

Duelling, Prize Fighting, and Boxing: The Role of Medicine and Technology in a Shifting Legal Terrain

Jennifer Harges

Abstract

This paper situates the criminalization of duelling and prize fighting alongside the legitimization and rise of boxing in 19th Century England in the context of biopolitics (Agamben, 1998; Foucault, 1990, 2003, 2007, 2008). The criminalisation of some practices and the codification of others such as boxing via the introduction of the 1865 Queensberry Rules cannot simply be understood as a 'civilization process' through which the state acquired a monopoly on violence (Elias, 1937). Rather, there was an important intersection of medical and technical knowledge that legitimated the rise of new boxing techniques and technologies (gloves, time between rounds, and later weight divisions and compulsory medical examinations etc.). This medical and technical know-how was essential in shaping boxing's rationalisation as being in the 'public interest', without which boxing was likely to have continued to lose public and legal support based on its prior reputation as a blood sport. This legitimization from medical and technical experts helped carve a space for boxing to be excepted in the law in contrast to practices that were criminalized, outlined in the updated Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, which stated that individuals could not rationally consent to the harm of their person at the hands of another. Arguably this introduction of safety enhancing technologies alongside medical expertise and authority shaped boxing as a legitimate sport in which the practice could not be contested as that which 'intended' to harm or cause injury.

Technologies of fitness: CrossFit, body politics and embodied wellbeing.

Ian Wellard

Abstract

The recent rapid growth of the 'fitness industry' has created new knowledge about the body influenced by technologies of fitness that are informed by science, health imperatives, consumer markets and social constructions of the fit (or ideal) body (Pronger 2002). These new forms of knowledge generate complex relationships of power that are expressed internally and externally by individuals. However, these relationships of power are not presented as acts upon other individuals, they are, as Foucault (1978) suggests, actions upon another actions. Central to the formation of 'knowledge' about the body are technologies of fitness that are legitimised and sanctioned through claims of scientific 'truths'. By incorporating historical analysis of the emergence of ideas that were constructed in arbitrary ways, Foucault's genealogical approach revealed 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1980:131) that were not consciously imposed by one dominant group over another but are constantly being reformulated through new ways of thinking. While it is not the intention in this paper, to present a genealogy of power within the context of health and fitness, the focus is, nevertheless, an attempt to understand the will to truth operating in relation to 'wellbeing' and individual pursuits of fitness. By using the example of CrossFit, and recent auto-ethnographic research conducted whilst taking part in a period of intensive CrossFit training, an exploration is made of the relationships of power that are informed by contemporary public policy, body politics, medical and scientific theory and broader discourses of contemporary western capitalism.