

Research on the Relationship between Violence and Ritual in Boxing

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Abstract. Violence is a competitive conflict that is characteristic of any living thing. But in human societies, violence is given more complex and diverse cultural symbols. Among them, violence in sports is one of the most apparent representatives. And should violence in sports be curbed? Can such behavior be used as a type of ritual to eliminate the fear of spectators and thus reduce the proportion of violence in real life? Based on the ritual research theory from anthropology, this paper will discuss and analyze the above problems from the perspective of ritual and drama performance. On the basis of combing the relevant research, this paper focuses on interviewing 10 members of a boxing club and watching the competition videos of some professional boxers, which will be the main data of this study. The results of this study demonstrate the correlation between violence and ritual. This study will help to provide new cases for modern ritual research.

Keywords: Violence; Ritual; Boxing sport.

1. Introduction

As a more abstract term, "sports violence" is often difficult to define. This is because, within this broad framework, two more distinct meanings are derived. One is violence caused by the sporting competition itself under the restricted conditions of the rules and legal treaties of the game—for example, the lack of communication between athletes and the resulting verbal and operational aggression. Fans are obsessed with the results against the athletes, leading to the phenomenon of "sore losers." As a result, such conflicts and resentments are directed at the athletes. Violent clashes arise between fans of different teams. These are all examples of violence caused by factors other than the sport itself. Another meaning is the "violent" behavior of sports itself. An example is boxing, which will be discussed in this article. Both meanings also represent two attitudes of today's society. One is an act that is generally rejected and reviled by human society because such violence is not only in sports but also in global issues such as war, lawlessness, and ethnic conflicts. The second type of violence is more like a sport that people accept and appreciate. For example, World Wrestling Entertainment's (WWE) Monday night shows soared in popularity in the late 1990s, even reaching a peak of 8 million viewers at a time [1]. But in today's society, people are becoming afraid of the effects of sports violence, both positive and negative. This is because teenagers are often not very mature in their ability to differentiate in the lower age groups. At the same time, with the continuous advancement of technology, online media has taken up almost the majority of people's lives. Therefore, parents are concerned that children may not be able to distinguish between "symbolic violence" and "real violence" through the intersection of gory sports, violent games, and clips of war that are promoted through social media. Therefore, including rituals and theatrical performances in sporting events can minimize the harmful effects of sports violence during the game.

Boxing has a long history of development. The earliest recorded history dates back to the seventh century AD when it spread from the Mediterranean island of Crete to Greece. As a means of defense, boxing has evolved into a competitive sport with a well-developed system and rules from its early days. Its passion, courage, and spectatorship have attracted tens of thousands of people to experience and pay attention to it. But because of, the blood and fierce confrontation it contains has also given rise to different views on the sport from other people. Those who support the sport believe it is full

of power and beauty and is highly spectator-friendly. Those who oppose boxing believe that it is too wild and does not meet the values of contemporary people. Nowadays, many scholars have studied the relationship between sports and theatrical performances, and many scholars have explored the violence generated by sports competitions.

However, this paper would like to investigate further the role of rituals in the aggressive sports represented by boxing. We will explore whether the production of rituals can reduce the probability of violence in real life by combining knowledge related to theatrical performance. By analyzing the "violent" behavior in sports itself, we will explore why this "violence" is so widespread. What role do such behaviors play in constructing human society, and how should adults guide the younger age groups in the proper understanding of "violence" in sports?

2. Literature review

2.1 Dramatic conflict in boxing: factors in the production of sports violence

When Carter studied Cuban baseball, he regarded the playing field as a unique social field constructed by athletes' particular form of social interaction [2]. He analyzed the sports venues as a unique environment. Such a contextual analysis can also be applied in boxing. Boxing is more like a performance, and it contains a lot of theatrical elements. In the last century, professional wrestling in the United States was replaced by programmed performance. Boxers were transformed from competitive players to actors in the ring. The entire fight was choreographed in advance by the professional writing team hired by the WFF and relayed to the boxers. Although this was nominally a performance, it is not inevitable that all kinds of dangerous acts will occur. For example, injuries and killings. Such a theatrical competition showing bloodshed and brutality is a heroic expression to the audience. There were strange costumes, noisy audio equipment, gorgeous stage decoration, mutual provocation between players, and cheers from the audience during the competition. These acts then brought the game, full of violence and drama, to a climax. Another reason for the dramatization of boxing matches is the audience's involvement, which can also be described as empathic engagement. The term "empathic" implies the tendency of sports to evoke a strong identity among viewers. Spectators are not just spectators from God's eye view, but they are directly "involved" in the game. They empathize with the game by feeling the boxers' movements and emotions. The emotional involvement of the audience is driven more by the emotional energy of the boxers. This is especially true in rituals like a pre-fight provocation. The pre-fight provocation is a regular ritual before every official competition. The actions made by boxers seem more like a provocative act, meant to make their opponents feel scared and retreat. In a way, this conjecture is not wrong and is indeed part of the reason. But to professional boxing insiders, it is more of a marketing tool known as "trash talk sells." Interestingly, however, this phenomenon is seen by some scholars as more of a symbol. Such a ritual adds some extra factors to the development of the game. These additional factors add a certain continuity to the otherwise transient and episodic dramatic conflict of the game. At the same time, such a distinctive dramatic conflict can script a degree of violent confrontation for the boxers before the fight begins. Thus, in the course of the fight, the boxers will subconsciously convey such emotion to the audience. This also plays a role in setting the stage for the violence of the match.

2.2 Boxing and Ritual

Either before the game, during the game or after the game. The ritual has been interspersed throughout the boxing match. Everything from the boxers to the audience to the front and backstage is tied to the ritual. This section will analyze and discuss the role of two types of rituals, interactive ritual and violent ritual, in boxing matches. Violent rituals have often been inextricably linked to religion in past scholarly studies. In anthropological studies, it has been shown that the ritualization of violence is a general rule in tribal societies. Violent rituals are symbols of "manhood" and power, from the title of "priest" and king to the rituals specific to some religious cultures. In Suzette Heald's book "Manhood and Morality", he researches Circumcision among the Gisu of Uganda and finds that

all violent rituals are created. At the same time, he argues that the role of violence in ritual revolves more generally around the emotional effects of the ritual [3]. Thus, we can consider that violence has a transferred form in the ritual, fully reflected in the boxing match. The message conveyed by a boxing match is not just a highly aggressive play, but more importantly, it is given more themes such as courage, excitement, status, and competition. At the same time, the violent rituals in boxing also have a soothing emotional and spiritual effect. Boxing-obsessed spectators see the experience of watching a fight as a "third world". After experiencing the pain, confusion and fear of the real world, people are more eager to enter such a new space. The audience can experience the excitement of this unique place as they have never experienced it before. Thus, in such a space full of blood and conflict, good and evil, indulgence and restraint coexist, and a ritual of unprecedented violence is formed.

Erving Goffman developed the concept of "interactive ritual". Goffman emphasises direct interaction at the micro-level, where each individual's self is established or constructed in context [4]. He is concerned with the effective conduct of rituals, where the ordinary realities of everyday life are not automatically formed but are built by carefully honed interactive work. The core mechanism of interactive rituals combines close mutual attention and high emotional connectedness, creating a sense of member identity and bringing emotional energy. It is worth emphasizing that the prerequisite for the formation of interactive rituals is the availability of order issuers and implementers. This is because the resources among individuals are unequal due to social and environmental factors. Therefore, a party that has a direct link to the interests should be found. In the interactive ritual, investors and sponsors in boxing are the sources of material resources. Only with sufficient support from material resources can boxers generate more emotional power. Based on Goffman's theory, Randall Collins attempts to unify micro-sociology and macro-sociology to build a "chain of interactive rituals" [5]. Collins believes that the entire history of human society is made up of contexts, so interactive ritual theory is first and foremost a theory of contexts. Furthermore, Collins' argument clarifies that interactive rituals in competitive sports are designed to produce emotional states of dramatic tension and triumph. Interactive rituals can be achieved when athletes and spectators co-create a sense of excitement and anticipation [6]. In addition, some related research results also provide theoretical and methodological references for this study from different aspects [7][8][9].

3. Interview and actual boxing match sample

To better validate the ideas presented above and further discuss the impact of rituals in boxing on the rights and wrongs of violence in real life. The author interviewed some of the Syracuse University boxing club members, and we may gain some new insights from their responses. Also, this section will compare the videos of professional boxers' fights to verify the points described in the previous quarter.

There are 35 Syracuse University boxing club members, and I chose 10 of them to interview. The interview questions included but were not limited to: 1. How long have you been practicing boxing? 2. Do you have any special rituals before each boxing practice? 3. If you had the opportunity to participate in a professional boxing match in the future, would you sign up for it, and if not, why? 4. What kind of connection do you think between violence and boxing? 5. Do you think the emotions and behaviors of the audience can play a role in a match? 6. if you were faced with a violent conflict in real life, would you choose to use violence against it because of your experience with boxing? 7. If you could change one specific thing about boxing, what would you change? 8. Do you think boxing can play a role in leading social trends and values in today's society? 9. Do you have a boxer you admire the most? 10. What kind of ability do you hope you can develop through boxing training?

Respondents can answer all ten questions selectively, and the answers recorded are anonymous. The ten questions are representative and do not ask members very deliberately about the connection between ritual, boxing, and violence. At the same time, the interview is a way of an investigation that can bring each other closer together, thus maximizing efficiency. The results of the interviews were similar to the expectation. None of the ten people saw boxing as a future career path, and people saw

it more as a way to release stress. On the question about rituals, only three of the ten said they had their rituals when training. One person said he would clean his hand wraps before every training session, which implies dedication to training. Another said he watches videos of matches before each training session to give himself more perspective on the boxing action. The last one indicates that he has the habit of organizing his training bag after every training session. As we found in another study, many students and teachers have certain ritual actions in their daily life, which are destined to affect a person's life attitude. On the issue of violence, eight members said boxing itself contains a lot of violent actions. But the sport is becoming more popular as more people participate, and most people see the sport as a fitness exercise and do not choose boxing training to generate conflict. As a result, the respondents believe that the violence caused by the sport is declining. Therefore, these answers show that more and more people can understand boxing properly.

Four out of ten students chose to drop their answers to the question about audience emotions. The main reason for this was that they had no experience watching boxing matches and therefore did not know how the audience reacted while watching the games. Of the six members who chose to answer this question, five thought that the emotions and reactions of the spectators were a demonstration of their participation in the fight process. In other words, they believed that the audience expressed their feelings by shouting, jumping, etc. One member answered this question by stating that he thought the audience's overreaction would lead to a particular inaccuracy and tendency in the outcome of the competition. From the answers to this question, it can be concluded that the interactive rituals between boxers and spectators are likely to produce negative results. For example, when the intense reaction of the spectators disrupts the normal rhythm of the fight, those present will feel panic and uneasiness, which will result in the match not being held correctly. In the framework of Collins' theory about interactive rituals, all emotions are mutual. Thus, the in-ring situation is linked to the out-ring problem. Suppose the spectators outside the ring cannot bring positive emotional energy to the boxers inside the circle. In that case, the boxers inside the circle will not connect them with a shared emotional chain, a solid emotional chain that binds the violence, and once it breaks, that is when the violence arises. The exchange of emotional energy is also likely to break down.

American sports columnist Rick Telander mentioned in an interview that on the playing field, athletes' violent behavior is likely to be part of what the competition needs. For example, in boxing, a sport in which violence is a profession [10]. Legendary boxer Tommy Hearns likes to cut his hair before every fight to get in the best of spirits. At the same time, Julio Cesar Chavez adds red to his outfit, whether gloves or headwear, during every match because he believes red is his lucky color. Marvin Johnson and Roberto Duran don't take a shower during each training cycle, which they consider to be their most crucial ritual for winning. Some professional athletes' rituals are personal habits of life or training, while others are seen as strategies to disrupt their opponents. In a close boxing match, any of these factors can lead to a biased outcome. To obtain victory, the side that has been suppressed for a long time will inevitably resort to more aggressive means. For example, physical confrontation, clothing interference, and other ways, thus making the opponent's emotional energy drop, such an approach without forming shapes the atmosphere of tension and panic on the field of play.

4. Conclusions

Through combing the relevant research on ritual and wrestling and conducting interviews, this paper finds that violence is a factor other than ritual. This means that several sources of uncertainty and fear can lead to violence. However, not every athlete present will be able to overcome this uncertainty. Only those adepts at using violence will find ways to overcome conflicting tensions and fears. When turn these tensions, and worries into their emotional energy, and when violence occurs, it is a struggle for emotional power. So, even though an individual has a solid motivation to be violent during a match, if there is no scenario to set the scene, then violence will not happen. The same can

be applied in real life, where violent behavior is only possible through both parties' interactive rituals and emotional transmission.

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