

Boxing and Urban Cultures

'Pugilistic Points of View'

SOC280: Lecture III



So, just why do boxers box?

- Exploring the 'positive moment of pugilism' versus critiques of a 'blood sport'
- Reasons against boxing tend to come from those outside the sport (ethicists, historians, etc.)—a spectator's point of view (p. 489)
- Reasons in defense of boxing to be found from within the sport—the embedded and embodied pugilist's point of view
- The voices of everyday boxers most often neglected in critical discussions of the sport
- Nearly all boxers fail to achieve a 'rags to riches' career

The pugilistic point of view

- A view that is not simply a single perspective but rather a synthesis of:
 - Individual attitudes and preferences (choice of constraints and choices embedded within constraints)
 - Socioeconomic and structural forces (structural shifts in manufacturing to service economies wrought by neoliberalism and persistent structural violence)
 - Symbolic forms and codes (street cultures and the sociocultural practices they entail)

Boxers' views of violence

- 'Boxin doesn't jus' teach you violence...' (Kenny, p. 494-495)
- 'It's mostly probably people who have nothin' to do with the sport...' (Roy, p. 497)
- 'Streetfightin', I'll probably half-kill a person...' (Bernard, p. 498)
- 'It's a skill...' (Keith, p. 498)

The boxing gym as a 'civilizing machine'

- Boxing as a physical deterrent to violent behavior (p. 499)
- Boxing as a highly constrained practice—a 'sweet science of constraints' (p. 499)
- Boxing as controlled violence (p. 499)

Boxing as work

- Gym as workshop
- Boxers as laborers or practitioners of a marketable craft (bodily artisans) within capitalist economies
- Boxers as essentially proletarian workers (wage-laborers)
- Boxers as laborers of the self—reflexive production and articulation/presentation of a unique identity

Boxing as a working-class socioeconomic practice

- Professional boxers have a relatively high degree of control over their own labor processes (p. 502)
- Professional boxing as a *skilled* practice (p. 503)
- Professional boxing offers the prospect (albeit illusory) of a career, in contrast to low-paying and de-skilled McJobs(p. 504)
- Being a boxer is a mark of respect and social recognition in contexts of disrespect and reification (p. 505)