this positioning. Its manifestation varied across the boxing clubs, where some retained this enclave in terms of physical space, others operated it on a sessional basis, and other clubs remained exclusively masculine and had not changed very much since their

first inception. This meant that the position of the young men could vary from being a celebration of traditional masculine values to participation in an inclusive open masculinity.

This section from my field notes typifies the expression of the strong skilled performance, represents the pinnacle of amateur boxing, and epitomises the qualities that were valued in the area.

Round 3 began after the one-minute interval; the boxers touched gloves and then jumped back. The referee signalled them to begin, and the two boxers initially danced around each other. There was an energy in the ring which was almost palpable. Red threw a punch, and Blue rushed in and started to hit him on the body; one blow followed rapidly by the next and the next. Red eventually fell against the ropes, and the referee stopped this altercation. Red then gave a swift left hook, hitting Blue on the jaw, which sent him across the ring, falling onto his knees, and sent Blue flying across the ring. He quickly got up and ran across and again began raining blows on Red's body and head. They were separated by the referee, and Red gave [a] few good left hooks and upper cuts. The crowd were ecstatic, on their feet and cheering the boxers loudly and enthusiastically, and calling out advice, which, if followed, would have cost the boxer the match. The bell went...end of bout, and the boxers went back to their corner, bruised and exhausted.

The usual location for a boxing club is an area of social housing. Usually boxing clubs ran three nights a week. Most of its members were in the junior range (below 17 years). In a typical club, approximately seventeen to twenty boys attended at any one time. While the club was well attended by the junior ranks, many attended for a short time and drifted off. Sugden (1987) described the trajectory of a boxer as going through junior and senior amateur boxing and achieving championship status. Some then go on to professional boxing. This was a small minority of the boxers. Most of the boxers drifted in and out of the boxing club, and at age of 16, there was an exodus when the young men drifted off into other pursuits, as one coach put it, "when they get to 16 and discover beer and girls." A minority did return to the club in their twenties.

The ethos of amateur boxing was about the channelling of aggression into constructive channels. This excerpt from a club programme summarises the philosophy of the club:

We try to keep the kids off the streets and instil in them self-discipline and character building. Boxing is a combative sport and as such requires a high degree of courage, self-dedication, physical fitness etc. It also provides an excellent outlet for their natural aggressive instincts, this is excellent training for "the Battle of Life" which the boys will soon be facing, modern life is very hard and the ability of a boy to accept good and averse conditions and decisions in a sporting manner is excellent preparation. (Programme for Tournament, Sunderland, October 2004)

Any breaches of discipline were not tolerated. I can remember one occasion at a tournament when the boxers continued fighting after the bell, and the horrified response of the officials and the audience. One particular incident which captures this philosophy is when I referred to the boxing match as a "fight," and a senior official informed me "fights are what happen in the street, this is a boxing match!"

As previously stated, boxing was seen as a highly skilled activity and one for which a degree of dedication and commitment is required to maintain this skill.

People sometimes say to me why do you have to repeat one punch so many times to perfect it? Well, these are not simple skills. It took me years to learn how to throw the right hand. Then there's the left hook, the right hand to the body, the left upper cut to the body, the right hook to the body—these punches take years and years to learn. You climb through the ropes and just do it. (Eubank 2003, 39)

The clubs regularly ran tournaments, and this was a means of bringing them under the gaze of the community, showing that all was well, that the young people were focused and disciplined and that dependable manhood was still on offer. Young men in the post-industrial world need to find ways in which they can show themselves as dependant and reliable (Nayek 2006; MacDowell 2011). “White trash” is positioned in opposition to the decent hard-working traditional working class. Much of the ethos of the boxing club was a way of assisting the boxers, walking the tightrope between being dependable and reliable and a life of drugs, alcohol, and crime. The boxers were all described as being highly reliable and dependable, and if a story about their past and/or poor home life could be added, this further illustrated the positive effect of boxing on their lives. There were also stories about many leaving boxing and becoming criminals or taking drugs. People not behaving in a dependable way were frowned upon or were asked to leave the club.

The skills of the amateur reflect the physical skills that were valued in the North East of England. Abramson and Modzelewski (2011) argued that men (and women) engaged in mixed martial arts because it embodied many middle-class American values. Similarly, the amateur boxing club embodied many of the values in the locality, all of which could be “straight out of a structuralist functionalist textbook of the 1950s” (Wacquant, 2002, 1514). It did, however, reflect the construction of a situation or a stance that people could take against the discourses. Boxing was considerably more complex than this. It was not the young men's entire world; they had interests and activities outside of boxing. Boxing was one way of expressing masculinity. The young men are all involved in a changing world, and the skills for traditional “manly” work were no longer a valued commodity. The hegemonic masculinity of the industrial past had an economic base. The male was the breadwinner, and this gave him an economic dominance

The collapse of heavy industry brought about a change in dynamics. The boxing gym, as found, was a space in which attributes or a version of masculinity could be expressed; these attributes were not necessarily valued in other parts of the member's lives (Matthews 2015). For instance, many jobs were in the service industries (McDowell 2002, 2003, 2011; Nayek 2006). It was still important to establish masculine dominance and while this could be achieved in the boxing gym to some extent, it was not much use outside the gym. As Wacquant (1995) maintained, the body capital acquired in boxing is not much use outside boxing, certainly in economic terms. A more fluid approach was required to maintain a hegemony of men and assert masculine economic dominance (Hearn 2004). The following section will examine one way in which boxing could be used creatively to assert masculinity.

Entrepreneurship

Perhaps the greatest societal force was the neoliberalist discourse and its effect on both the structure and organisation of boxing and those involved in boxing. Neoliberal discourses and associated policies meant that clubs were expected to be economically viable and to generate income, and this led to a variety of activities such as boxercise and exercise training based on boxing, but not involving contact. At an individual level, some used boxing in an entrepreneurial way, and some (a very small number) would go into professional boxing; others used their skills

in a creative and entrepreneurial manner, which gave them a degree of economic ascendancy and was also a way of expressing their masculinity.

There is an entrepreneurial spirit about boxing. There always has been an entrepreneurial spirit around professional boxing, with boxers, managers, and promoters all out to make money, but amateur boxing was different. Central to this entrepreneurship is that it is a way of expressing masculinity, although there is nothing to stop women using boxing in this way.

A number of studies have recently considered the concept of entrepreneurship in amateur sports (Hall 2006; Horne and Manzenreiter 2006; Ratten 2010, 2011; Nová 2015). A sports entrepreneur can be defined as follows: “[the] personality of an entrepreneur should have creativity, sense of subordination to laws of economy, successful managing skills, sense of business responsibility, control the risk he has to face” (Aćimović et al. 2013, 114).

In English amateur boxing, the clubs are expected to generate income and be self-sufficient; generated income includes grants and income generated from other activities, such as boxing tournaments and sponsorships, and the clubs were expected to behave as per the above definition. Coaches had no choice but to embrace this entrepreneurial spirit, and some did it with more enthusiasm than others. Coaches and boxers had to position themselves against these discourses. There were dependable coaches, such as Jim, who had been an amateur boxer and was immersed in the amateur boxing scene. He was a promoter of boxers in the amateur scene. The traditional boxing club promoted the values of the traditional working class in the North East of England.

Related to this approach was the more entrepreneurial individual who, while rooted in the traditional values, was a little more flexible. For example, Dave was a coach who ran a very successful amateur club but was happy to become a professional coach when his star boxers turned professional. He gave the running of the amateur club to others but was still (loosely) involved. The traditional jobs were no longer available, and many of the young men saw boxing as a means of making money. The age-old way to do this was to go into a career in boxing and become a professional boxer, and then a promoter or manager.

A recent pattern that I observed was coaches and boxers who were more creative in their use of boxing, but were still very much involved in the amateur scene. Al was from a working-class family in a former mining town, where the mines had closed and unemployment was fairly high. There was a well-established boxing club that he had attended since he was twelve years old. He was a skilled and competent boxer and quickly moved through the amateur ranks, winning a number of national and international championships, but an injury put an end to his boxing career. He then trained as a personal trainer and used his background to give himself a certain cache. Another way in which boxing was becoming diversified was in the increasing interest from the middle classes, who had always been spectators. Now many men approaching middle age wished to participate in the sport. They generally did not get involved in the amateur scene but went to gyms where they engaged to varying degrees mainly in the training and in hitting punching bags, and where some engaged in sparring. It was this market that Al exploited successfully and found that it engaged both his life and career:

Al: I’d say I can only go off on my life, and I would say yes, I’d say obviously the boxing dictated my life, without a doubt. If I hadn’t boxed, I know I’d be in a different situation to what I am in now, definitely.

Researcher: In what ways has it changed your life?

Al: It changed my life in the fact that, you know, if I hadn’t have been to the Olympic Games and that, and I hadn’t have been so successful, I don’t think I would have lived in the city. I am living with a girl, and I have a little baby son, I moved over here because I got well known through here through the boxing. If I hadn’t have been boxing I would probably never even come over this area ... Loads of things which would be hard to explain to you just thinking about them off the top of my head, if I went away and thought about it I would probably think of the ways in which it has changed my life. (Al, April 2003)

What Al meant was that participation in boxing and his entrepreneurship enabled him to lead a middle-class life style.

Al's friend Dan was a young man who had some involvement in boxing. Dan did not participate in competitive boxing but was involved in the training and had picked up many of the skills. He trained as a fitness instructor and used his knowledge of boxing to enhance his fitness classes. He introduced some of the techniques into circuit training, to great effect, as his classes became increasingly popular and he soon acquired a following. He put on additional classes, for which he charged people, gave private lessons, and used these techniques to train people on a one-on-one basis. He also bartered; for example, someone gave him driving lessons in return for boxing lessons.

He used boxing in an entrepreneurial way:

You meet a lot of good people, and being in a teaching capacity, you have a lot of people come to you and ask you for help in that they want to learn to box. They want to learn something or other, you know, and you do get a lot of pay backs from that, because the people you help because it's such an awkward area to get someone to school you on one-on-one. People are more than happy to help you when you need it. For example, I have been getting driving lessons. I've getting just all different kinds of things from the boxing training, people are willing to give you a bit of a deal back. (Dan, July 2002)

Despite and perhaps because of the decline in the purchasing power of the male body (Hochschild and Mackung 1989), there is an increasing interest in the development of muscle and bodybuilding, and thus developing masculine capital (Anderson 2008). In this way, boxercise and white-collar boxing grew. While many of Dan and Al's clientele were middle class, it was as if they were allowing them to experience the working class masculinity of the boxing club and charging them for the privilege.

The self as an enterprise emerges in response to neoliberalist discourses; that is, the self is treated as a product, and the individual uses their skills to generate income (McNay 2009). Foucault's theories (specifically discourses and discursive practices) can help us understand this phenomenon (Brockling 2016; Bührmann 2005; Peters 2001; Scharff 2016). While some feminist writers (Clark Munteam and Ozkazanc-Pan 2016) have argued that this is not specifically a male phenomenon, there is an acknowledgement that there is a link with entrepreneurship and masculinity. Male entrepreneurs perform middle-class masculinity in which the so-called traditional male values of activity and proactivity are performed (Giazitzoglu and Down 2017; Bruni et al. 2004).

Conclusion

In the North East of England, mature boxing reflected the position of working-class men, where the male was the breadwinner due to his physical prowess and skills. In the post-industrial climate this was no longer the case and men had to assert their masculinity in more fluid and dynamic way. Boxing clubs were places where masculinity could be asserted through physical prowess; however, the amateur boxing club was becoming an increasingly less homogeneous environment, and different groups were increasingly challenging this homogeneity. This also reflected the environment in which it was situated, and in keeping with neoliberal discourses, entrepreneurship was celebrated and fostered, and boxing could be used in an entrepreneurial way by a small but significant group.

Discourses go well beyond mere description and both shape and reflect what people think, and direct the focus and shape of knowledge. Discourses are accepted at various levels, both at the policy-making level and academically. Funding for amateur boxing and its existence as an Olympic sport depend on accepting discourses on the transformative and skilled nature of

boxing. A focus on the discourses and inherent changing nature of boxing leads to a deeper understanding of the sport's interaction with society.

The construction of masculinity is tied in with boxing, and as such discourses of masculinity are reproduced in the boxing club. Hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) no longer provides an explanation for the position of men; the economic dominance of men is being eroded and Hearn's (2004) hegemony of men provides a better explanation of the diverse and fluid strategies that men use to gain their ascendancy. As well as providing a physical outlet, boxing also could be used in a creative and entrepreneurial way, which was a means of men asserting their masculinity.

There are limitations to this study, and the findings are not generalisable. My status as an official of the Amateur Boxing Association (now Boxing England) positioned me in the boxing environment. The focus of the role was to ensure adherence to the rules and Regulations of Amateur Boxing, and this did place me in a position of power. However, amateur boxing was not a hotbed of people trying to bend the rules in a way that was a source of conflict and tension among boxers, coaches, and officials. Rather, there were good-humoured relationships among the various groups; people recognised and respected the various roles, and the situation was characterised by banter and mutual respect. Although there were occasional short-lived confrontations, there were no clear power relationships between official and coaches and boxers. I therefore concluded, from my interactions, that power imbalance was not an issue.

This study is specific to a specific geographical region, the post-industrial North East of England, and although as an official I was able to access all the clubs, my experiences were constrained, and findings were based on a particular set of circumstances. The issues and developments that I have highlighted and was aware of, such as the growing female participation, the increasing ethnic mix, and the small but strong Muslim presence, were not studied, followed, developed, or theorised. This could be the focus of subsequent studies.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Fulton: Associate Professor, Graduate Research, University of Sunderland, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear, UK

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