

Embattled Identities:
Constructions of Contemporary American Masculinity

Amongst Mixed Martial Arts Cagefighters

by

Jaime Holthuysen

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved April 2011 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Hjorleifur Jonsson, Chair
Takeyuki Tsuda
Andrea Ballesterio Salaverry

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2011

ABSTRACT

Masculinity has been increasingly recognized as a critical and relatively unexplored area of inquiry in anthropological gender studies. This project seeks to expand anthropological research on masculinity to contemporary American society. Using the case study of a male-centered popular new sport, Mixed Martial Arts (also known as cagefighting) this project integrates theories of embodiment and feminist perspectives to explore how masculinity and masculine hegemony are shaped, contested, and perpetuated in the United States. Using a multi-level framework this project explores: 1) How is masculinity experienced and expressed by Mixed Martial Arts fighters as a form of self-identity? How do their bodies play a role in constructing masculinity? 2) What are the pervasive forms of masculinity associated with Mixed Martial Arts (MMA)? Are they truly representative of the sport? 3) Can these pervasive forms of masculinity be seen as hegemonic? How would hegemony operate in relation to individual experience? Using multiple methods to capture multiple points of view was critical to thoroughly examining the complex notion of masculinity. This study employed participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, surveys, photo elicitation, and media content analysis, as each presented particular benefits and allowed for the development a more well-rounded understanding of masculinity within the realm of MMA.

This study also situates the rise of MMA and its representations of masculinity within the greater perspective of contemporary American society. By doing so reveals how ideologies of prescribed masculinity do not arise out of a

vacuum but in relation to particular economic, social and political contexts. An emphasis of this study was to examine the daily lives of MMA fighters to understand how their participation in what may be regarded as a hypermasculine activity affects their own perceptions of masculinity. In looking at how masculinity is embodied, the gaps and often contradictions between representation and individual experiences are revealed. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to contribute to a better understanding of masculinity as both an embodied and relational construct.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, who always wanted one of her children to be a doctor (MD). I think this was the best possible compromise!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University, and the Graduate and Professional Students' Association at Arizona State University. Funding from the Graduate College at Arizona State University and the Emeriti Faculty Association provided welcomed support during the writing phase of this project.

There are many people I would like to thank for their time and assistance. I am sincerely grateful for having the support of such an amazing committee. I would like to my chair, Hjorleifur Jonsson, for his unwavering enthusiasm and encouragement. Thank you for providing me with pertinent advice and guidance, while also allowing me the freedom to follow my own path. Thank you to Takeyuki Tsuda who always has his door open for his students. I am grateful for your insights, questions (and also for your careful readings of my many, many grant drafts.) I would like to thank my final committee member Andrea Ballestero, who stepped up to the plate on rather short notice. I sincerely appreciate your insight and vision for ethnography and socio-cultural anthropology. I must thank my colleague (and unofficial fourth committee member), Dolma Roder. Your feedback on my work over the years has truly been invaluable. Also, I would like to acknowledge the time and efforts of Alex Brewis-Slade and Ed Hackett for their comments and suggestions in reviewing my grant proposals. Thank you to the interns who contributed to this project, in

particular Juli Hubbard for her dedication. Importantly, I would like to thank all of the participants in this study, and also the owners of Desert Combat for allowing me to conduct my research there. I would also like to acknowledge the American Men's Studies Association for holding their annual meetings where I met inspiring, innovative scholars and received valuable feedback on my research.

Thank you to my friends for providing their kind support on this long academic journey: Jacqueline Chao, Alberto Perez, Muna Ali, Alanna Ossa, Ramsi Watkins, Nahal Namdaran, Lindsey Mulligan, and Andrew Hagar. Last but certainly not least I would like to thank my family. Mum, thank you for instilling the importance of education, and the value of dedication and hard work. My sister Janet, I am eternally grateful for your encouragement and editing. Thank you to Patrick Runez for helping me focus when I needed to focus, and distracting me when I needed distraction. I am sincerely grateful for your loving encouragement. Finally, Mr. G.H. Khan, I could not have done this without you. Thank you for always being by my side. You made writing up so much easier.

Without all of you, this dissertation would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTERS	
1 INTRODUCTION: THE GENDERED WORLD OF MIXED	
MARTIAL ARTS.....	1
Research Questions	4
Research Design	5
Research and Gender.....	13
Relevant Literature	20
Hegemonic Masculinity	21
Phenomenological Embodiment	29
Mixed Martial Arts: A Background.....	38
Outline of Study	46
2 EMBODYING MASCULINITY: "IT'S NOT THE SIZE OF THE	
DOG IN THE FIGHT, BUT THE FIGHT IN THE DOG"	48
Joining Desert Combat	48
MMA Class	55
Fighter's Class	57
Embodying Mixed Martial Arts.....	60
Training.....	61
Self-awareness, Feeling and a Mind-Body Connection	65
Sparring.....	71

	Page
CHAPTERS	
Lessons From the Cage	74
Getting Hit	75
Competition	77
Conclusions	83
3 BODY IMAGE: "FAT GUYS HAVE TO PROVE IT"	86
Ideal Bodies and Expectations	87
Cutting Weight	95
Relationships with the Body	109
Bodies in Parts	116
Conclusions	120
PART I Discussion: Embodiment, Body Image, and Hegemonic Masculinity	122
Critiques of Hegemonic Masculinity	122
Hegemonic Masculinity and Mixed Martial Arts	125
Embodiment and Body Image in Relation to Mixed Martial Arts	129
4 GENDER, SEXUALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS: "YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME, BUT WHAT PART DO YOU REALLY LOVE?"	135
Setting the Gender Stage	136
Female Fighters	137

	Page
 CHAPTERS	
Ring Girls	149
Girlfriends and Wives	153
Groupies	160
Women in the Media	163
Becoming Media	168
Sexuality and Intimacy	176
Conclusions	184
PART II DISCUSSION: Situating MMA in American Culture ...	186
The Rise of ‘Raunch Culture’	187
Post-feminism.....	188
Mixed Martial Arts and Post-feminism	189
5 REPRESENTATIONS AND REAL LIFE: "THE UFC IS CREATING A FALSE REALITY"	192
I’m (Not) Going to be Rich: Finances and Fantasy.....	193
Every Body is For Sale: Body as Commodity	198
As Real as it Gets: Manufacturing Reality	200
A Typical Day on Reality TV	204
MMA: The First Reality Sport?	207
Stigma and Sterotypes	212
What Draws Fans?.....	225

	Page
CHAPTERS	
True Fans vs Wannabes: Authenticity and Exclusivity	230
Fan Fighter Interactions.....	233
Conclusions	237
PART III DISCUSSION: Contexts of American Masculinity:	
Momentous Events of the New Millenium.....	239
The Iraq War.....	240
Reality TV	243
6 CONCLUSIONS: MASCULINITY AS EMBODIED AND	
RELATIONAL	246
REFERENCES	251
APPENDIX	
A INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD DOCUMENTS	264
B SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	268
C MIXED MARTIAL ARTS TIMELINE.....	272
D UFC RULES	276
E DESERT COMBAT WAIVER	280
F BASIC MIXED MARTIAL ARTS GLOSSARY	283
G SURVEY DATA.....	286

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: THE GENDERED WORLD OF MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

Why is it popular? Everyone gets the adjudication of disputes through force. Then there is the athletic component. It is unparalleled physical rigor, a deeply intimate experience. It is not animalistic--a triangle choke is not in someone's DNA. It is a sport of human combustion. It is a means of defining oneself by walking through fire. *Re-inventing the self*. It is the examination of the ideal human form, but more so it is the expression of the most effective human body, the capacity of it that is demonstrated in so many ways. It is art and beauty and unique. Football doesn't have this arduous journey. MMA is like re-birth through desire. MMA is the struggle for success. Look at the intention—you want to know who you are as a man. It is self-discovery. When the chips are down who are you? Am I a leader? Most guys want some kind of medium to answer questions about the self. Sport is thoughtful, regulated, controlled. It is contained. It provides a satisfying answer. MMA has to do with self-conception/perception, ego and confidence. Men question who they are. Will I dominate? Will I deal with the pressure? It provides insight into your own character. MMA has had its ugly moments, but pushed through. It is deeply complicated and unendingly fascinating. It is so complicated, but on the surface it is so simplistic, and that is the beauty of MMA.

(Sports Analyst: Luke Thomas on MMA, fieldnotes 2009)

Gender “is a way of classifying phenomena, a socially agreed upon system of distinctions rather than an objective description of inherent traits.

Classifications suggest a relationship among categories that make distinctions or separate groupings possible” (Scott 1988: 29). For Joan Scott, these categorizations are not statements of fact but often terms of contestation. Sex and gender are no longer being thought of as the same, nor are they conceived of as solely rooted in biology. There have been shifts away from gender as derivations of sex-roles, toward more complex frameworks of gender. Gender is now viewed as multifaceted. It is relational and experiential (Bourdieu 2001; Connell 1987; 1995; Moore 1994; Weiss 1999) as well as performative (Butler 1990; Goffman 1959).

Until about twenty years ago, masculinity was a facet of gender and social life that was long ignored in critical analysis. It was just assumed that men were men, and of course they acted in masculine ways. Feminist research (Bordo and Jaggar 1989; Owens 1985; Snow 1989) has critiqued the pervasive male gaze and voice in constructions of history and society. This male perspective has indeed overwhelmingly built the memory of American history (Kimmel 2006; Rotundo 1993), but what exactly does it mean to be a man in contemporary American culture? What are the contexts of self and social knowledge of masculinity? The difficulty with conducting research on masculinity is that it is at once ubiquitous and obscured. Men and maleness are everywhere--their bodies, their images and their practices. What defines masculinity and how do we examine something that does not have a clear definition? Guttman (1996: 9) states that to view masculinities requires a “constant refocusing of one’s vision.” I interpret this refocusing as referring not only to masculinity being constantly in flux, but also to the way its characteristics and manifestations are so heavily context dependant. The experiences of masculinity vary depending on a number of factors such as age, ethnicity, geographic location, socio-economic status, cultural heritage, etc. In addition, men must contend with representations of idealized forms and valued traits of masculinity. Masculinity is both public and personal. R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt argue that “it is logically possible to define ‘a thousand and one’ variations of masculinity” (2005: 845).

An avenue of inquiry that has proved fruitful for examining masculinity and men’s experiences in contemporary North American society has been sport

(see Dunbar 2000; Klein 1993; McKay, Messner et al. 2000; Messner 1992, Robidoux 2001). Sport is a forum that has been used to examine other aspects of culture such as identity formation at a national level (Archetti and Dyck 2003; Ots 2003) and an individual level (Curry 2000; Kohn 2003; Wacquant 2004). Using the case study of a male-centered popular new sport, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), this project integrates theories of embodiment (Merleau-Ponty 1989, Csordas 1999; 1994a, Bourdieu 1977; 2001) and feminist perspectives (Connell 1987; 1995; 2005) to explore how masculinity and masculine representations are shaped, contested and perpetuated in the United States. Mixed Martial Arts provides a valuable new context to examine imposition and resistance to masculine ideals because as a new sport, public images and ideals of masculine representation are still being negotiated. Currently the sport is dominated by male athletes. Only in recent years have female athletes begun to compete with each other in some of the same high profile and televised competitions. Men are paid significantly higher salaries and prize money, and have far more opportunities for competition. Spectatorship is primarily male, and marketing campaigns are targeted specifically toward a male audience. This context is unique in that particular notions of masculinity are integral to the construction and propagation of the sport. This study also situates the rise of MMA and its representations of masculinity within the greater perspective of contemporary American society. By doing so we can see how ideologies of prescribed masculinity do not arise out of a vacuum but in relation to particular economic, social and political contexts. An emphasis of this study is to examine the daily lives of MMA fighters to

understand how their participation in what may be regarded as a *hypermasculine* activity affects their own perceptions of masculinity. In looking at how masculinity is embodied, the gaps and often contradictions between representation and individual experiences are revealed. Ultimately, my goal in this dissertation is to contribute to a better understanding of masculinity as both an embodied and relational construct.

Research Questions

This research examines the following major questions: 1) How is masculinity experienced and expressed by Mixed Martial Arts fighters as a form of self-identity? How do their bodies play a role in constructing masculinity? 2) What are the pervasive forms of masculinity associated with Mixed Martial Arts? Are they truly representative of the sport? Do public representations of a fighter's image fit his personal conceptions of self? 3) Can these pervasive forms of masculinity be seen as hegemonic? (Connell 1987; 1995) How would hegemony operate in relation to individual experience? Using multiple methods to capture multiple points of view was critical to thoroughly examining the complex notion of masculinity. I employed participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, surveys, photo elicitation and media content analysis, as each presented particular benefits and allowed me to develop a more well-rounded understanding of masculinity within the realm of Mixed Martial Arts.

Research Design

I used a multi-sited ethnographic research design (Hannerz 2003), as the sport itself is not geographically fixed. Based on a number of factors (e.g. whether or not state law deemed the sport legal, approximate number of gyms, attendance numbers for live professional events, and reputation of gyms), I identified regions in the United States where the sport was most popular. California, Nevada and the Southwest (Arizona, New Mexico) were the most prominent locations, while there were other pockets of high interest in Massachusetts, Florida and Washington State. My research concentrated mainly on Arizona, California and Nevada.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was key in attempting to identify dominant forms of masculinity and exploring processes of production and control of masculinity. It allowed me to examine how masculinity was experienced, and provided critical data to analyze relationships between more dominant forms of masculinity and fighters' perceptions of their own masculinity. The two field site settings of great consequence to my research, and in particular participant observation, were competition venues and training facilities.

Competition Venues

I attended approximately fifteen professional MMA competitions at various locations across the United States (e.g. San Jose, California; Las Vegas, Nevada; Seattle, Washington; Fairfax, Virginia) between 2006-2010. I attended as

both a member of the audience, and for a short time as a writer/photographer for an MMA magazine (2006-2007). Events were held in indoor and outdoor arenas, casino tents and large meeting rooms, and theaters. Depending on the venue, audience attendance ranged from maximum capacity (sold out) to half empty. The largest venue (Los Angeles Memorial Stadium) could seat over 90,000, whereas the smallest venue (a casino in Lemoore, California) held less than 2000.

It was important to observe cagefighting matches, as facets of masculinity were demonstrated during competition in diverse ways. I watched for the fighters' reactions to outcomes (e.g. crying and other public displays of emotion), and how fighters were described and portrayed by announcers and the organizations they fight for. I took note of the atmosphere that was created at these events, and how that contributed to the experiential aspects the sport emphasizes. The locales that hosted MMA competitions were central to this comprehensive analysis, as they were the venues where narratives of masculinity were constructed and circulated in the public sphere.

Training Facility

My primary field site was Desert Combat, situated in Phoenix, Arizona. This location was chosen because it has been established as one of the premier gyms for MMA over the past five years. It has been consistently ranked as one of the top ten gyms in the United States according to MMA industry websites.¹ At 14,000 sq ft, it is one of the largest gyms (referring to square footage, not participants) in Arizona, if not in the United States. Desert Combat is open six

¹ (*mmamadness.com 2008; sherdog.com 2008; thefightnetwork.com 2008*)

days a week, Monday through Saturday, from 10am until 10pm. There are several classes: Brazilian jujitsu, Muay Thai kickboxing, MMA, and an advanced Fighter's Class (for people who currently compete professionally or are very close to competing professionally). At this gym, I was able to connect with amateur and professional fighters, coaches (who were also former professional fighters), and was also given access to media and various fight organizations who often came by to interview and recruit the professional fighters.

My Position

I came upon Desert Combat by chance. I had just moved to Arizona to begin my graduate studies in anthropology and I was looking for a new pastime that would keep me in good physical shape. Being a longtime fan of Bruce Lee and Van Damme martial arts movies, I decided to take up kickboxing. Desert Combat was within walking distance of my home, and I frequently passed it on my way to the university. I stopped in, inquired about classes and watched the participants for about half an hour. The class had only two females, compared to twenty males. I would be remiss to say that I wasn't just a little intimidated. However, the owner and instructors were friendly so I decided to sign up. During my first few months I learned that several of the kick-boxers were turning to the new sport of Mixed Martial Arts, and beginning to compete professionally. I was at that time only vaguely familiar with this phenomenon of MMA/cagefighting. I knew that it began in the early 1990s and was subsequently banned due to claims of brutality. When I arrived at Desert Combat in 2004, the sport was already making a steady comeback. It was back on television, its popularity growing

rapidly. I was intrigued with this rapid shift in social boundaries. How had this rogue spectacle now become a legitimate sport? What drove participants to engage in this activity? And why were the narratives of hyper-masculinity so important to the sport's popularity? What does this say about contemporary American culture? These questions were too compelling to ignore, and in 2006 I began my doctoral research on how Mixed Martial Arts both shaped and reflected contemporary American masculinity.

In-depth, Semi-Structured Interviews

Ethnographic interviews were a major source of data. As mentioned earlier, most of the participants were recruited from Desert Combat. I interviewed a total of fifty-five individuals. Fourteen were amateur fighters (meaning they were recreational participants that had not been paid to compete). Twenty-seven were professional fighters (meaning they had been paid to compete in an MMA event). I conducted interviews with professional fighters since they could comment on far more aspects of the MMA industry, such as financial support, the influence of the organization on their image and personal life, and coming to terms with recognition and fame (Appendix B). Interviewing amateurs and well as professionals allowed me to follow the career trajectory of fighters as well as explore the expectations of individuals who were just embarking on this career path. I interviewed three coaches/trainers, two representatives from MMA organizations and seven members of the media. The fighters ranged from age 21 to age 41. As the central focus of this project was on understanding emic notions

of masculinity amongst cage-fighters, the majority of interviews took place with male fighters. The sample population was representative of the demographic breakdown at the gym as the overwhelming majority of members were male. However, I did interview two female professional fighters, female members of the media, female fans, and in a couple instances, the female partners of the fighters. While this was a study on masculinity, it was essential to communicate with females associated with the industry to ascertain their perspectives and experiences in such a male-dominated industry.

Focus Groups

Focus groups consisted of participants I had already interviewed individually. I conducted two focus group sessions where I acted as the moderator. These sessions were held at Desert Combat gym, and both sessions lasted approximately one hour. Sessions were audio-recorded and then later transcribed. All participants were male, between the ages of 23-29, and all had at least one professional fight as of 2009. The first session had five male fighters and all self-identified as Caucasian. The second session had six male fighters, four of which self-identified as Caucasian, one as Hispanic and one as mixed-ethnicity Asian-American.

I employed questions addressing masculinity similar to those I used for the individual interviews, such as asking participants who benefitted from the popularity of this sport, or to describe differences in male and female cagefighting. Participants generally gave the same answers as they did in the

individual interviews, however if one participant had a particularly strong opinion, the others seemed more likely to agree. Conducting focus groups allowed me to gather additional data while also investigating social dynamics and issues of hierarchy amongst the fighters. This method also promoted deeper reflections on the nature of masculinity, adding another dimension to data acquired from semi-structured interviews.

Photo Elicitation

During the focus groups I used photo elicitation techniques to prompt participants to verbalize their views on masculinity. This technique involves using visual aids provided by photographs and/or video clips and asking participants to provide comments (Collier and Collier 1986; Harper 2002; Tobin and Davidson 1989). This was especially helpful to get at the participants' emic view of masculinity. With this technique, my role as a researcher was de-emphasized, letting the participants provide their immediate reactions. Their responses led me to highlight reoccurring themes and categories that seemed most important to participants. Photos of cage-fighters both in training and competition were used as a prompt for participants. Images came from public sources of circulation such as MMA magazines and MMA internet sites to ensure there would be no issues of copyright infringement. After all of the participants had a chance to view an image, I posed a question such as 'could you gauge the success of this fighter based on his body type?' I would wait for the individuals to respond, taking a passive role while they discussed this question amongst themselves. I did not

want to influence their responses or put a particular person on the spot to answer. While I was the one selecting the images and asking the questions, this method allowed participants to also guide the course of data collection.

Photo elicitation had both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, the body and body images greatly impact self-perception, and the fluidity or lack or fluidity between varying perceptions is crucial in understanding constructions of a gendered self (Weiss 1999:166-167). In addition, as MMA is a spectator sport, participants were well versed in interpreting images, which allowed them to speak with a sophistication and knowledge that is less easily solicited through direct verbal questioning. The use of images aided in the anticipated problem of getting participants to comfortably articulate and describe notions of masculinity.

Surveys

Surveys were used to capture information regarding the general population of MMA fans and their perceptions of the sport. I administered a brief eight-question survey during the UFC 100 Fan Expo. This fan expo provided a pool of participants that had established themselves as MMA fans (e.g. through their attendance at the expo, and payment of fees for expo admittance). While fans were waiting to enter the building I walked up to them and verbally administered the survey, recording their responses on the survey sheet. This method ensured that I would receive a 100% response rate. I began at the front of the line and asked each subsequent person if they would like to take a survey on MMA for my dissertation research. Most fans were happy to participate, as they had nothing

else to do but wait for the doors to the Expo hall to open. I obtained one hundred responses to this survey. This method proved to be an effective way to quickly gather information from a large number of people, spending approximately five minutes or less with each individual. My only concern regarding potential limitations for this survey is that individuals who were behind the survey-taker could overhear, and be influenced by the survey-takers' responses. However, when reviewing the data for duplicate/identical responses for consecutively numbered surveys, this did not appear as a trend.

Media Content Analysis

The media is extremely influential in the normalization of images and discourse and the inevitable situating of the subjective placement of identities. Entangled within media representation and ideologies are aspects of identity and commodification. Using media content analysis I examined the role and influence of the media, as it is the primary means of extending masculine ideologies to the general public. This method of interrogating mass media content has been used by other social science academics to trace changes in popular perceptions and trends over time (Danielson and Lasorsa 1997) and political and racial ideologies (Andrews 2001). Media content analysis has been long been used in feminist research of popular representations of women's roles (Duffy 1994; Ganahl et. al 2003; Kuperberg and Stone 2008). Following the premise that the media also communicates messages that inform individuals of the socially accepted, current standards and definitions of masculinity (see Hearn et al. 2003; Jackson et al.

2001; Messner and Montez de Oca 2005; Morrison and Halton 2009), I believed this would prove a valuable line of inquiry. There were specialized media sources on MMA (e.g. magazines, websites, blogs) but the sport was often mentioned in mainstream media such as newspapers (e.g. the *New York Times*), cable television and radio. A primary objective of media content analysis was to determine how popular (non-industry) media sources were representing the sport. I wanted to uncover what messages and images were being constructed and consumed by the general population, and not explicit fans or industry insiders.

Using the database Lexus Nexus, I randomly selected one hundred popular newspaper articles concerning MMA (popular meaning non-MMA industry, such as *The Toronto Star* or *The Boston Globe*.) Search parameters were limited to: English language sources, over 100 words and published between 2000-2009. The texts were analyzed with a particular emphasis on what terms were used to describe the sport, whether articles seemed negative, positive or neutral, and the underlying themes of the articles. The analysis of discourse and contexts of representation (e.g. how ethnicity and gender were described) allowed me to identify trends in the portrayal of the sport.

Research and Gender

From the start of this project I was aware that my gender would influence methodology and data collection. It is important to disclose this in order to consider the circumstance and the specificity of intersubjective relations. Toren suggests that “intersubjectivity is central to anthropology as an epistemological

project whose fugitive object of study can only be ourselves, even while its focus is bound to be on others” (Toren 2009: 130). As a female researcher studying masculinity and speaking with mostly male participants, this would indeed impact the course and nature of my study. As mentioned earlier, I interviewed participants only in public settings (e.g. the gym or as a last resort a coffee shop). This was an intentional decision on my part. I had to keep in mind the frame of context that most male cage-fighters viewed women associated with sport. Women were either ring girls (scantly clad in bikinis offered up as ‘eye-candy’ for the audience at MMA competitions) or groupies (who followed the professional fighters around in hopes of having sexual relations with them). On occasion, women were fighters, or photographers, writers or girlfriends/wives of other fighters (refer to Part II: Gender, Sexuality and Relationships). My previous few years training of kick-boxing at this facility gave me some credibility as someone with some practical knowledge of the sport. They knew my face and that I also trained there. I was not the wife or girlfriend watching from the sidelines, nor was I there to ‘snag’ a pro fighter. As a female researcher, I felt like I had to draw clear lines to establish that my interactions with the male fighters were purely professional. I purposely emphasized my role as an academic researcher more than I would have had I been studying female cage-fighters or another topic. I chose to wear more professional clothes (business casual) when interviewing the fighters. I tried to impart a serious demeanor by having them review their IRB consent waivers, listen to my speech regarding this written consent and showing them my digital audio recorder that would be recording our sessions. For the most

part these strategies served me well in representing myself as a serious academic researcher. Ethnography requires embedding one's self in a particular social group, and learning through interactions and experiences with this culture. A male anthropologist studying masculinity and working with male cage-fighters could very well go out for a drink at a local bar with his participants. Due my gender I felt it best to turn down invitations for drinks, parties and lunches, as I did not want any participants to confuse my intentions. I had to be very cognizant of my credibility and reputation. Part of me felt a little cheated, that perhaps I could have gained more information, become more of an insider, if I had taken advantage of these informal opportunities for participant observation and rapport building.

While conducting preliminary research I discovered some minor difficulties that a young, female researcher studying men and masculinity was to encounter. In 2006, I developed an ethnographic film project detailing the lives of Pankration practitioners. (Pankration is a form of Martial Arts used in MMA). I found it extremely interesting that some of these practitioners of Pankration were employed by their coaches' wife as children's entertainers. This meant that one day they would impart a perfect picture of hyper-masculine aggression, kicking and punching each other into submission, and the next day they would be dressed as Bubbles the Clown, wearing makeup, making balloon animals and singing nursery rhymes to small children. To me, this was an exciting juxtaposition of contemporary masculinities. I made contact with the assistant coach, Kenny, whom I met with a couple times prior to filming to resolve logistics. At these meetings we discussed my PhD research concerning American masculinity.

Kenny thought it was 'cool' that I was studying MMA but was rather confused why I would be studying masculinity. I explained that because it is something that is so taken for granted as the norm, it is important to understand what it really means. He seemed satisfied with this answer. I visited the Pankration class once prior to filming to consider issues such as class activities, lighting and sound quality. During this first visit I did not introduce myself to the class, I simply observed from the back of the room.

On the day of filming, I arrived early at the gym to set up equipment. My recollection of this situation is as follows: members of the Pankration class slowly begin to file in and eagerly sign consent waivers. They appear happy at the prospect of being in front of a camera. They begin warming up, running around the gym, laughing and talking amongst themselves. After ten minutes Kenny blows his whistle and calls the class to gather around. "Guys! This is Jaime. She is going to be filming us working out today. She is doing her PhD on MMA." I hear them mumble words like "cool" and "awesome." Then Kenny adds, "Oh and she studies masculinity so let's show her how masculine we are...." The guys abruptly stop talking to each other and stared at me. The room is utterly silent. Flustered, I attempt to say something about gender, identity and men. It's of no use. They continue to stare at me, their eyes wide with shock and disbelief. Kenny may well have told them that I study 'incest' or 'cannibalism.' When did masculinity become taboo? When did it become a dirty secret? I didn't expect Kenny to tell them that I studied masculinity, nor request them to actively display their masculinity. I certainly did not expect their reaction to the word

‘masculinity.’ Once the class began to fall into their usual routine, they began to forget the camera and microphones were there. We completed filming without further incident or embarrassment.

The following week I met with Kenny to thank him for coordinating the filming for the project. I ask him what his class thought of filming and the project. “To be honest, they were wondering if you were some hard-core, lesbian feminist, or if you had a thing for alpha-male type guys.” I was extremely surprised by these assessments. The members of the Pankration class were trying to figure me out. They seemed to have come to the conclusion that my interest in MMA and in masculinity must be rooted in my sexuality. My motivations for ‘studying’ them were either under the guise of a man-hating, feminist political agenda to denounce them for being men (i.e. too aggressive, too macho) and therefore a liability to humanity, or I was simply creating opportunities to select a well-muscled, dominant male for sexual partnership. It is genuinely interesting that despite the fact that I was a doctoral social science researcher, being female left me confined to only two possibilities.

I learned a great deal from this encounter. I realized that I had to be aware that my identity as a female researcher would inevitably be entangled in this academic pursuit to study masculinity. It would be important to find ways to minimize the influence of both my gender and also connotations that come along with the word ‘masculinity.’ There was little I could do about my gender, only to emphasize that my interest in their lives was purely academic. The experience with the pilot study led me to more actively construct my ‘professional’ role as a

researcher in my exchanges with male participants. The other important adjustment to methodology was to exercise caution in my use of the word 'masculinity.' The experience with the Pankration class suggested that informing participants that my research concerned masculinity somehow prompted them to feel as if they had to 'perform' masculinity. The word 'masculinity' was met with reactions of anxiety, disbelief and mistrust. It appeared as a challenge or a threat to participants in the pilot study, and was not at all helpful in rapport building. Rather than state that my research was about contemporary American masculinity, I told participants that my research was on the experiences of cage-fighters and representations of identity. Occasionally I would say that I studied gender and sport. I chose to omit the word 'masculinity' in my initial encounter with participants as this word drew to mind pre-conceived notions that would impact their responses. It was far more fruitful to talk 'around' masculinity to uncover definitions and perceptions. I felt it was important to frame masculinity as a part of identity rather than letting the word stand alone.

Gender is unavoidably considered in human interactions. It is one of the first categories through which we are defined as infants. I could not hide my gender nor was this my goal. It is easy to identify limitations brought on by my gender such as not being privy to details of most participants' sexual conquests, or knowing that some responses were worded differently so as not to offend my female sensibilities. Yet as a female researcher, I firmly believe that I was also presented with opportunities that a male researcher may not have been. I was often the foil against which they would construct or display their masculinity. The

interview becomes a location for signifying and asserting masculinity (Schalbe and Wolkomir 2001). As Grenz (2007: 2001) points out,

Masculinity is not to be seen as the “real” or “inner” truth of the interviewees but as something constantly produced in the interview setting through the content of their stories as well as through out interaction.

In addition, I was often a sympathetic ear for their relationship issues and childhood traumas. Two participants revealed emotional information about their personal lives and childhoods they insisted they had not spoken about with anyone else, and would not have felt comfortable sharing with a male researcher. This experience of gender-based, selective emotional openness has been recognized by other female academics interacting with male participants (Frank 2002; Matza 2009). The reason for this may be that for many men, women are frequently the facilitators of male speech; they are listeners and encourage the flow of men’s talk, (Smart 1984; 155). Furthermore, being a female researcher also allowed me experience the world of MMA as woman. This exposed me a different dimension of gender interactions.²

² Part II: Gender, Sexuality and Relationships further discusses how my research activities were influenced by my gender.

Relevant Literature

Sport and Masculinity

Recently scholars have begun to explore the relevance of both sport and masculinity. Sport is a forum to examine intriguing aspects of culture such as identity formation at a national level (Archetti and Dyck 2003; Klein 1997; Ots 2003) and an individual level (Curry 2000; Kohn 2003; Wacquant 2004) and performativity (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004; Rinehart 1998), with the notion of spectacle being crucial. Sport may be regarded within capitalist societies as tied to processes of globalization and commodification (Horne 2006; Crawford 2004). The consumer dimensions of sport are often the forces driving popularity and may reconfigure the sport itself (Downey 2007; van Bottenburg and Helibron 2006). Athletes themselves can be understood as commodities, participating in a complex negotiation of self under these capitalist constraints. Dunbar (2000) recognizes that while individuals may conform to standards and ideals of masculine identities, there also exists 'commodified rebellion' in which the participant exercises some kind of non-conformist yet marketable form of masculinity. This perspective becomes crucial to examining Mixed Martial Arts, as it is marketed as a high-risk, extreme sport.

Sport is recognized as a masculine domain, with explicit rules differing according to gender. Most scholars agree that sport is entangled in the reproduction of gender relations. Feminist analysis of sport has a relatively short history (Duquin 1978, 1984; Greendorfer 1974, 1978; Hall 1972, 1978, 1981,

1984; and Harris 1972 *cited in* Messner and Sabo 1994). These pioneers examined women, gender and sex inequality in sport, and uncovered sex differences in athletic socialization and dominant institutional forms of sport that have served to naturalize men's power and privilege over women. The issue of gender is often taken for granted, as sport is constructed according to overtly male heterosexual ideologies (Degaris 2000; Pronger 2000). Connell's theory on *hegemonic masculinity* examines how aspects of gender are structured in favor of particular groups and why these ideas are perpetuated.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Some of the most influential frequently cited research on masculinity has been put forth by R.W. Connell. Connell developed the theory of hegemonic masculinity in the late 1980s as a reaction against the fixed nature of sex-role theories and their weakness in dealing with change and contexts of power. Gender theorists of the 1980s, such as Connell, found fault with this static view of gender relations, believing it to be too absolutist to encompass the full range of nuanced experience (see Connell 1995; Pleck 1981). Hegemonic masculinity suggests that "masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals...masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action, and therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 836). To add critiques of power and structural inequalities, Connell turned to Gramsci's (1972) notion of hegemony. Gramsci's use of this term refers to a dynamic wherein one group claims and sustains a leading position over other groups. Like Gramsci's

definition, hegemony does not function due to violence, it is attained through the influence of institutions (such as government and schools) and through persuasion (such as established through media).

Connell defines the term hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (2005: 77). This configuration is constantly in motion, constantly changing. This description would indicate that the contexts of social life and therefore the political, economic and social factors that comprise culture are crucial to its manifestation in contemporary culture. Meaning that the hegemonic masculinity of 1940 is perhaps quite different than the hegemonic masculinity of 2009. What remains the same is the process of development, and its underlying force in structuring gender relations and patriarchy. Visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity may be exemplars such as film actors, athletes or even fantasy figures (ibid: 77). Connell emphasizes that it is likely established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideals and institutional power, and provides the example of the corporate masculinity of the military and government. These are more obvious examples of the interplay between institutions and individuals operating within a traditionally ‘masculine’ realm. A major contention of this theory is that there is not a singular masculinity, or way to be masculine. There are numerous masculinities that exist in relation to a hegemonic ideal or group, and the nature of hegemony may be constantly challenged according to contexts. Connell suggests

that it is more accurate to use the term masculinities rather than masculinity as it relates to pluralism and the existence of multiple masculinities. Essential components underlying the perpetuation of hegemony are 1) subordination, 2) complicity and 3) marginalization. Hegemony relates to cultural dominance in society as a whole and within that framework there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men (Connell 1995: 78). Even though in Connell's eyes it is women who are ultimately sufferers of hegemonic masculinity, groups of men from various backgrounds are subject to subordination as well. This contributes to the reasoning for using 'masculinities' rather than simply 'masculinity' to denote the subgroups and the diversity of masculine experience. Connell uses the example of homosexuals as a subordinate group. Oppression is overtly manifest in the laws of the United States, making sodomy a punishable crime and denying same sex couples of the right to marriage. Homosexuality is equated with femininity and therefore not approved as legitimate masculinity. This homophobic structuration of contemporary American society leaves not only gay men as a subordinate group, but heterosexual men who may possess more so-called feminine qualities as accessory to homosexual subgroups. (See Klein (1993) and Kimmel (2006) for further discussion.)

Why would individuals who are not part of the hegemonic group still participate in these structured relations? Crucial to the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity is the complicity of individuals and society to invest in current hegemonic images and representations of masculinity. In terms of complicity,

“the number of men rigorously practicing hegemonic masculinity may be quite small. In American society few men fit into the exemplary category of well-muscled, white, ‘captains of industry’. Yet the majority of men gain from hegemonic masculinity (ibid: 79). Connell is accurate in his observation that if a larger number of men have a connection of hegemonic masculinity but do not embody hegemonic masculinity there must be a way of explaining this situation: complicity. Although Connell’s explanation is reasonable and indeed follows the logic of Gramsci’s hegemony, there are few details explaining the exact processes involved in complicity. Men reap ‘patriarchal dividends’, or benefits due to their status as male. For example, in domestic situations, women are likely to do the majority of household work and make far more compromises than their husbands. The social structure of gendered relations normalizes this inequality in domestic labor in favor of men.

While complicity, subordination and hegemony are internal to gender order, marginalization has to do specifically with intersections of ethnicity and class. New facets of information technology become a vehicle for redefining a middle-class at a time when the meaning of labor for working class men was in contention (Connell 1995: 80). Not having the physical elements of labor to fall back on as definitive elements of masculinity, the middle-class is reconfigured into an identity and competence based on technological know-how. Even more pertinent and more visible to a discussion of marginalization is the aspect of ethnicity. Connell cites race relations as an integral part of the dynamic between masculinities. In sports and entertainment black men are often seen as hegemonic

exemplars, yet the benefits to working class and lower socio-economic strata black men are not realized in the same ways that benefits of white representations of hegemonic masculinity are reaped by white working-class and lower socio-economic strata white men. Marginalization is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group (ibid: 81). *Subordination*, *complicity* and *marginalization* as a part of hegemonic practice are all relational and not categories. They are not character types, and there is much opportunity for both overlaps and even conflicts.

Another essential facet of hegemonic masculinity is the recognition of a diversity of masculinities. Feminist research on women paved the way for the status of “woman” to be now recognized as being crisscrossed and overwritten by whole range of disidentifications, incongruities and remappings of the material. Why should we expect men and masculinity to be homogenous and monolithic? (Weigman 2002: 52). Masculinity is no longer considered a singular, homogenous category; as Connell (1995) notes, there are subordinate and marginalized masculinities. Masculinity can also be female, in that females can indeed be masculine. Halberstam (1998) has done some groundbreaking work on this topic, noting that there is more interest (both in popular culture and academically) on feminine males rather than masculine females. Masculine femininity can be seen in the young tomboy climbing trees, to the ‘bull-dyke’ riding her Harley Davidson, to the Drag King entertaining a crowd as Tina Turner. Through these examples the embodiment of masculinity is explored, recognizing how it is part of the body, part of the self. At the center of Halberstam’s work is masculinity

without men, an impossible notion in the eyes of scientists and the general public. Simply because one is male, does not make one automatically masculine. The majority of research on masculinity in the United States identifies the Caucasian-Anglo male, usually of good economic standing, as the exemplar of hegemonic masculinity. The subordinate, marginalized or alternative masculinities are usually noted as homosexual, ethnic (Asian, African American) of lower class and income. A criticism of masculinity research is that it often takes a heteronormative or heterocentric starting point (see Halberstam 1998; Petersen 1998; Pronger 2000). I suggest that Connell's (1987; 1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily take this as a starting point, but is informed by the recognition of more dominant or more socially accepted sexual practices. Yet, at the same time as with ethnicity and masculinity, the masculinity of the 'other' will always be the marginalized or subordinate group. This does draw attention to the covert differences that exist, but does little to illuminate the processes of hierarchy at work within these subordinate or marginalized subgroups. What is important to take from theories of hegemonic masculinity, with particular respect of the concept of multiple masculinities, is the flexibility in which masculinity can be deployed. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 841) note that men can adopt hegemonic masculinity when it is desirable but they can also distance themselves when it serves their purpose. Masculinity therefore, does not represent a particular fixed type of man but rather a way that men position themselves through discursive practices. Pronger (1990) discusses how masculinity is far more fluid than previously thought. Using a phenomenological orientation, he investigates

the ways in which athletic experience emerges for gay men. Pronger's concern is not with categories, but ways in which individuals interact with historically constructed sexual categories in athletic settings. Popular images of the 'athlete' and the 'gay man' are virtually antithetical.

As in the case of sexuality, the perception and deployment of masculinity is important to consider when looking at masculinity amongst different ethnicities. How does hegemonic masculinity account for men of color? Chan (2001: 9) states that Chinese men living in the United States are excluded from the elite hegemonic group because hegemonic masculinity in this country is defined in opposition to men of color. Constantly reinventing a homogenous patriarchal identity serves to protect current and primarily Caucasian networks of power. The conclusion reached by Chan (2001) is that the section of the model of hegemonic masculinity that relates to marginalized identities is somewhat ineffectual for examining ethnic masculinities. While the model leaves space for theorizations of marginalized masculinities in relation to hegemonic norms, the emphasis should be placed on recognizing where power lies among the interacting groups, how this is contested and accommodated, and how this power may be resisted or negotiated (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994).

Whether or not it is necessary to consider masculinity in the plural, as entirely different masculinities rather than dimensions or forms of masculinity, should be held in question. While the emphasis on a plurality of expression highlights the variation of masculinity, the separation of subordinate, marginalized and hegemonic masculinities prove to be gray categories. As

mentioned earlier, according to Connell (1987; 1995), subordinate masculinity may be related to a number of identifying factors, while marginalized masculinity seems to be more closely tied to race or ethnicity. These lines are often blurred. In using the model of hegemonic masculinity in Europe or North America, the groups that are marginalized (or ethnic) will continue to be the non-hegemonic groups. The structure remains stationary, yet flexible enough for challenges and conflicts to alter bits and pieces of contemporary hegemonic masculinity.

However, this model of masculinity attempts to fit masculinity of the other (gay, female, Chinese etc.) into a construct that will almost always place them in the role of the disadvantaged. Chan (2001) suggests that Chinese masculinity, for example, should be analyzed within the context and history of Chinese culture. Distinct cultural contexts are relevant to any masculinity of other ethnicities or immigrants living in America. This would provide more understanding as to why masculinity of the 'other' does not always fit the hegemonic ideal. It is not necessarily the hegemonic ideal that forces these masculinities to remain subordinate or marginalized, but the cultural frameworks of these groups of cultures themselves that guide these groups to choose more resistant types of masculinities. This may still be accounted for within the current models of hegemonic masculinity. However, it draws attention to the need for a deeper understanding of the workings of alternative masculinities before assuming the directionality of power within this model.

Power and agency continue to be aspects of gender that require in depth investigation. Scholars of masculinity and embodiment continue to investigate

these issues, yet take a more relational rather than structural standpoint. A more nuanced understanding of gender and society comes to light examining masculinity in terms of the body and daily experience. For example, Whitson (1990) suggests that through sport, boys in particular are encouraged to experience their bodies. Downey's (2005) research on Capoeira suggests that the body is interchangeable for comprehending subtle differences in the perception of reality. For example, experienced practitioners of Capoeira insist that they see, hear and feel the world differently because of their life long endeavors to enhance their senses (ibid: 18). In Alter's (1992) study of Indian wrestling, he proposes that life for these men is organized around their physical development. This physical development goes hand in hand with spiritual development. Wrestlers are not only competitive athletes, but regarded as moral reformers whose conception of self and society is fundamentally somatic. It is crucial to understand the relationship between the body and the self to explore notions of gendered identity.

Theories of Embodiment

Maurice Merleau-Ponty can be regarded as one of the forefathers of embodiment theory. His work on perception and phenomenology appears primarily based on the phenomenological works of Edmund Husserl. As Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, Husserl posited that it is the intuitive experience that should be taken as the starting point of existence. While Merleau-Ponty also takes the essence of first person experience as the starting point of existence, he does not

support Husserl's idea of ego's transcendence of the world. In contrast, the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty proposes that, "the very experience of transcendent things is possible only provided that their project is borne, and discovered, within myself" (Merleau-Ponty 1989: 369). Merleau-Ponty's notions of an embodied world are a reaction against both the Cartesian supposition of the mind as the starting point for existence, as well as the positivism of the scientific method. He clearly is at odds with the idea that empiricism can provide a satisfactory explanation of the world through its so-called objectivity. Because of a tendency toward objectification, and a circular quest to discover laws of nature, scientific endeavors inevitably fail as they draw upon a false separation of the observer from the observed, the external from the internal, the subject from the object (see Merleau-Ponty 1989: 3-12). Science itself, or more so the construct of scientific understanding, serves to obfuscate the very phenomena which it attempts to explicate.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is based upon the experience of the senses and their engagement with perception. Perception is an active, not passive process. Merleau-Ponty suggests that experience and existence are an intertwining of the subjective and objective. He suggests that the body is not of the external world but takes peculiar place as it is always there; "not only is the perspective of my body not a particular case of objects, but furthermore the presentation of objects in perspective cannot be understood except through the resistance of my body to all variation of perspective (ibid: 92). The body can be regarded as more than simply a link between a material and ideational world, but an equally

essential component of conceptualizing existence. Rather than a passive recipient of commands from the mind, the body is absolutely vital in processes of learning, understanding and communicating. Sensation is the unit of experience.

According to Merleau-Ponty we learn through the body. Not only do we learn through the body, but through action and movement we “revise our notion of ‘understand’ and our notion of the body” (ibid: 144). It is a reflexive process. Habits may be read as actions that are repeated as part of a daily bodily experience, which combines facets of the pre-conscious or subconscious with intention. He describes the acquisition of habit in examples such as a typist’s motions on a typewriter, or a musician’s playing of an instrument. These examples call to mind the complexities in attempting to understand the entangled connection between the mind and body. Elements such as memory and reflex are bound together in habit and practice.

The Gestalt view of bodily existence is also demonstrated in Merleau-Ponty’s (1989) discussion of the body’s motility. He consistently underlines the connection between spatiality and temporality. The body is the juncture at which spatiality and temporality meet. It is quite impossible to discuss a synchronic dimension of being in the absence of a diachronic dimension of being:

In so far as I have a body through which I act in the world, space and time are not, for me, a collection of adjacent points nor are they a limitless number of relations synthesized by my consciousness, and in to which it draws my body...our bodily experience of movement is not a particular case of knowledge; it provides us with a way of access to the world and the object.

(Merleau-Ponty 1989: 140)

This is a particularly pertinent observation as this excerpt gets at both the theoretical importance of embodiment, and also possible reasons for the diverse ways in which this term has been employed. The understanding of relations of time and space in terms of existence is a concept not often addressed in anthropological theory. Time and space are quite often conceived of as diametrically opposed axial points. The body as the means through which such parameters of cultural study can be addressed provides an encouraging direction for future study. Yet, at the same time, with the body as the nexus of subject/object, time/space and knowledge/existence, how can we begin to operationalize these entanglements? Various theorists have attempted to employ the insights of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, taking up elements of his work and attempting to engage phenomenological theories of the body with method and practice.

Thomas Csordas presents convincing research documenting the use of embodiment theory built upon the works of Merleau-Ponty in his socio-cultural anthropological research. In fact, Csordas (1999; 1994a; 1994b) presents an extremely comprehensive discussion of culture and the body and embodiment in terms of a phenomenological approach. He notes that studies of embodiment are not so much about the body, or situate the body as a subject, but can be understood from the standpoint of bodily being-in-the-world. His concern is of the immediacy of embodied experience with the multiplicity of cultural meanings that we are inevitably immersed in. Csordas makes it clear that the body is not simply biology, but is a cultural and historical construct. The different ways in which we

inhabit bodies or exist as embodied are essential for understanding culture. He demonstrates how Merleau-Ponty's juncture of space and time experienced through the body may be interpreted as built into social, political and historical circumstance. The contexts and conditions of life serve to shape experience and as a result are indoctrinated and expressed through the body. Embodiment is not a topic of study but an alternate standpoint from which to address familiar topics such as gender, power and emotion (Csordas 1999; 1994a; 1994b).

A phenomenological approach is a useful framework from which to examine gendered experience within the very physical realm of sport. It offers the opportunity to construct an interconnected method and theory that is both reflexive and attentive to the data and circumstances of research. There are numerous ways in which the terms embodiment and phenomenology have been employed. The benefit of this diversity research is that it highlights the flexibility and utility of theories of embodiment but also recognizes a number of concerns. These include the issue of representation versus reality, how socio-political and historical circumstance affects experience of the body, and the body as both individual and social, to name but a few. Embodiment, it would seem, can best be understood as a standpoint of investigation. Aspects of existence such as gender, power-relations, boundaries and representation are inherently tied to the practices of the body that are rooted in experience. A phenomenological framework based on the foundational work of Merleau-Ponty (1989), and further shaped by the works of key theorists such as Csordas (1994a), provide a means by which to investigate bodily experience as it shapes identities.

Frameworks of (phenomenological) embodiment attempt to explain relations by way of existence and experience. With this goal in mind, it makes it exceptionally difficult, and counterproductive even, to attempt to separate method from theory. In fact, one of the strengths of attempting understandings through embodiment is a necessary consideration of how theory and practice are joined together, how models of social life fit with daily lives of individuals and ultimately how this is represented by the researcher.

Embodiment, Representation and Writing

Csordas (1994a) also calls to our attention the complicated issue of representation, particularly for those who use frameworks of embodiment in their research. Theoretical trends in the anthropology of the 1970s and 1980s dictated that representation did not denote experience but constituted it. Representation, or critiques of representation, dominated discourse and there seemed no way to answer the question of what lies beyond representation. Csordas offers the solution that the phenomenological idea of *being-the-world* be used as a dialogical partner to representation (Csordas 1994a). This experienced-based concept should run alongside issues of representation in what could be considered a course of lateral reason. It would seem that an analysis that recognizes these dialogical partners would therefore require an identification of such. Yet in Csordas' work and also my own fieldwork experience, this is more difficult than it appears. In some cases it was difficult to extricate the representation from the experience. Csordas observes in his work on Navajo religion and healing (Csordas

1994b) that there is a difference between what he calls *mythic texts* and *mythic worlds* and actual religious experience. In this ethnographic experience one can see actual religious experience as being-in-the-world while the mythic texts and mythic worlds are representations. Yet in looking at the religious ceremonies themselves in part as a reenactment or representation of events of a mythic nature, the experience of being-in-the-world or participating in these rituals seems to blur the line between Csordas' dialogical partners. Perhaps it is not so important to distinguish one partner from the other, only to acknowledge an interaction between the two? Csordas' (1994b) ethnography on Navajo healing illuminates the dilemma between experience and representation, and the difficulty in both trying to express embodied experience in a textual manner and attempting to implement a methodology of embodiment in practice. How does one capture experience? With consideration to the textual dilemma (i.e. the act of writing and recording information as inherently representative), Csordas (1999: 150) suggests that adding the reflexive component of embodiment "constitutes a restructuring of representation rather than offering an alternative to the primacy of representation." Reflexivity acts as a counter-balance to representation. Others who cite embodiment as a standpoint or foundation for analysis would seem to agree. Kohn (2003) discusses how the philosophy of the Japanese martial art Aikido is experienced through the body of practitioners. The relationship of the body's movement through space becomes a medium other than consumerism through which to re-shape an adult identity. Kohn (2003) argues that current anthropological notions of sport lack key experiential components and that sport

is often examined in terms of what makes sense to the analyst rather than the participant.

My primary goal was to examine how Mixed Martial Arts makes sense to participants. Chapter headings are themes generated from observations and interviews, and while I was the one asking questions, interviews were open enough to include topics that were relevant to fighters, which they brought up themselves. I follow Toren's concern to "as clearly as I can, describe how humans constitute themselves as unique beings who can nevertheless be seen to be the always dynamic product of the history of intersubjective relations in whose terms they live their lives" (2009:136). I am looking at embodied experience, therefore how I write is as important as what I write with regard to the representation of subjects, meaning both the participants in this research and also anthropological issues investigated. With this in mind, I chose to take Toren's lead and include extracts directly from my field notes not only to allow for the experience of the immediacy of situations but also to expose/outline my own embodied experience.

Likewise I choose to use the identifier "*me*" when offering excerpts from interviews, as the use of initials somehow gives off a homogenizing illusion that *J.H.* and *P.R.* have the same power and motivations, undermining the intersubjective experience that I feel made interviews meaningful. Furthermore, I use the term *participants* where anthropologists have traditionally used the term *informants*. I do this for two main reasons. Firstly, the individuals who participated in this project were a diverse group: men, women, fighters, coaches, journalists. It was easier to use this one term, *participants*, in instances where I

refer to all those who took part in this study. Secondly, the term *participants* suggests that these individuals *chose* to take part in this study. They were collaborators. For those who are not familiar with the convention of using the term *informant* in anthropology, it evoked connotations of clandestine CIA operations or hapless FBI snitches. Upon hearing the term *informants*, some individuals cautiously joked that this term implied some kind of coercion, that perhaps they were revealing secrets about others that they should not be revealing. As I anticipate that some of my participants who are non-anthropologists as well as non-academics will be reading this, I chose to use a term that is less suggestive.

Mixed Martial Arts: A Background

Once viewed as an undesirable subcultural activity, Mixed Martial Arts (also known as Cagefighting or No Holds Barred Fighting) is now recognized as an immensely popular and profitable new sport in the U.S and globally (see Gentry 2004; Krauss and Aita 2002; Mayeda and Ching 2008). In 1993 the new spectacle of cagefighting was presented to North America. (See Appendix C for a timeline of the sport.) The first *Ultimate Fighting Championship* was held in Denver, Colorado in front of 2800 fans. It was broadcast live on pay-per-view. Eight men from various martial arts backgrounds entered a tournament to determine which combat style was the most effective, and thus who would be deemed the “Ultimate Fighter.” Created to replicate a realistic fight situation, participants were allowed to use any style of martial art to kick, punch, wrestle or choke their opponents. The stage of combat was set in either in a boxing ring or an eight-sided chain-link cage (thus the moniker *cagefighting* was born). The only two rules were no eye gouging and no biting. Although there was a referee, there were no weight classes or time limits, and the match would only end with either a victor submitting or knocking out his opponent or the opponent ‘tapping out’ to signal his surrender. The winner received \$50,000 and the title of *The Ultimate Fighting Champion*.

*Evolution of MMA in the Americas*³

According to Krauss and Aita (2002), the Japanese Martial Art of *jujitsu* was brought to Brazil in the early 1900s by Japanese immigrants. Mitsuyo Maeda is credited with teaching the art to members of the Gracie family. With Maeda's influence, his students modified the traditional Japanese style, and developed their own school of Brazilian jujitsu. Members of the Gracie family engaged in numerous competitions to prove their form of jujitsu was the most effective. In 1969, Rorion Gracie moved to California and brought with him Gracie jujitsu. In 1992, Art Davie, a student of Rorian Gracie, suggested creating a pay-per-view combat tournament that would pit martial art styles against each other to see which was most effective. Both Davie and Gracie believed this would ultimately display the prominence of this new martial art style, Brazilian Jujitsu. After some time and negotiations, the *Ultimate Fighting Championship* was born.

While there was always a referee, in its infancy there were no time limits for MMA bouts. They could last from merely seconds due to a knockout, or fighters could be locked in a relative stalemate for over an hour. There were no weight classes to prevent a 120-pound man from fighting a 250-pound man; in fact, this kind of challenge was welcome. Would skill and intelligence beat the brute force? Royce Gracie, the legendary champion of several early *Ultimate*

³ I chose to follow the path of MMA evolution in the Americas, and its primary founder the UFC. However, I must acknowledge that there were other organizations that developed in different areas of the world. The Japanese MMA organization *Shooto* was formed in 1985, nearly ten years before the UFC. This organization grew out of an off-shoot of professional wrestling. It was an attempt to display an authentic fight experience, rather than the 'fixed' matches of professional wrestling.

Fighting Championships, proved just that. He demonstrated that knowledge could defeat strength and this became an enduring tenet of the sport, according to long-term fans. The potential for David versus Goliath triumphs contributed to the spectacle of MMA in the early 1990s. The desire to simulate a ‘real-life’ combat situation led to founders to implement as few rules as possible. Participants were not required to wear any protective gear (head protection, gloves etc.). The idea was to put forth an image of danger and intrigue. Two men enter, only one leaves standing. This was reality, and not the staged melodrama of WWF wrestling. Contests were only available through pay-per view and the underground, subversive nature of the sport produced a cult fan base. These fights represented everything contrary to everyday life in America. One is not allowed to use physical force against others. There are legal repercussions and one certainly is not rewarded for it. The monetary compensation for these fighters was minimal, but acclaim and title of *Ultimate Fighting Champion* was enough for men in the United States and internationally (e.g. Canada, Brazil, France) to enter these competitions. Its initial marketing in the U.S. in the early 1990s as bare-knuckled, anything-goes fights prompted a nearly national banning of the sport, with government officials such as Senator John McCain deeming it to be the equivalent of “human cock-fighting” (Gentry 2004:73) and claiming that it may lead to deaths. Interestingly, Senator McCain, perhaps one of the greatest opponents to MMA, was a self-admitted fan of boxing. When questioned about the brutality of boxing, the Senator had no response, although he had witnessed firsthand the

death of twenty-three year old Columbian boxer Jimmy Garcia (Shamrock and Hanner 1997:86-87).

The elements driving the popularity of MMA events were precisely the elements that led to its near demise. The public took wind of the barbaric events occurring under their noses, in their own cities, and rallied for a stop to seemingly senseless violence. The owners of the trademarked *Ultimate Fighting Championship* were desperate to sell their ailing company. MMA events went underground once again.

Ten years later, the resurfacing of the sport and its meteoric rise in popularity was achieved through regulatory changes (See Appendix D for current UFC rules) and strategic marketing by the *Ultimate Fighting Championship organization* (UFC). Seeing an opportunity where other saw only failure, businessman Dana White convinced wealthy casino chain owners Lorenzo and Frank Fertitta to purchase the organization for two million dollars. Under their company *Zuffa*, they began the process of re-packaging the event to make it more socially acceptable. The way to achieve this was to model the sport after other well accepted sports such as baseball and football through increased quantification. An official set of rules was implemented, including thirty-one fouls (i.e. actions not allowed) along with earlier changes of weight classes and protective gear. Ironically the mandatory use of gloves resulted in making the sport more perilous (Van Bottenburg and Helibron 2006). The public perception of the danger of bare-knuckle fighting was incorrect. When participants fought without gloves they were more likely to break their own hands. Therefore

knockouts were less likely to occur. With padded gloves, participants are able to hit much harder, increasing the likelihood of knockouts. In attempting to appease public perception, owners of the *Ultimate Fighting Championship* actually added an additional degree to injury. Regardless, the apparent increase in safety standards and quantification of the sport served their legitimizing purpose.

During this time No Holds Barred Fighting or cagefighting developed into MMA. It became apparent that a combination of three major facets of martial arts led to superior control over an opponent, therefore instead of having one distinct style versus another cagefighting transformed into a hybrid sport. The newly evolved sport of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) combines the techniques of Muay Thai kickboxing, submission wrestling and Brazilian Jujitsu. However participants may also have a solid background in a variety of other martial arts (often depending on their country of origin) such as Judo, Savate, Sambo etc.

Going Mainstream

MMA is often referred to as ‘Ultimate Fighting’ and for many the terms are synonymous. The UFC effectively branded itself as the sport of MMA. Successful branding occurs when “the brand is a site of interactivity, organizing a dynamic, two-way exchange of information between consumers and producers” (Kennedy and Hill, 2009: 263), and this certainly what the UFC did. With the triumph of the UFC’s reemergence as a profitable and legitimate sport, several other MMA organizations in North American began appearing. Companies saw the financial possibilities that MMA could bring and were eager to share in the

proceeds. This was also reflected in media content analysis as mainstream news sources such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *The National Post* (Canada) and *The New York Times* began running more articles on the sport. In 2006, UFC's major competitor *Strikeforce* came onto the MMA scene, followed shortly after by *The International Fight League* later that year, and *EliteXC* in 2007. Only a couple short years later, like the Dotcom bubble, the MMA bubble burst. The UFC bought out smaller MMA shows, eliminating most of its minor competitors. Other larger companies were to be blamed for their own demise with top executives making important structural and financial decisions without any real knowledge of MMA. There is much speculation in the MMA industry that perhaps some of these business forays were in actuality 'pump and dump' operations. Currently, there are organizations such as *Strikeforce* and *Bellator* that compete with the UFC, but for the most part this founding company holds a monopoly of the MMA industry. *Forbes Magazine* (May 5, 2008) reported that offers to buy the UFC from *Zuffa* exceeded over one billion dollars. While live events and advertising deals account for much of their profit, their financial success is largely due to pay-per-view revenue. In 2010, *Zuffa* was estimated by industry sources as doing 9,145,000 buys and generating \$411 million in gross pay-per-view revenue for sixteen events, including five that topped 750,000 buys.⁴ To put this into perspective, in 2009 (the year of UFC 100) the UFC not only held the top spot for pay-per-view buys rates but also the fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth, and ninth places out of the top ten. Boxing events ranked second and third and the final tenth sport

⁴ (<http://sports.yahoo.com/mma/news?slug=dm-ppvbiz011111>)

was held by WWE.⁵ This displays not only the commanding profit that Zuffa obtains from its pay-per-view UFC events but also the immense popularity of the sport.

Mythic Origins

Numerous participants and fans cited the ancient Greek sport of Pankration as the origin of MMA. Pankration has been documented as early as 648 BCE (Arvenitis 2003). This ancient practice utilizes a combination of boxing and wrestling in one-on-one competition. It is interesting that in Aita and Krauss' (2002) popular book on MMA, their descriptions emphasize Pankration as a noble pursuit: "the tales of Pankration champions are shrouded in legend and poetic license" (ibid: 14). They further state that Pankration lasted until the height of the Roman Empire. Although it continued on in the Greek Olympics, in Rome it had mutated into a gladiatorial bloodsport, for which warriors donned bladed gloves and fought to the death (ibid: 14). The significance of this passage rests upon establishing the fact that there once was a pure form of Pankration. This was once a highly regarded athletic competition that transformed into a gory spectacle. While Pankration from ancient Greece provides the first written account of a mixed technique combative sport, there is not a direct timeline that traces the movement of Pankration across the continents and across two millennia. This is not a case of unilineal, cultural transmission and evolution. Pankration as an origin appears to be more of a symbolic linkage. It is a nostalgic hope for MMA participants to be regarded as Greek heroes were, as legitimate athletes who

⁵ (<http://peteprose.com/2010/02/top-10-ppv-buyrates-of-2009>)

represented bravery, skill and hope for their nation. This heroic legacy is touted as part of the UFC's market savvy ideology as they include imagery of Roman gladiators in their opening sequence to live pay-per-view events.

Outline of Study

This first chapter provides an introduction to topics of study such as gender, masculinity and Mixed Martial Arts, highlighting the research questions posed. It includes an overview of the research design and methods used, and also general background on theories of hegemonic masculinity and embodiment that frame this research. I have divided this study into three major parts. Part I (Chapter 2) introduces the primary field site *Desert Combat* and includes a description of the facility and structure of the classes offered. I explore how MMA fighters understand their bodies, selves and masculinity through their practice in MMA. This chapter further examines processes of embodiment, focusing on how fighters experience the world of MMA through a critical mind-body-social connection. Chapter 3 continues to explore embodiment, in particular how MMA fighters perceived their own bodies in relation to idealized representations. Part I concludes with a discussion of key points from Chapters 2 and 3, including how hegemonic masculinity fits with MMA, a critique of hegemonic masculinity and how embodiment may add to theories of hegemonic masculinity. Part II/Chapter 4 examines women, sexuality and relationships in the world of MMA. This chapter includes insights on embodied practice yet also discusses representations of gender. Therefore it provides a bridge between Part I that focuses on embodiment and Part III that concerns representation. This chapter looks at the experiences of various women in the MMA industry (myself included), and touches on homosexuality and heterosexual male intimacy. In the conclusion of Part II, I situate MMA in relation to other popular American cultural trends (e.g. the rise of

“Raunch Culture”) and academic trends (e.g. Post-feminism). In Part III/Chapter 5, I consider issues of representation and reality and their frequent incongruence in the world of MMA. I examine finances, commodification, fame, and the stereotyping of both fighters and fans. I examine how representations affect the lives of individuals involved in the industry. Part III concludes with a discussion of the contexts of MMA in American culture and the two major events of the new millennium that correspond with the explosion in popularity of the sport: Reality TV and the Iraq War. In order to understand masculinity as a relational construct it was necessary to interrogate wider representations and contextualizations of gender in contemporary American society. In the final chapter, Chapter 6, I briefly summarize this study, highlighting important points from each discussion section. I contemplate hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical construct in terms of three key considerations. The first concerns adding notions of embodiment to achieve a fuller understanding of how daily practice fits with models of power and gender relations. The second addresses the idea that hegemonic masculinity is best understood as a model of reality functioning in the realm of representation. And the third suggests that in order to comprehend masculinity as relational, it is necessary to thoroughly examine the contexts that shape contemporary gender.

PART I: CHAPTER 2. EMBODIMENT: “IT’S NOT THE SIZE OF THE DOG
IN THE FIGHT, BUT THE FIGHT IN THE DOG...”

The majority of field research took place at Desert Combat gym in Phoenix, Arizona. Participants spent enormous amounts of time here, and this site proved crucial to developing notions of their self-identity. For this reason, I take the liberty of describing in great detail the layout of the gym, the atmosphere, and what is entailed in training in MMA. As participants spoke of the demands of the classes, they also alluded to the experience of a mind-body connection that seemed more reminiscent of yogic practice rather than combat sport. In this chapter, I explore this facet of embodied practice and conclude by reviewing the ways in which psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists have theorized this mind-body-social connection.

Joining Desert Combat: the Field Site and Key Employees

As you enter the gym you are immediately greeted by the reception area and the adjoining merchandise room. This merchandise room that offers Desert Combat t-shirts was a more recent addition, as the gym only began to sell their own branded clothing within the last two years. Participants can also buy necessary gear: hand-wraps, gloves, shin guards, and jujitsu uniforms called *gis*. The kickboxing and MMA classes do not require any kind of specialized clothing, though most people wear t-shirts and shorts. The office, where the owners/trainers conduct meetings and attend to paperwork, is located adjacent to the merchandise area. The reception area has a clear display case that holds trophies and two world

championship belts, a visual statement that this is an elite gym and that champions train here. The receptionist, an attractive lady in her forties, greets clients and potential clients as they enter. New clients sign a waiver (Appendix E) indicating that the gym is not liable if the client gets injured or contracts some kind of disease (such as AIDS, hepatitis or fungal infections). The prospective members are given a schedule of classes, a copy of their waiver, and told that their first trial class is free. Beth, the receptionist, then gives the potential client a tour of the gym and answers any questions the client may have.

Beth has been a point of contention with the regulars at the gym. She was employed by the owners just a year ago to formally manage the memberships and daily functioning of the gym. Prior to this, the former receptionists (Ryan and Jake) were members of the gym. The face that greeted you was an established member of the gym, someone who practiced these sports (kick-boxing, jujitsu, or MMA) and therefore had bodily and intimate knowledge of the workings of the gym. Unfortunately for Jake and Ryan, the owners decided that they needed to re-organize the workings of the gym to promote efficiency and keep better track of the clientele. Regular patrons of the gym resisted and also resented the introduction of Beth. She was clearly an outsider. She did not train at the gym, or participate in any form of martial arts. She didn't seem to be a fan of the sports (MMA, kick-boxing, jujitsu) and patrons suggested that she did not belong there. Some of them even stated that if she were the wife/girlfriend of an owner, coach or participants this would make her employment more acceptable. When I asked some of the long-time gym members if it was because she was a woman, their

response was “of course not”. They stated that they resented her presence because she did not have any knowledge of the sport or of the gym whatsoever. She represented a corporate force brought into the “family” gym atmosphere. Beth’s lack of knowledge and participation made it impossible for her to be seen as having a legitimate place in this group membership. No one directly indicated this to Beth, and when I spoke with her asking her about how she felt as a new employee, she indicated that it was fine and that it was a good job.

The hallway is a museum of martial arts accomplishment and inspiration. The walls along the hallway leading toward the training rooms are covered with photographs. Most of these photographs are of gym members at tournaments, or other events. Some photographs are of famous fighters, perhaps to inspire new gym members to fulfill their own potential greatness. The floor of the hallway is lined with trophies of varying sizes. These trophies, won at different tournaments and fights, belong to the gym’s members. I estimated there were over fifty trophies from various events (jujitsu, kickboxing, boxing) won over the past eight years that the gym has been open.

There is also a large cork-bulletin board in the hallway, a handmade tribute to the career of the primary owner of the gym, Francisco, and the career of his twin brother, Fernando. Francisco is thirty-five years old and from originally from El Paso, Texas. As a young man, he and Fernando (who is also a head coach at Desert Combat) competed professionally in Muay Thai kickboxing. For the two brothers, martial arts was an outlet and escape from an unpleasant family life. Their relationship with their stepfather was tenuous at its best, and violent at its

worst. Kickboxing was something they both excelled at, thereby creating a means to travel the world. They competed in premier kickboxing events across the United States, and even in front of the King of Thailand at the famous Lumpini Stadium in Bangkok. In the early 1990s they transitioned to the new spectacle/sport of cagefighting. The brothers competed in some of the earliest international events in Hawaii, Japan and Abu Dhabi, gaining a reputation for being tough and determined fighters. Although they are not widely recognized by today's MMA fans, those who take time to research the beginnings of the sport would cite them as relevant pioneers, particularly for their weight class. The brothers are smaller in stature, standing 5'6" and "walking around" at approximately 140 lbs. In the early days of the sport there were no time limits or weight classes, so often they were competing against men who were 20-40lbs heavier than they were.

Francisco and Fernando identified themselves as the perpetual underdogs with audiences due to their size. Growing up they were sometimes the target of bullying, again due to their size, and had to learn how to stand up to these threats of violence. Their success is prominently displayed across the bulletin board, with photos from their events showing them in action and being awarded trophies and medals. Across the top of this display there reads, "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, but the fight in the dog." This has been a life-long mantra for the twins, having been constantly judged for their size and having to prove their toughness. This saying is also a source of inspiration for many of their fighters from lighter weight classes. I have often heard these lighter weight fighters repeat this phrase

during interviews, and also in during practices. I asked several participants (men and women of varying sizes) to comment on this phrase. I did not encounter one person who believed this to be false. Many invoked a comparison of “David and Goliath,” and a reasoning that technique and tenaciousness could win out over brute strength. The core of all martial arts promotes this ideology: skill and training can overcome adversity. Fernando’s and Francisco’s achievements are evidence of this, and furthermore evidence that one’s physical stature should not be an encumbrance if one is determined enough. The brothers’ size is a benefit to their business, as clients can identify with them, and believe that their own bodies can be shaped and trained as they wish, if only their will is strong enough.

Francisco teaches kickboxing and the Fighter’s Class. Fernando also teaches the Fighter’s Class, and comes in exclusively to prepare professional fighters for their upcoming fights.

The gym consists of one large open training room (with a boxing ring, and cage), a weight room (with treadmills, dumbbells etc.) and a smaller room in the back of gym for MMA and jujitsu exclusively. There are men’s and women’s changing rooms, roughly the same size, although the men’s changing room is larger. The changing rooms have cupboards rather than lockers, and there are no locks. It is an honor system and people leave wallets, purses, and other valuables in there. Surprisingly, there have been very few claims of theft during my time at this gym. There are separate men’s and women’s restrooms, but one room with a single shower that both men and women use. The owners stated that when they first moved to this space a couple years ago, they planned far more elaborate

changing rooms, complete with separate showers for men and women, but had run out of money to make these expensive renovations. Male and female participants take turns using a single private shower room.

The MMA classes take place in the back room of the gym. There are bulletin boards with photos of participants competing at events, and a shelf with numerous trophies. Blue, two-inch thick mats cover the ground of the entire room. Victor, a member of the Fighter's class, who has several professional fights and championship titles to his credit, teaches the MMA classes. Victor has trained with Desert Combat since the start of his MMA career at age eighteen. Now twenty-five, Victor often comments how he has grown up with this gym and would not think of leaving (until he decides to run his own gym full-time). Victor is very well known at the gym, and was also one of the gym's most famous professional fighters. He is a draw for new members of Desert Combat. Many potential members inquired whether Victor would be teaching there before they agreed to join the gym. Santiago, the jujitsu instructor who shares this room, is quite a well-known practitioner in his field. Although jujitsu is a component of MMA, MMA fans would not necessarily know of Santiago. However, dedicated jujitsu practitioners are aware of Santiago's prestigious lineage, training with important founders of the Brazilian style of jujitsu.

The largest training room is for the kickboxing class and the Fighter's Class. The walls are covered with mirrors and the floors are lined with the same type of mats as in the MMA/ujitsu room. There is a regulation size boxing ring, an eight-sided cage, and numerous heavy bags (for punching and kicking) that

hang from the ceiling. A large banner hangs above the doorway that reads, “*One year here is like five years anywhere else. To be the best, you have to train with the best.*” The banner is a declaration of the high quality of training a member will receive at this gym. When Francisco first opened Desert Combat approximately eight years ago (2002), there were only one or two other MMA gyms around. (Now, in 2011, there are at least thirty other MMA gyms in the greater Phoenix area). His major competitor, Caged Battleground, had been established a few years earlier (1998). Caged Battleground emphasized the spectacle aspect of MMA. This gym opened during a time when MMA was just beginning to be accepted as a legitimate sport. It was still often called cagefighting or No-Holds-Barred fighting. The owner, Sven, was also a fight promoter who held MMA competitions around Arizona. Sven’s gym became a place to recruit fighters for his shows. Desert Combat has had several transfers from Sven’s gym. Several former Caged Battleground members described a disappointing experience at Sven’s training facility. One former member stated:

That place was ridiculous. I came in there and they immediately threw me in with some big guy to spar. I had no martial arts training before, just a street fight or two. The guy just wanted to take my head off. Everyone there was like that. They just wanted to brawl and show how tough they were. I didn’t really learn anything. No technique, nothing...I wasn’t even there for two months...Sven came up to me and asked if I wanted to fight in one of his shows. You’ve got to be kidding me?! I didn’t really know what I was doing. I told him I was busy. Don’t get me wrong I wanted my chance to fight, and be a cage-fighter, but I didn’t think I was anywhere near ready for that.

Other former members of Caged Battleground commented that they also didn’t really feel like they learned anything. (I requested interviews with Sven several

times and was denied, and therefore I cannot comment on his position regarding Caged Battleground's policies or training methods.) Francisco and Fernando told me they could immediately spot the guys who came over from this gym. They usually had poor technique, and thought they had to prove themselves. The brothers clearly had little respect for the workings of Caged Battleground. They felt the owner Sven was just there to make money and didn't really take training seriously. The brothers commented that Desert Combat was different. This was a place where you would learn the proper techniques through effective coaching and practices, and they refused to let any of their members fight without being thoroughly prepared. Thus, the brothers firmly believed in the sentiment of the banner. Their members should expect to receive the highest quality training around.

MMA Class

The participants in the MMA class are primarily young males (with the addition of one or two females in a given class more recently) between the ages of 18-33, with the average age being around twenty-two. Most are beginners to the sport, although many have backgrounds in high school or collegiate wrestling. There are usually between 15-30 participants for any given class. Victor teaches the one-hour class five days a week in the early evening. The participants wear t-shirts, tank tops and shorts. Much of their apparel comes from popular MMA clothing and gear companies, such as Tap Out. The participants train barefoot and do not wear socks or shoes. In comparison to boxing or kickboxing where large

12-16oz gloves that cover the entire hand are worn, in MMA, gloves are only 4-6oz and the fingers are left open. This is to allow for the grappling component of MMA. The fingers must be left free to execute takedowns (where the waist or legs of the opponent are grabbed) or to implement jujitsu techniques such as chokes or arm bars (see Appendix F for MMA glossary).

The class begins with a brief warm up of running around the room, push-ups and sit ups, and stretching. The next exercise is drilling. Drilling involves pairing up with another participant of similar size (height and weight) and working on specific techniques such as wrestling take-downs or Muay Thai clinches (Appendix F). This exercise lasts for another ten to fifteen minutes as the pairs rehearse their repertoire of established techniques. Then the participants are given instructions regarding which set of skills they will practice for that particular training session. Victor may demonstrate a combination of punches or kicks, or an effective means of setting up a Rear-Naked Choke (Appendix F). The participants take turns practicing these techniques with their partners for the duration of the class or the class may end with participants spending the last twenty minutes or so sparring (i.e. putting on protective gear and throwing and defending strikes).

The gym does not offer official ranks or belts for kickboxing or MMA achievements, and therefore there is no visible skill differentiation based on clothing or accessories. In contrast, the jujitsu class offers a succession of colored belts and stripes to enforce a tangible skill hierarchy. When asked about this lack of visible status recognition, the fighters' responses were split. Some indicated

that it would be nice to be given the recognition, saying it would motivate them to practice harder or enter more competitions. Others said that MMA is a different kind of sport where the traditional martial arts hierarchies displaying rank are not so important. One fighter noted, “It’s not like Karate, we just win the [championship] belt to prove our rank. The only rank that counts is world champion.”

Fighter’s Class

The Fighter’s Class is held five days a week in the evening. This class has the least amount of participants compared to the other classes offered. There are usually less than ten people. Participants are invited by coaches Francisco and Fernando to join this class, and cannot simply promote themselves. All of the participants are male, except for Alissa (a high level kickboxer) who regularly attended, and Reina (a professional boxer learning MMA who only attended for about a year). The participants of this class are noticeably older than the MMA class, with an average age of about twenty-six. These are individuals who have already had experience fighting in amateur leagues and are now professionals or soon-to-be professionals. (The main distinction between amateur and professional is that professionals get paid; also, the rules may differ depending on the state in which the competition is held.) The class begins at 6:30pm. The fighters are dressed in t-shirts and tank tops, and wearing Muay Thai kickboxing shorts or MMA shorts. They all wear hand-wraps, which resemble thick cotton bandages that are wrapped around the hands to protect the knuckles and wrists from injury. These hand-wraps are worn under gloves. Most fighters are barefoot, although

some choose to wear wrestling shoes. It is the gym's policy not to wear street shoes on the mat, as this would damage the mats and also bring in outside dirt. Wrestling shoes are soft flexible shoes that are laced above the ankle to provide support for foot and ankle while also providing traction. These shoes may only be worn indoors.

The fighters from this elite class are given more freedom during the warm up than other classes. Some choose to run around the gym, while others choose to jump rope. After about ten minutes, one of the coaches will yell for them to begin shadowboxing. Shadowboxing involves practicing punches, kicks, elbows and other strikes against an imaginary opponent or your own shadow. It also involves visualizing that your shadow or imaginary opponent is also returning these strikes. Therefore, you must be constantly moving out of the way and also defending and blocking against invisible attacks. Each day of the week is set aside to practice a particular set of skills. For example, Monday is set aside to concentrate on improving boxing skills. As boxing is a major component of MMA, the professional fighter's "hands" must be very well developed. Other gyms may choose to practice all components of MMA every day and spar everyday, but the coaches at Desert Combat feel it is more effective to break down important components and practice them separately to improve. There will be specific exercises practiced to hone the desired skills. These exercises usually involve putting fighters in pairs (generally with someone of similar size who is their regular training partner) and have them each take turns practicing. One individual will hold up pads while the other strikes. There are two types of pads held in

exercises such as these. One type of pad is called a hand-mitt and used only for hand strikes (i.e. punches). This hand-mitt resembles a heavily padded baseball mitt. The other type of is called a Thai pad, which is used to cushion blows of all types (e.g. kicks, punches, knees, elbows). Thai pads are larger than hand-mitts. They are rectangular shaped, and cover the hands down the forearms to the elbow. There are handles to hold the pad with fingers, and straps to secure the pad to the forearm. These pads can vary slightly in size and thickness. The participants could either take the rest of the class to perfect the striking activity using the pads, or end the class with time spent sparring, employing the techniques they learned that day. This decision is up to the coaches. The entire class runs approximately 90 minutes. The Fighter's Class is not required to do calisthenics (push-ups, sit-ups etc.), as the kickboxing or MMA class is asked to do. This is because they are already expected to be in excellent cardiovascular shape. Francisco notes:

I expect these guys to be really good shape. They shouldn't be coming here to work on cardio, but to be learning the techniques. They need to be working on their cardio on their own time...Sometimes in a fight, it comes down to how much you have in your gas tank

Clearly, there are higher expectations for the Fighter's Class. They are expected to use their own free time to be improving their overall cardiovascular health. The coaches treat these participants as serious athletes, and the participants also try to live up to these standards. Mark describes his decision to take his health more seriously after barely completing his first Fighter's Class.

Me: How was the transition to the Fighter's Class from the regular kickboxing class? What were some of the differences that you noticed?

Mark: There was a difference...[*laughter*]. When I first started at Desert Combat I was a bit overweight, not really in shape. I liked to go out with my friends most nights, drink, smoke [*cigarettes*]. My first kickboxing class with rough, all those pushups and squat jumps and that was just the warm up...it was really hard, but I could make it through though. I'm naturally an athletic guy so I could pick up on things really fast. Francisco said I was good, even though he said my cardio sucked [*laughter*]. When I got to the Fighter's Class the guys were in really good shape. I was a little embarrassed that my cardio was so bad. Half way through the first [Fighter's] class, I felt like my lungs were going to give out. I decided to quit smoking right then.

Me: Right that minute? Because of the class?

Mark: Yep. I need my lungs. I need to be in good shape if I want to do this professionally. I did start drinking way less too. I was too tired to go out every night after spending a couple hours here [at Desert Combat].

As Mark observed, the Fighter's Class requires a dedication to train on a consistent basis and to keep the body functioning at a high level. Although Francisco never asked him to quit smoking, drinking, or going out at night, Mark made the choice to do so. Several other fighters commented that they had made similar choices to improve their health as result of their commitment to MMA. The physicality of the sport forces participants to be more aware of their bodies—how their bodies function, and what changes in their lifestyle are necessary to obtain their goals. Through participation in MMA, fighters develop intimate and profound relationships with their bodies.

Embodying Mixed Martial Arts

Thomas Csordas (1994a) theorizes embodiment as the existential condition of cultural life. In contrast to theories that suggest the body is simply inscribed by culture, or perspectives that suggest the passive body is manipulated

by the mind, Csordas emphatically states that the body is dynamic and crucial to knowledge and experience:

Embodiment is reducible to neither representations of the body, to the body as an objectification of power, to the body as a physical entity or biological organism, nor to the body as an inalienable center of individual consciousness...Phenomenological theory of culture and self [is] an anthropology that is not merely about the body, but from the body.
(Csordas 1994a: preface)

From this standpoint, the body is taken as the starting point of existence.

Knowledge of one's self and the world is learned through the experiences of the body. Mixed Martial Arts is an extremely physically demanding activity, and the body is revealed as a site of self-development and identity. Yet MMA requires dedication not only of the body but also of the mind. Interview data suggests that much of the learning process involved in MMA requires a complex relationship between the mind and the body, and also a balance, which demands trust in one's body in addition to a strength and training of one's mind. In this section I examine how participants experience their bodies in training and competition, and how *knowing* is achieved through creating an existential connection between the mind and body.

Training

"I'm training my body but at the same time I'm trying to condition my mind"

(Dennis, *field notes May 2009*)

Aside from school, home, and work, Desert Combat was next most frequent response by participants to the question 'where do spend your day'. An

informal poll of members at Desert Combat suggested that recreational/amateur fighters attended an average of three to four days a week, while professional fighters came in five to six days a week. Recreational/amateur fighters spent one to two hours at the gym taking classes, while professional fighters spent at least three hours per day taking classes. Professional fighters would also spend at least another two hours lifting weights or doing cardiovascular activities. This significant amount of time training was reflected in the semi-structured interviews I conducted with participants. Paul has been with Desert Combat for three years now, and has just started competing professionally.

Me: Tell me about a typical day training for you. How many hours a day do you spend training?

Paul: I usually go in [to *Desert Combat*] after work, so between two and three hours.

Me: A day? Is it a major part of your daily life then?

Paul: Oh yeah. I usually get in at either 6:30pm and leave at 9:30pm, or if I can get in earlier, I do. I usually have at least a two-hour practice you know. If I can get a three-hour practice in, even better. I've noticed doing MMA you can work on so many different things, standup, grappling...I can spend the whole day there and not get too physically exhausted because my intensity level doesn't have to be high the whole time. There's a lot of things to work on, technique wise too.

Me: You don't get burnt out at all?

Paul: Not really. On average I'd say I go five days a week and because there are so many different aspects to learn, I don't get burnt out. Whenever I get off of work, I'm fortunate. I'm in sales so I can make up my schedule...free up my nights up so whenever I get off of work I'm usually just straight to the gym.

Paul tells me he is dedicated to the sport, and training that much is necessary to be good. Every other professional fighter I spoke with agreed that it is a sport that takes up a large amount of time to practice in order to be successful.

Raphael has come to Desert Combat on a training holiday. He trains in jujitsu in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil with the same school where Santiago, the head jujitsu coach at Desert Combat, had trained. It is quite commonplace to have members from the same jujitsu school (e.g. *Nova Uniao*) visit different locations of this same school across the United States and even the world for training. It is very much like an exchange program. I spoke to Raphael to see if the intense professional training philosophy (6 days a week/five hours a day) of Desert Combat professional fighters held true for professional fighters in Brazil.

Me: Tell me about your training. How many times a day, how many days a week?

Raphael: I train every day. Now here, I'm training two times a day. Morning is grappling and evening is boxing or MMA, but when I'm in back in Brazil I'm training two or three times a day on physical preparation. You know what that is?

Me: Like running or lifting weights?

Raphael: Lift weights and cardio. Ahh, and grappling, and stand up or wrestling. Basically, is two or three times a day training.

Me: Not one day of rest?

Raphael: Wednesday. Cause it's the middle of the week. Not all day rest, sometimes I just run a little bit.

Me: Do other professional fighters in Brazil, or at your gym, train as much as you?

Raphael: Yeah. Most, if they want to be good.

Not only professional fighters, but individuals who had no desire to compete and simply engaged in MMA for recreational purposes, also suggested in order get better, it required dedication and significant time commitment. I asked this group of recreational/amateur MMA fighters why they chose this sport. Some responded that it was a realistic form of self-defense while others stated that it was fun because there were so many different components to learn. All participants replied that it was the best possible way to stay in shape.

Desert Combat has several professional football players that train MMA in their off-season. These individuals come to Desert Combat because of its reputation for high quality training and for producing several professional, world-renowned fighters. Sam has been a professional football player in the NFL for approximately four years and has been coming to Desert Combat for the past year and a half.

Me: So why MMA and not something else like karate or cycling?

Sam: I like MMA because it's full-body training. More than any other sport, you do so many different things...the ground game [*referring to jujitsu and grappling*] and stand up [*referring to striking*]...you use every muscle. And it works your cardio. Man, does it work your cardio.

Sam: Which is more difficult training-wise, football or MMA?

Sam: Ooh, I mean being a professional football player, I would say football is very physically demanding, but overall, as far as being physically demanding, I would say mixed martial arts is more physically demanding. I think they're both physically demanding in their own right but you know mixed martial arts would definitely have to take it.

In consideration of the fact that Sam is a professional athlete, it is a significant acknowledgment that MMA requires intense physical conditioning. The individuals competing professionally are athletes and training just as much for MMA as they would any another professional sport such as football or tennis. In the early days of MMA, the spectacle of cagefighting did not require such intense training. Ronald has been competing in MMA since the early 1990s and continues to compete professionally although he is now in his forties.

Ronald: In the beginning it was just brawlin'. Just like a street fight. You don't really train for a street fight. You just get in there. Well, I did train a bit though, because that's who I am. I was really good cause I was a college wrestler. I was even an Olympic qualifier in '87. I used my background as a wrestler so I had an advantage...then I went over to Japan

Me: Ah, yes. That is where you were with New Japan Pro Wrestling?

Ronald: Yeah. Then I went back to MMA.

Me: Did you notice a difference?

Ronald: Yep. Sure did. I kind of noticed this transition happening all along. Like I said in the beginning it was all just brawling, now you have to be good at everything. The kids in the sport now are really turning into true athletes.

Self-awareness, Feeling and a Mind-body Connection

It seemed odd to many participants I interviewed that I would ask them how training *felt*. Training was something you do. You experience it. You don't necessarily verbalize this. I explained that I was examining the daily lives and experiences of MMA fighters, and it would be helpful if they could describe what it was like to train so that those who did not have first hand experience training

could understand. For several participants, I had to ask that they comment on physiological cues, and this would trigger more specific responses from them.

Me: How do you feel when you train? What's your mindset like? Do you notice your heart rate? Do you notice your breathing?

Carlos: When I'm out of shape I notice my breathing.

Me: Is that the first thing you notice?

Carlos: When I'm out of shape, yes, because when your lungs go and you're tired, you can get away with it if you have better technique but when your lungs go, it's harder to keep going. I think if everything is feeling good and I'm in shape, I'm actually less aware of my body. It's almost like my mind goes blank and I'm just flowing with everything. I'm very focused on what's happening here when I'm not stressed out at all.

Me: Are you consciously thinking, "Do this, do that"?

Carlos: Sometimes I am, but for the most part the ideas don't come to my mind like "Okay, this is what I need to do." It's more just you're focused and your mind is taking in everything that's happening, then it just kind of goes. You just know when to move your hands, or feet in a certain way. You don't really have time to consciously think, "Okay, I need to do this now." It just kind of happens. At least for me, my mind is usually kind of blank.

Me: So what is the best part of training?

Carlos: I think that relaxing and focusing and being there— nothing else matters. No matter what else is going on in your life, when you're there, you're just there. Your main problem is either getting punched or choked. That's everything that you're focused on right now. I like that. I like leaving all the other crap behind. No matter how bad of a day it is, no matter how good of a day it is, that's just my time to not think and to just take in everything that's happening.

Me: So it's very much in the moment?

Carlos: Yeah.

I was surprised by Carlos' responses to how training MMA feels. I could replace the sport of MMA with the practice of yoga and his responses would be equally, if

not more conventionally appropriate. Carlos describes his MMA training almost as a form of meditation. It provides an opportunity for him to be present in the moment and provide a reprieve from the stress that he may be feeling resulting from other aspects of his life. It appears paradoxical that the intense bodily activity, which requires focus and concentration, would allow for his “mind to go blank.”

In contrast, Jared’s experience training suggests a more intense, and mentally constructed experience. Like Carlos, Jared has also been fighting professionally for a couple years now. Jared makes frequent reference to the mental aspects of his training, evoking a much more mind over matter philosophy. He spoke about the satisfaction he received from pushing his body to the limits of nearly losing consciousness.

Me: How do you feel when you’re training, what is your mindset like? Do you notice changes in your body, like increased heart rate? What do you feel like when you’re training?

Jared: The only thing that I really notice when I’m training real hard is my breathing, my heart rate. If get winded then my vision starts to fade a little bit, you kind of, I guess its like blacking out but its just like everything starts to close in a little bit. And that’s when you train real hard, that’s when I know I’m doing it right, I’m pushing myself.

Me: So what do you do if you’re tired or you get to that point where you’re so exhausted, and part of your head is saying, what is your head saying to you at that moment?

Jared: If I’m training and I start to feel that way I just push through it because I know like if I push myself to the point that I like vomit or something, when the trainings over, when the coach say ‘alright you guys are done,’ you did good. I feel so good about myself that night, and I sleep really well. That’s what keeps me going and that’s how.

Me: And if you didn't push yourself through that, you'd be upset with yourself?

Jared: I'd feel terrible, yeah; I'd feel like I let myself down.

Me: So what's the best part of training? That feeling of pushing through that you were talking about?

Jared: For me the best part of training is learning something, and just knowing that I'm not wasting away on the couch, not doing anything.

Me: What is the worst part about training?

Jared: An off-day, like when your timing is off and you just can't make things click and when you just; it's just a frustrating day. That's the worst part of it, when you're trying so hard to make it better but you can't.

Me: What causes an "off-day"?

Jared: When your head is not there. Or your body is just so tired and broken down. But mostly it's when your head isn't there.

Jared and numerous other fighters commented that it was one's mind that was often the cause of a poor practice or an "off-day." I asked participants who trained in MMA (amateurs, professionals, coaches) to estimate what percentage of the sport was mental and what percentage of the sport was physical. An overwhelming majority stated that the mental aspect outweighed the physical aspect. Responses ranged from 50% (the lowest estimate) to 90% (the highest estimate), with most participants citing a range of (75-85%). One fighter summed it up best by saying, "It doesn't matter how good you are, or how hard you trained, if your mind isn't right you're going to lose." Most frequently cited reasons for a fighter's "mind not being right" were personal/relationship issues, or being intimidated by one's opponent and not having enough confidence. The

subtext of these responses appears to be a lack of focus. According to all fighters, mental focus and determination are critical to a successful career in MMA.

Although Desert Combat was my primary field site, I also travelled to other gyms across the United States to observe their teaching methods and philosophies, and to interview other fighters and coaches. The gym American Fight Club, located just outside Miami, Florida, placed an exceptional emphasis on the mental aspect of MMA. Out of the five different gyms that I visited during the course of my research, only American Fight Club had a mental conditioning coach. Clarence is a forty-four year old former collegiate wrestler. He had practiced MMA recreationally for over ten years, but did not compete professionally. His most important role at American Fight Club was to prepare professional fighters mentally for their competitions. Clarence would also attend regular MMA practices for both amateurs and professionals, observing the class and walking over to individuals offering tips on mental clarity.

Me: As I was asking you before, can you explain a bit more about being the mental conditioning coach? What is your specific role?

Clarence: I am here to help out with everything but technique. I help the guys get mentally prepared. I was involved with coaching a gentleman who won a gold medal in wrestling at Beijing in the 2008 Olympics.

Me: That is quite impressive. Could you tell me more about how you coach? Do you have a specific technique you employ?

Clarence: I coach with goal setting, how to turn a victory into a learning experience and then also how to turn a loss into a learning experience. A real big part of it is goal setting. Then right along with goal setting is following through on your goal setting. I help kids establish a goal, then I help them establish an action plan.

Me: Are there specific exercises you do with them aside from goal setting?

Clarence: Well, there's mental visualization. I have them picture the moves they will use to win in their heads, and also picture standing in the octagon with their hand raised [*in victory*].

Me: To what degree is a fight mental?

Clarence: I'd say 90%. Let's put it this way, if you aren't focused on the fight, you've already lost.

Clarence went on to describe to me the mentally challenging aspects of training. He explained that training itself is not just physically but emotionally draining. Clarence tells me, "Sometimes your emotions just sneak up on you...you have to control them." To Clarence, fighting is not about getting out aggression and anger but learning to control emotions and being mentally strong. This is relevant from both a coach's perspective and a fighter's perspective. Ryan, from Desert Combat, seemed to relate to this point of view. He stated that in order to be a successful fighter being mentally tough is key.

Ryan: The qualities that a fighter should have...one is definitely being mentally tough as far as emotional side of it and the training side of it. You need to train two or three times a day. A lot of people can't do it. You need to push past the physical and that is where the mental comes in. I know people who have panic attacks before the fights but you have to control it. You have to know how to get your heart rate down. You have to know your body and this takes mental strength.

After reviewing interview data, it seems that fighters describe training for MMA as an interesting combination of the mind commanding the body to endure, while also allowing the body to subconsciously act.

Sparring: "Practice fighting in a safe place"

"First and foremost, you've got to conquer ego."

(Francisco speaking to Fighter's class, Oct. 2008)

Sparring involves taking the techniques learned during classes and practiced during drills and implementing them in a fight situation. I feel the practice can be best described by the words of Desert Combat participant Jared: "Sparring is like a kind of toned down version of an actual fight. It's like practicing fighting in a safe place." Participants at Desert Combat are not allowed to spar until one of the coaches (either Francisco, Fernando, or Victor) says they have reached a level of proficient technical skill. Sparring is closely monitored by the coaches and may take place in the cage, in the boxing ring, or on the large open mat area. Sparring participants are generally matched up by approximate size and skill, although sometimes the coaches will have more advanced students helping the less experienced. Most members of the gym are eager to spar because it means they are a step closer toward fighting at an amateur, then professional level. Fernando tells me of the countless times an individual with no experience will walk into the gym and demand to get into the cage to spar.

Fernando: I can't tell you how many times we've had some guy off the street come in and want to spar...Lots of them don't even have experience or say they train MMA in their backyard. You can't just get in here and spar. You have to earn it.

Me: You mean prove you are good enough to spar?

Fernando: Yeah. It's not just about technique. It's about control. Guys think it's all about how tough you are but it takes a lot of training.

Me: So what do you tell these guys?

Fernando: I tell them they have to show they have the skill and control before they can get in there. That's how we weed out the guys that really want to learn and the guys that come in here to prove something. There was this one, big, roided-out [*steroid user*] douche-bag that came in here wanting to fight one of our pro guys.

Me: Did you let him?

Fernando: No, but god, I wanted to. I wanted to be like 'ok, buddy get in there with Steven.' Steven would've totally kicked his ass. People still think it's just a fight...It takes a lot of work to be a pro.

Fernando and the other coaches expressed concern that if one does not take the experience seriously it could lead to injury. Fernando mentioned control and this is an important distinction. Sparring is not about getting out aggression and simply pummeling the other person. Sparring requires being able to control one's emotions, and the strength at which one delivers strikes. The coaches will instruct participant to "go at 60%", meaning to go at 60% of one's full strength. The only times the coaches may tell participants to go full force is when a pro fighter is getting ready for a competition. Participants do wear protective gear such as gloves, shin guards, headgear, elbow and knee pads, mouth guards and protective groin cups, but there is still risk of injury. Therefore it is crucial that participants know how to control their emotions and strength. Both Francisco and Fernando tell me that females have the most difficult time controlling both their emotions and strength. Although the MMA and Fighter's classes are almost entirely male, the kickboxing class, which has more females, also participates in sparring.

Francisco: It's the ladies that get out of hand the most. (*Laughter*). The girls are more vicious than the guys.

Me: Really? What do you mean?

Francisco: Well, it's a couple things. The girls get angry faster. If the other girl hits them, they want to hit them back harder.

Me: Well, aren't most people like that?

Fernando: No, it's true. I've seen it turn really ugly with girls. Girls that used to be friends then after they sparred they couldn't stand each other. They just couldn't let go.

Me: So do you think that women are just more emotional? Is that why?

(Fernando and Francisco emphatically nod their heads in agreement)

Francisco: Guys are more used to wrestling and play fighting--girls don't have that experience.

Fernando: Also, when we put the girls with the guys they go hard because they think they had something to prove. The poor guy barely hits the girl and she's going all out on him. It's funny.

Me: What do you mean he barely hits her?

Fernando: Guys grow up learning that it is wrong to hit a girl. Most guys. So it's hard for them to go at an equal level. They don't want to hurt them.

Initially, I assumed this was a reiteration of a common stereotype—that females were more emotional than males and have a more difficult time controlling their emotions. After speaking to several male participants, it would seem that the coaches' assessments were not purely speculative. Many of the lighter-weight male participants would be paired with females of equal experience. These men commented that although they would only “go 30% [of their strength]” yet their female partner would retaliate with estimates of “80%” or “as hard as they could.” These male participants suggested the same reasons for this as the coaches, “they

don't know how to play-fight, cause they never did as kids," or "they have something to prove." Although I may not necessarily agree that female participants were more emotional and therefore less in control, I did find that many male participants found it somewhat unnerving to spar with a girl. Many suggested that holding pads during a drill for a female was not a problem but when it came time for them to actually hit a girl it was very different. Luckily, during my participant observation I was fortunate enough to find sparring opponents without this prejudice.

Lessons from the Cage

I quickly put on my shin guards, pop in my mouthpiece, and put on my boxing gloves. I step into the cage. Finally, it was my time. I was going to spar. "Give her the headgear too!" yells Francisco. Jonathan pushes the padded helmet-like protector over my head and fastens the strap under my chin. "Ready?" Jonathan asks me. I nod. 'Am I ready for this? Will I remember the drills and combinations of punches and kicks? Hmm, it is really quite difficult to see out of this headgear...I think it's a little big....It kind of smells funny too...' My thoughts are interrupted by the bell signaling the start of the round. Marlon and I circle around each other. 'Should I jab? No, I should go for head kick right awa--' Marlon lands a clean jab to my forehead. Already, I have made my first mistake—I am thinking too much. Something that Jonathan and Francisco often call me out on. 'Ok, I'm ok. This isn't too bad.' I throw a kick at the left side of Marlon's abdomen. He quickly deflects it. We continue to circle each other. I can tell I am still too much in my head. I am trying to mentally run through combinations that may work on the more experienced Marlon-- jab, cross, hook, switch- kick...Marlon was landing blows to my head and body from out of nowhere. I didn't even see it coming...I realize that my peripheral vision is severely impaired by the ill-fitting headgear. He finishes another flurry of combos with a double jab that knocks my head back. I picture myself as one of those bobble-head dolls sitting atop a car's dashboard. I quickly return a jab, a cross and then a kick to the body. Marlon drops to his knees. Out of instinct, I throw another cross at his head on his way down. 'Wow, I did it!' I am standing above him waiting for him to stand back up as the bell signals the end of the round.

Jonathan and Francisco come running over. I rip off my gloves and headgear, concerned that I may have injured Marlon. I then realize that Jonathan and Francisco are laughing uncontrollably. My victory was short lived. Jonathan yells, "Holy shit! Did you see that? She nailed him in the balls with that kick; then she sucker punched him in the face on the way down!" I was mortified. I thought I had kicked him in the stomach and he had gone down due to my skillful combination.

"My god Marlon, I am so sorry. I couldn't see out of this headgear really. Are you ok? I'm so sorry."

Marlon responds, his voice barely above a whisper, "No, no it's my fault. I didn't wear my cup."

Francisco turns and yells to the class, "See guys, this is why you always wear a cup."

(First time sparring, field notes, Oct. 2006)

The lessons here are two-fold. There are practical messages such as: 1) if you are male, you should always remember to wear your cup while sparring, and 2) it may be worth it to invest in headgear that fits properly and allows for your full range of vision. However, the most important lesson I learned from the experience was to trust my body more. I was intellectualizing and silently verbalizing my intended actions, which only served to slow down my reflexes. I spent far too much of that first sparring experience in my mind rather than in my body.

Getting Hit

What do you think it feels like to get hit? It hurts. Like my request to describe how training *feels*, most participants found this to be a bizarre question. Luckily, the participants at Desert Combat grew accustomed to me asking apparently strange and self-evident questions. Many replied with the most

obvious response “it hurts,” but a couple fighters replied that they actually enjoyed the experience of being hit.

Me: You joked before that you liked getting hit. Now what do you mean by that?

Carlos: Well I was sparring with Ruben a while back. He noticed something funny, that every time I get hit I tend to smile.

Me: You know what? I’ve noticed a lot of people do that during a fight, especially when it’s a good hard punch or kick.

Carlos: Yeah! You’re just like “Ah! Good one! You got me.” When a fighter smiles after that means the shot really hurt.

Me: So why is it a good thing to get hit?

Carlos: I don’t know. It just kind of makes you feel like you’re alive. You get hit and you’re just like there...alive. I don’t know why it’s a good thing. It just feels kind of good.

Indeed, it was also Carlos who also described MMA as if it was were an exercise in meditation that connected both the mind and the body, but he was not the only one to suggest that pain was a positive and life affirming experience. Although I intentionally avoided my research becoming an academic quest to uncover fighters’ psychological motivations for engaging in such as seemingly violent activity, I did ask participants why they chose this sport and why they wanted to ‘fight.’ Many seemed to restate Carlos’ sentiments that it is just something that *makes you feel alive*. Although fighters try not to get hit, getting hit provides a consequence—an assurance of purpose and existence. According to numerous professional fighters one of the most truly exhilarating moments in their lives involved stepping into the cage to fight.

Competition

I asked the coaches at Desert Combat how long it took to become a professional fighter. They responded that it depended on the person. Each fighter at the gym had to undergo an informal and unspoken assessment by the coaches. If the individual had developed the proper technical skill, had good cardiovascular fitness, and could maintain a level-headedness about them during sparring, they were given permission to compete. This could take anywhere from six-months (for exceptional athletes with prior experience in wrestling or other martial arts) or several years. Fernando and Francisco emphasized that the individual had to be mentally prepared because there are a number of factors that elevate competition above a day at the gym sparring. For many people, not just fighters, demonstrations of one's skill in a public place, in front of an audience could understandably add a component of pressure. Oftentimes, the events are also as televised. There are bright lights and cameras that can be placed within inches of a competitor's face. Several fighters described their first professional fights as both stressful and exhilarating.

Me: Tell me about your first time competing at a professional event. Were you nervous?

Jason: I was just trying to stay positive and not freak myself out. It's just pretty intense when you're walking out in front of ten thousand people. I just went out there and I just did whatever came natural to me, and ended up winning it. But it was definitely...serious butterflies, that's for sure; it's definitely a rush, you know. But one guy was telling me, you have a choice to either be nervous or just soak it in. And that's what I try to do, just soak it up cause everybody's there for you. It's just a mental thing for most people. That's pretty much the only obstacle I feel I have had to get over. But other than that, yeah it was a definite rush and it was fun. I can't

explain how it feels having your hand up at the end and everybody cheering and going nuts. It's pretty cool.

Although Jason fought in front of an extremely large crowd, he has had some experience competing in front of a large audience while wrestling in college.

Other individuals admitted that their first fights were sources of extreme anxiety.

Lawson had a far more difficult time getting used to the feelings that arose before a competition.

Lawson: Yeah, I had a lot of anxiety. I'm getting better at that, the anxiety thing. I'm never really worried about it anymore. But at the first one I was stressed and wondered if maybe I couldn't perform... You wonder if you're going to go in there and freeze up. What's going to happen? Am I going to get knocked out right away? I did pretty good though; I won. It's stressful. You've just got to deal with it.

Me: How long were you anxious and stressful? Like a week before?—a day before?

Lawson: Like months, like a month before.

Me: Really? A month before?

Lawson: Like a month and a half I was stressed. I was like "Why am I doing this?" But I did it anyway and I'm still doing it.

Me: So why were you doing it?

Lawson: Because I wanted to. I wanted to be good at what I'm doing so that's the only way to find out if you're good at it.

Me: So how did you deal with the stress right before the event?

Lawson: I don't know. I just drove myself into a frenzy kind of I guess. I just went in there and did it.

Me: Does it help to be really anxious and just sort of let it out?

Lawson: No. It's better to be mellow...relaxed.

Me: What do you remember about your first fight?

Lawson: What's weird about your first fight (or the first couple), you are fighting out of pure emotion and instinct. Later fights you know how to keep your mind in that perfect balance where you know you are thinking, you are feeling the pressure but letting your body do the work. You just let your body do its thing.

Lawson noted that the best mental state to be in was one that was relaxed yet feeling some kind of pressure. He and numerous other fighters talked about moments when you are so intensely focused that the body just takes over. Some have even compared this occurrence to an out-of-body experience. Professional fighter Tito Ortiz writes about this in his autobiography:

When it's time to fight, I flip the switch and there's character that comes out of me that's not me. I have an out of body experience when I fight. I see myself high from a place outside the ring. It's like some kind of fantasy.

(Ortiz and Shapiro 2008: xii)

Zeke, a professional fighter at Desert Combat, shares a similar experience with me:

Me: Tell about your first fight. Was it memorable?

Zeke: Yeah, it was memorable because it was local, so all my friends and family were able to go. Actually, my first fight almost felt like I was in a video game, but it was like someone just kept pushing the A and B button. It just felt like kind of surreal, like things slowed down...amazing, like I wasn't even in my body type of thing.

This experience during competition could perhaps be equated with being in “the zone.” Sport psychologists refer this as the zone of optimal performance, according to theories of anxiety/arousal and performance. The Inverted-U Hypothesis (substantiated by Martens and Landers 1970) states that when depicted visually, the correlation between the quality of motor performance and

arousal creates an inverted-u shape. This means that the optimal level of arousal for high quality performance is not low or high, but moderate. Participants allude to this in their interviews, suggesting that it is important to be somewhat excited but not excessively nervous or “too pumped up.” Athletes have often commented that when they perform well, everything comes together and simply flows. The intention and action are complementary. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls this a “flow state.” In 1996, sport psychologists Jackson and Marsh developed a measure to evaluate one’s situatedness within a “flow state.” Although there are nine dimensions of “flow,” the aspects most pertinent to this research and participants responses include:

Action-awareness merging: Involvement is so deep that it becomes spontaneous or automatic.

Concentration on the task at hand: Total concentration of the task as it occurs.

Sense of control: The person experiences a sense of exercising control but without actively trying to exert control.

Transformation of time: Time alters perceptibly, either slowing down or speeding up.

(Jackson and Marsh 1996)

Looking at interview data from professional MMA fighters, based upon this criteria, it would seem to indicate that many of them were in this *flow state*. They were concentrating intensely but their actions were almost automatic. This is what Merleau-Ponty (1989) also discusses in his work on perception, motility and habit. He describes what Jackson and Marsh (1996) would call *action-awareness merging* using the example of a musician learning to play the piano. The musician practices and concentrates on combining mental and physical efforts together to learn. Over time, and practice, this activity becomes automatic. The musician no

longer has to actively think of each note, or the how many beats per measure. The musician, with closed eyes, can let the fingers move across the keyboard without conscious thought. This experience is not reserved solely for musicians or athletes. Wacquant (2004:149) cites this mind-body connection evidenced in, “the moral and sensual logic of criminal careers (Katz 1989), the learning calculus (Lave 1988), and the craft of surgery (Cassell 1991).”

Zeke’s and Tito’s references to an out-of-body experience during competition suggest that something more than individual experience may be going on here. More than a merely autonomic state, it seems to be almost some kind of cathartic, spiritual experience. Perhaps the added dimension of being in a public venue, sharing the moment with others or an audience elevates an individual’s *action awareness-merging* (Jackson and Marsh 1996) to a whole new level. Wacquant (2004) also describes this phenomenon occurring in a social setting in the presence of others. Here he gives an account of boxers shadow-boxing at an inner city Chicago gym:

This continuous visual and auditory reinforcement generates a state of “collective effervescence” quite reminiscent of the frenetic excitement of the great aboriginal totemic ceremonies of colonial Australia, which has the effect of facilitating the assimilation of gestures by prodding participants to drop their inhibitions, to “let go” of their bodies, and whip up their energy.

(Wacquant 2004: 116)

The body is often cited as central to facilitating highly sensory religious experiences such as trance-like states or spirit possession (see Bacigalupo 2004, Kapchan 2008, Port 2005, Nguyễn 2008).

Theorists such as Mauss (1973) and Bourdieu (1977) have explored this physical-mental state in relation to social contexts. Mauss (1973) describes how the learning that occurs through the body is not just physical, but also entangled with the mind and with society. Mauss uses the word *habitus* to imply action that is beyond simple habit: “they do not just vary by individuals and imitations [...] in them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties” (1973: 73). In *Techniques of the Body*, he emphasizes how movements such as running and eating are learned and culturally constructed according to variables such as age and gender. Bourdieu builds upon Mauss’ (1973) work and expands upon the notion of habit. He describes an apparently infinite number of components to the term *habitus*, though it can be summarized as a system of durable and transposable dispositions that enable agents to reproduce the conditions of existence. There are three main aspects of *habitus* come out in Bourdieu’s (1977) work: 1) the manner in which it is generated by social practice while simultaneously generating and passing social practice; 2) its emphasis on the unconscious and unintentional; 3) its connection to history. The culmination of these aspects of *habitus* allows for processes of embodiment to occur. Bourdieu (2000) addresses how perception and cognition are intertwined with experience but beyond individual experience. *Habitus* can be taken as Bourdieu’s way of adding the social dimension to Merleau-Ponty’s theory of embodiment, in that the perceptual is itself *conditioned* by the social (Hoy 1999: 11). These theories of embodiment all underlie the learning that goes on for MMA participants. Their

craft, their sense of knowing, feeling and awareness, is mediated by social contexts (such as sparring or competition) and impacts facets of practice such as mental acuity (i.e. *flow states*). Their world is not simply defined by their bodies or by the physical.

Conclusions

Mixed Martial Arts sometimes requires conscious mental focus, and other times the habitual actions of body can lead to a meditative state.

Elements of an anthropology of boxing as “biologico-sociological phenomenon” set into relief the central place of practical reason into this limiting case of practice that is pugilism invite us to move beyond the traditional distinctions between body and mind, instinct and idea, the individual and institution by showing how the two terms of these perennial antinomies are constituted together and mutually support one another, specify and reinforce themselves but also weaken each other in the same movement.

(Wacquant 2004:149).

In this quote from *Notebooks of An Apprentice Boxer*, Wacquant describes the complex and seemingly contradictory facets of MMA’s cousin sport, boxing. The activity is at once physical and mental, learned through one’s body but also through interactions with others’ (bodies). Mixed Martial Arts, like boxing, is not purely instinctual but must be *learned*, repeatedly executed to attempt perfection. The body is central to this. The body is the vehicle of experience and perception but the mind is its collaborator. In examining the experiences of MMA practitioners during training and competition, various states of consciousness and cognition are revealed. Although on the surface, the sport of MMA may appear to be heavily physiological, training and success in competition require intimate

knowledge of and trust in one's body and mind. Elements such as memory and reflex are bound together in habit and practice to create self-awareness, but can also fashion moments of "inarticulate half-consciousness" (Weber as cited in Wacquant 2004: 149) often necessary for flawless athletic execution otherwise known as *flow states* (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). On an individual level, the practice of activity to a point where the conscious mind and the body 'let go' is recognized by sport psychologists as achieving a *flow state* (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), or as *action-awareness merging* (Jackson and Marsh 1996). Merleau-Ponty (1989) would describe this as a key part of phenomenological embodiment, and sociologists such as Mauss (1973), Bourdieu (1977) and Wacquant (2004) recognize the collective component that situates individual experience to add dimensions of shared a socially embodied experience. There is remarkable complexity to uncover in exploring the relationships between the mind and body and society but it is difficult to define the terms used to explain these processes.

As Scheper-Hughes and Lock point out:

We lack a precise vocabulary with which to deal with mind-body-society interactions and so are left suspended in hyphens, testifying to the disconnectedness of our thoughts. We are forced to resort to such fragmented concepts as the bio-social, the psycho-somatic, the somato-social as altogether feeble ways of express the myriad ways in which the mind speaks through the body, and the ways in which society is inscribed on the expectant canvass of human flesh.

(Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 10).

The Cartesian illogicality of controlling the mind while also letting the body take over, is illuminated through Merleau-Ponty's denial of such a simplistic duality.

The body, not as object but also subject, is fundamental to existence as, “the very experience of transcendent things is possible only provided that their project is borne, and discovered, within myself” (Merleau-Ponty 1989: 369).

CHAPTER 3. CONTROLLING THE BODY AND ITS REPRESENTATION: “FAT GUYS HAVE TO PROVE IT”

Pope et al.'s (1999) study of the increasing muscularity of male action figures over the past thirty years suggests growing cultural concern with the appearance of the male body in American society. For Mixed Martial Arts participants, the body provides the foundation for their identity as a fighter. The active, efficient, material body is key to sporting success, yet the image and representation of the body is equally important to attaining financial and overall career success. There are many issues that arise out of an inquiry into the body and its role in MMA. In this chapter, there are three issues I address: 1) is there a pervasive image or hegemonic ideal for the male body associated with the sport of MMA; 2) if there is, to what extent is it represented by actual participants; and 3) is the ideal, if it does exist, a result of training the body into its most effective and efficient form for MMA, or is it influenced more by aesthetics? Through participant observation and interviews (with the use of photo elicitation) I discovered that there is a great deal of diversity in terms of the height and weight of fighters, but also a shared acknowledgment that there is a representation of an ideal form and concern over achieving this. The body in MMA is equated with power and control, but also professionalism. It was apparent that at times, some participants were uncomfortable verbalizing ideas regarding bodies; however, their practices of cutting weight in preparation for competitions suggests an impressive, intimate knowledge of their own body's functioning. The body appears at the forefront of self-representation for individuals participating in

MMA yet the body also becomes a vehicle through which to uncover self-awareness.

Ideal Bodies and Expectations

One of the first questions I asked participants was whether there was an ideal body type, weight, height or look for an MMA fighter. I received similar responses from participants at Desert Combat, and the professional fighters nearly all gave the same answer: “There is no ideal body type, height or weight. It depends on the individual. The ideal is whatever wins.” Ruben was the first professional fighter I encountered who fought in the flyweight (or 125 lb) weight class.

Me: Is there an ideal weight or height for an MMA fighter?

Ruben: Any weight, any height. I’ve pretty much learned now that you can’t judge. It’s like you can’t judge a book by its cover. Watching fights you see guys who are tall, skinny guys, almost scrawny, that have no muscles, and you’re like this guy is definitely going to lose. But when the fight starts and they get on the ground, the guy’s jujitsu is absolutely unreal. I mean the only thing I would say is that usually for MMA you just think of somebody who’s lean. You know, someone who does MMA, you think would have low body fat. That’s probably the most similarity that I see, lean.

Me: So what about your weight class, 125lbs, right? Is there an ideal for your weight class?

Ruben: No, I think it’s whatever you feel the best at, you know. You gotta be lean of course. But it’s whatever you feel comfortable at. You know some people feel comfortable at a lower weight, higher weight, more muscle mass, just whatever you feel your body...for me it’s always been you know as lean as possible, and you know, whatever I feel the fastest and the quickest at, you know, and it’s been 125 for me. I think it just depends on your build and your skill level, and you knowing what your strengths are.

Me: What about in terms of height? How tall are you?

Ruben: 5'4". Height isn't so much of an issue. With the lighter weights, like fly weights, most of us are pretty short. You know you get a lot of Hispanic guys, and Asian guys and they are usually smaller. We do get some tall guys, but at 125lb they aren't too many that are taller than like 5'8". Those guys probably have a reach advantage but I get in and out. I'm quicker, and I have good balance, a lower center of gravity. Some of those lanky guys can be good at jujitsu though. I think there really isn't an ideal. It depends on the person.

I was curious to get Ruben's take on an ideal body for a fighter, since from a commercial standpoint he is not the most visible weight class. In the past, televised MMA events usually showed fights at 155lbs as the lightest weight class. Only in the past couple years have they begun showing 135lb fighters. Ruben fights ten pounds below this weight at 125lbs. He acknowledges to me that he feels there is some bias toward heavier fighters.

Ruben: You know in boxing it was all about the heavy weights? I think America still thinks of all fighters as heavy weights. I guess they think the heavier weight class will give you more knockouts. But I think lighter weight classes are more exciting. The guys are faster, move around more and don't get tired as easily.

Me: Yeah, I agree. The heavy weights seem to get tired and hang onto each other.

Ruben: Yeah they get into that clinch position and just hang on until the ref breaks it up.

Me: So do you feel like you have to live to more difficult standards if people want to see the heavier weights, or think of fighters as bigger?

Ruben: No, not really. I mean that's the way the industry is right now, but it's changing. WEC [*World Extreme Cagefighting*] has got the lighter weights in and the fans really like that. It's definitely changing. As far as standards, not really...I can't change my height, and I don't want to fight

at a higher weight class. Like I said, it's about the fighter and how he fights best.

Although it appears that an effective fighter can be any height or any weight, the public perception still seems to be that fighters are somehow physically identifiable through their bodies. Many expect fighters to be 'big' and 'strong'. Survey data gathered from one hundred fans at the 2009 Ultimate Fighting Championship Fan Expo indicates that fans believe that fighters share several physical characteristics. When fans were asked about words that came to mind to describe professional fighters, "muscular", "big", "strong", and "good shape" were the most frequently cited adjectives. Several of the lighter weight fighters commented that people were often surprised that they were professional fighters because fighters are supposed to be "big". James tells me about a particular experience that illustrates this discrepancy between perception and reality.

James: Yeah, so, I was in this bar with some friends. We were there hanging out, and a girl came up to me and asked me about my ear and I was like, 'oh, I do MMA fighting.'

Me: Uh-huh. So she meant the cauliflower ear that wrestlers/fighters get from training right?

James: Yeah. And she was like, 'Oh, MMA? What do you mean?' Then I say, 'I'll give you the short version, (since she obviously didn't know what it meant) it's similar to the UFC type fighting.' She took a step back and looked at me, and she was like, 'you're small.' I couldn't even believe that she said that. I tell her, 'you know there are weight classes...' I was a little bit taken back by it actually.

Me: Did it offend you?

James: A little bit.

As James re-told this encounter, I could sense that he was truly offended by her comment. This girl did not appear to be very knowledgeable about the sport so her comment appeared generated out of ignorance rather than malice. When I pressed James about how he felt about being called ‘small,’ he told me that no guy wanted to be called small even if they were shorter or lighter than the average man.

Me: Why is ‘small’ so bad?

James: Well, ‘small’ is for a kid. I know that I am not as tall or big as the average guy but no guy wants to be called small. It’s like for girls—no girl wants to be told she’s big.

Me: Ok. I see your point.

‘Small’ seemed to imply a juvenilization of his masculinity. ‘Small’ is a term used to describe a boy, not a man. A boy has not reached the pinnacle of his masculinity yet. James was still muscular, and was in what anyone would consider good shape, but his legitimacy as a fighter was questioned due to his stature. For him it seemed that it was not just an attack on his profession, but also on his masculinity.

I also asked the same set of questions regarding body type ideals to Raphael and Luiz, two professional fighters from Brazil who were on a training holiday at Desert Combat, in hopes of seeing cultural differences in bodily ideals. They shared the same sentiments that fighters could be different sizes but should be lean and muscular.

Me: Is there an ideal look for a fighter? Does he have to be really big?

Luiz: Don't have to be really big, depends what class. Fighters don't have to be like too much muscle, too tight, too much muscle. You lose your flexibility.

Me: You lose your flexibility?

Luiz: Ya. You know if you see fighters he looks like kind of we call *dry* all your body *dry* ya know muscle *dry*.

Me: Like no fat? Cut?

Raphael: Ya, cut. The speed and power is potency and this is the best thing. If you're too big you spend a lot of energy to one punch and one movement and the other guy escape.

Me: Oh. So in Brazil fighters want to be cut, have *dry* muscle so they can be flexible and agile. They can't be too big, have too much muscle.

Raphael and Luiz (talking over each other). Ya. This is right.

Me: In America it seems that fighters say the same thing. Have you noticed a difference between the bodies of American fighters and Brazilian fighters?

Raphael: Ya they want the same. All good fighters know the best ratio for muscle is not too big.

It was clear from my numerous interviews with individuals who practiced MMA that in practice there was no ideal body for a fighter per se. So how can the pervasiveness of the image of the lean, muscled fighter be explained? I assume that from practicing such a vigorous sport that requires huge amounts of caloric fuel, that body becomes shaped as a result of this intense physical exertion. For individuals who were truly serious about the sport, training five to six days a week, and three to four hours a day, their bodies simply become a product of this activity. This, combined with the fact that most fighters expressed a concern to eat healthy (low sugar, emphasis on protein, vegetables and fruit), would seem to shape the body in this particular, lean, well-muscled manner. Yet not every fighter demonstrates this ideal body. There does seem to an image presented in the media

that portrays fighters as lean and well-muscled. I was curious as to how much of the shaping of their bodies was a conscious effort to keep up with these representations. Some individuals remarked that they were aware of social pressures to have a lean, well-muscled body and that the body in fact becomes a marketable commodity.

Lee: When we grew up, everybody idolized body-builders and runners...so I think that image kind of carries over a little bit. These are like media types. You see there are certain heavyweight fighters that are a little harder to market because they don't look like fighters. Fedor [Emelianenko] doesn't look like a fighter. No one knows he's one of the best in the world just by looking at him, unless you've seen him fight and unless you know him. You would put him and Andre Arlovski together and you would just automatically assume that Arlovski would kill [defeat] him.

Me: Based on the body shape and image?

Lee: Yeah, I would say based on the images of what they look like, which realistically is not all that important. I think on the outside, the media look more toward image.

Me: Do you think if the media is looking toward promoting these people with six-packs and closer to the aesthetic ideal that it would filter down into everyday life? Like some guy who is just working at some gym, an MMA gym, and he would see this image and think 'well, I should look like this'?

Lee: I don't really know. Maybe subconsciously? People always want to look good, but I think it's always going to come back to the effectiveness of the fighter and your trainers. Sometimes Francisco calls me *fat* to be like "you're a fat kid," just poking fun. I took it as a joke. I don't think he was being mean, it was just his way of telling me to get back in the gym and keep training. Don't take time off. And it kept me in the gym, and I've been in ever since. I don't want him to call me *fat* again (*laughter*)...

Although Lee insists Francisco was joking, and was 'just being Francisco,' Lee appeared hurt by the comment. I must add that Lee is not what one would call

conventionally fat. In fact, I doubt that word would even have come to mind were I asked to describe him. He appears a little heavier set, and while he isn't slim he also isn't overweight. He has slightly round cheeks that are emphasized when he laughs. He admits feeling anxiety over being called *fat*. Perhaps his anxiety lies in not being recognized as a fighter. Lee mentioned that Fedor, who is a world-class champion Russian MMA fighter, does not have this lean, well-muscled body. This is the way that other participants have also described this fighter. Fedor *doesn't look like a fighter*. Lee could very well have invoked Fedor as a role-model displaying a higher level of body fat in response to Francisco's harsh assessment of his body. But he didn't. Although on a practical level, Lee knows that it is more about skill, technique, and stamina, somehow it becomes important to look like a fighter. Body image plays a large role in the representation of these individuals. It is an unspoken way to communicate information about that individual. Like Lee, other participants in this study suggested that image is important but very few of them actually admitted that they were actively incorporating this ideology of physical perfection into their own career plans. Most participants could cite famous, well-known elite fighters who didn't have ideal bodies but were extremely successful athletes. Despite this evidence, the media representations (such as those in MMA magazines and websites) still give seem to endorse the lean, well-muscled body as potentially the most effective. Most participants interviewed seemed to indicate a desire for this physique.

Me: Do you think fighters have to be concerned about what their body looks like?

Bryan: No.

Me: Do you think some of them are?

Bryan: Yeah. You have millions of people watching you on TV. You want to look sexy or whatever. Some people are just fat and flabby. Look at Big Country [*Roy Nelson*]. He's not sexy at all, but I'm sure he still gets laid and chicks still dig him because he's a big, burly fighter and stuff. I think about it too. I wish I was a little bulkier and had more abs. If you're a good fighter and you're doing your thing, look at Chuck Liddell, for instance, big old beer gut, ugly as shit, but so many girls are just all about him. He's so famous. It doesn't matter what he looks like. He's a bad ass, so people respect him....If you're more concerned about what you look like then you're not going to be totally focused on your fighting. That's kind of the way I look at it. I don't really give two shits about it, if I'm ripped up or whatever, as long as I'm a good fighter. It doesn't really matter. I enjoy being ripped up. It's fun being kind of jacked.

Bryan tells me it doesn't matter what you look like as long as you are a good fighter, but he also enjoys being *ripped* and *jacked*. (By this Bryan is referring to having large, visibly defined muscles.) Another professional fighter, Jose made some particularly insightful comments regarding body image. He suggests that the fans provide additional pressure regarding one's physique as they come to expect certain standards due to the images that are promoted by the media.

Jose: Training generally gives you the idealized body so most guys don't worry. Fans expect certain things: broad shoulders, they want to live vicariously through the fighter's bodies. Fans want to see the idealized bodies and are disappointed when they don't get it. It's a safe forum to appreciate the male body. You want to be that person. If he looks like that—imagine what he can do. Fat guys have to prove it.

This seemed to be consensus among the professional fighters I interviewed: *fat guys do have to prove their ability*. Since there is a perception among fighters and among fans that fighters should be lean and muscular, those who do not fit with this image must work harder. The appearance of the body allows for inferences

about the individual to be made and how the individual measures up to their social groups' ideals. For example, Popenoe's (2004) study on the fattening practices of Azawagh Arab women is an interesting counterpoint to western/North American notions of fatness. North Americans' notions of fatness (shared by MMA participants) generally equate fatness with laziness, ineffectualness, and perhaps even unattractiveness. Popenoe (2004) concludes that the fattening of Azawagh Arab women creates sexual desire, displays healthfulness, and further notes that constructs of gender are entailed in the process of fattening. The image of the male body functions in much the same way for MMA participants as lean, muscled bodies become representations of individual attractiveness and health but also embodied ideals of the society to which they belong.

However, fighting bodies fluctuate, meaning the weight that a fighter "walks around at" is often different than the weight a fighter competes at. Fighters would mention to me that their bodies visibly changed depending on whether or not they were fighting soon, or at what point they were in their training camp. Training camp refers to the preparation for a fight and includes a schedule for physical activities, other members to train with, and sometimes even changing training locations. The body can be altered significantly during this time. For example, at the start of a training camp an individual may be 180lbs and by the end of it (after 6-12 weeks) he is down to 160lbs. Days before a fight the individual may dehydrate his body to lose an additional five pounds to make the required fight weight of 155lbs. The dehydration causes the muscles to stand out

even more than usual. This process of *cutting weight* can alter one's body dramatically.

Cutting Weight

Many fighters dread weigh-in day, depending on how much they have to cut. Some have to pare down their eating a couple days out and carry around a bag of raw spinach leaf to snack on. Some don't eat a sliver of food or drink an ounce of water 24 hours to 40 hours before weigh-ins. Depending on the fighter's knowledge of how to cut weight or circumstances like taking fight to the last minute, I've heard of guys cutting up to 30 pounds a week of the fight. This can be a miserable, draining process.

(Couture and Hunt 2008: 246)

Cutting weight is a temporally relative term. It may refer to the amount of weight a person wants to lose by the end of a training camp. Or, it could refer to the last couple pounds of water weight an individual has to lose before a fight. Either way, it implies losing weight in a relatively short amount of time. It would seem odd that if a fighter "walked around" (non-competition weight) at 180lbs that he would choose to compete at 155lbs. Why would anyone want to go through all the extra effort of losing twenty-five pounds before a fight? Ryan explains the advantages of cutting weight to me:

Ryan: Well everyone wants to have the advantage. If you are 160lbs and you fight at 155lbs and you are fighting some guy who's usually 180lbs but he cuts down to 155lbs, he will have the advantage.

Me: Why is that?

Ryan: Well, he is going to be naturally bigger and probably stronger. You want to get your body fat down and muscle mass up so you can be stronger. It's about having the best ratio of fat to muscle at the competition weight. The thing is, you only have to weigh-in at 155lbs...and twenty-four hours later you can rehydrate and be up to 175lbs. If you don't cut

weight you are going to rehydrate back to only 160lbs. You will be smaller and not have the size or strength advantage.

Fighters must compete at certain weight classes. Height or other bodily measurements (such as reach—the arm length of a fighter’s punch) do not matter. The fighter’s weight measured during weigh-ins provides a sense of equality and fairness that the competitors somehow begin the competition on par with each other. The implementation of weight-classes was crucial to MMA becoming a legitimate sport. With weight-classes, the spectacle aspect of a 150lb man fighting a 220lb giant disappears. The quantification creates a sense of fair play and equality that is pertinent to the structuring of genuine sport activities. The reasoning behind cutting weight before the weigh-ins is to have the best possible advantage size-wise over an opponent. It is a way of physically re-structuring the body in order to manipulate the established system without actually breaking any rules. This practice of cutting weight is common in the sport of wrestling at all levels, from high school to the Olympics. Many professional MMA practitioners come from wrestling backgrounds and therefore have had years of experience learning how to cut weight.

There is controversy (as evidenced in numerous MMA chat-rooms online) over cutting weight due to issues of fairness and also out of concern for the fighters’ health. Although at the time of weigh-ins, both individuals may weigh 155lbs, by the time they get into the cage, one fighter may outweigh the other by twenty pounds. While the match is listed as a fight between 155lb men, what the audience may be in fact watching is a fight between a 160lb man and a 180lb man. I was astonished to learn that fighters may gain back ten, even twenty-five

pounds in a twenty-four hour period. Victor, the instructor of the MMA class, and world champion professional MMA fighter cuts over twenty pounds to compete at 155lbs.

Me: Okay, so let me see if I have this right: you walk around at about 175lbs, then you weigh-in at 155lbs, but the next day at the fight you are back to 175lbs?

Victor: Yeah (*laughter*). About 175lbs, maybe 170lbs.

Me: How does the body do that? Is that safe?

Victor: I've been doing it forever since I've been wrestling forever. I can do it safely. My body is used to it [*cutting weight*]....It's pretty much all water weight. You know that body is like 90% water. [*Note: the body is actually composed of 55-65% water.*] I'm careful how I rehydrate. Some guys aren't. They take in the wrong things.

Me: What do you mean?

Victor: Well, you want to hydrate again. That's the main thing. I drink lots of water and special rehydration drinks like Pedialyte. Not too much sugar. Gatorade has too much sugar...I try to get as much in as can, but slowly. I also try to eat things like oatmeal, eggs, maybe a bit of pasta (sometimes we go to like an Olive Garden), a bit of protein, a couple bars but I don't go overboard.

Me: If I had been starving myself for six-weeks, I would eat everything!

Victor: Yeah, that's where some guys make the mistake. They are so hungry they eat too much sugar and carbs. It's like a rock in their stomachs and when it comes time to fight they feel like shit. You need to be smart about how you do it [*rehydrating and re-gaining weight*].

Other fighters echoed this same sentiment. There is a good way and a bad way to re-gain the weight. Many of them say they learned through undergoing the experience, and by watching other fighters go through this process. None of them read books on how to do this, or were taught in their MMA classes how to do this. Information was gathered on an informal level through casual conversation.

Several fighters pointed out to me that it is specific to each person, and that the best way to re-gain weight before a fight may not be the same for every individual. They suggested it is a “learn as you go” experience. What happens when you don’t re-gain the weight properly? The outcome can be disappointing, painful, and even embarrassing. Bryan tells me,

There was this video all over the internet. Dude, it was so funny. I can’t remember who it was...this fighter...well, he gets in the cage, the fights starts, they go to the ground...then all of a sudden you see this stain appear on his white shorts (*laughter*). Aww, it was sooo gross. The guy shit his pants...seriously just shit his pants there in front of everyone...

(I give Bryan a minute to compose himself as he has now fallen onto the floor and is still laughing.)

Me: That really happened? Why did that happen?

Bryan: Yeah, check it out. You can find it if you google it...(*laughter continues*). No really, people said it was because maybe he was scared, but he probably just ate like shit before the fight.

Me: What do you mean?

Bryan: Well, you need to do it right. He probably just had some soda and KFC [*Kentucky Fried Chicken*].

This did not seem to be an isolated incident of indigestion as internet searches would reveal. MMA websites, blogs and chat rooms actually had numerous threads regarding this unfortunate happenstance. As humorous as it may be to some, re-hydrating and regaining weight properly is actually quite a serious issue. I spoke to a general physician who also trains recreationally in MMA at Desert Combat. He explained to me that this process of cutting and regaining weight could “wreak havoc” on one’s digestive system, particularly if the individual does not have much experience in this practice, or makes poor dietary choices when re-

gaining weight. Not eating or drinking, then choosing to consume the wrong product (e.g. too much sugar) could indeed cause stomach upset and diarrhea. Dr. Simmons also suggested that in the long term, liver and kidney damage could potentially occur due to bouts of severe dehydration. Although the body may intake the fluids and re-gain the weight, it may be a slower process at the cellular level if the individual is extremely dehydrated.

It has now become common practice in MMA competition for some fighters to rehydrate using intravenous therapy after the weigh-ins. This may either take place at a hotel, or off premises such as at a medical clinic or fire hall station. The IV may be administered by a doctor, nurse, or anyone with proper training (such as an Emergency Medical Technician). The IV is usually inserted into the arm with the process taking about two hours, depending on the individual and the rate of the drip. The IV is the fastest way to rehydrate the body and rebalance electrolytes, far faster than if one were to intake the fluids orally. When I asked the few fighters at Desert Combat who have had personal experience with this method of rehydration, they seemed to think it was a safe practice but had very little precise knowledge as to the contents of the I.V. or side effects from this practice. In fact, only one individual knew vaguely that the IV was probably saline solution. There seemed to be great trust in the science of medicine to the point where the fighters felt exact details of the IV were not important. Out of the three fighters that had used IVs to rehydrate, Victor and Jose said that they would continue to use IVs after weigh-ins. They described the experience as “great” and

that they felt “fantastic” about an hour after the IV drip had finished. Kristoff on the other hand was decidedly against it.

Kristoff: I don't know about IVs. I tried it once but it's not really my thing. It made me feel sluggish...I almost felt too hydrated. Also I'm not really in control. I'd like to be able to control what I put back in my body. It was ok, but I don't think I'd want it again...

What Kristoff may be referring to is a side-effect of the I.V. therapy called *fluid overload*. Fluid overload is common to all IV solutions and therefore should be adequately monitored by a healthcare individual. Another point of concern, especially since all three fighters were not aware of the exact contents of their IV drips, is the possibility of allergic reaction. Although rare, some components of the IV solution could potentially cause irritation to cells in certain individuals. There are numerous types of solutions and different ratios of elements present in IV solutions. Some solutions carry high potassium levels that may cause heart dysrhythmias (Alam and Rhee 2007). Infiltration is another side effect, wherein fluid seeps in the surrounding tissues at the site of catheter entry due to the patient's movement or incorrect placement (ibid: 2007). All three fighters however, had not considered any adverse affects that may have occurred due to the IV, instead citing the safety of this practice because of its pervasive use in hospital and other medial settings. Jose tells me, “Hey, if the doctor or nurse does it, it must be safe.” Jose is no different from the general population, as cultural norms enforce the expertise of the science of medicine, and the need for unwavering, unquestioning faith for the institution of healthcare for it to run efficiently. There are many health issues to take into consideration to properly cut

and regain weight. This process of cutting and regaining weight is crucial to MMA competitions as it could make a difference for the outcome of the fight. A fighter who has more experience and does this safely may recover faster and have more energy for the fight. He may also have a greater size advantage for the match.

At all competitions (regardless of whether they are televised or not) the fighters weigh-in weight is announced, as opposed to their weight immediately prior to the match. Their weight prior to the match is irrelevant to the structure of MMA fights and rarely mentioned. It is important to promote the idea of a fair fight. It is an issue of presentation, not quite deception, but a means to work within the rules to gain an advantage. Weigh-ins are almost always held twenty-four hours before the fight. In order to remedy this dilemma of having fighters in a single match competing at vastly different weights, why not have weigh-ins right before the fight? I proposed this solution to several of my participants and was told that it would be too dangerous.

Me: Why don't they have weigh-ins right before the fight?

Jared: Because the guys need time to re-hydrate and recover. They are still going to be cutting weight to get that advantage...If they don't re-hydrate properly they won't be able to fight properly. They will be tired, slow, maybe even disoriented. No one wants to see guys fight like that. They want to see athletes at their peak.

Me: Good point. It seems to me that the guys who have been wrestling their entire lives and are used to cutting weight may have the advantage.

Jared: Absolutely. They have it down to a science. But some guys don't know how to do it safe...I've seen guys starve and dehydrate themselves too many days before the fight because they are trying to make weight so

bad. They are fatigued mentally, because their bodies are at a weaker state from cutting so much weight. I think it just puts your body in like a catatonic state. You get really tired and when you do need to compete, your body is just in shock. You can damage your kidneys, your liver...

As Jared points out, while cutting weight can give a fighter an advantage (if done properly), it could also hurt a fighter's performance and overall health. Yet, several of the participants I interviewed were former high school and collegiate wrestlers. They informed me that the process of cutting weight does not have to be harmful and if done 'properly' it can be quite safe. Kristoff is a professional fighter who competes at 135lbs. He has wrestled throughout his life, from elementary school until graduating from college. He has successfully cut weight hundreds of times.

Me: Tell me about how you prepare you body for a competition, in terms of losing weight.

Kristoff: Well, first you wanna lose as much as you can naturally leading up to the fight cause you know you can only lose a certain amount of weight or body fat. You can only lose two pounds of fat a week at most-- you can't really lose more than two pounds a week of 'legitimate' weight. My plan for 135lbs [*his competition weight*] is to get within ten to twelve pounds, and be comfortable and be well-hydrated. You want to stay hydrated till the furthest possible point, till you have to start dehydrating yourself. Then the last two or three days before weigh-ins, I work out hard, drink less, really limit my meals to get down another five or six pounds. The day or two before weigh-ins, I don't eat, just have a couple sips of water to get the last few pounds of water weight off.

Me: What does this whole process feel like?

Kristoff: The day before the fight, when you're doing most of the weight cutting, you're definitely a little physically and mentally fatigued. It's not that bad though, you just feel kind of tired, kind of worn out. Like you have been over-training... You have to realize that it's just temporary. The

process is mental and physical. You need to control your mind while your body is weak.

Several other fighters described this as a mentally draining process as well. Some fighters commented on how “your mind could sabotage you” while cutting weight. They noticed that they were often more irritable, in a daze, and it was a true struggle of will and determination to continue the drastic transformation of their bodies. According to those who have undergone this experience, it is important to stay positive and to stay focused on the end goal of victory. While in this stage of losing weight, many fighters emphasized that they would try to isolate themselves from loved ones.

Ryan: I go into hibernation mode. I have to separate myself from my friends and family. I know that I am not fun to be around. I know I can be mean...My girlfriend understands, but I try not to see her as much because I don't want to get mad at her for no reason. I know how my body works, if it's really tired I know I can be a jerk.

He went on to explain that the weight cut affects people in different ways. For those who have had a lot of experience, it may not be as severe. Cutting weight properly requires intimate, detailed knowledge of how one's body functions. Hall of fame, world Champion MMA fighter Randy Couture describes how he developed a method for cutting precise amounts of weight due to his many years of practice at cutting weight:

I cut weight for over half my life, and my body responds well to a process I've fine-tuned over the years. I gradually trim down in the weeks leading up to the fight so I only shed a few pounds of water on that day. I had 5 1/2

pounds to go, I headed to the Mandalay Bay spa and jumped on the treadmill, wearing long underwear, a plastic suit, and sweats over that. I have a formula where I can lose 1 pound every 10 minutes walking at a normal pace. I can also tell how much weight is going by watching the sweat stains rise up my sleeves.

(Couture and Hunt 2008: 246)

It is hard to image having so much knowledge of one's body and its functioning that you can relate a standard form of measure (lbs) to the amount of sweat collected in one's clothing. I had another remarkable conversation with Ruben, who was also a life-long wrestler with extensive practice cutting weight. He revealed to me that he has paid such close attention to how his body works that he knows how much exercise he must undertake, how much food and water he will intake and how many calories (therefore pounds) his body burns at rest.

Me: So have you perfected at system for cutting weight, with all your experience wrestling? I have heard from your training partners that you are always on weight. You are never over, even a tenth of a pound.

Ruben: (laughter) Yeah...I think that's right. I have gotten quite good at it [*cutting weight*]. I know if I work out regularly at practices and eat and drink regularly I will *float* a pound overnight.

Me: Float? What does that mean?

Ruben: I will lose a pound overnight.

Me: Wow, that's an efficient metabolism. How did you figure that out? Just by getting on a scale? Counting calories?

Ruben: Not really. I do get on a scale but I track my weight during my training camps. I keep a chart of what I weigh everyday, and then I go back to look at that. I don't count calories or anything that scientific. I just know how I workout, what I eat and drink and how I need to adjust things to cut weight.

Ruben and numerous other fighters emphasized that they just *knew* their bodies. This sense of just *knowing* supports the notion of a phenomenological understanding of the body. In fact, the body is taken as starting point of perception, through which knowledge is thusly acquired and shaped. This knowledge is rewarded in the world of MMA as participants are required to control the weight of their bodies to the degree of a tenth of a pound. They must weigh-in at a precise weight of 155.0 lbs, for example. Generally, fighters are given leeway of one pound, in consideration of inconsistencies in the scale, but they should not weigh-in at 156.1 lbs. This would imply a lesser degree of control over the body. Should a fighter weigh-in at five pounds over the agreed upon fight weight, this would be regarded as unprofessional and the fighter would be seen as lacking control over his body (and self). The following describes the weigh-ins twenty-four hours before a professional MMA competition held in New Mexico in 2009.

During the weigh-ins at Cagesport Challenge, the promoter, Frank Rednen, became very upset when several of his fighters did not make the agreed upon fighting weight. Ryan Marcus was nearly five pounds over. The athletic commission read the number on the scale (176 lbs)...There was a pause. The whole room was silent. "Is that right?" They re-read the number. It was right. He missed the target weight by six pounds. The promoter is visibly upset, almost horrified. "This is a professional organization!!!" He curses and throws his hands up in disgust. MMA photographers rush in to snap photos. The crowd is whispering. Ryan apologizes, "I swear this has never happened to me before. I'm sorry." Ryan descends off the scale and dresses slowly. He leaves the room. The next fighter Marshall Linden undresses down to his underwear and gets on the scale. It is a replay of Ryan's situation. Marshall is five pounds over. Frank's face is turning red. He is very angry, cursing, saying this is supposed to be professional fight. Marshall is quiet. He does not make

apologies like Ryan. The weigh-ins continue and a couple other fighters weigh-in at two-three pounds over their fight weight.

Yukiko, the female fighter from Japan, weighs in at 114.6 lbs for her 115lbs matchup. Relief crosses Frank's face. However, her opponent, Maggie is not present when her name is called. Her manager tells the Frank and the audience that she is downstairs in the hotel gym on the treadmill, still furiously trying to cut weight. When Maggie finally arrives, she is 118 lbs, three pounds over the agreed upon weight. I hear her corner (team, advisors) whisper that her extra weight is due to the fact that she has her period. The promoter, Frank, says he doesn't care. She needs to cut the last three pounds as soon as possible or their fight will not happen. Frank looks over at the fighters then yells, "This is a professional organization and you are supposed to be professional fighters! What the fuck is wrong with all of you?" He storms out of the room.

The fighters are off in the corner, talking quietly amongst themselves like scolded children. They come to the conclusion that the scale is not forgiving. Some suggest because the scale is on carpet as opposed to a smooth surface like cement, it weighs heavy. One fighter states that the scale in the hotel gym is almost half a pound lighter and they all nod in agreement. Ryan jokes that he should have stood on his head during the weigh-in---a myth that this will make him weigh less. They laugh quietly. The guilty fighters are trying to find reasons that would absolve them from missing weight, but they clearly feel embarrassed. (Ryan later admits to me that he should have started his cut earlier and he knew a couple days ahead of time that he was not going to get his weight down in time for the weigh-ins.)

(Cagesport Challenge weigh-ins, field notes, November 15, 2009)

Frank, the promoter, spoke with me after the event was over, telling me how disappointed he was that several of his fighters didn't make weight. According to Frank, they make the sport look bad: "This is a real sport, not back in the day when there were no rules. I had to work hard to get this fight sanctioned."

As mentioned earlier, the introduction of official weigh-ins for MMA competitions, overseen by state athletic commissions, added a level of quantification needed to turn the spectacle into a legitimate sport. The implementation of rules (MMA now has thirty-one rules codified under the

Unified Rules of MMA) served to shift MMA from activity to sport because sport requires quantification. Frank described the effort he has put in trying to promote MMA as a legitimate sport, and his desire to distance himself from the no-holds-barred brawls past of MMA. To Frank, *professional* means strictly abiding by the rules, and *professional* also means control over one's weight and one's body. In addition, Frank is a business owner and fighters are his products. Like any successful business that relies on uniformity, Frank is attempting to put into place standards that fulfill public expectations. Just as the McDonalds hamburger is always approximately 100 grams (www.mcdonalds.com), a fighter fighting at 155lbs should weigh-in at just that—155lbs.⁶ Bodies are to be standardized. This is what Martin (1992) refers to as the Fordist body. Fighters who do not make weight are penalized and fined, in much the same way that Henry Ford's auto-plant workers that were found to be engaging to unhealthy habits (drinking too much etc.) were penalized and not given their full five-dollar wage (see Martin 1992: 122).

The weigh-ins are a demonstration in complete somatic control and discipline. This is part of the fight, or even the fight before the fight. The challenge begins far before these fighters step in the cage. They must get their weight down through exercise and food intake. It requires strict discipline but more so an amazing level of bodily knowledge. The weigh-ins provide a stage to display this knowledge and discipline. When MMA first began, weigh-ins, if held

⁶ After weigh-ins it is no longer necessary as the issue of standardization is for the purposes of presentation only. By this I refer to the fact that fighters may weigh-in at 155lbs the day before the fight and the next day at the fight be 170lbs.

at all, were not open to the public. Lauren Harrison, an MMA journalist who has covered the sport since the early 1990s, recognized that over the years the weigh-ins have become an important part of MMA competitions.

Lauren: In the early days, it would just be me, and maybe one or two other reporters at the weigh-ins. There were hardly ever photographers even. The fighters would be there, maybe a family member or girlfriend, and the coaches and managers. The rooms would be really tiny. Now, everyone who goes to the fight wants to go the weigh-ins too.

Me: Why do you think that is?

Lauren: At the weigh-ins you get to see the first glimpse of the fighter. You get to see how lean they are. You get to see the stare-down. [*When two fighters get into a fight stance with their fists up and stare at each other.*] Sometimes there is drama, and a fight might almost break out. Sometimes it is funny, and a fighter will wear pink bikini underwear. It's part of the show.

Me: Do you think fighters can get intimidated and thrown off during the weigh-ins?

Lauren: Absolutely. If one fighter comes in right on weight, and looks lean and muscular, and the other guy looks out of shape, it may affect his confidence.

The weigh-ins provide an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of one's body. It is an indication of the physical and mental discipline an individual can possess to shape the body at will. By extension this accomplishment reveals potential power over opponents' bodies.

Relationships with the Body

For participants in the Fighter's class it is mandatory that they keep their bodies in peak condition. During interviews, most of these participants told me that they try to maintain a healthy diet (i.e. not too much carbohydrates, lots of

protein) and did various other activities (such as weigh-lifting or jogging) to stay in good shape. Francisco tells me how he has had several people in the gym lose significant amounts of weight through their training here. Joe began his training at Desert Combat weighing over two-hundred pounds. Joe was also only 5'6''.

Joe: I was never slim growing up. I always had a wide build. I didn't really care about much. Before, it just got out of control I guess, my eating, and I was drinking a lot back then. But then I had to start training hard, cut back on drinking too.

Me: So, how do you look at yourself, when you were 200 pounds, compared to now?

Joe: Um, lazy.

Me: Lazy? Is there a big difference between the way you were then and the way you are now?

Joe: Definitely, um, a little, I've always been like, felt like I was a motivated person, but, I always like, must have found excuses back then as to why I was going to do this, and why I wasn't going to do that, and there was always something. I make sure my priority list is kind of on track, I guess. Rather than going out and hanging out with my friends and partying, I'm at home sleeping, when I need to be, wrestling and you know, doing all of that. My girlfriend really likes it too, because I'm not the fat kid anymore. I think I'm way happier with how I look now.

I asked several participants during interviews if they felt their bodies had changed as a result of participating in MMA, and also how they felt about their bodies. Some were visibly uncomfortable talking about their bodies with me. I assumed this was because I was female, but also because many men are not used talking about their relationships with their body. Relationships with bodies are often framed within the discourse of deficiency. By this I mean that one of the only times that men are asked to speak about their bodies is when there is

something wrong. This is generally in a medical context, when their bodies are injured or not functioning properly. Any other context seems irrelevant, boastful or feminine. For example, one fighter, Gary continued to avoid responding to questions of how he perceived his body:

Me: Has your body changed since starting MMA?

Gary: Huh? Ummm. I don't know what you mean...

Me: Have you noticed differences in what your body can do, or how you think about it?

Gary: I guess I can hit harder. Um, I guess I never really think about my body like that.

Me: How's that?

Gary: I don't know. I just notice things when I get hurt. It's not really that important to me. Ummm...

As, he was clearly uncomfortable, I quickly changed the subject so as to continue a positive flow of conversation. Another Desert Combat fighter, Jake also seemed to think that it was odd that I would be asking about his body:

Jake: You want to know what I think of my body? Um, it's good? You want me to talk about body parts like muscles? Or what?

Me: How do you think of your body?

Jake: Oh, ok...[long pause]. I don't want to brag or anything.

Me: It's ok. Go ahead. What do you think about your body?

Jake: I'm in good shape. I'm proud of my abs, my back and my calves...I think my biceps could be bigger. I could be a little more ripped [pause]. I don't want to sound like a girl.

Me: What do you mean?

Jake: Well you know how girls always complain about their bodies.

To Jake, complaints about the body fall into a feminine domain. I was not entirely sure whether his hesitancy to talk about his body was because he felt it was a feminine topic, or because for him it, was strange to ask someone about how they *think* about their body. His discomfort may also have been because I was female and that he did not know me very well. Perhaps he felt that it was only appropriate for women to touch and feel male bodies, whereas verbalization regarding the body was somehow off limits and seen as a potential critique or too intimate a gesture without proper qualification. Were we lacking an appropriate context to discuss his body? Clearly, the participant did not know exactly how to respond. However, some participants were quite receptive to this line of questioning and shared some interesting insights on their bodies. For one fighter, the experience shaping and controlling his body had brought him more confidence:

Me: Would you say participating in MMA has changed the way you think about how your body works or how you perceive your body?

Eric: Most definitely. I know more about my body and just how a body works in general now than I ever did before. I think the main driver of gaining that knowledge was trying to do better in the sport and be a better coach and understand it better.

Me: Has it made you more comfortable with your body? Are you comfortable with your body?

Eric: Yeah. I mean, being in shape, obviously I'm more comfortable with my body. More than that, even when I'm not training and I'm feeling fat or overweight or whatever, I'm still happy and self-confident. That's

because of the training and because of my background in martial arts. Once you're comfortable with yourself you can be comfortable with so many other things in life, and I'm really, truly comfortable with myself. It's nice.

Eric describes how he has learned more about bodies in general and how they work. When I questioned him further, he talked out how particular exercises can be employed to gain not only strength but also speed and endurance. Before training, Eric told me he figured all training was pretty much the same for most sports. Now, he realized the interactive nature of bodies and sport. He suggests that bodies can be molded to influence the sport in terms of increasing standards of strength, speed and agility, but also bodies also reflect the sport sports they are engaged in. In terms of MMA, Eric emphasizes:

You can't be too muscular or the body will use up too much oxygen. Also, you would not be flexible enough or be able to move fast enough. And, you can't have one of those body-builder type builds...you know those guys with huge bulging muscles and the short T-Rex arms?

Certain body types and muscles groups can be developed depending on the sport that one trains for. My interview with Matthew reaffirmed this point.

Matthew is a thirty-six year old, former professional football player for the NFL. After leaving the sport due to a knee injury, he turned to jujitsu to stay in shape. While at Desert Combat practicing jujitsu, coaches Fernando and Francisco recognized his impressive athleticism and suggested he try MMA. He competed in a couple professional MMA fights, but then decided he would rather devote all his energy to jujitsu. Matthew was quite open about talking about his body, something that may be credited to his age, or perhaps just because he appeared to

be a very confident individual. I asked him if his body had changed after he stopped playing in the NFL and began training for jujitsu and MMA.

Matthew: I'm flexible in ways that I was not in football and didn't need to be then. I've lost all the muscles that I needed in football. I don't have those anymore. I'm stronger in different ways like my hands are like unbelievably strong now because I have to grab and pull and tug and now I have a different type of cardio, a different type of lungs now, it's just really weird.

Me: Can you tell me more about that? As far as body shape and things changing. Was that awkward or different for you when you developed all these different muscles?

Matthew: Well it was weird because of my genetic makeup. Whatever I do, whatever I use the most, is going to grow really fast so because you know I was a runner, a stopper and a starter I had to run twenty-something thousand hours fast as I can, stop, come back and go the other way. I did that all day, every day. Sideways, dodging people, I was jumping over people like all day, every day. That's what I did for 26 years. That's a long time and so all of a sudden one day I stop. I mean all those muscles it's just disappeared and that was my lower body. But because I still use my upper body like all the time for MMA and jujitsu. I use my back, my arms and chest and stomach. My upper body's totally still in shape and my lower body doesn't look like it did...in my opinion it doesn't match my upper body you know. My lower body just took a hit.

I notice that Matthew often referred to his genetics and how easily he puts on muscle. I asked him if he thinks this has anything to do with being African American. He hesitates on the issue:

Matthew: Probably...Race may have something to do with it. I don't really like the idea of race though. People look at me and assume that I am African American. I am also part Native American. Well, I think my great-grandmother was. I have a bit of everything in me, French, Scottish, somewhere a long time ago. I look black though, my parents look black though, but I hate it when people just assume things.

Me: Do you think people assume things about the athletic ability of African American men?

Matthew: Yeah. Look at the NFL and NBA, most of them look black. The thing is, there are a lot of brothers that aren't that athletic too...*(laughter)*. I was good at sports though, since I was a kid. I saw these guys in my neighborhood in football uniforms and I thought I want that too. So that's what I did. I do have natural athletic ability, but I also had to work hard. It is a little frustrating when people assume that you don't work as hard just because of the way you look or how your genes happen to be.

Me: I see. Are you happy with your body?

Matthew: Oh yeah. I love my body. I mean I'm 36 and I'm in really, really good shape but I don't have that football body anymore. You know people see me and they go what happened to your legs? What happened to your lower body? These are the people that knew me when I got voted for Washington D.C.'s "Best Legs" and "Best Butt" award. They did all these silly awards back when I was in high school and college. People that see me, that knew me then, are like what happened to your lower body? You know, what happened to your butt, and legs? I don't care. I'm 36 and I'm probably going to look like this for another ten years.

Matthew suggests he is happy with his body, especially in comparison to the bodies of other men his age. However he does sound somewhat nostalgic for his 'old lower body.' For him, the aesthetic sacrifice is a price he must pay but is also willing to pay for his newly obtained skill in MMA and jujitsu.

This interview with Matthew was especially revealing with respect to the multifaceted nature of body image. Matthew described his first-hand experience with popular conceptions of race and genetics that are tied to sports, and indeed tied to his own perceptions of body image. Weiss (1999:1) argues that the term 'body image' itself is problematic in that it creates a façade of a neutral phenomenon. She suggests that images of the body are not discrete but form a series of overlapping identities whereby one or more aspects of that body appear to be salient at given moment in time. In Matthew's observations of his own body

and body image we see how different elements such as the athletic body, the African-American body, the football player's body, the attractive body, the fighter's body, and the thirty-six-year-old body are all crucial to Matthew's conception of self. Body image is both social and comparative. Like identity (of which body image is often a key characteristic) there are intersections of ethnicity, age, sex and gender, as Weiss concludes:

Rather than view the body image as a cohesive, coherent phenomenon that operates in a fairly uniform way in our everyday existence, a presumption that underlies many traditional accounts of body image, I argue...for a multiplicity of body images that are copresent in any given individual, and which themselves constructed through a series of corporeal exchanges that take place both within and outside specific bodies.

(Weiss 1999:1)

Bodies In Parts

In Matthew's interview and many others, I noticed that participants felt most comfortable discussing their bodies when the body was reduced into parts. Earlier, Jake spoke about specific muscle groups he was proud of, or wanted to improve. This appears to be an influence from bodybuilding discourse where the body is understood in a mechanistic and segregated fashion. This functions to separate out muscle groups for precise enhancement.

The gym has mirrors along all of the walls of the training rooms. This is to allow participants to correct their own technique as they practice. To some, the mirrors are indeed a chance to critique their own technique but also an opportunity to assess their own physique. Several times, particularly during the Fighter's class, I caught a couple individuals "checking themselves out." They were clearly admiring their appearance and sometimes would comment on parts of their bodies. The most admired body part seemed to be abdominal muscles. Fighters would lift their

shirts, look in the mirror and flex their abs. Sometimes they would make comments like “almost there, almost got my eight-pack,” meaning that these abdominal muscles were defined to the point to almost reveal eight separate abdominal muscle groups.

(Fieldnotes, January, 2006)

I wondered why abdominal muscles were important and one participant responded:

“That’s the way you can tell if someone is really ripped. Abs are some of the hardest muscles to get definition on because you need to have such low body fat in order for them to show up. You can tell that if someone has abs, like a six-pack or eight-pack, they are in really, really good shape. Besides, the ladies like it...”

Through my own practice in kickboxing, and conversations with the coaches at Desert Combat, I discovered that abdominal muscles are crucial to creating the torque needed for effective punches and kicks. Abdominal muscles are also important for movement, form and balance. When I asked the participant about abdominal muscles, however, he made no mention of functionality. He commented that it was for the benefit of females, and it provided a personal gauge of muscularity and fitness. He later mentioned it was also for the benefit of other males.

“I’ve had other guys come up to me in the gym to comment on my abs. ‘Bro, those are some sick abs!’ Not in a gay way, of course... Yeah, I liked it because I work hard on my abs... I think other guys may be jealous of my abs. Sometimes people ask me what kind of exercises I do cause they are trying to get the six-pack too...”

Members of the gym seemed comfortable commenting on the bodies of their training partners. If a professional fighter was getting ready for a competition it

was commonplace to hear other fighters telling him his chest was “looking good” or his back appeared “really ripped.” When speaking to each other they omitted the qualifier “not in a gay way” that they frequently included when I questioned them about bodies. This may be because they were familiar with each other, aware of each other’s heterosexual disposition, and assumed due to the gym setting and context of conversation that it would not be confused as an expression of their attraction. Commenting on musculature provided a safe forum in which to speak about the bodies of others.⁷ By speaking about distinct muscle groups in terms of progress in a sport setting, this somehow negates any implications of homosexual attraction. The bodies of others and one’s own body may be somehow more relatable when conceptualized as fragmented.

What can be inferred from this compartmentalization of the body? As Sharp (2000: 290) asserts, pertinent questions posed of the fragmented body should include: how is the body fragmented, for what purpose and by whom, and how can these processes augment constructions of personhood or social worth? For MMA fighters, the body appears readily understandable in terms of compartmentalized muscle groups, which implies both effectiveness and aesthetic ideal. Does the individual have a more compartmentalized vision of their own image? Merleau-Ponty (1989) suggests that the body is structured by its world. By way of perception and motility, a reciprocal and reversible relationship between the body and its world takes place (Merleau-Ponty 1989; Weiss 1999). Weiss (1999) states that the consciousness of the body is encountered in

⁷ This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4

fragments, and these fragments illustrate the multiplicity of body images that are lived according to context. Fighters' evident compartmentalization of the body may support Weiss' notion of fragmentation. The manipulation of the body through training and cutting weight establishes that the fighter's body may drastically change over a relatively short amount of time. Therefore fighters may view their bodies not in a singular and static form but in a continual state of transformation. Weiss (1999) proposes that in order to assume a normative view of the body (i.e. a healthy view of one's body) one would accept the notion of the existence of multiple body images. The rejection of this existence of multiple body images, relevant to context, results in body dysmorphic disorder, which is thought to lie at the heart of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia (ibid). The idea of multiple body images, (rather than a singular body image), provide an alternate perspective in the psychology of distorted body image and resulting disorders. Some of my research participants on occasion suggested dissatisfaction with their body images, and an acknowledgment that there is a lean, muscular idealized form for the male body in MMA. Yet, disjunction in image and actualized bodies need not indicate personal psychological dysfunction but rather a response to cultural pressures or as Sharp (2000: 290) notes "social worth of human bodies."

There appear to be ideals of the male form that are circulated in the realm of MMA that elicit reactions of personal comparison and critique from MMA participants and fans. This pervasiveness of this ideal may sway this population to generate a more singular and static view of the male body. (In this manner, the

body becomes more of a social experience when considered in relation to a hegemonic ideal.) Therefore, representations of a masculine hegemonic form are encountered and interacted with by these participants in MMA. Representation becomes a key facet in shaping identity using the body as means of constructing self-identity. Yet I cannot leave the impression that these participants are blindly attempting to re-create this hegemonic ideal. There is acknowledgement that the body plays a key role in establishing one's self in the world of MMA and that a lean, muscular form will bring the benefit of implied power and control.

However, participants note this is one facet of image in MMA. Compared to other sports, MMA's weight classes allows for more variation in body image. Those with knowledge of the sport recognize that a fighter could be 5'4" and 125lbs or 6'4" and 300lbs. This implies a wide range of variation in height and weight.

While a lean muscular form is preferred, the embodiment of this ideal representation is complicated by numerous factors such as variation in height and weight, and also the temporality of size indicated in the process of cutting and regaining weight.

Conclusions

The body is central to identity in the world of Mixed Martial Arts. It appears that on the one hand, the size and shape of actual MMA participant can vary dramatically. Monaghan's (1999) study of body-builders comes to a similar conclusion that there is a far wider range of ideal body shapes than what appears on the surface and that maximizing size is not the only goal. On the other hand,

like body-building, there does appear to be a consensus that a lean, muscular body having a low percentage of body fat is a desired form for MMA. The intense training of the sport itself can contribute to this ideal, yet the ideal seems in part constructed out of aesthetic desire. Functionality and success in combat can be achieved without possessing this ideal form. However, as MMA evolved into a legitimate sport and required strict quantification, the ideal form became crucial to displaying potential power and control. In *Unbearable Weight* (1993) Bordo suggests that in Western cultures, the body has come to denote the moral state of an individual and that one's body is an outside reflection of inner commitment and self-control. For MMA fighters this is certainly true. The weigh-ins are a platform for the display of skill in controlling one's weight, one's body and one's self. Even more so, the weigh-ins are now a competition within the competition, through which one can generate an influential representation of kinetic power. This can only be achieved through an intense and actualized awareness of the body's own functioning.

PART I Discussion: Embodiment, Body Image, and Hegemonic Masculinity

This discussion examines the previous two chapters pertaining to embodiment and body image, how these concepts were explored in research on MMA, and how these concepts relate to the overall framework of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; 1995). As I examined MMA participants' daily lives, how they conceived of their bodies, their relationship to their bodies and their own identity, I began to realize that Connell's (1987; 1995) hegemonic masculinity was somehow lacking.

Critiques of Hegemonic Masculinity

While this theory of hegemonic masculinity has had such a great impact on those in the field of gender studies, and in particular, those who study masculinity, some criticisms have been brought forth since its conception nearly a decade ago. In 2005, R.W. Connell, the researcher to whom this idea is attributed to, along with James Messerschmidt, authored an article that re-evaluated the idea of hegemonic masculinity. As noted by the authors, the term has been applied to a variety of contexts where male domination or the appearance of masculinity is most visible: criminology (Messerschmidt 1993), sport and media (Messner 1992; Messner and Sabo 1994; Sabo and Gordon 1995) and the workplace and military (Barrett 1996; Cheng 1996; Cockburn 1991). These studies highlight the various arenas in which hegemonic masculinities operate, and detail the diversity, changes, and costs and consequences of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 834). The success of this framework is in its flexibility; it

has been used in a variety of contexts world-wide. (See Guttman 1996; Ferguson 2001; Taga 2003.)

While demonstrating utility in many ways, hegemonic masculinity was not immune from criticism. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) address major criticisms of hegemonic masculinity such as: the confusion over the underlying concept of hegemonic masculinity; the ambiguity and overlap in its usage; the reification of the power of hegemonic masculinity; the unsatisfactory theorization of both masculinity and hegemony as separate concepts; and the functionalist interpretation of the patterning of gender relations. The major criticisms presented in the article are tightly intertwined, and at the heart of the problem is the complexity of creating an operational definition.

Given that the concept of masculinity has only begun to be critically examined in the last twenty or twenty-five years, it is not unreasonable that there is confusion over the term '*masculinity*' and how it may be employed. In attempting to define any complex idea, there are always criticisms that to do so involve a reification of something that is a process or a dynamic. The very definition of masculinity, as with concepts such as *gender*, *identity* or *ethnicity*, is often at the center of debate. Many researchers attempt to delineate the boundaries of a concept or create models regarding an idea in order to operationalize the subject for critical inquiry. Therefore, the criticisms related to the aspect of the reification of masculinity such as those by Petersen (1998) can be seen as a common critique of any model of society's functioning. In attempting to create an explanatory model or theory there is always the risk of reification.

The manner in which hegemony is treated has also drawn opposition. First of all, the notion of power does not seem to be treated adequately. Connell's (1987; 1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity does not clearly describe how power culminates in institutions in the first place or how it may change. This may be due to the fact that hegemony of any kind is a process that is context dependent, and creating an all-encompassing theorization of the operations of power was not the intent of the researcher. Whitehead (2002) claims that hegemonic masculinity is a concept that is reductionist and as it has been presented by Connell (1987; 1995, 2005), appears as a result of structural determinism. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) deny this, and stress that this is a relational model of practice. Hegemonic masculinity is a result of historical practice, not a self-contained, self-reproducing system (ibid: 844). In addition, the framework of hegemonic masculinity has been so widely applied that it has often been related to instances of a particular type of fixed masculinity, or applied to whatever form of masculinity appears dominant. Martin (1998) asserts that the usage of the concept is inconsistent and the nuances of the processes of power relations, particularly engagements with institutions, come across as either elusive or amorphous. Such criticism is echoed by Wetherell and Edley (1999) as they suggest it is unclear as to how this actually looks in practice or how people conform to *hegemonic masculinity*. Hegemonic masculinity as a concept is diverse. Lusher and Robins (2009: 389) note that "hegemonic masculinity is a multilevel concept operating at local, regional, and global levels that also simultaneously engages cultural, individual, and structural factors." They suggest the flaw in Connell's theory is that the interdependency

between structures, individuals and culture has not been explicitly expressed theoretically.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 838) agree that there has been a lot of diversity and perhaps misuse of the term *hegemonic masculinity* and emphasize that it is not to be used as a fixed, transhistorical model. They further suggest that the ambiguity surrounding the usage of *hegemonic masculinity* is important to recognizing mechanisms of hegemony. This can be seen in the various models of masculinity (such as in government, religion or media) that refer to but also distort the everyday realities of social practice (ibid: 838). Therefore, it appears as if there can be numerous spheres of dominant masculine ideologies that both overlap and conflict and are interpreted by individuals in their daily lives. These interpretations can manifest in bodily practices (e.g. sports, fashion) or emotionally and intellectually as influencing day-to-day interactions with others. It needs to be emphasized that historical and particular social contexts prove vital in understanding the changing nature of masculine hegemony.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Mixed Martial Arts

The emphasis of this study was to examine the daily lives of MMA fighters to understand how their participation in what may be regarded as a *hypermasculine* activity affected their own perceptions of masculinity. With the assumption that MMA is a practice that glorifies aggression, dominance and physical prowess (all attributes said to be those of the hegemonic male in America) the sport can be seen as nothing else but an outward manifestation of

male hegemonic power. The term hegemony implies uni-directional power. Hegemony in this case would seem to refer to the MMA organizations, and pre-existing, entrenched gender structures of the United States. Male fighters, with their muscled bodies and readiness for physical combat complicitly re-create these same relations of gender inequality in order to reap their patriarchal dividends (Connell 1995). Those fighters who succeed in the MMA industry who do not fit traditional, ideal conceptions of masculinity (e.g. female fighters, fat fighters, or male fighters who adopt feminine practices such as painting their nails) are said to be practicing *resistant* masculinity. Yet this theorization of masculinity and MMA under the framework of hegemonic masculinity is entirely lacking. This framework presents only one way of viewing the sport and its male participants and obfuscates the daily practices, embodied experience and negotiations of what it means to be a man in the sport of MMA. As Pringle notes, “Hegemonic masculinity is a term of *generalization* and *generalizations*, although useful for helping to understand big picture accounts, can be problematic for understanding the constitution of individual subjectivities” (Pringle 2005: 267 emphasis in original). There are aspects of MMA culture that just didn’t fit anywhere into hegemonic masculinity and could not simply be explained away as *resistant* masculinity.

Working with the framework of hegemonic masculinity, Cheng (1999:298) describes key attributes as “domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism and control,” and notes that “Aggressive behavior if not outright physical violence is important to the

presentation of hegemonic masculinity...love, affection, pain, and grief and improper displays of emotion.” While this does indeed on one level describe the practice of MMA (the overt domination, aggressiveness, athletic prowess), it fails to fully account for the displays of emotion central to the sport. Immediately after a match, the winner of the fight, and often the loser, are interviewed. In this moment these men almost always display incredible amounts of emotion and vulnerability, often crying and showing affection for their opponent through hugs or kisses. There is also often tremendous pain and grief expressed by the ‘loser’ of the fight. This post-fight interview has long been part of the configuration of MMA competition, and suggests that the audience longs for more than just a display of domination and violence. The audience appreciates the opportunity to hear the statements and view the expressions of deep and sincere emotion by these men. Theories of hegemonic masculinity present a one-sided view of masculinity, and as this post-fight ritual suggests that MMA does not fit neatly into the category of hegemonic masculinity regardless of its outward appearances. Within the framework of hegemonic masculinity these valued displays of emotion could be deemed a practice of *resistant* masculinity (as everything counter to hegemony is resistant), but its labeling it as such offers no real explanatory power. Instead, it highlights the multi-dimensional nature of masculinity that cannot be forgotten or ignored in trying to fit the everyday lives of individuals into an orderly model of hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; 1995) certainly offers a starting point. There are inequalities in social relations, be it based on socio-economic

differences or gender, that should be addressed. This model allows us to perceive MMA as a gendered social phenomenon, but is less useful in understanding the processes of how individuals are incorporated into a hegemonic structure. Like Wetherell and Edley (1999: 336) conclude, “Connell[‘s theory of hegemonic masculinity] does not articulate how the differing configurations of masculinity identified in the theory actually prescribe or regulate men’s lives.” Male participants in MMA do not automatically become ‘alpha males, or hegemonic men’ by entering this sport and not every man entering the sport is an ‘alpha male’ or archetype of hegemony. Considering someone a ‘hegemonic man’ is the equivalent of creating a character type. In creating a character-type the relational aspect of gender disappears and gender once again becomes an individual attribute (Lusher and Robins 2009). Masculinity is constant negotiation in relation to perceived ideals. There is a gap between the representation of MMA as a hegemonic sport of hegemonic men and the individuals who participate. Robinson (2010) states that in researching sporting masculinities we need to interrogate everyday lives, as the public world of sport cannot be understood in a nuanced manner unless we also investigate both the private sphere and the emotional/subjective aspects of sporting identities. Further, “it is through the mundane, the ordinariness of peoples’ lives and the assumed and taken-for-granted everyday rituals and practices, that how relatively little we know about masculinity in certain contexts is illustrated” (ibid: 311). While a widely televised, physical competition between men inside a chain-link cage is quite an exceptional display of masculinity, it is their daily lives (the hours in the gym, the

dieting, the relationships with their families) that provide the context and platform for shaping embodied masculinity. Adding embodiment as a theoretical component in examining hegemonic masculinity helped to illuminate the processes of negotiation and reflexivity that occurred for these men in their daily lives.

Embodiment and Body Image in Relation to Hegemonic Masculinity

Mixed Martial Arts is a physical endeavor that overtly places the gaze on body. The body is a location for achievement, expression and identity. In looking at how fighters use their bodies as such, it allows for considerations of how daily practices fit within the construct of hegemonic masculinity. Rather than simply being an exercise of fitness and conquest, MMA for many of these participants becomes a way to understand and appreciate their bodies. It allows them to gain an intimate level of bodily awareness that many individuals will never experience (as discussed in participants' knowledge and practices of cutting weight). While not unique to sport, participation in MMA highlights a mind-body-social connection that psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists attempt to explain in theories of *action-awareness merging* (Jackson and Marsh 1996), *flow states* (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977; Mauss 1973) and ultimately embodiment (Merleau-Ponty 1989; Csordas 1999; 1994a; 1994b). As Toren points out, "relations between people mediate the processes in and through which, over time, mind constitutes its own transforming products and is constituted by them. The challenge, then, becomes that of fleshing out a theory that is able to

recognize that biological, psychological, and socio-cultural data give us access not to different ‘levels’ of integration (and thus of explanation) but to aspects of one and the same phenomenon (Toren 2009: 141). The question then becomes how could the notion of hegemonic masculinity benefit from the acknowledgement of this integrated embodied and social phenomenon? Moore’s (1999) recognition of the relational quality of the body provides the connection. She suggests that “bodies are the site where subjects are morphologically and socially constructed, they are at the intersection of the social and the symbolic; each subject’s relation with his or her body is both material and imaginary” (Moore 1999: 168). In this statement, Moore notes that the body is conceived of as physical but also in relation to an imagined ideal. For MMA fighters their bodies were viewed no doubt as physical, possessing kinetic power, but in relation to an ideal. This is where hegemonic masculinity is key, in that it provides the representation of an ideal.

For example, the physical altering of the body (cutting weight) impacts both fighters’ and fans’ perceptions. There is a representation of the ideal fighting body, one that is lean, muscled and silently speaks of control and power. The body becomes a forum to pronounce both individual and social values. The weigh-ins are a moment in time where the body perhaps does achieve the imaginary and thus the process of illusion-creating that is necessary for representation, which purposefully implies the presence of a hegemonic force. In this respect we can see how the body, embodied with ideals and expectations, becomes involved in the production of what could be considered hegemonic

images. Yet, the next day, this body drained of fat and hydration transforms and becomes ten, fifteen, or even twenty-five pounds heavier. The day of the fight this fact is rarely acknowledged. What *is* important is the moment (the weigh-in), the illusion and representation of fairness and control. Here, we see how images and reality are transitory and how the body connects to the imaginary and operates in constructing perception and ideals.

Despite the fact that many professional, male MMA fighters displayed such intimate knowledge of their bodies, they often found it difficult to articulate their feelings about their bodies. Men are allowed to create or acknowledge relationships with their bodies when based explicitly on domination/violence or sexuality. The image of MMA appears formulated to celebrate these dimensions, with the goal of this combat sport being knock-out or submission and ring-girls in bikinis as a constant reminder of heterosexual desire, yet when speaking to participants they understand their bodies as more than this. Bodies become a means for experiencing a connection to the mind, the negotiation between control, determination and letting go. But the body can also be a source of vulnerability and recognition of how others may perceive them. Former NFL football player and MMA practitioner Matthew, reveals how relationships with the body are tied to ethnicity and perceptions of genetics that create naturalized conceptions of race and ability. Again, this speaks to the fact that ideals of the body, of men, are considered in relation to expectations and the imaginary, and thus the fact that hegemony operates squarely in the realm of representation.

Theoretically, there are aspects of embodiment frameworks that provide deeper understandings of processes of hegemonic masculinity. Coles (2009) suggests that Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of *habitus*, *capital* and *field* be added to complement hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; 1995) in order to avoid limitations of hegemonic masculinity. (The major limitations being that men are not always consciously acting to achieve dominant positions, and that as Hearn (2007) notes, hegemonic masculinity does little to account for the variety of dominant masculinities that exist under this umbrella term and how they are interconnected). Coles (2009:39) postulates that "*habitus* describes how men negotiate masculinity often in unconscious ways (e.g. through their posture or speech), and this level of performance, below consciousness allows for men to view their masculinity as innate and simultaneously allows individual men to consider their own form of masculinity as a true sense of masculinity without questioning what it means or seeking a reason to validate their actions." *Habitus* provides the explanation for why men act in ways they do, but consciously are not actively seeking to gain the upper hand. It appears that Coles (2009) is alluding to Bourdieu's (2001: 55) notion of *anamnesis*.

In his work on gender and social order, *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu discusses how androcentric views of the world are not 'natural,' but because these views are presented as such, they appear as an inherent structure that is self-legitimizing. This is achieved through *anamnesis*. In essence, *anamnesis* involves the forgetting of the process of learning knowledge and not the knowledge itself. Bourdieu borrows this concept from Freud, who borrowed the concept from Plato,

and while the original term was used on abstracted and psychological levels, Bourdieu translates this phenomenon to a social level. He notes that individuals are bound to each other in society and their existence in relation to each other allows for this *anamnesis* to occur. *Anamnesis* functions on an experiential level as “it is not the familiarity supplied by the acquisition of a simple knowledge [*savoir*], but the familiarity gained by that re-appropriation of a knowledge [*connaissance*] (ibid: 55 emphasis in original). The concept of *anamnesis* is useful in the sense that it provides explanations for actions that are not easily explained. For example when asking fighters why they feel men’s MMA is superior to women’s,⁸ many responded by saying that men were naturally stronger, more aggressive, or that it was in men’s DNA to fight and not women’s DNA—that’s just the way it is. Yet these are learned frameworks of understanding. The idea of men being stronger than women is naturalized and thought to be a matter of fact because this notion is so unquestioningly repeated. Their references to *DNA* or *genetics* speak of the rhetoric of current, popular bio-evolutionary theories that reinforce the infallibility of science as all knowing, and man as the driving force of humanity. This is the reiteration of “man-the-hunter hypothesis [which is] pre-eminently about male ways of life as the motors of the human past and future” (Haraway 1991: 86). These explanations of this being a *natural* state of gender display the re-appropriation of knowledge (*connaissance*) that Bourdieu states produces *anamnesis*. Yet this concept of anamnesis explains

⁸ Examined in detail in Chapter 4

more why actions or traditions continue and less about why and how they change.⁹

Bourdieu's embodied notions of *habitus* and *anamnesis* are helpful to understanding how subconscious thought and action play a role in everyday life and contribute to gender order. However, as Hoy (1999:16) recognizes, Bourdieu himself insists that this model of reality should not be confused with reality itself, and Connell's (1987; 1995) hegemonic masculinity is a conceptual model of reality. During the course of my field research I found it difficult to delineate the processes and categories of hegemonic masculinity—who was being hegemonic, who was being marginalized...the men (and women) that I encountered were far too complex. The layers and intersections of ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, education, family and even emotion, provided contexts that made hegemonic terms like *dominant*, *subordinant* and *marginalized* insufficient. While oftentimes it was clear that a specific body image or particular characteristic of the male MMA fighter was deemed an ideal, it was visible through the presentation of this ideal (e.g. advertisements) and how individuals perceived their own relations to this ideal. Therefore, it may be that hegemonic masculinity is a concept that can be better understood as a construct of the realm of representation rather than actuality.

⁹ To be fair he does aim to examine embodied structures. Furthermore, Bourdieu (2001) focuses much explanatory energy on gender as constructed through sex-roles, noting that because of the way that women are perceived, primarily through their 'physique' (outer appearance), women tend to highlight signs of social position (e.g. dress, decorations) and make it "a language of seduction" (Bourdieu 2001: 99).

PART II: CHAPTER 4. EXPLORING GENDER, SEXUALITY AND
RELATIONSHIPS: “YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME, BUT WHAT PART DO YOU
REALLY LOVE?”

Part I, (the previous two chapters), explored the ways in which male MMA fighters used and understood their bodies as part of their self-identity. Gender and masculinity are relational concepts, and as previously stated, masculinity is not conceived of as a biological essence. Masculinity can also be associated with women (see Halberstam 1998). It is not my aim to evaluate the masculinity of women, but to include women and women’s perspectives as a key part of this study. In recounting the experiences of women in this male-dominated sport industry, we can gain a fuller, more nuanced understanding of masculinity as constructed through MMA. By speaking with women I was able to more clearly see how men in the sport shape their identities in relation to the women involved in the sport (but also to *idealized representations* of women) and importantly, how these women though constrained, contributed to and shaped the MMA industry. In this chapter, I explore the various positions of women in MMA: female fighters, girlfriends, groupies and women in the media. I include my own experience as a member of the MMA media and how my own gender (and education on gender) complicated the situation. The last section in this chapter on sexuality and intimacy juxtaposes male intimacy with the prevailing notions of normative heterosexuality. In this masculine environment that plays up representations of women as objects of lust and men as their obvious sexual counterparts, I was curious as to how homosexuality was perceived. This led to

the realization that MMA actually provided a rare avenue for non-sexual male intimacy.

Setting the Gender Stage

On June 17, 2009, Kim Winslow became the first female to referee a televised MMA event for the Ultimate Fighting Championship. As MMA journalists noted, this momentous event passed with ‘little fanfare.’ It was actually quite remarkable that a female referee be placed in such a crucial position considering that the organization itself does not hold any female MMA matches. Kim Winslow has trained extensively in MMA for over twenty years, and has been a referee for smaller MMA events before working at this UFC event. She was appointed to the Nevada State Athletic Commission, and it was the commission that selected her to oversee the match. The controversy over Winslow as a referee is not necessarily due her qualifications, but her ability to effectively stop a fight. A referee must be prepared to physically get in between two fighters and there has been public criticism she may not be able to do that. In an interview with the website *MMAfighting*, Winslow highlights the fact that this assessment has nothing to do with her stature and everything to do with her gender.

The question I get a lot that I'd like to address is, as a female, whether I can stop a fight, and should I be restricted to lower weight classes. I've never been restricted to lower weight classes. The largest fighters I've been in the ring with were a 386-pounder and a 392-pounder up in Washington (Ernest Henderson vs. Gaylon Cooper in 2007) and I did get in the middle of them and I did stop them effectively without a problem. I do want people to know that. That is not a factor. We are not expected to fight the fighters. I am definitely able to defend myself if it came to that. And anyway I'm not a small female. I'm bigger than Steve Mazzagatti, Josh Rosenthal and Yves Lavigne [*other UFC referees*]. It's not a gender

issue, and if I weren't capable of stopping fights I wouldn't have come as far as I have.¹⁰

Although there are female judges, time-keepers, and ring-side doctors, these are all positions appointed by individual state athletic commissions. There are females that work behind the scenes for MMA organizations, female members of the media, female fans, and also wives and girlfriends of male fighters. These women are on the periphery of the MMA scene. The most visible women in the world of MMA are female fighters and ring girls. This is a carefully constructed presentation of gender that serves to reinforce a prevailing ideology of heterosexuality. There has definitely been progress in terms of women's MMA becoming more popular, but ability becomes entangled with presumed notions of femininity and image. Men too are confronted with issues of appearance and marketability for heteronormative consumption. However, an exploration into the daily practice of MMA and the relationships established through experience ironically suggest that this 'manly' activity actually provides an avenue for real male intimacy.

The Visible Women in MMA: Fighters and Ring Girls

Female Fighters

In a sport that is so heavily dominated by male athletes, promoters, and managers, and with marketing campaigns targeted specifically toward men, women have just begun to carve out their own place in the sport. What are some

¹⁰ (Kim Winslow, <http://www.mmafighting.com/2009/06/25/kim-winslow-on-being-the-first-female-ref-in-ufc-history/>)

of the strategies that women have employed in this arena? Must their femininity be downplayed to be accepted, or exaggerated to succeed? I spoke with male fans, male fighters and male representatives from organizations and sponsorship companies regarding their views on women's MMA. I also interviewed professional and amateur female fighters about experiences, image and created opportunities.

Me: Tell what it was like starting out for you?

Reina: Well, I've been boxing my entire life. I have a professional record of 19 [wins] 6 [losses] and 6 [draws]. I've been a flyweight champ...I transitioned to MMA about two years ago. Even though there are a lot of female boxers, boxing is also kinda considered a guy's sport. I dealt with that with boxing so I expected it with MMA too. Women's MMA now is like how women's boxing was like 15 or 20 years ago.

Me: What do you mean by that?

Reina: It's just getting started really. There are some shows that have women on the card but the major organization UFC has not put any women in any of their events. There are less fights, and less women fighting so a lot of places feel like the quality of women's MMA is not up to par yet.

Reina tells me it has been a struggle for women's MMA to be accepted by both organizations putting on the events and also by fans. Granted, there are many male MMA fans and male fighters who appreciate the skill and dedication of female fighters but overall it is difficult to be taken seriously. She speculated that it had something to do with the violent image of the sport and also the idea that women are supposed to be more delicate and gentle than men, and therefore had no place in such a visceral sport. These sentiments were reflected in the opinions of most of the men I interviewed who expressed dislike for women's MMA. Their

concern appeared as a mixture of chivalristic principle, patriarchal protectiveness and a presumption of the pre-determined biological deficiency of women. My interview with Leo, a professional fighter from Desert Combat is representative of most male participants' responses their opinion of women's MMA.

Me: What do you think of women's MMA?

Leo: It's cool but I'd rather watch men.

Me: Why is that?

Leo: A bunch of reasons...It's a masculine sport. It's violent. I don't want to see women hitting each other. It's not right. Besides they are not very exciting fights anyhow.

Me: What do you mean? The technique is not as good? They aren't as aggressive?

Leo: Yeah, both. Women's MMA is not up to the level men's is. Women weren't made for that kind of punishment. They weren't made to fight like that.

Me: Men are? Is it a matter of biology?

Leo: Yeah. Men were always the hunters and women cooked and stuff. Men had to fight and women didn't...

Me: What about fighters like Cyborg and Gina Carano?

Leo: Gina is ok but they just want her on T.V. because she's hot. Cyborg is a dude. No woman really looks like that.

This conversation highlights several issues. First, Leo talks about how he would not want to watch women hit each other. In his words, "it is simply wrong." When I questioned other male fans and fighters who agreed with this statement many of them insisted they were taught it was morally wrong to hit a female. I replied by

saying that this was a setting where it was not men hitting women but women competing in sport. These men continued to cite political correctness as their reason for not wanting to watch female MMA fights. For them, denouncing violence against women carries over to women fighting with other women. As I pressed further, a couple interviewees admitted that a female friend or family member had been a victim of domestic abuse and these fights summoned recollections of these past traumatic events. Other interviewees, suggested it was a matter of principle, that regardless of the situation women were to be protected and never subjected to injury.

The second issue Leo presents is that of biology. Women were not genetically engineered to withstand the kind of physical trauma men are able to. Leo declares that women's biology prevents them from being aggressive and strong, characteristics necessary to competing in the masculine sport of MMA. It is interesting that Leo referred to the old adage of "man as hunter" and "woman as preparer." Leo certainly was not the only male participant in this study to quote this kind of popular evolutionary theory. Numerous participants presented evolutionary biology as accounting for everything from men's physical fitness being superior to women's, to reasons for infidelity, to the explanation for why the sport is so popular—"it is in our genes."

Finally, Leo discusses image and women's MMA. Male fans would often divide female fighters into two groups: 1) attractive yet ineffective, or 2) manly steroid-users. One MMA fan described the situation as "you've either got the hot girls that guys want to watch because they are hot...or the bull dykes the look like

men. Some of these chicks look more masculine than most guys.” Although many participants in this study admitted that there were women who were talented and not seemingly masculine, the polarized conception of women in MMA as either “hot” or “manly” was a reoccurring theme. Halpert’s (1997: 7) study of female boxers also exposed this bifurcation, observing that “the lesbian label, in fact, seems to be the most popular stereotype for female prizefighters. In fact, women pugilists pose a dichotomy to those who stereotype them as either lesbian (non-heterosexual and not attractive to men) or Foxy boxer (heterosexual and attractive to men).”

Gina Carano would fall under the “hot” category. She is one of the most famous female fighters in MMA. She participated in the first women’s MMA event sanctioned in Las Vegas in 2006. She also became the first female to fight on a widely televised major MMA event (Strikeforce 2006). Carano soon became the ‘face of women’s MMA.’ Although her record of seven wins and only one loss speak to her talent in MMA, critics suggest her appearance was the defining factor in her popularity. Carano is conventionally feminine and attractive, with delicate features, long brown hair and a genial smile. Articles about her describe her as looking more like a model than a fighter. Carano has received numerous public accolades for her appearance: she was voted “Hottest Woman In America” by *Big Biz Magazine* in the Spring 2008 issue; on May 13, 2008, "Gina Carano" was the fastest-rising search on Google and third most searched person on Yahoo; and in May 2009, it was announced that Carano was ranked #16 in *Maxim's* Hot

100 list.¹¹ The other fighter mentioned in the interview with Leo is Cyborg. If Gina Carano is the feminine poster-girl of women's MMA, Cristiane "Cyborg" Santos is her antithesis.

Cristiane Santos is from Brazil and has competed in MMA events in America since 2008. She competes at the same weight as Gina Carano (145lbs). She is extremely muscular and has a more pronounced jaw line and brow ridge (characteristics associated with masculine faces). Since her appearance on the American MMA scene, there have been ongoing accusations that she is either really a man, or is using steroids (thus giving her a masculine physique and facial structure). Either allegation places her outside the realm of femininity. What makes Gina more popular than Cristiane? I asked a Terry, a journalist and owner of a popular MMA website. He has a degree in marketing and has also worked in the field of consumer research.

"People want to look at pretty faces. When they turn a TV show on, they don't just want to see normal. They want to see really attractive people. I think so for the most part, a brand will latch on to somebody that is very good in their sport, and then if they're good looking or have a great body, they're charismatic or whatever, then that's obviously going to take them farther, the companies will want to pay them more money or have them promote more products. I think that's just the way it is. It holds true for both sexes, but women definitely more than men."

Both Gina's and Cristiane's abilities in MMA are somehow discredited due to being female. Gina is a marketing tool for the industry of MMA, a beautiful face to entice male viewers. Cristiane's physique and supposed steroid use is evidence

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gina_Carano

that women must resort to artificial means to adopt masculine posturing and stature in order to compete in this sport.

The female fighters I spoke with were aware of the fact that the public's views of women's MMA were not solely based on one's abilities but more heavily upon one's appearance. Many stated that there was more concern with training and getting fights than focusing on creating a marketable image.

Me: Do you and your manager try to do anything to enhance your image as a female fighter?

Sara: Not really. I am who I am. I'm not going to change that. I know some girls [*female fighters*] that have posed in men's magazines, or done bikini photo shoots. I'm not comfortable doing that. I want to get my shot for the title because I am good at what I do.

Me: What do you think about the female fighters that pose and play up their sexuality?

Sara: If that gets them noticed, more fights, more money, good for them. It's just not the route I am going to go...but I've thought about it. I'm too shy to do stuff like that anyway...I'm just going to concentrate on my training and hope I get more fights.

The importance of appearance and self-promotion is not lost on Sara. MMA is a sport but it also provides entertainment. It is sport where celebrities are made, and many who enter the sport are seeking this celebrity lifestyle.¹² Women who participate in this sport are confronted with the tacit social message that they must somehow retain their femininity or risk falling outside the category of female. For these women, appearance is also entangled with sexuality and opportunity.

¹² As will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5

Jenny has been training at Desert Combat for a couple years. She has hopes to fight professionally but has yet to undertake an amateur fight. Her coaches have had difficulties in setting up matches for her due to lack of opponents and events. Jenny decides that she will find her own way to practice combat.

Every Tuesday night the downtown "gentleman's club" Vixens's hosts what they call "stripper cage-fights." It is their busiest night of the week. Valet parking is mandatory and I am told the price is thirty dollars. This exuberant price seems incongruous to the locale. This does not seem to be an "upscale establishment". The neighboring businesses are a Jack in the Box and a check-cashing store that I am later told has been subject to attempted robberies over the past year. I negotiate with the valet and end up paying ten dollars. At the door I am asked for my ID and my purse is searched for "tasers, mace and other weapons." I tell the lady at the front that I am with Desert Combat gym. The manager of the club was a former member of Desert Combat so he has made special arrangements. My entrance fee of seven dollars is waived and an extremely large security guard dressed all in black escorts me to our table. Two female members and one male member of Desert Combat are already seated. There are approximately twelve small round tables with three or four chairs around each that form a semi-circle below the three foot-high raised stage. An empty cage sits in the center of the tables below the stage. The cage is made of chain-link but appears to actually be a temporary fence (like those used at construction sites) fashioned into a six-sided enclosure. Customers are asked to pay forty dollars for a table. The customers who get "bottle-service" (meaning they buy a bottle or two of alcohol) are placed closest to the stage.

It is dark and crowded. Surprisingly, women seem to make up 40% of the audience. The audience is primarily African American, followed by Hispanic and then white. Considering the location of the establishment, this would appear representative of the neighborhood demographics. There are two poles on stage that the majority of strippers walk around rather than actually dance or climb on. There seems to be a lack of enthusiasm from most of the women on stage, characterized by a blank gaze and emotionless expression. Periodically, the audience members will throw money near them to encourage the strippers to dance near their seats. This establishment serves alcohol, therefore according to state law the women are only allowed to be topless and not entirely nude. The fights were to begin at 11:00pm, and it is nearly midnight.

Our waitress is a tiny girl, athletic looking, with braided hair. I ask if she will be fighting tonight. "Yep, sure am." She says she does not have formal experience fighting and that she is just a "scrapper". Shortly after that exchange, she is called into the cage. The lights are brightened and club owner comes on stage. He announces the fights are about to begin. Each girl is introduced, said to weigh approximately 110 lbs. The girls are dressed in similar outfits --tight tank tops and small "booty shorts" that reveal the lower part of their buttocks. They are given 16oz boxing gloves, protective headgear and mouthpieces. They are barefoot. Before the fights are allowed to commence there must be enough money thrown into the cage. The announcer yells, "You won't see any fights if you don't spend the dough. Come on these girls deserve it." People start gathering up their one-dollar bills and tossing them into the cage with the girls. The announcer stalls, again asking for more money. Finally a man sitting up in the balcony of the VIP section tosses a large handful of one-dollar bills into the cage, making it "rain" money. "Making it rain" is a common practice in strip clubs. The idea is to shower the stripper in money, thus increasing the prestige and social capital of the "rain-maker" by calling attention to himself and making it appear as if he has a lot of money to spare.

Finally it is time to begin. There are three men in the cage with the two women. There is a referee (not dressed in any official clothing) and two men who act as coaches and are there to fix equipment and give the girls water in between rounds. "Fight!" yells the announcer. The girls launch forward at each other, a flurry of gloved fists. The crowd cheers. They push each other into the corners, and one girl attempts a kick. Mostly, it is just wild punching. Although each round is only one minute there are several stops to fix equipment. The headgear is broken and must be taped up each time it falls off one girl. The other girl points to the hole in her boxing glove and is ignored. Round two: much of the same wild punching. One girl throws the other to the ground and while standing over her, kicks the fallen girl in the stomach. Clearly there are no fouls or established rules. Round three: more punching and the round ends with the girls being physically separated. One girl is clearly enraged at having been tossed to the ground. She is restrained by the referee as she tries to continue the fight. Resulting injuries appear quite minimal; one girl has a small cut on her eyebrow and the other girl is complaining of a sore finger. There is confusion over who has won the fight. The girls take off their gear, gather up the dollar bills on the ground and are ushered off stage.

"Well, should I do it?" asks one of the girls at my table. Jenny has been training in MMA for a little over a year now. She has not had any amateur or professional fights but has every intention of competing. "Jenny, you could totally take those girls. They have no technique at all," Melanie tells her. We all encourage her, and she signs up to fight. Jenny

goes back stage to find some shorts to wear and to sign a waiver of liability.

After about ten minutes, Jenny is called to the cage. One of the strippers has lent her some “booty shorts”. She enters the cage wearing her protective gear. She throws a couple quick combinations of punches and knees into the air. We cheer for her. Moderate amounts of cash are thrown into the cage. The announcer calls out for more money to be placed in the cage. He insists they there will not be a fight unless there is more money. At least ten minutes pass. Finally a very tall, African American man in his forties hands a waitress a large stack of money to throw into the cage. This appears to be a sufficient amount of money to finally start the fights. (I later learn the benefactor of this money was a former NBA player who several audience members took pictures with.)

“Fight!” Jenny attempts a more traditional sparring session approach while the other girl runs forward, her gloved arms flailing. Jenny is unable to actually use techniques learned in the gym because her opponent is swinging so erratically. She resorts to swinging back but clearly has more skills than her opponent. I am excited for Jenny. She is doing very well. I yell, “knees!” to remind her to knee her opponent when her opponent pulls her close to a clinch position. This elicits amusement from the group of men in front of me as they turn around and laugh. Jenny dominates all three two-minute rounds, although her opponent did make contact with a couple wild yet effective punches. In between rounds, the announcer again requests more money from the audience, threatens to terminate the fights if his demands are not met. The audience reluctantly obliges him. The last round ends with the women on the ground and when the girls stand up Jenny initiates a hug. (This is common practice seen at professional cage-fights, the opponents will hug to acknowledge the experience and leave the aggression in the cage.) The announcer comes on stage to declare the winner. He has the audience cheer for the girl they believe won the fight. The cheers are overwhelmingly in favor of Jenny. We cheer loudly. She raises her arms in the air. As she walks over to us she is stopped by a “fan”. A man in his twenties wearing a Tap-out t-shirt tells her that she is a good fighter and then gives her a small wad of cash. We congratulate her and she laughs and tells us she lost a contact lens in the process. She is clearly happy with her victory. She goes to change, while the male employees of the club gather up the money from the cage floor. The strippers resume their positions on stage and the lights dim once more.

With the fights over for the night, people begin clearing out. It is almost 1:30am. Jenny comes back and announces that she has made \$176 dollars for her six-minute fight. She is told that all the money is simply split down the middle for the two girls. Jenny comments, “\$176 for six minutes—not bad. I think I’ll start coming down here on a regular basis. Where else am I going to actually get fights?”

(Field notes, October 12, 2010)

There are several key issues relevant to gender and MMA that arise out of this excursion to *Vixen's*. Jenny alludes to the fact that it is very difficult for female MMA participants to get amateur fights. First of all, there are less women in this amateur pool which makes matching up with opponents difficult. Second of all, few amateur promotions actually include female MMA matches in their events. This leaves little opportunity for competition. Jenny spars with the both female and male participants at the gym. She has asked the coaches at Desert Combat to look for a fight for her, but they had thus far been unsuccessful. For Jenny, even though her opponent was not trained in MMA, these “stripper cage-fights” presented one of the only venues available for her to practice her skills in competition.

The staff at *Vixen's* told me that “stripper cage-fights” on Tuesdays is their most popular night of the week. Danny, the club’s manager, tells me that the club’s parking lot is always full, and then they decided that they would convert to a valet system to make more money. I am somewhat surprised that these fights would be so successful but Skeules (2000: 20) offers the perspective that “men perceive women fighting as erotic because battle is the antithesis of female sexuality, whereas male sexuality is fused to it...girl-fights are a male turn-on because of the abandon, and the passion they see displayed.” Having strippers fight enhances this eroticism because their bodies are already equated with sexual objectivity. Who thought of this idea to have strippers fight in a cage? And how come not all of the women are strippers? Danny tells me,

“MMA is really big now. Guys love watching that stuff. Guys also love watching hot girls take off their clothes. Why not combine this?... Yeah, you know we got the girls [strippers] to do it first. They were the ones who thought it would be fun to fight. Some of them are really feisty anyway. Then we just opened it up to any girl that wanted to do it. Actually, it’s better that way. We don’t want our girls fighting each other because then it can cause problems at work”

Danny’s comments provide insight into the juxtaposed pairing of MMA as a masculine sport and stripping, which although involves females is located primarily in a masculine domain. Here, is an explicit demonstration of how women’s bodies are sexualized in relation with combat for the obvious benefit of the male gaze. Women’s MMA struggles with organizations and social structures that demand a standard female beauty, in terms of recognizable femininity while taking part in the presumptively masculine activity of combat. Despite the fact that it is obvious that more attractive female fighters are more marketable and as a result more successful (in obtaining fight contracts), this dilemma is somewhat avoided in public discussions and presentations of the sport. Here, at *Vixen’s*, they are making this gender commentary unequivocally visible and using it as an unapologetic strategy for profit. This is meant to be entertainment, while also providing a sense of reality. The event is not staged. The fight results in (minor) injury. The outcome is not predetermined. It is in a sense a real fight, but it also must *only* be entertainment.

For legal purposes, *Vixen’s* fights are not real. In order to hold an actual cage-fight there are legal procedures that must be enforced. The promoter must get a license, there must be insurance, there must be medical tests. It is time

consuming and expensive to hold an actual MMA competition. Danny tells me that *Vixen's* has no intention of holding sanctioned MMA events. They are more interested in the profit and have no stake in furthering legitimate female MMA competitions. I argue that it appears as if they are holding real fights, they have the cage, protective gear, a referee and the girls get paid for fighting. Danny tells me, "Exactly. It has to look real... Well, I mean... they are real fights... I guess?" (At this point, I choose not to pursue a philosophical debate on the nature of reality.) Hiding fights under the guise of being purely entertainment could perhaps be a clever way of bypassing state laws, or simply a declaration that female bodies are most conventionally perceived as a source of entertainment. In any case, for Jenny, this provides a *real* avenue for practicing combat. Is she complicit in her own subordination and sexualization? Or is she subverting and manipulating the system by using "stripper cage-fights" as means to her own financial and experiential gain?

Ring Girls

The crowd begins to cheer loudly, there are whistles and I hear a male voice behind me remark, "Yeah baby, that's what I want..." An attractive girl with long brown hair, wearing a bikini and tennis shoes walks around the perimeter of the cage holding a sign with a large "2" on it. She is there to signify the end of the first round and the start of the second round. She smiles and blows a kiss at the audience. I hear the voice behind me say, "Did you see that? That kiss was totally meant for me!"

(Field notes, Feb 2007)

Strangely enough, the voice behind me was right. The duty of the ring girl in the sport of MMA is to provide a source for male desire. She is a convenient,

re-occurring reminder that this sport is staged for a heterosexual audience. Ring girls have been a long-standing tradition in boxing and this practice has carried over to MMA. The ring girl appears at the end of each round (after five minutes). There may be three rounds for a non-championship MMA fight and five rounds for a championship fight, therefore she will make either three or five appearances during a fifteen-minute or twenty-five minute match. The ring girl will walk around the outside of the cage, holding the sign signifying the round and smile and gesture toward the audience. They are almost always wearing revealing outfits, such as bikinis, that will often display the symbol of the organization putting on the event. These women are either employed by the organization, signing a temporally specified contract, or they will be hired for just a single event. (The latter is often the case for smaller and amateur events and the women hired are frequently exotic dancers from a nearby gentleman's club, or aspiring models.) Ethnicity is variable: Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, and Native American. However, the women hired for these positions are always young (I estimate between eighteen and twenty-five years old) attractive, in good shape and appear conventionally feminine. By this I refer to signifiers such as wearing make-up, usually long hair, and evident hips and breasts.

During the UFC 100 Fan Expo in Las Vegas I had the opportunity to observe a contest to “discover the next UFC octagon/ring girl.” The UFC Fan Expo was held over two days (the weekend of UFC 100) and included several activities such as autograph signing by professional fighters, MMA demonstrations and seminars. There were over one hundred MMA companies

exhibiting apparel, fight gear and equipment, and various beverages and supplements. The new UFC octagon/ring girl event was heavily promoted and gathered an audience of at least two hundred people. It was a joint promotion held by the UFC and by *Maxim* magazine, a popular men's magazine known primarily for its revealing photo layouts of attractive women and female celebrities. The women on stage were the finalists who had been chosen to attend this MMA Expo in Las Vegas, where the final judging would occur. The marketing director for *Maxim* told me that hundreds of candidates sent in photographs to the *Maxim* office and only five were selected. Two of the judges were from *Maxim* (marketing director and editor) and one was a representative from the UFC. The UFC representative was unavailable after the contest; however, I spoke with both judges from *Maxim* magazine. I was quite curious as to how these women were judged or what specific criteria they were looking for.

Eric: Well, we look at their personality, their looks, their physique, and their ability to represent UFC in a good way as Octagon girl.

Me: So what are some of the specific qualities that you look for?

Ivan: Body tone.

Me: So they have to have very little body fat?

Eric: Um, I don't know how it equates to a percentage, but its overall body tone and proportion. I mean we had lots of girls in different sizes, which is great. There are some really tall girls. There are some really short girls. I mean proportion is a really important part. You know hips and chest and waist. It's important, especially for television. You don't want anyone who's too skinny or too rounded. A lot of the finalists were really physically fit, so they didn't have the stereotypical Barbie body in my opinion.

Me: Are there differences in the way you [*Maxim*] judge the finalists and the way that the UFC does? Do you look for anything different?

Eric: Yeah, I think we take a little bit of a different tact than the judges from the UFC side. We are used to dealing with print and image models, and it's a little bit different than girls who are going to be appearing on television, especially in High Def. They have to come up to even higher standards, especially body tone, cause High Def is so unforgiving... We [*Maxim magazine*] cater to a lot of different audiences, so we love a variety of different body types, racial types. It always just depends. I think we might be interested in a girl who may not have the perfect ten body, but has that perfect nine or ten face because being a print side, we can do some things on the retouch. UFC doesn't really have that luxury because they are going to be on live television, so that might be the biggest difference.

According to the *Maxim* judges, there were no specific requirements such as weight, height, chest size or even age (although all participants have to be over the age of eight-teen). Knowledge of MMA was not required, nor any kind of training in the sport. The new octagon/ring girl simply had to be considered attractive and fit and appear friendly and approachable. As Eric suggested, with the invention of High Definition television the standards of female beauty and perfection are elevated further than for print images in a magazine. High Definition increases the resolution of images by increasing the number of pixels in a screen thus resulting in minute detail being much more visible to the human eye. For women whose physical appearance is scrutinized, every dimple, wrinkle, or blemish can be seen by television viewers, therefore shattering the fantasy of perfection. In print magazines, photos can be re-touched; these supposed imperfections are airbrushed and made non-existent. Eric and Ivan tell me this practice is extremely common, and almost every magazine from *Men's Fitness* to *Good Housekeeping* will use computer technology to re-touch images.

The new octagon/ring girl selected is a petite blonde. She appears physically fit with subtle muscle contouring but also retains a conventionally feminine shape. Natasha tells the audience that as an aspiring model she is grateful for this opportunity. The audience cheers and whistles. Somewhere behind me I hear, “she’s hot, but too bad her tits aren’t bigger...”

The most visible women who inhabit the world of MMA are primarily there to enhance masculinity and the masculine sexuality of male fighters by exhibiting their own sexual appeal. Even when there are female MMA matches, the ring girls are still brought out between rounds to reinforce conventional female beauty and roles. The ring girls are there to provide an illusion of fantasy for the audience. It is both the fantasy of sexual promise and fantasy of the perfection of female beauty.

Relationships

Girlfriends and Wives

“I’ve been in this business a long time. I’ve interviewed thousands of fighters over the years...If a fighter is off [*during a competition*], it’s usually mental—he’s got other things on his mind...It’s almost always issues in his relationship.”

(*MMA journalist Lauren Harrison, field notes April 2009*)

At the time of the interviews, I would estimate a little less than half of the fighters (professional and amateur) had a significant other such as a steady girlfriend or wife. I was particularly interested how these relationships functioned as the fighters spent considerable amount of their time training. Would this make having a romantic relationship difficult? What other factors do fighters, and

women in relationships with fighters, have to confront as a result of their participation in the sport of MMA? Overall, I found that participants were quite open about discussing their relationships with me. I spoke to fighters about their relationships, but also to their partners. Many stated they were in happy, long-term relationships. When asked to identify their most serious issues, both fighters and their partners responded with the following: the time large amount of time spent training (and therefore less time with their partners); their partner not agreeing with the violent appearance and injury resulting from the sport; and also issues of jealousy and trust, particularly for professional fighters who had attained a higher level of fame and recognition.

I asked participants how women reacted to them being mixed martial artists/cage-fighters. Jared's response represents the three most common reactions, "Some women think it's scary; some of them think it's hot; some of them just don't understand..." The stereotype of MMA being barbaric follows participants into their personal lives. It is a misconception that they must confront when explaining their occupation to others, particularly those with little knowledge of the sport.

Victor: That is probably one of the hardest things for me to tell people, tell girls--this is what I do for a living and it is difficult...when they hear fighter, they are thinking Mike Tyson. They are thinking this motherfucker has got anger issues, he is going to beat me when he gets mad and we argue. I don't have anger issues, I have never, never once laid a hand on a girl...I try to avoid telling people I'm a pro fighter at all costs, but if it is a girl I am interested in, then I am not going to lie to her. If it is just some chick I met at a club and I don't really care, I will tell her whatever, like I'm a golf pro.

Victor takes the approach to avoid revealing his true occupation whenever possible. Even if a fighter explains his unique employment to his partner there can still be issues of conflict surrounding the his chosen profession. Ruben dated his girlfriend for a little over a year. He tells me that it was her distain for the sport that finally drove them apart.

Me: So what happened?

Ruben: She couldn't handle blood or even bruises. I'll come home with a bruise, which I get all the time. But she'll just freak out about it. I just say this is what I'm doing and I don't expect you to understand it, or you if you wanna understand more about it, I can help you. But if you think it's barbaric, then it's barbaric. But it's what I do, so you just gotta respect it.

Me: Did she try to respect it?

Ruben: No, she just thinks it's barbaric. She thinks it's just two guys hitting each other; it's not a classy thing you know. She never really tried. She would avoid everything that had to do with MMA, even my friends. She would be a bitch to my friends from the gym on purpose. That was the last straw. She didn't have to be like that.

Me: Didn't she know you were a fighter from the start?

Ruben: Yeah, but maybe she didn't realize it was such a big part of my life.

It would appear an initial hurdle is getting one's partner to understand that despite MMA's beginnings as a No-Holds-Barred spectacle of violence that it has evolved into a regulated sport. The next obstacle presented would be finding a partner considerate enough to understand the enormous amount of time spent preparing for competition. Professional MMA training requires three-five hours a day, if not more. Many professional fighters also maintain full or part time employment elsewhere, leaving few hours to spend with partners and families.

Often fighters travel to other locations for training camps, which can last anywhere from six to twelve weeks. For the fighter and his partner this can be a lonely time.

Tito was traveling all the time, he was gone a lot. I didn't see him much and even when he did come back, he would be training. If I had issues, I couldn't talk about them with him because he was in training mode. Once he was done fighting, it was all about him having fun and partying. All of a sudden it was never about me.

(Tito Ortiz's first wife Kristin Ortiz. From Ortiz and Shapiro 2008: 110)

Even if the training camp is in the fighter's own town, some choose to isolate themselves from their partners and families. Kevin, a professional fighter of five years tells me this is crucial to his preparation for competition.

Kevin: I go into isolation mode. It's like I'm going to battle. I need to prepare myself mentally. I can't risk the distractions of relationships or family drama. I need to focus completely on what I am going to do.

Me: Does this mean you go away somewhere for training?

Kevin: Well, not necessarily. Sometimes I go up to Flag [*Flagstaff*] but usually I stay around here. When I say isolation I mean I go to the gym and I go home. That's it.

Me: You avoid everyone for a couple months? Really?

Kevin: The best I can. I tell everyone first. They understand. If there's an emergency they contact me but I need to be alone.

Me: What do you do at home, by yourself?

Kevin: I watch fight footage...I'll write poetry, read...

Me: What do you read?

Kevin: Mostly scripture, the Bible. It helps me to stay focused and calm. It gives me inspiration.

This self-imposed exile is quite remarkable. Kevin chooses to avoid human contact and the outside world. He tries not to watch television or surf the Internet. He is very serious about this preparation and likens himself to a warrior going to battle. How would others perceive Kevin's behavior? I spoke with Kevin's girlfriend Reina (separate from my interview with Kevin). She is also a professional MMA fighter. They met while training at Desert Combat.

Me: Can you tell me about what it's like dating a fighter?

Reina: I never wanted to date a fighter. Actually, I've only had one serious relationship. He was my boyfriend first and then became my trainer. That was kind of something, but Kevin's the first person who's a fighter that I've ever dated. I was always like...it's just such a selfish life.

Me: Being a fighter?

Reina: Yeah. I'm at the gym every night for hours upon hours. I know how much time I need to spend there. I've been so dead set against dating someone who fights but honestly it's like who else is gonna understand my lifestyle more than someone who does exactly what I do? How else would someone understand him? It would be really stressful and I couldn't imagine it if I weren't a fighter too. Yeah, so God bless all those girlfriends and wives. At least if you're a wife hopefully you've been through it and you kind of can understand.

Me: I see. With you and Kevin, you can understand each other—all the time spent training, and Kevin's isolation before fights. But you guys get to see each other at the gym. Right?

Reina: Kev tells me when he is going to do this. He makes it clear that it is not personal or has anything to do with our relationship. It's tough, but I understand. At the gym we keep it very professional. We acknowledge each other but we don't talk. We are there to train.

Me: Are there any conflicts with dating someone from the same gym?

Reina: I want people to think of me as a fighter, not as like Kevin's girlfriend. It ended up being fine. I think everyone respects both of us a lot. No one ever bothers us about it.

Reina insists she wants to be recognized through her own merits as a fighter and not simply known as the girlfriend of a fighter. Reina is afraid that her gender may influence others to see her first as a girlfriend, as an accessory to a fighter, but male fighters too struggle with how others view them due to their profession. Jon tells me about the difficulty in being seen for who he is. In his case, Jon reveals that doesn't merely want to be seen as a fighter but as an individual with thoughts and feelings.

Me: So you had a girlfriend from the time you started competing professionally? Did she ever have a problem with you fighting?

Jon: Actually, she liked it a lot. I'm pretty sure, that's why she was attracted to me, because, she knew I fought. It was probably a turn on to her. Maybe she just liked me because I was a fighter. I don't know. Who knows?

Me: Are you worried about that happening, with other girls?

Jon: Yeah, definitely. I was on the tv show [*The Ultimate Fighter*]. When it was done, people started to recognize me. Girls started to recognize me. The girl I was with liked the attention, the spotlight. She would tell everyone I was a fighter on tv.

Me: So you weren't sure if she really liked you or if...

Jon: I had feelings for her, and eventually it's like, do you really like me? I really like you because I know who you are, but you just like me because I am this fighter kid... You tell me you love me but what part do you really love? Do you even really know me?

I was surprised by Jon's openness but I also felt privileged to witness this vulnerability. While many professional fighters admitted that they liked the fact that their career often brought female admirers, Jon's honesty highlights what numerous participants said they truly wanted out of a relationship: a partner who loves them for who they are and understands the demands of their chosen career. Relationships begin and end because of MMA. The circumstances surrounding training and competition make maintaining relationships difficult. The separation from one another, lack of understanding and the fame all provide a recipe for infidelity.

Travelling to different cities, attending promotional events and parties, and adoring female fans may make it difficult for many professional athletes to remain faithful to their partners. Professional athletes (along with other employment that includes travel, media exposure, and fame) do not have the best reputations when it comes to fidelity. While infidelity was not a topic I specifically asked about it sometimes came in interviews when we spoke of women and relationships.

Me: How did that relationship end?

Rick: Well, (*long pause*) I cheated on her. We weren't getting along, fighting all the time...I was away a lot. I was meeting lots of girls. I was doing promotions and appearances at places like the Playboy Mansion and the hottest clubs in Vegas. It wasn't something I intentionally set out to do.

Me: It just happened? Really?

Rick: Ok. It was my fault. I just had so many opportunities. The girls would come up to me and give me their numbers. Or they would Facebook me or hit up my Myspace saying that they wanted to hookup. It was just so

easy. Factor in alcohol and that I was kinda lonely...I mean...I regret hurting her though.

Me: How did she find out?

Rick: Um, yeah. That was not good. This chick posted a pic of us, um, in bed on Myspace and my girl saw it.

Me: Wow...I don't know what to say.

Rick: Neither did I...

Groupies

Rick suggested that part of his lack of fidelity can attributed to the many opportunities he had to meet women who sought out his company. The women from these encounters are known as “groupies.” According to participants, almost every professional sport has its own groupies. These women follow fighter’s careers; they will show up at fights, after fight parties, promotional events, just about any place professional fighters are scheduled to be. I was somewhat intrigued by this practice. What were these women gaining from these encounters? What were the athletes gaining from these encounters? Sexual gratification is the obvious answer, but is this somehow a means of gaining social/cultural capital? (Bourdieu 1986). I found this aspect of interviewing male fighters quite difficult. When I broached the subject of ‘groupies’ and sex, most fighters displayed signs of uneasiness. Some would shift uncomfortably in their chairs, look away or even laugh nervously. I can only speculate that my gender had very much to do with these responses. Perhaps had I been a male researcher they would have seen me as an ally to share stories of seduction with, but as a female researcher they admittedly were worried about what I would think.

Me: Do you think that MMA has groupies?

Carlos: Yeah, for sure. Every pro sport does.

Me: Have you had any personal experiences with this?

Carlos: What? Well...um...kinda...I guess, a little?

Me: It's ok, this is all confidential, just for research purposes.

Carlos: Aww, I can't really talk about it. I see you in the gym all the time. You are going to think I'm a jerk. [*laughs*]

Me: I won't judge you. I understand that things happen.

Carlos: Yeah, but if a guy just hooks up with a girl, then never calls her again, other girls think he's an ass.

Carlos did eventually tell me about some of his experiences after I repeatedly assured him I would not think any less of him. His encounters were for the most part quite tame and followed the general premise offered by Rick: a girl would contact him on Myspace or Facebook, let him know that she was interested in meeting him when he was in town and leaves her phone number. The Internet was cited as the most common source for connecting with groupies. Sometimes, girls would come up to professional fighters at parties after fights and introduce themselves. There would usually be some drinking involved and then they would retire to a hotel room, her place or other location to have sexual relations. One fighter (who explicitly wanted to remain anonymous) told me that he often meets up with the same girls depending on the city. For example, he told me there are a couple girls he always "hooks up" (meaning has sex with) in Vegas, one girl in Los Angeles, and one in New Jersey. He just texts them or contacts them through

the Internet to let them know when he is in town. I ask him to comment on the benefits and drawbacks of this arrangement.

Anonymous: Benefits? Obviously the sex. No strings attached. They know I am just in town for a day or two. It's just about having fun...Hmm, drawbacks...I guess sometimes I meet new girl and I have to decide who to go home with. Shit, I sound like such an asshole...

Me: Do these women want a relationship from you? What do they get out of it?

Anonymous: Like I said, it's about having fun...I guess they get to say they had sex with a celebrity? It's an ego thing for both of us...Sometimes girls can get a little clingy. If she wants a relationship, relationship, like for me to be her boyfriend, I tell her I can't because of the distance. That always works.

Me: I see, you let them down easy...Have you ever felt any of these girls want money from you?

Anonymous: Yeah. No doubt. Especially the ones I meet at after parties. Not like a prostitute getting paid for sex, but like sometimes they talk to me about money. They hint around about stuff they want. They think I make a lot...[laughs]...I mean I make a lot but I'm no millionaire.

Me: Let's see if I understand...These girls, groupies want excitement, fame and money?

Anonymous: Yeah, pretty much.

This criteria seemed to make sense, but I wondered how could one truly recognize a groupie? Knowledge of the sport of MMA was not necessary. Several professional fighters stated that in fact the majority of the groupies they met did not possess much knowledge about the workings of the sport. Is there a way to visually identify groupies by their appearance? Participants (both female and male fighters, and fans) suggested that they were usually the women at the fights and after-parties in short, tight dresses, with breast implants and perhaps tattoos. How

do you tell these women apart from ‘ordinary fans’ or party attendees? I was told that how they acted and represented themselves revealed their intentions and true ‘groupie-ness,’ yet several female fans, as well as female members of media expressed concern (and even anger) over being mis-labelled as a ‘groupie.’

Women in the Media

It is interesting that some of the most talented pioneers of MMA media are women. In an industry so heavily constructed upon masculine ideals and men, these women were crucial to advancing MMA as a legitimate sport. Here I will focus on the contributions of three women: Lauren Harrison (journalist/author), Eva Ching (photographer) and Leah Terry (photographer/website owner). All three of these women confront several of the same issues in their line of work. There is the constant flirting from their subjects and requests for dates, the accusation of being an ‘MMA groupie’ and most importantly not being taken as a serious and productive member of the MMA media community.

Me: What was it like starting out in this business?

Lauren: Well, it was rough in some aspects...Fighters look you up and down, look at your chest before answering you. They question your credentials and think you are a groupie...Some wives of fighters even thought I was groupie.

Me: How did you deal with these things?

Lauren: I just made it clear that ‘I am Lauren Harrison, and I am a reporter.’ After you are out there awhile people start to know you and know that you are serious... Actually, it’s been the last two years I have experienced more discrimination than ever, not in the beginning. In the beginning it was like we were all fighting together to get the sport

established. After this hurdle, where it turned from cagefighting to MMA and became more mainstream, more and more people became MMA journalists. It has become more competitive and people just want to be famous now. Some men in MMA media often express that women should not be writing about this or involved in this industry. That's ridiculous—I've been covering this sport before most of them even heard of it.

For those who follow MMA it is obvious why Lauren feels more discriminated against in the past few years. In April of 2009, Harrison wrote an article on an MMA news website discussing how the UFC would now be restricting backstage access of agents and managers at their discretion. This story apparently outraged the president of that organization, Dana White, who took to the Internet to respond. In a video-blog taped and released by the president of the organization himself, he attacks not only the validity of the article but also Harrison using misogynistic and homophobic language.

“Fucking retarded story ... you fucking moron ... fucking dumb ... you don't know what the fuck you're talking about ... shut the fuck up ... whoever gave you that quote is a pussy and a fucking faggot and a fucking liar ... maybe you're the liar ... everything that comes out of your mouth is fucking stupid ... You fucking dumb bitch. Fuck you, [Lauren Harrison].”¹³

This tirade was met with some outrage but also a surprising amount of indifference when it came down to any kind of penalty or real recourse. A month later in an interview with ESPN the president of the organization offered a public apology for using homophobic slurs but not to Lauren Harrison. He stated

¹³ (<http://deadspin.com/5195532/ufcs-president-really-knows-how-to-handle-the-media>)

emphatically that he would not apologize for his opinion of her. He felt people respected him for his honesty, “You know what?...The feedback I got was not negative. It was overwhelmingly positive from our fans. It was, 'Yeah, you go...you're the man.'” The president of this organization made it a point to apologize for homophobic language but not for his misogynistic language. There was some public scrutiny over whether the president had put MMA back to the days of violent spectacle. Several sports reporters suggested that if MMA was truly a legitimate sport with real regulations like the NBA, he would have been pressured to resign. This debacle indicates that MMA holds a privileged and liminal position. MMA attempts to quantify, regulate and legitimate itself as a real sport to obtain mainstream sports’ financial success. Yet, its beginnings as a spectacle for entertainment value both undermine and also protect it from operating at the same ‘moral’ levels as other mainstream sports, particularly in terms of gender equality. (However, not every organization expresses the views espoused by this individual. Some organizations have taken active steps to promote female MMA as discussed in the previous section of female fighters.)

I spoke to Eva about her experiences as a member of the MMA media. She tells me that unlike Lauren, she has never encountered sexism anywhere near the extreme level Lauren has. This may be due to the fact that Eva is a photographer. While images are also a powerful mode of expression she does not have to answer for controversial written or verbal statements. Eva is a free-lance photographer that has been contracted by several MMA websites and MMA organizations. She attends fights and takes action sequence images as well as

doing photo-shoots of individual fighters. Eva has had numerous fighters ask her on dates but many fighters seem to respect her work and tell her “it’s cool” that a girl is doing what she does. I ask her if she has any strategies to have the fighters take her more seriously. Eva tells me that she doesn’t do anything specific, she is just herself. She dresses the way she always would (jeans and a t-shirt) and she doesn’t try to downplay her femininity nor enhance it. I ask her about her opinion of well-known MMA photographer Leah Terry.

Eva: Leah is a great photographer. Some people have a problem with her, the way she uses her sexuality, but everyone uses their own assets. There is no resentment here. In fact, Leah is responsible for the fighters becoming celebrities. Her work set them up to be more famous, and with that they are able to get paid more. She has done a lot for the industry.

According to her website, Leah is an “MMA photographer, Nightlife Connoisseur, Entrepreneur, Internet Marketing Guru, & all around fun chick.” Her photographic work displays talent but her greater ability is to create fame for fighters. This is achieved through emphasizing the life-style of MMA. She was one of the first to photograph fighters at after-parties and other non-fight contexts to promote an image of a fun, extravagant, almost hedonistic, lifestyle that MMA would appear to promise.

Leah is a somewhat controversial figure in MMA. She has been a model for several years and has thus learned that to create fame and celebrity, sex indeed does sell. Unlike Eva, Leah heavily plays up her feminine sexuality. On her website, she posts modeling photos of herself in revealing clothing (such as bikinis) and has been very public about her plastic surgery breast enhancement.

Leah overtly uses her sexuality as an ‘in’ to the industry, a way to set herself apart and bring an element of celebrity to her person. Opinions of Leah vary. Some, like Eva, believe she is a good photographer that has done much for MMA and for the fighters; others suggest that she is a decent photographer but is only well-known because she uses her sexual appeal. Some male MMA journalists suggested she was obviously promiscuous due to her appearance.

Me: What makes Leah a “whore”? Do you know her personally?

Michael: No...but I heard she slept with a bunch of UFC guys.

Me: How do you know that is true?

Andy: Just look at her. She’s always with fighters and porn stars. She wears slutty clothes and puts her cell phone in between her tits so people will look at them.

Michael: Yeah, and puts all those pics on her site...in tiny bikinis...and she’s hanging all over the fighters at parties...

Unfortunately sexuality is a slippery-slope, particularly for women. Although I did not get a chance to interview Leah to get her response to these accusations, I am quite certain she is aware of these rumors and misconceptions. Other members of the media (both male and female who know Leah) insist that although she definitely uses her sexuality, “she is not some kind of super-groupie, sex fiend.” The rumors of her promiscuity result from the false implication that any overt display of sexuality must equal sexual activity. For Leah, I assume that this simply a facet of her strategy she has to deal with. Perhaps it makes her more intriguing and generates more publicity for her business? The majority of people I spoke with had a great respect for Leah and her work but I did encounter those

who saw Leah's sexualized approach to enhance her career as degrading to women. Shelley is an amateur female fighter and MMA website blogger.

Shelley: Ok. I know that Leah does all that to get more business but it is really bad at the same time. It is bad for female fighters and other women in MMA who want to be taken seriously...She may flirt and put sex out there, but then the guys will just look at other women and think that they can treat us the same way. I don't want to have dress up and pretend I want to sleep with a guy just so I can get an interview. It's bad enough sometimes...

Shelley's critique echoes the arguments put forth by well-known orthodox feminists (such as Dworkin and MacKinnon) that the use of the body in activities such as prostitution or stripping not only make women complicit in their own subordination but they are victims of oppressive patriarchy. Leah's attitude, on the other hand, is aligned with sex-positive feminists (such as Paglia and Rubin) that believe that women who use their bodies in such a way are in fact empowering themselves and actively making decisions from which they are benefitting. Yet being familiar with this theoretical literature did not give me any substantial, practical insight when I found myself in complicated situations where *I* became responsible for representations of women in the world of MMA.

Becoming Media

"Hey, you study MMA right? I heard that you are doing a PhD on MMA."

"Um, well yes..."

"I'm putting together a new magazine on MMA that also focuses on the local talent here in Arizona. I'm looking for writers and photographers. Are you interested?"

Jerry and I meet for coffee the next day and discuss his business plans.

Jerry is a member of Desert Combat. He is a forty-year old entrepreneur and fitness fanatic. Although not a fighter himself, he has trained in MMA at Desert Combat for a couple years and has become a newly devoted follower of MMA. Like me, he has watched several fighters from Desert Combat become successful professional fighters. He tells me he sees a great business opportunity to publish a local MMA magazine. It is important that this magazine have a different angle. There are numerous other MMA magazines out there, and an infinite number of MMA websites that bring up to the minute news on MMA events. It would not make sense to compete in that respect. Our 'in' would be in depth interviews and profiles on fighters from around the Southwest. The magazine will visit gyms around Arizona and highlight up-and-coming local fighters and local MMA equipment/clothing companies. Jerry proposes that the profit will come from advertisements and therefore decides that the magazine will be distributed for free. By the end of our meeting I have agreed to sign on to this fortuitous research opportunity, and Jerry has promoted me to Assistant Publisher of *Fightzone Magazine*.

Once I was officially a member of media, I was afforded several privileges that I was not as a researcher. I sent in applications to major MMA organizations to obtain press credentials to view events across the United States. I attended approximately ten national MMA events as a member of the media. Press credentials gave me backstage admission to events where I was able to move freely around the venue. Most organizations would set up a Media Room for the

Press with access to Internet and tables to set up equipment, and there would often be refreshments provided. The Press were given good seats to view the fight, and photographers were often given ring-side seats to capture up-close images of the action. We were seated in the front row for weigh-ins and for after-fight press conferences, where we could take photos and ask questions. I met numerous other members of the media who had come to the United State for these events from as far away as Japan and Brazil. I had the opportunity to speak with professional fighters (from all over the world), managers, coaches and organization representatives. I found that as a member of the Press my identity was much more understandable. Most people I encountered were familiar with reporters and photographers. Explaining that I was an academic researcher studying gender and masculinity in contemporary American culture was often met with skeptical and quizzical responses. Once I began working with *Fightzone Magazine* I made the decision to tell people that I was a reporter, particularly when I was attending these events as a member of the Press. When conducting interviews for *Fightzone* I would tell individuals that I was also doing a PhD in Anthropology and that I study issues of gender and MMA. I would then request their consent to include information we discussed in interviews for my dissertation. Over the two years I was employed with the magazine, I was fortunate and did not have one person who objected to my use of this material in my dissertation. While reflections on my work with *Fightzone* could be incorporated into any section of this dissertation, I feel it is most poignant here, in this chapter that includes women in MMA. This is not only because I was a female member of the MMA media, but

as the Assistant Publisher of *Fightzone*, I had to make difficult decisions that pertained to the image of women in MMA.

There were four of us who worked full time on the magazine. Jerry was the Publisher who also acted as a writer and photographer. I was the Assistant Publisher, writer and photographer. Roman was the graphic designer who worked on the layout and publishing of the magazine. Fred was the copy-editor (and ultimately became my nemesis regarding gender politics). Jerry and I would meet on a weekly basis to discuss ideas for the magazine, which fighters to interview, gyms to spotlight, and also various strategies for advertising. With such a small staff we decided that we would limit our quarterly issue to about twenty-five pages. Jerry and I worked well together as we both had some background knowledge of MMA, and shared the vision that *Fightzone* could help to promote local fighters, gyms and other MMA companies. Roman was also a fan of MMA and very flexible when it came to me suggesting layout changes. I was genuinely surprised to find that working with Fred would be such a challenge. Fred had a Master's in writing. He was well-spoken, and was a self-proclaimed progressive liberal. I assumed with Fred's level of education and his political stance that he would most likely concur with my ideas about how women in the magazine should be represented. He did not.

Our primary target audience was fans of MMA. This demographic was males 18-40 years old. Since ring/octagon girls were clearly a visually appealing part of MMA, we decided to include a feature in the magazine called "*Fightzone's Knockout*." The '*knockout*' was an attractive female model who would answer

sexually suggestive questions about MMA (e.g. Do you like it standing up or on the ground?). Jerry suggested *Maxim* magazine as the format that we would imitate when it came to these layouts. *Maxim* is a magazine that has cornered the market for 18-40 males. It offers photographs of highly attractive women wearing bikinis or lingerie. I struggled with this idea: Would this be demeaning to women? How could I as an academic and feminist contribute to this? What would my colleagues think? Or worse, what would my dissertation committee think? My role was to think like an Assistant Publisher. I had to consider what would make the magazine more successful. Looking back on my experience with the magazine, *Fightzone's "Knockout Girl"* definitely contributed to our short-lived success. Jerry put me in charge of overseeing the photo-shoots. According to him, I was female so I would make the models feel more comfortable, and I would know what looked 'pretty.' We hired a photographer who supplied us with a pool of models. The models would work for free and be provided photos to use for their portfolios. Jerry and I would both agree on the model to be used for the feature.¹⁴ Selecting models would prove more difficult than I imagined. I was not prepared for the level of 'honesty' used to critique the women in the modeling industry. I talked to several of the girls who told me they were used to employers commenting that their 'teeth were too crooked' or 'their breasts were too small.' I simply told the girls we did not select that they didn't have the look we were going for. Roman explained it to me as follows: "Modeling is not the nicest industry, but these women choose to make a living off the way they look so they

¹⁴ All questions of finance were handled by Jerry. It was his business and his money.

are used it to. It is nothing personal, but it takes time (which costs money) to airbrush out cellulite and acne. We have to be picky.” Roman had a point—his job as a graphic designer for a magazine includes photo-editing, and this process can be quite time-consuming. Still, I felt guilty telling one girl to keep her hat and sunglasses on as a means to hide her fresh outbreak of blemishes.

Although I supported the idea of the ‘*Knockout Girl*’ I wanted to make sure that our readers would be able to differentiate between this source of ‘eye-candy’ and female fighters. I wanted to make sure that all the time and dedication that female fighters put into the sport was taken seriously. I wanted to make sure that they were taken seriously. (Perhaps it was my slightly guilty conscience, my unexpressed questioning of the exploitation of the *Knockout Girls* that made me entirely committed to this principle). Jerry and I both agreed that women’s MMA was just taking root and we should do a story about a prominent female fighter. Jerry contacted the manager of MMA’s most popular female fighter Gina Carano and secured an interview. As Gina was living and training in Las Vegas, I conducted the interview over phone and email. We discussed how she got her start in MMA, her image as the ‘face of women’s MMA’ and what she thought about the future of MMA. Her responses revealed her to be intelligent, thoughtful and wholly dedicated to her chosen career. Although she was the ‘face of women’s MMA’ she was unwavering in position not just to advance her own career but that of all female fighters. We used some stock photos that her manager sent us, and Roman put together the layout for print. He decided to use a pink background because she was a female fighter. Immediately, I questioned his color

choice. I thought perhaps the feminizing color would detract from the seriousness of her skill as a fighter. Roman pointed out that Gina Carano herself often chose to wear pink, as did many other female fighters. This was certainly true. Many female fighters wore pink to distinguish themselves, to appropriate their femininity as a source of empowerment. “Ok,” I conceded, “but not *too* pink.” Roman’s final layout did incorporate pink, but he used it sparingly and in edgy patterns such as tribal tattoo style images. My next task was to review the copy-edits done by Fred.

What’s a pretty thing like you doing in a sport like this...

I could not believe what I was reading. This was not my opening sentence. I read through to the end and discovered numerous instances where Fred had inserted provocative phrases and sexual innuendo. Horrified, I contacted Jerry and showed him the newly ‘edited’ article. I told him that our goal was to portray women’s MMA as a serious endeavor and that the new edits reduced one of the most talented female fighters down to a generic male fantasy. Jerry agreed. I approached Fred and kindly suggested to him that perhaps the use of the ‘*Knockout Girl*’ had confused his interpretation of what I intended the profile on Carano to be about. He stared at me blankly. I reiterated that she was a professional fighter and some of the edits he made were not appropriate. He responded by telling me that ‘this is what guys like.’ Although Fred admittedly had very little knowledge of MMA, he was certain he *knew* the demographic. He elaborated by insinuating that the *Fightzone* demographic was most likely

uneducated, and they would all perceive women as sex-objects anyhow and therefore it did not matter that the subject of the profile was a professional fighter. I attempted to reason with Fred, stating that he was making unfair generalizations, and that if he believed that were true wouldn't he want to take the stance of establishing women's MMA as a legitimate sport. Fred would have none of it. He insisted that his edits were just what the magazine needed. I tried another approach. I told him that the language used in his edits made it appear as if the author were using tired pick-up lines on Carano and that it would appear strange because I (another female) was the author. Fred thought perhaps it would make the article more interesting. Finally, I told him as the author and assistant publisher I felt we could not take his edits to print. His response was that writers get too sensitive over their own material, they want too much control, and it was his *job* to edit the drafts we produced. There appeared no reasoning with Fred. As I removed myself from this exchange I wondered if he would have been so stubborn and condescending if I were male. In the end, my tenacity won out and Jerry agreed that I should have the final editorial say.

No amount of feminist theory prepared me for the decisions and negotiations I had to make regarding representations of women in the MMA industry. My position as a female, a feminist, a researcher and part-time martial artist reflected my steadfast decision to promote women's MMA as legitimate and on par with men's MMA. My role as an assistant publisher, concerned with developing a successful product, guided my choice to print images of scantily clad young women as *Fightzone's Knockout Girls*. The experience left me

conflicted, wondering how I would categorize my feminism. Was I Third-wave? Was I post-feminist? Was I a selective sex-positive feminist? Reality is messy and unbounded. It is confused with ideals, abstractions and representations that are shifting and circumstantial. Women in the MMA industry are confronted not just by the opinions and morals of those in the industry but also the judgments and generalizations of those looking down upon this social world.

Sexuality and Intimacy

There is little room in the realm of MMA for anything but a heterosexual consciousness. Every aspect of the sport seems to speak to the power and glory of a conventional, 'straight' masculinity, ironically even with the unspoken implications of homoerotic posturing. Could it be intentional that a female presence (the ring girl) is interspersed with the intimacy of one-on-one male MMA combat therefore reinforcing the heterosexual ideology for the sport? The grappling activities involve manipulating another man's body with one's own body and this puts the fighters in extremely close bodily proximity while wearing very little clothing. For example, on the ground, men are often straddling the torso of their opponent and scrambles for obtaining an advantageous position may involve one's face coming into contact with other's genital region. When watching professional fights on television with those unfamiliar with the sport, (particularly other females) I was often asked if I realized how "homoerotic" the sport appeared to those who did not follow MMA. I responded by asking what made it "homoerotic" and was told, "Well, it's two guys rolling around wearing

almost nothing...” In addition, the language of grappling/jujitsu supplied much amusement for some first-time observers of MMA (again particularly females). I heard several snickers and laughter at the terms, “rear-naked choke” and “full mount.” Why are instances of close physical contact between two men to be equated with lust and desire? Are men left only with one route to explore physical intimacy with another man? It would be very easily to proclaim the sport a product of some kind of repressed, homosexual desire but I feel the analysis of this phenomenon deserves more than a psycho-sexual, reductionist generalization. Sport actually provides one of the only socially accepted avenues to explore physical intimacy without accusation of homosexuality.

Chris has been training in martial arts since he was a child. He was an early convert to MMA in the mid 1990s and has been coaching at a well-known gym in the Los Angeles area for almost ten years. He emphasizes that fighting is truly an intimate activity.

“A lot of the reason why guys get into this sport is because they want to test themselves. They want to know themselves. What would you do when it comes down to something so primitive like a fight...How much can you know about yourself if you’ve never been in a fight?” Likewise, how much can you know about someone else if you’ve never fought them, being a fighter. That kind of intimacy, those kinds of boundaries that we were talking about before, intimacy boundaries, just totally bulldoze down. There are no boundaries after that. You’ve just been in a fucking scrap with somebody where you’re both really trying to hurt each other bad and win. After that, a hug, a kiss on the cheek, a pat on the ass, whatever is nothing. You’ve just shared something that’s like the most intimate experience you can have outside of sex with another person. Well, for some people sex isn’t intimate, but we don’t need to get into that... You’ve just had an extremely intimate encounter with another person where you’re both putting everything out on the line and sharing a lot of things with each other, and all of those boundaries are just taken down.”

As Chris describes it, the fight is an intimate experience because the fighters put so much effort into training and so much effort into the fight itself. The training is a long and arduous process. It involves physical and mental exhaustion, emotional distress and isolation. The fighters that step into the cage realize that their opponent has gone through the same kind of harrowing experience. Both fighters want “the win” so badly, and are willing to put “everything on the line.” The unspoken, shared knowledge of the desire to win and experience of training creates this “extremely intimate encounter.” The end of the match is often marked by a hug between fighters or a kiss on the forehead of cheek even. I ask Chris why this type of affection is acceptable in a public arena and not simply walking down the street.

Chris: It’s complicated...Like I said the experience that they have just shared brings this kind of gesture. It also has to do with it being a cultural thing. In other cultures where it’s not quite as taboo to be homosexual or to be touchy with another man like that. For instance, in Brazil they give you kisses on the cheek or even on the lips no matter what your sexual orientation. I’ve said hi to Brazilian guys before and they give me a kiss on the cheek and give me a big hug. They’re always so touchy with you and that’s not a bad thing. That’s just how it is where they come from and there are a lot of other countries where it’s the same way. It just depends on where you come from, but ultimately in America that kind of male-on-male or female-on-female contact is taboo to a lot of people. Being in the sport of MMA, I meet a lot of people from different cultures, like Brazil, or Mexico or Japan. They have different customs and you learn that we are actually really uptight here in America

Chris has trained in various locations around the world and recognizes that in comparison to other cultures, the United States is quite “conservative”

when it comes to interactions between men. His cross-cultural observations suggest an insularity of American heteronormative views. In the United States, there does indeed seem to be some fear and anxiety over any physical contact with other men. Any touch can lead to an allegation of homosexuality. Only in a public setting, in a domain like sport that is highly constructed around heterosexual norms and roles, can typical boundaries be pushed. The masculine appearance of the sport--the ring girls, the marketing campaigns, the aggression (that generally associated with men and masculinity)--all negate any implication of homosexuality such as a kiss or hug between two men. Chris appeared very accepting of homosexuality and male intimacy but I wondered how these issues were confronted on a daily basis for MMA practitioners. Was homosexuality something that was ignored, made invisible or exposed?

While I certainly observed fighters using denigrating language involving homophobia and misogynistic slurs (e.g. "gay, fag, pussy") I did not encounter any first hand incidences of homophobia or gay-bashing. I acknowledge that the use of such words indicate a disregard to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, and the use of such terms as insults may perhaps reveal a disdain for women or homosexuals at some level for some individuals. Yet when I asked several fighters why they used these terms as insults many responded that this simply the language they grew up with.

Jared: I never think about what it means... When we were kids everything was "gay"... "gay" was just the word you use to insult someone. We didn't really think they were gay, and I would never insult a gay person by calling them "gay."

Me: What about calling someone a “pussy” as an insult?

Jared: Same thing. I never really thought about what it means... Obviously he’s not really a girl, and there’s nothing wrong with being a girl. It’s just what we say. There are some girls in here that could definitely kick my ass...

Many remarked these insults were made simply in jest. There was no thought or meaning, it was always said as a joke and never a serious commentary on the inferiority of homosexuals or women. Kimmel (2011 personal communication) suggests that in this interviews with college-aged males at various campuses across the United States, the majority of males simply utter the words to mean “stupid or dumb” not actually as accusations of homosexuality. “That’s gay” or “you’re so gay” are in fact the most common put-downs from male youth, and seems to a product of the times in which they grew up (Kimmel 2011; personal communication). Could these slurs be thoughtless, poor choices of vocabulary or evidence of real homophobia? Interview questions I asked nearly all participants were “what would you think about training with a male fighter who is gay” and “would you have any issues fighting a publicly gay fighter?” The overwhelming majority responded was that they would not mind training with or fighting someone that was a homosexual.

Mark: Hey man, to each his own. If that’s what floats his boat it’s none of my business. All I care about is how hard he’s going to work in the gym.

Other interviewees echoed the same sentiments, that the other fighter’s sexual orientation was none of their business. Several mentioned a close friend or family member being gay and explained to me that “it wasn’t really a big deal in society

anymore.” These observations, that many of the fighters did not seem consider homosexual “a big deal anymore,” is echoed in research done by Men’s Studies scholar Eric Anderson on beliefs and views of sexuality amongst American male youth. Anderson (2005) posits that in addition to, and also in response to hegemonic (or orthodox) masculinity, men are also displaying inclusive masculinity. He suggests that as cultural homophobia decreases, along with decreased expressions of sexism and racism, college-aged men in both America and Great Britain, are able to construct “softer” versions of masculinity (Anderson 2009).

However a couple fighters added the qualifier, “as long as he doesn’t hit on me.” Despite declarations that sexual orientation does not matter, a deeper fear of being propositioned by a gay man surfaced. On these occasions I argued that just because someone is gay it does not mean he will immediately have romantic intentions for every other man that crosses his path.

Me: What makes you think that a guy will just hit on you because he is gay?

Victor: I dunno, he might.

Me: My understanding is that gay guys don’t simply hit on anything that is male. Do you hit on every female you see?

Victor: Well...*[laughter]* Ok. You have a point...but I am pretty irresistible!

Actually, I observed a surprising amount of playfulness surrounding homosexuality from not only the fighters, but also fans and sponsors. Several of

the fighters at Desert Combat lived together. They trained together and knew each other for years so when looking for a roommate, the gym provided reasonable pool from which to select a roommate. Some fighters would joke about the nature of their relationships and sexuality.

“I didn’t hear you come home last night...were you with another man? I thought I was the only one...”

“Do these shorts make my butt look big...that’s not what you said last night...”

“Quit flexing those pecs, you’re turning me on...”

Their intention is not put down homosexuality but to highlight the intimate nature of their relationships. I was also surprised by the ease at which some men talked about the attractiveness of male fighters.

Adrian: I think Scott is the best looking one.

Dale: Scott has a baby face.

Adrian: Dale’s got a man-crush on Scott.

Dale: I don’t have a man-crush on Scott.

Adrian: All he does is talk about Scott.

Dale: Ok, maybe I do...

Adrian and Dale own an auto-parts company in Arizona and sponsor several of Desert Combat’s professional fighters. They insisted they were joking about their romantic interest in their fighters. However, we did speak about the reality that “better looking” male fighters are more marketable. This in fact was the entrée into our exchange over romantic interest. They spoke with ease regarding the

physical attributes of these male fighters that made them conventionally “good looking.”

Although this is a general speculative observation, the playfulness surrounding sexuality may indicate an increase in the level of acceptance of homosexuality and other types of male intimacy. This is the era of the “Bro-mance.” The term is a combination of the word “brother” and “romance.” The bro-mance is a close relationship between heterosexual males that resembles a romantic relationship. This term was coined by skateboard magazine editor Dave Carnie, who first used the term in the 1990s to describe the close relationships between skateboarders who spent a lot of time together.¹⁵ The “Bro-mance” is also now a new genre of film. It is more than just the typical buddy film but explores the acknowledgment that men too, are looking for more intimate and meaningful relationships with other men. The last five years have produced box office hits such as: *The Forty-Year-Old Virgin* (2005), *Superbad* (2007), *I Love You Man* (2009). Men’s Studies scholar Robert Heasley (*personal communication, 2011*) suggests that heterosexual male friendships have been an increasing site of academic investigation as reflected in the topics presented at recent annual Men’s Studies conferences.

It may appear counter intuitive that a sport built on the foundation of aggression and extreme competition should provide a source of intimacy for men who participate, yet this notion has been cited in studies of sport and masculinity (Bird 1996; Burstyn 1999; DeGaris 2000; Wacquant 2004; Woodward 2007).

¹⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bromance>

The close physical contact of grappling, combined with minimal clothing worn by MMA competitors, could allow for superficial and misguided suggestions of homoeroticism. But this is all-too easy, etc interpretation would obscure that value of genuine, intimate relationship being established by the men who share the experience of MMA.

Conclusions

Like many other sports, in the world of MMA the presentation of gender appears crafted to uphold a firmly entrenched ideology of heterosexuality. Women are afforded a limited range of identifiers: fighter, ring girl, wife/girlfriend and groupie. This makes it quite problematic for other women who are part of this world. In this male-dominated MMA we see how theoretical arguments of agency are enacted on the level of daily practice. The terms of femininity, masculinity and sexuality are approached and negotiated with both caution and intentionality. There are female fans (whose genuine interest is questioned due to their gender), as well as female members of the media (whose close contact with professional fighters often gets them lumped in with the category of groupie). The marketability of appearance is a factor that both female and male fighters are confronted with, and both fighters and their partners struggle with being *seen* for who they really are. An unexpected turn in this research highlights that participation in this sport often leads to genuine intimate relationships between men, and the playfulness surrounding these “bro-mance” type relationships may indicate more social acceptance for homosexuality. This is

the era of celebrity, where sex and sexualized appearance can immediately skyrocket unknown individuals into the spotlight. Sexual relations are seen as achievement, particularly those made public (e.g. Paris Hilton's infamous sex tapes) and provide a new source of *social capital* (Bourdieu 1986). The world of MMA is very much a world of celebrity. MMA has become more than a sport and is touted as *lifestyle*. It offers the appearance of fame, fortune and a plentiful land of sexual opportunity. The actuality of the MMA lifestyle is often quite different than what it appears.

PART II DISCUSSION: Situating MMA in American Culture

This chapter discussed women involved in the male-dominated world of Mixed Martial Arts. In looking at how women inhabited this social world we are able to see how gender is constructed into the ideologies of MMA. The most visible women were the fighters and the ring girls who were represented as either attractive and sexually desirable to men, or as butch, manly lesbians. This dichotomous categorization of women appeared pervasive, and was also used as a tool for image-management and marketability. This concept was applied not just to female fighters, ring girls, and groupies but appeared extended to all females who were a part of the sport. I experienced this as a female researcher on an occasion when I discovered that my research on masculinity led me to be classified as either a groupie looking for an “alpha-male” mate, or a lesbian revolutionary attempting to condemn all men.¹⁶ Yet by also looking at the experiences of the numerous women who occupy the background of MMA (photographers, referees, wives, journalists) we can see the other dimensions of the sport, challenges to gender ideals, and even how MMA has been shaped by key female members of the media. The women involved with this sport were certainly not a homogenous group. Perspectives on the sport and gender varied dramatically. Some women found the sexualization of female fighters and ring girls objectionable and disgusting, while other women purposefully and unapologetically employed their own sexuality as means of success in this industry. The construct of the sport itself may be viewed as an unapologetic

¹⁶ Refer back to methods section.

throwback to a time before gendered political-correctness seemingly invaded public and personal life. A time (both real and imagined) before sexual harassment workshops were held at the workplace, and men and women had clearly defined roles. In this discussion section I examine MMA in relation to American popular culture in the new millennium, and how this fits into theoretical notions of a transition to a post-feminist era.

The Rise of “Raunch Culture”

The new millennium brought with it television shows such as *The Man Show* (1999-2004) where nubile, large breasted women (known as ‘Juggies’) jumped on trampolines before each commercial break. In 1998, the first *Girls Gone Wild* video was released that captured countless college girls on Spring Break lifting their tops to flash their breasts. (The now multi-million dollar franchise is still in active production thirteen years later). Levy (2005) suggests these types of public statements on sexuality and gender are part of what she calls “the rise of raunch culture,” and part of a backlash against feminism. The ideologies of this “*raunch culture*” are espoused by both men and women. For example, Levy interviews members of an organization called CAKE, whose goal is to reclaim female sexuality and liberation through activities such as pole-dancing, and having porn-viewing/lingerie modeling parties. They champion a new type of feminism, yet Levy insightfully points out that the ‘new feminism’ looks strangely similar to the ‘old objectification.’ I can’t help but be reminded of Leah’s choices to use her sexuality in order to become successful as a

photographer in the MMA industry. She would most certainly see her actions as reclaiming her own sexuality. Considering the structure of MMA, the bikini-clad ring girls enforcing normalized heterosexuality and acting as foils to enhance fighters' masculinity, the misogynistic rants of UFC President Dana White, the sexualization of female fighters, I am forced to question if MMA is a manifestation what Levy (2005) calls the rise of "*raunch culture*," and therefore a product of a post-feminist era?

Post-feminism

"Feminism is, in part, a project for the reconstruction of public life and public meanings; feminism is therefore a search for new stories, and so for a language which names a new vision of possibilities and limits."
(Haraway 1991: 82)

In this quote Haraway is comparing feminism to science, and suggesting that both are frameworks for public constructions of knowledge. Much of the drive behind feminism (*Second Wave*) was acknowledging how this construction was largely a male endeavor placing men at the forefront and women somewhere in the background. It is not enough to recognize how women play greater roles in society, but to see how gender relations of inequality (e.g. in the family and workplace, and with reproductive rights) can be challenged. Then came the acknowledgement that there was no 'real universal sisterhood,' as women of color, gay women and disabled women faced unique challenges. The *Third Wave* feminist movement includes the development of anti-colonial feminism, anti-racist feminism, transnational feminism, queer theory, disability studies and ecofeminism (Piepmeier 2006; Walker 1992). Post-feminism highlights the

popular presumption that the goals of feminism have been achieved, and we are entering a different phase in which people rarely contemplate women's gender equity. Stacey's (1991) study on daughters of feminist activists found that this younger generation felt that feminism, as they understood it, was "excessive" or "irrelevant." Coppock, Haydon and Richter (1995: 5) too suggest that the ideological basis of post-feminism reveals the politics of feminism to be outdated and many expressed that, "women have only themselves to blame if equality is not achieved." Unlike *Second* and *Third Wave* feminism that articulates goals and understandings of gender, post-feminism is more a description of cultural milieu. The major critiques of post-feminism as a true era are very much the critiques that *Third Wave* feminists had of *First* and *Second Wave* Feminism: this is a primarily a privileged, (upper) middle-class, heterosexual, White phenomenon.

I think it is vital that we pay attention to this point, as the women who identify the Third Wave as "postfeminist" have the luxury of *not* having to work for collective social change. Their individualized understandings of "feminist advancement" (versus struggle) underpin a particular privilege that does not require them to pay attention to a transformative politics.

(Rasul 2010)

Mixed Martial Arts and Post-feminism

Although the concept of post-feminism is multi-faceted and contested, there are several characteristics associated with this phenomenon that are highly relevant to an examination of Mixed Martial Arts. First of all, the reluctance for women to label themselves feminists, what is referred to as the "I'm a feminist but..." type of feminism (coined by Susan Douglas 1994), parallels men's anxiety, and reluctance to engage with the term 'masculinity.' For example when

my intentions to study masculinity were revealed during my pilot study on Pankration, I was deemed to be either a man-hating lesbian or groupie looking for sexual opportunities (see Methods section). Throughout my research activities, it became clear that there is suspicion and apprehension over the term masculinity, and those who are here to examine it. This implies that feminist endeavors of equality are far from having been met, as questioning gender and masculinity resulted in such suspicion and anxiety. Second of all, post-feminism is said to have a very particular relationship to late-capitalist culture. Tasker and Negra [REF] suggest that “Post-feminism is white and middle class by default, anchored in consumption as strategy (and leisure as site) for the production of the self.” MMA is often called an extreme sport. Extreme sports are potentially violent in nature, involve a high level of adrenaline, danger and risk and include activities such as skateboarding, moto-cross, kayaking, rock climbing and cave-diving (Daddario 2010:129). Daddario further labels these *postmodern sports* and notes that *postmodern sports* share characteristics such as being highly commodified (having significant commercial appeal and corporate sponsorship), and cites these activities as making particular statements about one’s identity.

MMA is indeed a site of leisure, where participants crafted their identities and emphasized certain aspects of masculinity. Many of them saw themselves first and foremost as a fighter, before a student, salesman or husband. Dominant images of masculinity operate within the same sphere as female liberation achieved through consumerism. Mixed Martial Arts is a multi-million dollar industry. There are gyms, events, clothing, toys, supplements: it is a lifestyle and

even more so a lifestyle that offers the promise of the American dream of fame and fortune. This falls in line with Postrel's (REF) description of contemporary American society as characterized by hyperaestheticization. This "hyperaestheticization" emphasizes a luxury lifestyle, retail pleasures and is thoroughly integrated with economic discourses of aspirational, niche-market Western societies. Mixed Martial Arts shares the same myth of gendered empowerment through consumption. There are numerous products to consume that display one's allegiance to the sport and performative masculinity. Thirdly, post-feminism also notes a pre-occupation with women attempting to stay eternally young. This is similar for men, as plastic surgery rates for men are increasing, and sexual enhancement drugs such as Viagra and Cialis are becoming more widespread. MMA fighters take countless supplements to perform acts of physical grandeur thought to belong to those twenty years younger, and some even resort to using Human Growth Hormone or steroids to accomplish this. The body is crucial to displaying this youthful vigor. Theories of post-feminism highlight a growing concern in American popular culture over image and representation. MMA has become increasingly successful in expanding its fan base in part because of the ways in which MMA (primarily the UFC) have represented the sport and marketed as not *just* a sport but a seductive and desirable lifestyle.

PART III: CHAPTER 5. “THE UFC IS CREATING A FALSE REALITY”:

NEGOTIATIONS OF REALITY AND REPRESENTATION

I love being associated with the sport. I’m proud of being associated with the sport. I am embarrassed when people have a perception of the sport that is something other than that what it really is... There are people that give MMA a bad name, that go around and get into bar fights and wear their Affliction T-shirts too tight, and have too much gel in their hair. They run around saying that they’re a cage fighter because they walked into a gym and trained for three months. They think they will get rich and famous... that part of it I’m embarrassed by. I hate that part of it. I wish that part of it would go away. The real side of MMA is that it is a magnificent sport.

(Chris, Gym Owner/Professional Fighter, 2009)

Mixed Martial Arts is more than just a sport. It is a lifestyle. Clever marketing and an entrance into the reality television genre combined legitimate athletic pursuit with the very contemporary phenomenon of ‘reality’ celebrity-ism. The possibility of fame and fortune is intertwined with athletic prowess and viewed as an equally important goal, if not, at the least, a consequence for many who enter the sport. Yet the public representations offered do not necessarily reflect the everyday lives and experiences of MMA participants. MMA’s origins as a counter-culture ‘blood sport’ provide a profitable image of dangerous appeal, what Dunbar (2000) would recognize as *commodified rebellion*, however, the sport and its participants must constantly contend with this self-perpetuated stigma of brutality. MMA is visceral, and produces powerful images. Its popularity relies heavily on a convincing discourse of its inherent reality, yet in efforts to produce reality, it becomes clear that reality is not always real. In this chapter I look at how the sport and MMA fighters are represented and how

fighters' lives are affected by these representations. I examine issues relevant to representation such as: finances, sponsorships, Reality TV, stigma and stereotypes, and finally relationships between fighters and fans.

I'm (Not) Going To Be Rich: Finances and Fantasy

For the average aspiring fighter, a career in MMA rarely provides an exceptional income. In fact, most professional fighters maintain a part-time (and sometimes full-time) employment while competing in MMA. While it is true that top athletes in the sport can command hundreds of thousands of dollars per fight, the secretiveness and complexity surrounding fighters' income make it nearly impossible to uncover fighter's total earnings (i.e. salary, bonuses, endorsements, pay-per-view percentage earnings). The highest confirmed amount (base pay) ever paid was \$1.5 million to Andre Arlovski for his fight with Fedor Emelianenko under the organization Affliction.¹⁷ The only pay information that is actually made public is that which is contractually guaranteed. This includes the base pay and performance-based bonuses (for Knockout of the Night, Submission of the Night, or Fight of the Night). These bonuses are incredibly important to fighters. Bonuses for these fight outcomes can more than double a fighter's pay for that fight. Kevin puts this into perspective as he recounts the bonus he received for his impressive Knockout of the Night:

¹⁷ www.twinspecial.org/mma/who-are-the-highest-paid-mma-fighters-in-the-world

Kevin: Yeah. So I got Knockout of the Night and ended up making \$44,000 that night. I got paid \$7000 to fight, \$7000 to win and then got \$30,000 for the knockout. My coaching salary was \$41,000 when I left coaching. So it was like I made the same amount of money in a minute and forty seconds, that I made in a year at Ohio State.

Me: That's unbelievable. Does the chance of getting the bonus change your game plan?

Kevin: Yeah, I think that's the point—to encourage fighters to have more exciting fights. For the submission and knockout [*bonus*] only one guy gets it, but both of you get it if you get Fight of the Night. So you could lose, get paid \$5000 then get the Fight of the Night bonus and get \$60,000 more. It's almost worth just slugging it out...

A locker-room bonus, an extra amount given out for exceptional performance at the organization's discretion, is another type of possible income. More often additional income derives from sponsorship. The money from these bonuses or sponsorship is rarely released to the public. States such as California or Nevada where MMA events are overseen by athletic commissions will often make fighter payouts, and arena gate income (money from ticket sales for the live event) public immediately following the event. Other states or countries where MMA events are held are not required to provide this information, therefore compiling a consistent record of gate earnings and fighter payouts is nearly impossible. Upon reviewing over twenty different MMA websites and MMA blogs, the consensus would seem that when sponsorships and pay-per-view percentages are taken into account, along with base salary and bonuses, the top salaries would belong to high-profile fighters such as: Georges St. Pierre, Chuck Liddell, Randy Couture, Tito Ortiz, Fedor Emelianenko and Brock Lesnar. At UFC 100 held July 11, 2009, both Georges St. Pierre and Brock Lesnar were paid

\$400,000 for their performances and the total disclosed amount paid to fighters was \$2,208,000.¹⁸ Some professional fighters on this elite level are seen driving expensive cars, dining at the finest restaurants and wearing the latest fashions. A number of aspiring fighters I interviewed suggested both celebrity and money as motivations for beginning their practice in MMA. MMA is a manifestation of the ‘American Dream.’ It offers an avenue for fame and riches that is achievable in a matter of years.

Unfortunately, there are only a handful of fighters who are paid well enough to live this kind of luxury lifestyle. What is lifestyle of the ‘average’ professional fighter? How much does this fighter actually make in the industry of MMA? It was very difficult to ascertain the salary for ‘the average’ professional fighter using Internet sources, as records are not consistent or sometimes even reliable. However, reviewing the twenty or so MMA websites that discussed finances, I would estimate that established fighters on the track toward championship belts would receive between \$20,000-\$40,000 per fight. They may fight an average of three times per year. The fighters (depending on the organization) get paid according to their experience, how marketable they are and how hard their manager pushes for a desired salary. There are numerous factors that may come into play that make it difficult to identify a meaningful ‘average’ that is not the result of distorted statistics. What these fighters do share are similar expenses and schedules that should be considered when talking about finances. The average professional fighter (with no other employment) spends at least five

¹⁸ www.mmaconvert.com/2009/07/13/ufc-100-fighter-payouts

hours a day, six days a week training year round. He has typical expenses (mortgage, car payments, food, often a family to support) as well as training costs (gym fees, trainer fees, manager fees). He must buy nutritional supplements, and pay for all medical care out of pocket (as they do not have insurance). And like everyone else, he must pay taxes on any income gained from competition.

I asked a number of professional fighters from Desert Combat and other field sites what their income was from fighting. The responses were quite diverse. For fighters brand new to the professional circuit the money was disappointing.

Me: Congratulations on your first [*professional*] fight!

Shawn: Yea, thanks. It was a good first fight.

Me: If you don't mind me asking, how much did you get paid?

Shawn: [*Laughs*] Um, not that much...

Me: Would you rather not say?

Shawn: No, no it's okay. I got paid \$1000 but after paying for my pre-fight medical exams, and blood tests, eye exams, it didn't leave much at all.

Me: Wait, so you had to pay for all that yourself? No insurance or the organization didn't provide these medical services?

Shawn: Nope. I just switched jobs so no insurance and there's no way this organization would pay for any of that. It's up to us.

Me: I see. Did you think the money would be better?

Shawn: Yea. But I didn't do it for the money. I need the experience. I need the wins to get into the bigger shows. When I make it to the UFC I know the money will be better.

It turned out that this was Shawn's only fight for the year. Other new professional fighters shared a similar experience. Taking into consideration all the training

costs and medical costs the payout for early professional bouts barely covered these expenditures. These fighters stated it was impossible to make a reasonable living off fighting alone, (with no other source of income) when first starting out as a professional.

Other fighters, who were employed by major organizations like the UFC, stated that they made well over \$100,000 (including base pay, bonuses and endorsement deals).

Me: Last year, can you sort of estimate how much you made fighting?

Eddie: Yeah. Probably, just like with sponsorship and fighting made like \$40,000. I really only made like \$8000 or \$9000 from the fights and like \$13,000 from sponsorship because I worked a normal job too, for like \$22,000. But this year, triple that.

Me: So, if we're estimating how much you made this year—just guessing?

Eddie: Almost \$170,000 from fighting, sponsorship and everything.

Me: Wow. That is big change from last year. How did that happen?

Eddie: Most of the money comes from sponsorships but it's because I went on the show [*The Ultimate Fighter*]. I am under contract with UFC for three years so for my next fights I make ten and ten [*\$10,000 to fight and \$10,000 to win*]. It increases every three years or so, so like every year it will increase like \$2000. When you think about it, that's not that much.

Me: Let's go back to sponsorships a little later... For the winner of the show they get a six-figure contract right?

Eddie: Yeah, the winner gets like \$100,000 but that's over a certain amount of years for a certain number of fights so it's really not as much as it sounds either.

Me: Right, but it seems like a lot of people hear that and think, 'Wow, these fighters are rich!'

Eddie: Yeah, there's not as much money as you think. So you have to hustle [*try to get media exposure and sponsorships*] on the side to make a decent living. Just because, you know, especially once taxes start coming

out, yeah it really cuts [*laughs*] down on the amount of money you make.

Every Body is for Sale: Body as Commodity

Sponsorships are crucial to making money in the MMA industry. Several successful professional fighters that I spoke to estimated that between forty to sixty percent of their income comes from sponsorship deals. Sponsorship is a common practice in professional sports. A company pays a professional athlete a monthly or yearly salary or a one-time fee, and the athlete will wear the company's logo, make appearances for that company, or assist in other ways promoting the company. Sponsorships are a means for advertising. The most popular way for companies to sponsor a fighter is to pay a fighter a certain amount of money to wear a patch with the company's logo on the shorts he will wear during a televised MMA competition. MMA journalist Jonathan Snowden comments that:

Fight shorts aren't a commercial product that companies are able to sell to the general public. What they are is a billboard for advertising that could appear in front of a television audience for up to 25 minutes. Short space is sold in four pieces: the crotch, the butt and both thighs. The top agents have been able to score more than \$30,000 per patch, but that's rare. For a television fighter who isn't a major star, the crotch and butt space are worth from \$500-\$2000. Each thigh ranges from \$250-\$1500. Savvy agents can sell these spaces at a premium if they pitch it right...“I represent one guy who is a great wrestler,” an agent told me in confidence. “When I sell the space on his butt I tell the company 'Look, his ass is going to be in America's face for 15 minutes while he pounds on this guy.' That's incredibly valuable space.”¹⁹

The most expensive locations on the fighter's body are the 'crotch and butt'

¹⁹ Jonathan Snowden, www.bloodyelbow.com/2010/9/27/1715233/the-economics-of-mma-fight-night-and-the-sponsorship-game

spaces. This does not appear to be based on sexual connotation but due to the fact that these areas are more exposed to the camera. This buying and selling of objectified bodily space is such a glaring example of commodification in that this process “transforms persons and their bodies from a human category into objects of economic desire” (Sharp 2000: 293). In the case of the MMA fighter, not only is the fighter a commodity, but the fighter’s body parts are commodities for which one can attribute rates of monetary value. Investigations of these kinds of transactions have been studied in arena of medical technologies and reproduction (Becker 2000; Casper 1994) organ donation (Joralemon 1995; Ohnuki-Tiemey 1994) and also in the sex for profit industry (Augustin 2005; Frank 2002; Dalla 2000). At the heart of this discussions are notions of ownership, the blurred line between the individual and society and the body as ultimately as product.

MMA has a wide variety of sponsors who contract athletes as well as MMA organizations. The most prevalent sponsors are affiliated with MMA. These include MMA clothing and gear companies (such as *TapOut*, *Affliction*, *Everlast*), or supplement or energy drink companies (such as *Gatorade*, *AMP Energy*, *MusclePharm*). Other sponsors whose products are not directly related to MMA may simply want to attach themselves to the MMA’s major demographic (18-34 year old males). These companies include *Harley Davidson*, *Burger King* and *Condom Depot* (an online company that offers a wide variety of prophylactics). An entire study can be made of the advertising in the sport of MMA as advertising points to the relationships between representation, consumption and identity. Jackson, Andrews and Scherer (2005: 2) note that

advertising has been identified as playing a key ideological role with respect not only to the legitimation of capitalism and consumer culture (Bell 1976; du Bay and Pryke 2002; Ewen 1976; Lury 1996) but also within the politics of representation and identity formation (Bonney and Wilson 1990; Cronin 2000; 2004; Goldman 1992; Kellner 1995; Kilbourne 1999; Mort 1996; O’Barr, 1994).

‘As Real as it Gets:’ Manufacturing Fame through Reality Television

Around the time that MMA began its ascent to worldwide popularity, another intriguing phenomenon was taking place—the explosion of Reality TV. The new millennium saw a public thirst for reality and all things unscripted. A variety of reality shows documented everything from how to survive on a desert island (*Survivor 2000*), to how to become a famous singing star (*American Idol 2002*), to how to become the person you always wanted to be through extensive plastic surgery (*The Swan 2004*). As Andrejevic (2004: 7) states, by 2003, “reality television had become a dominant prime-time programming staple, easily dominating ratings in the most coveted time slots.” The public, represented as millions of television viewers, seemed to long for representations of reality, and MMA fit perfectly with this desire. The reality television phenomenon was the launching platform for the MMA phenomenon and therefore central to the widespread discourse of contemporary American masculinity.

The tagline for the Spike TV show “The Ultimate Fighter” is “As Real As It Gets.” After a decade of struggling, it was in fact the reality TV phenomenon

that revived cagefighting from its almost certain extinction. As an innovative marketing promotion, in 2005 the UFC decided to launch a reality television show about MMA. The premise for the show was that sixteen men (not actors) would live together and train together. They would compete against each other until there was only one winner. Fighters were paid an average of \$10,000 for the duration of six to eight weeks while the show taped. However, the winner of the tournament was given a “six-figure contract” and deemed the Ultimate Fighter for that season. The fighters that participated in the television show were almost always invited to fight in future UFC competitions regardless of winning or losing, as long as they appeared to have a promising career. Professional wrestling was widely known to be a fraud; although athletic, the wrestlers were actors/stuntmen who played along with pre-determined storylines. There was nothing ‘fixed’ about MMA. It was marketed as a primal form of sport competition. The venture became an immediate success with the first season averaging 1.6 million viewers, and 2.2 million viewers in the 18-34 male demographic (*mmapayout.com*). This television show was central to bringing Mixed Martial Arts into mainstream society, as it was far more accessible to the average person than a Pay-Per-View event. At the new millennium, the public was hungry for unscripted entertainment. How could television get more real? Except it was not *entirely* real.

I spoke with UFC representative Michael Randle about the success of *The Ultimate Fighter* television show:

Me: What outside influences have affected UFC? I know you have the reality TV show and that was a big boost, a big stepping stone to get the public involved with mixed martial arts.

Michael: I think that's certainly the catalyst of the popularity. That show is so important. I think it's in its 11th season...It's a remarkable reality show and it's done very, very well and made these fighters very popular. I think that's very important. When you're having over a million people watch every week when the UFC comes to their town or comes to their area, they want to see these guys in person.

Me: Right. It's like they've grown up with them and they've seen them.

Michael: Yeah. They really invest their time in them and they want to see them. I think that's been a very big part of our popularity.

The true value of being on that television show for upcoming professional fighters is the exposure. The media exposure allowed these little-known fighters to develop an extensive fan base and make a name for themselves to entice potential sponsorship opportunities. Both the organization and the individual benefits from the experience. The fighter gains a reputation while the organization creates 'reality-characters' with whom the audience can somehow relate. The reality television show often depicts how fighters' skills impressively develop over the short course of the show, or highlights emotional elements of the fighters' personal lives with which the audience can empathize. Either angle allows for an affective connection with these fighters that results in not only increased viewership of the show, but the likelihood that these same viewers will watch the pay-per-view events that the fighters' will later compete in due to the viewer's emotional investment.

I spoke with five professional fighters who had participated on different

seasons of *The Ultimate Fighter Reality* television show. Three of them felt the exposure was incredibly beneficial to their careers (characterizing it as ‘overall positive’), one of them felt it did not help his career (‘indifferent’), and one individual felt it was a mistake that he would not repeat (‘overall negative’). In fact, their opinions of various aspects of life on *The Ultimate Fighter (TUF)* were mixed. There were enjoyable, demanding and unpleasant aspects of the experience. The process begins with an audition tape. Some fighters are recruited by the UFC but still must make this tape. This is usually a brief (approximately) five-minute visual summary of the individual’s skill and personality. It will often include clips from MMA training and some kind of comedic aspect. Then the selected fighters will attend a preliminary interview in Las Vegas. At this interview potential *TUF* participants seemed to be assessed more for their potential as an exciting television personality than for their skill as a fighter.

Javier described how the interviewer tried to provoke him:

“This guy asks the weirdest questions...he tries to gauge your reactions and he will call you a ‘pussy’ or a ‘fag’ to get a reaction out of you. Then he asked what I would do if someone stole my stuff or pissed on my pillow cause guys always pull stupid pranks like that.”

I asked Javier if he thought that the recruiter wanted a particular reaction. Did he want Javier to get angry and try to escalate this confrontation? Was it a test to see if he could suppress his emotions? Both Javier and I were unsure of the motivations behind this bizarre assessment.

In the early seasons, sixteen fighters were selected and immediately went to the *TUF* house. Later seasons the selected fighters would fight each other

tournament style to get into the house. Each season had one or two weight classes (e.g. Season One was Middleweights and Light Heavyweights). Although all of the participants lived in the same house, they were divided into two teams (not by weight) and each team was placed under the guidance of a famous, experienced MMA fighter. The coaches were entirely in charge of the training regiment. Each team practiced twice a day in the same location but at different times. The intensity of the workout and skill practiced were at the discretion of the coach. According to interviewees, some coaches appeared to take the task very seriously, while others seemed more interested in having fun. Each week there was a fight between two participants. The winner would get to stay in the house and compete in the semi-finals and while the loser was out of the tournament he would still get to stay in the house. The show is pre-taped but the finale is a three-hour live, televised event held in Las Vegas.

A Typical Day on Reality TV

What would it be like to have your daily life recorded twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for six weeks? According to former contestants this experience was “incredibly strange but surprising at how fast you get used to it.” Before filming begins all participants were required to sign a privacy waiver so they will not leak the fight results or daily happenings of the show since it is pre-taped, and also to give legal consent to the UFC use their image as they see fit. The fighters were intentionally isolated from news of the outside world. According to Chuck Liddell the coach of Season One:

The rules for the guys in the house were pretty simple: you can do anything. You want to create some tension in the house real fast? Put sixteen amped up amateur fighters in there and tell them they can't watch TV, read books, listen to music, or go out. The only thing they can do is stare at each other, eat and think about fighting.

(Liddell and Millman 2009: 225)

There were cameras and microphones installed in the bedrooms, living room, training facility and even bathrooms. There was a camera crew following participants at all times. The five *TUF* participants all agreed that life there was fairly structured and monotonous.

Me: What would you do everyday there in the house?

Brandon: A typical day in the house? We would wake up, eat breakfast, go to practice, come back and relax, eat lunch, practice, eat dinner, then just hangout til we go to sleep. It was pretty boring, we didn't have anything so we actually made a chessboard out of whatever and used water bottle caps as pieces.

Me: You didn't have books or games even?

Brandon: Nope. You could have a Bible. That's it.

This isolation appeared to be an intentional strategy of the show's producers, to have the participants focus only on fighting, and to increase the level of interaction between the participants. The former *TUF* cast members I spoke to suggested that this was done to increase drama for the show's storylines.

Confining sixteen young males (between the ages of 18-33) in a relatively small space, with no entertainment, would almost certainly lead to tension. According to these cast members the training and the fights were obviously difficult and physically demanding, but the true challenge was enduring the boredom and strain

of isolation within the *TUF* house. Javier tells me that the stress gradually got worse and worse:

“Living in the house the first day was pretty cool. You walk in and the house is nice and clean and you are interacting with everybody. It was pretty cool, everybody is very talkative the first couple of days just because we don’t know each other. After a week that gets old...teams start to stick together. It becomes an ‘Us’ against ‘Them’ mentality. Then tension builds between people, people start getting drunk, people start losing their fights and talking shit. It was crazy...for me first week was pretty cool, second week was alright, the third week I started counting down the days so that I can leave. The last weeks you get you can’t sleep at night. All you do is sit on the balcony and stare at the strip of Las Vegas and we would have to take sleeping pills before we go to bed.”

Javier likened the experience to being in a prison. His insomnia was not so much a result of anxiety over fighting, or having to live with one’s opponents but the overwhelming boredom. The other former cast members of *TUF* shared this sense of isolation and boredom although it seemed to have the most negative effect on Javier. Chris’s major complaint was the juvenile, drunken altercations that happened every season. He attributed these acts to the plentiful amounts of alcohol available at the house:

“The cabinet is always stocked full with alcohol, like any type of Tequila, any type of Vodka, anything you could want. There was this room called the Request Room. There is a list with your name on it. You put whatever you want on it. You can ask for seafood, steaks, even running shoes, but most guys were excited about the alcohol. You can order a beer from Brazil, or a Tequila from Mexico, and they will bring you that alcohol just because they want you to act like a fool.”

Reviewing the clips from eleven seasons of *The Ultimate Fighter*, I would have to agree with Chris’s observation that most televised altercations appeared the result

of intoxication. It seems that producers were aware that the combination of isolation and alcohol would inevitably lead to confrontation. Chris stated on occasion they would be reprimanded, and the alcohol would be taken away, particularly if they caused a significant amount of damage to the property. However, within hours, the cabinet would be stocked full again. The promise of drama, which translates to ratings, was perhaps far too enticing for producers to permanently ban alcohol from the premises. Although all participants of the show stated that there was no script, and they were not openly told to say or do certain things, they were aware of the subtle manipulation perpetrated by producers of the show.

MMA: The First 'Reality' Sport?

“The UFC is creating a false reality for people. Most of the people that come to train at my gym don’t stay that long. These are the people that watched The Ultimate Fighter and had delusions of grandeur of being magnificent fighters after just a month...They see it happen on T.V. but they don’t realize these guys have been training for years. They think it will happen fast, they think fighting will make them rich and famous...”

(Chris, MMA gym owner and participant on TUF)

Reality television is an interesting blend of unscripted action/reaction combined with behind the scenes manipulation. Reality television is a fitting platform for MMA and the UFC. It is slowly becoming known as a legitimate sport, but it cannot escape its sideshow past. It is at once reality (the outcomes are unknown, the injuries are not fake) and entertainment (character types, storylines). It is entirely a product of its time. MMA is the construction of reality

for entertainment purposes. It is different than other sports such as football, basketball, or even its cousin, boxing. Although athletes in those sports may have distinct or eccentric personalities (such as Dennis Rodman or Muhammad Ali), the fighters of MMA are more character types. Yet MMA is not like America's professional wrestling, with soap opera story lines, clearly delineated 'good guys' and 'bad guys' and staged combat. MMA is 'real'. It is 'real' in the same ways that Reality TV is 'real'. It is 'as real as it gets' when entertainment and profit are at stake. Reality with respect to Reality TV is no longer really 'real'. It is subtle manipulation, enforced perspectives and truths that are not quite true. It is in every essence a simulacrum.

The premise of Reality television is to capture real-life, unscripted situations. Yet, it through these interviews that it becomes quite obvious that scenarios are intentionally constructed and cast members influenced to act or speak in a desired manner. Frankie describes how the participants of *TUF* were encouraged to say negative things about their housemates to promote confrontations:

“They try to get you talking crap about each other. It was hard in the Confessionals. For the Confessionals, you are stuck in the garage and it was summer so about 115 degrees out in Vegas. There was no air-conditioning the garage so you are just sweating. You can't see the camera, there's just lights everywhere. They start asking questions, they try to prod you, and they will keep you in there until they get you say something bad about another guy in the house.”

This “Confessional” is a special place where *TUF* participants were told to reveal their negative thoughts and feelings. It appears modeled after the Christian

(Catholic) confessional booth where churchgoers would confess their sins to be absolved. Ironically participants would rarely voluntarily confess their own sins here but are coaxed into making negative statements about their fellow participants. Frankie revealed that often participants would be told that someone in the house had said something damaging about another fighter that most likely was not true. These miscommunications were leaked out into the house so that confrontations would occur.

Brandon was particularly unhappy with the way that the show had presented them. Brandon felt that the show's producers/editors had made him out to the "cocky asshole" of the season. Although he indeed made the comments that producers highlighted, he insists many of them were taken out of context.

Me: Is there anything you regret about the way you were portrayed on *TUF*?

Brandon: Yeah. They kind of made me into the jerk. They made me seem like a cocky asshole and kind of dumb.

Me: How did they do this?

Brandon: They filmed me doing dumb stuff, joking around, being sarcastic but made it look like I was being serious.

Me: Can you give me a specific example?

Brandon: Ok. They were asking me questions about the fight. Like 'What is Brandon Stoakes going to do in the first round?' They kept repeating the question to me in the third person until I finally said 'Brandon Stoakes is going to...whatever.' They had like ten takes of me saying 'I am going to do this' but they used the one take where I talked in third person. Everyone bugged me about that. Even after the show people would mock me saying 'What is Brandon Stoakes going to do?'

Brandon felt coerced into not making a particular statement, but to use a particular means of phrasing. This situation demonstrates how something even as minor as grammar can impact public perception. Javier disclosed that producer/editors also manipulated chronological time. Events that happened in the beginning of the season could appear at the end of the season when televised. The power of altering time can have a significant impact on creating storylines or characters. Editors were able to splice comments and scenes together that actually happened but at the same time were also invented. Javier noted that this technique was employed to turn a minor one-time altercation between two cast members into what appeared a full-blown rivalry when the show actually aired. From his knowledge of what cast members from previous seasons disclosed to him prior to his own experience, during the taping, Javier was well aware of the control that the production team on *TUF* possessed. He remarked, “Yeah I was kind of worried. I didn’t want to look like ass on TV because they can do it to you. They can edit this however they want to, they can edit words from this episode and like things that happened like Week One and they put it with Week Three.” Javier assured me that in the end, there was no reason to worry too much. He felt that overall he was fairly represented. It appears that it was the luck of the draw. Javier was not a major character for that season therefore he flew under the radar of alterations. Frankie summed up the power of producers to manipulate representation as follows:

“They can create characters that they can do whatever they want with... they can make you a nice guy, or they can make you a bad guy. They have so much tape on you that they can turn you in to monster, or they can

turn you into the nicest guy in the world. You just have to wait and see.”

Outcomes of Reality: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly

Appearing on UFC’s The Ultimate Fighter Reality Show can be viewed as a mixed blessing for fighters. On a positive note, fighters gain recognition, a larger fan base, and a contract with the UFC. All of this translates into more opportunities (e.g. sponsorships) increased income and fame. Former members of the show have stated that they were finally able to leave dead-end jobs (e.g. waiting tables) and more easily support their families. One fighter noted how exposure from the show led to new sponsors, which allowed him to pay off medical bills for his wife’s brain surgery. The negative side for some fighters include feeling misrepresented, looking foolish and “wasted opportunities.” Jon described this notion of a “wasted opportunity:”

Jon: I was just too young. I was eighteen when I got on the show. I had been doing MMA for less than a year. I was good, I had a lot of wins but I really wasn’t ready. I didn’t take it seriously enough. Also, in the early seasons the guys who lost their fights would leave the main house and go to the “loser” house. We thought we were out of the running, so we drank, played video games all day and didn’t train at all. Then I got the chance to come back to the house so I took it. But there was no way I was prepared for that fight.

Me: Do you regret taking that fight or...

Jon: I regret being young and stupid and not knowing I had a chance to get back in. It was kind of a waste because I ending up with a bunch of losses on my record and I ending up looking like a bad fighter. It’s taken me a long time to work my way back up because of it.

While Jon felt he had ultimately grown from the experience, his appearance on

the show resulted in a personal and professional set back. Similarly, exposing the world of MMA through a reality television show brought the UFC and MMA great benefits such as launching MMA into the mainstream of American society and making the UFC exceedingly profitable. However, it also drew criticisms of the ugly side of MMA. The behavior of participants on the show, their drunkenness, their angry altercations, their destruction of property, only served to perpetuate the stereotype of MMA as a senseless and barbaric sport, and fighters as unintelligent, emotionally-stunted bullies.

Stigma and Stereotypes

Regardless of whether the interviewee was a fighter, a fan, or member of the media, they all acknowledged the presence of three prominent stereotypes. I posed the question: What are some of the misconceptions or stereotypes that you feel are associated with the sport of MMA? The predominant answers were: 1) MMA is barbaric and dangerous, 2) MMA fighters are uneducated with no other career prospects, and 3) by default, MMA fans are also aggressive and uneducated. Given the emergence of the sport as an entertainment centered spectacle first called No-Holds-Barred fighting, that drew on Roman gladiator imagery and relished in its edgy, clandestine status, it is not difficult to see why these stereotypes persist. The image and reputation of MMA is a double-edged sword. On one hand, part of the market appeal is the danger, the countercurrent swagger, (once again I submit Dunbar's (2000) *commodified rebellion*), that those who are part of the industry, fighters and fans, are allowed to claim. On the other

hand, attempts to legitimize the sport have been in many ways hindered by this intentionally manufactured illusion of peril. UFC representatives acknowledge that although they implemented numerous rules and regulations, efforts to grow the sport are still impacted by its early representation as a ‘blood-sport’:

“One of our main goals is educating the general public about the sport. A lot has changed over the past fifteen years. We still have to combat the misconceptions that it is a brutal sport with no rules, and that the fighters are thugs. They are trained, dedicated athletes. Now it’s all about education.”

(Michael Randle, UFC Representative, 2009)

Stereotype One: MMA is violent, barbaric and dangerous

Mixed Martial Arts is a full contact sport. The ultimate goal is to defeat an opponent through submission or knockout. There is no denying that aggression and injury play a part in this activity. However, when compared to other professional sports such as boxing or football we see that these sports can be deemed just as, if not more dangerous when considering rates and severity of injury. Yet it needs to be acknowledged that because MMA is a young sport, it is statistically difficult to compare to other sports. MMA lacks systematic and intensive medical study of incidences of injury that other sports such as boxing or football have undergone. Much of the rhetoric that MMA is a ‘deadly and violent’ sport rests upon speculation and conjecture, rather than scientific or academic evaluation.

A search of "Martial Arts Injuries" in PubMed Plus (a major Internet search engine that searches for topics in clinical medicine across a large

number of major research journals) yielded only 107 articles. Of these, I was unable to find even a single article that compared the injury rates of different martial arts to one another. And, in the articles about individual martial arts, there is not even unanimity about what the most dangerous techniques are... Thus, what we need to do is determine the actual rates per thousand exposures. Unfortunately, so far as I can tell, no one knows the real numbers of injuries. Instead, everyone seems to be arguing anecdotally rather than objectively.

(Landa 2004:5)

At the time of writing, there have been two fatalities (2007, 2010) that occurred directly related to participation in sanctioned MMA competitions. Both fatalities were a result of a blow to the head and failure to regain consciousness. In comparison, Svith's (2007) investigation estimates the risk of death in American football is about 8.9 per million. To further put this into perspective, Svith states, "at 76 deaths per million, the death rate for [*professional*] boxers fighting in Nevada casinos was lower than the average for US manual laborers. For example, US construction workers have a death rate of 251 per million, while US farm workers have a death rate of 393 per million." This is a remarkable comparison. There has been such public outrage against the violence of contact sports but so little acknowledgment of the hazards of everyday work for the individuals in these physically demanding professions. Perhaps the highly visible, televised nature of entertainment as 'work' draws more attention to the fatalities and injuries of professional combat sport athletes.

How does MMA compare to boxing? In boxing, the only target areas are the head and torso. The danger in boxing is chronic injury. The accumulation of blows to the head can lead to severe brain damage (see Heilbronner et al. 1991; Moriarity et al. 2004; Porter 2003). In MMA there are more target areas because it

is a hybrid sport. As kickboxing is allowed, the lower body now becomes open. It would seem counter intuitive, but with most of the body opened up as a target, the head and torso are subjected to less attacks. In addition, as a hybrid sport that includes jujitsu, fighters have numerous options for attack, such as obtaining arm or leg locks or chokes to force their opponent to submit. Technically, an MMA match can be won without a single punch being thrown.

I spoke with one former NFL football player and two current NFL football players that are also amateur MMA practitioners. I was curious as to their insights comparing the two sports. All three athletes agreed that while MMA was equally physically demanding, NFL football was far more dangerous. Sam and Colton, current NFL players, were particularly adamant that football was more than just a harmless pastime.

Sam: Well, I haven't fought professionally but I can tell you there are so many injuries in football. I've been knocked unconscious and told to get back out there for the next quarter.

Me: Um, is that common? You could have a concussion and to go back out there...

Sam: Yeah, especially for the quarterbacks. We need them so unless they are incapacitated they are going back out.

Me: What kinds of injuries have you gotten while in the NFL?

Colton: Let's see um a separated shoulder, ACL (knee) surgery, sprained fingers.

Sam: I've had a concussion, hamstring injuries, issues with my lower back.

Me: Those sound quite serious. I know you haven't competed in MMA but from what you've seen in football and MMA which sport do you think takes more of a toll on your body?

Sam: Football, no doubt.

Colton: Definitely football. People think that it's a nice family sport but when you have some three hundred pound lineman running you down you wouldn't think so. It takes a lot of aggression, guys coming force at you, helmet to helmet even.

It appears that the violent image of MMA has much more to do with its reputation as a 'blood sport' rather than true incidents of injury. The majority of professional fighters I spoke with stated that most of the serious injuries they received occurred during practice rather than competition. Some of the more serious injuries incurred were fractures of the nose, ribs, toes, and various bruises and strains. What is it that makes MMA appear more violent than other sports? MMA/jujitsu coach Santiago suggests that it may be a lack of knowledge: "If you have never seen MMA before and see a guy being choked until he passes out, of course it would look violent and scary. But, it is actually not that dangerous. MMA fighters learn how to use these techniques properly but they also learn when to tap out." The lack of knowledge of MMA techniques may also impact the medical community's perception of MMA. Martial Artist and physician Robert Nishime states:

It is my opinion that sports medicine professionals inexperienced with covering martial arts competitive events should focus first on becoming familiar with the issues and injuries associated with submission techniques, including choking and joint locking, followed by takedowns and throws. These techniques and their injuries are not as easily or intuitively conceptualized and understood as are those occurring from striking (i.e. punching and kicking). Chokes--These submission techniques can appear dramatically dangerous to the inexperienced observer, as well as the seasoned fan, but are considered relatively safe...If these chokes are performed properly, crush injuries to the neck and laryngotracheal area

should be nonexistent.

(Nishime, 2007:165)

MMA is undeniably a contact sport that often results in some kind of injury. Yet the image and reputation of MMA appears far more responsible for the perception of this activity as a mortally dangerous sport, rather than the actual practice itself.

Stereotype Two: MMA fighters are aggressive, uneducated and have no other career options

People have a lot of misconceptions about fighters, but most of the guys who fight MMA that I know are college educated and are really nice guys, never would hurt anyone. Most MMA fighters I know don't even get into fights outside of the ring or the cage and have never even been in a street fight in their lives. There are obviously guys who've come out of prison or rehab or whatever or had a troubled youth where they were fighting a lot. There's both sides of the coin there. For the most part, in my experience, most of the guys that I've met are extremely well-educated, extremely nice, non-confrontational guys who have families, have regular jobs, work their asses off just like the rest of us. They aren't a bunch of roughneck hooligans who go out there looking for trouble. That's not what they do. Unfortunately, that is a negative connotation that most people associate with the sport, and that's getting better now that the sport's gained a lot of mainstream popularity. But it's by no means forgotten.

(Jake, professional fighter interview 2009)

How does participation in this seemingly violent sport affect the lives of MMA athletes? Does being viewed in such a negative light create problems in their personal lives? Numerous participants admitted that they were often uncomfortable disclosing their chosen profession, particularly to individuals with little or no knowledge of the sport because of the misconceptions that fighters are aggressive and dumb.

Stephan: It was awkward telling my girlfriend's parents what I did for a living. I knew right away that they would judge me.

Me: What do you mean?

Stephan: Well if your daughter brings home a doctor, you think he's a smart, nice guy. If your daughter brings home a fighter, you think he's dumb and mean.

Me: Did they think that about you?

Stephan: I think so. They didn't know what MMA was for one thing...It sounds really bad when you tell them that you get into a cage and fight. They didn't come out and say it but I could tell. I mean her mom's into real estate and her dad does financial planning. I think they were disappointed maybe.

Me: Did that make you feel badly or wish you hadn't told them?

Stephan: A little, it was kinda clear they didn't think I was good enough. I could have told them that I work in IT [*information technology*]. That's what I used to do before I turned pro. But it shouldn't matter that I have a degree in computer science. I'm still the same person.

Stephan's level of education was common for most MMA fighters I interviewed. In fact, the UFC boasts that many of the professional fighters on their roster hold college/university degrees. As MMA developed into a hybrid sport, wrestling and grappling became recognized as an important foundation of the practice. A vast majority of successful fighters gained experience wrestling in college or university. As a wrestling base is so important to MMA, this perhaps explains why there are so many university/college grads fighting professionally in MMA. The UFC and other MMA organizations have put visible efforts into combating the stereotype that fighters are uneducated. In televised or Internet promotions, representatives will often mention the education levels of fighters. For example: UFC's tattooed, mohawked badboy Chuck Liddell has a Bachelor's degree in

Accounting; Heavyweight Shane Carwin has a double Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering and Environmental Technology; former math teacher and “good-guy” Rich Franklin has a Master’s degree in Education; *TUF* reality show finalist Phillippe Nover was a registered nurse; and new-comer Terry Martin is currently a PhD candidate in Psychology. Rather than seeing MMA as a last resort to make money, many fighters are choosing to become professional MMA practitioners over previous conventional careers as teachers, policemen and accountants.

Somehow, in American popular culture, a man is either a scholar or an athlete but rarely both. Where does the idea that a man must either be smart or else tough and athletic come from? This duality is not universal, but geographically and historically relevant. Being either of the mind or of the body appears in opposition to the idea of the ‘Renaissance Man’ or the more holistic notions of Chinese masculinity as presented by (Louie 2002) that incorporate the *wen* (scholarly, academic) and *wu* (physical, martial) as both important and complementary aspects of masculinity. I suspect that the ideological divide between the mind and body so prevalent in American society influences categorizations of individuals into these two camps. One only has look to popular American films of the past twenty or thirty years (exemplified in the *Revenge of the Nerds* franchise) to uncover the perceived antagonistic relationship between the nerd and the jock, or the mind and the body.

Playing up Stereotypes to Create Character types: Ethnicity and American-ness

Stereotypes can function to make the world more recognizable, more knowable. Ethnicity and socio-economic status seem to play a role in developing character types for the sport. As, mentioned before, these are not the soap opera characters of professional wrestling (*WWE*) but more so identifiable character types. The standard of physical perfection applies to all men involved regardless of ethnicity or financial background, but these two factors are used in creating variations of representations. Some fighters are far more image conscious than others, and may, in collaboration with managers and organizations, intentionally aim to develop a more public image. Interviews with fans and fighters brought to light three main fighter character types: the “All American”, the “Biker Badass” and the “Underdog.” When surveyed, respondents were able to consistently identify several fighters as such, thus reinforcing a shared perception of these types. Yet, respondents suggested that types could overlap in various aspects, and perhaps half of all the fighters they knew of would not fit in a certain category. Unlike professional wrestling, there are no universally recognized heroes and villains. The character types are not as obvious and clear cut; in MMA, they are subtler. In order for MMA to maintain its integrity as a real, authentic sport, fighters and promoters must guard against too aggressively and obviously constructing a persona. There is a fine line that must be walked to make the fighters a recognizable character (to draw interest and loyalty) but this fighter’s image must develop in an organic manner.

In order for a fighter to be recognized as the “All American” type there are several key ingredients. 1) Ethnicity—”All American” seems to be equated with being white/Caucasian. In interviews with fans when asked which fighters could be labeled “All American,” 100% of responses indicated fighters who were Caucasian. 2) Socio-economic status—fighters of this representation are thought of as coming from the middle class. Whether their true socio-economic background is middle class is not important, rather, the perception of middle class is. 3) Attitude—these fighters generally have a positive demeanor particularly when interacting with fans and media. According to fans and fighters interviewed, they possess a never-say die outlook and level of respect for their opponents and the sport. 4) Physical aspects—respondents suggested that these fighters could range in weight classes (from lightweight—155 lbs to heavyweight 205 lbs but within reason (capping off around 250 lbs). However, they must maintain an excellent physique, meaning low percentage of body fat and clearly defined muscles. They should appear lean. Also, these fighters do not have any excess adornments such as numerous tattoos, colored hair or painted nails. They are almost always clean-cut, clean-shaven and have no tattoos.

In comparison, these four facets (ethnicity, socio-economic status, attitude and physical aspects) vary in the representation of other types. The “Biker Badass” is almost always Caucasian or appearing to be of primarily Caucasian descent, from a lower-middle-class/middle-class background. These fighters are also physically fit but may possess a higher level of body fat. Survey respondents said that they usually have several tattoos, usually tribal designs, Asian characters,

or skulls. These fighters usually have a Mohawk hairstyle or shaven head. One fan described them as “the typical guy you’d find at a biker bar, like a Hell’s Angel kind of guy.” This fighter has a tough attitude and is more like the strong silent type. However, even if this character type is seen as a “bad-ass,” he must demonstrate a good heart underneath (such as smiling or positive interactions with fans, evidence of being a family man, etc.).

Interestingly, ethnic minority fighters are the ones that respondents more often associated with the “Cinderella/Underdog” representation. They are most often African American or Latino and from a lower socio-economic background. They often were depicted as escaping a difficult situation (e.g. living in poverty in a rough neighborhoods) to become a fighter in a prominent organization. Industry articles describe these fighters as having little other opportunities and fighting was their means of escaping violence and poverty. They are determined and remain connected with their roots. They often do interviews or photo shoots set in their former neighborhoods. This type of fighter is usually respectful of the sport and his opponents but has a determined air and confidence about himself. These fighters are in top physical condition, having very low body fat and clearly defined muscles. In a review of fight commentaries from randomly selected events over the past 10 years (available on the internet), African-American fighters are more likely to be called “a physical specimen” as opposed to any other ethnicity. Could this possibly be because more marginalized groups (i.e., ethnic minorities) are judged more on their physical appearance rather than other aspects of their identity? African-American athletes are also more often described

as having innate talent or being athletically gifted rather than being described as working hard to develop their skills (Messer, 1990). Alternatively, the use of the word “specimen” may be a reflection of a pervasive discourse of evolutionary biology that has entered popular culture in the past twenty years or so.

Butler (1990:140) states, “If gender is a series of repeated performances, then the distinctions of gender are dependent on the quality of its enactment by the body. As a result, the body has become the battleground for the policing of boundaries between men and women.” Examining these character types of masculinity suggest that these negotiated boundaries also involve ethnicity and socio-economic status. Ethnicity and socio-economic status appear to be represented in particular ways in the sport of MMA. These facets of identity contribute to subtly developing publicly recognizable character types. It is not an overt ideology of racial categories; rather, it reveals a subliminal message about what and who is truly American.

The presentation of gender or masculinity in MMA is complicated by factors such as age and ethnicity. To provide a parallel, Banet-Weiser’s (1999) work on North American beauty pageants describes the beauty pageant as a more than just a rehearsal of femininity and relays how pageants also operate within the realm of politics and ultimately defines both national identity and individual female aspirations. She notes that “the ideal female citizen” of America in the past was almost always white, but the relatively recent occurrence of minority winners highlights how beauty pageants mediate ethnicity within national boundaries. MMA, like beauty pageants, provides a venue for the presentation of gender

ideals, but is also a site where the performance of gender serves to reshape or reinforce notions of how aspects like ethnicity fit together with gender.

Stereotype Three: Given the nature of the sport and its participants (see Stereotypes One and Two) MMA fans are also uneducated and aggressive

The weekend of UFC 100 (July 17-19, 2009) the UFC also held their first MMA Fan Expo. This provided an excellent opportunity to see first hand who fans of MMA were. (See Appendix G for details on survey.) Target demographics provided by the UFC suggest that the majority of their viewers are males between 18-34 years old. This demographic also appeared to the prevailing cohort at the MMA Expo. However, I was somewhat surprised to see numerous women and children were also in attendance. Most of the females I spoke with indicated that while it was true that their husbands/boyfriends had gotten them interested in the sport, they also considered themselves to be true fans of the sport. This meant that they would view events even if their male partners were not present, and they had a favorite fighter whose career they would follow. For some fans this appeared a family event. There were children of all ages present (e.g. infants, toddlers, teenagers).

I conducted a survey of one hundred MMA fans to gain insight into who these individuals were (demographically) and why they were fans of MMA. I randomly selected one hundred individuals by administering surveys to the first one hundred people who were in line waiting for the expo to open. I interviewed 85 men and 15 women. Forty-nine percent of fans were aged 18-25 years old and

41% of fans were 26-36 years old. The remaining fans were over the age of 37 years old. The mean number of years that individuals self-identified as a fan was approximately 7 years, while the median was 5 years. Sixty-six percent listed 'Caucasian' as their ethnicity, 24% listed 'Hispanic,' 6% listed 'Mixed Ethnicity,' 2% listed 'Asian' and 2% listed 'Rather Not Say.' In terms of education, 70% percent stated they had either graduated college, attended some college level courses or technical schooling. The demographic characteristics of this cohort appear to be comparable to that of a study done by Nancy Cheever (2009) regarding viewing practices of MMA fans.

Cheever (2009) administered an online survey to over 3,500 MMA fans. The survey consisted of 61 questions that measured attitudes, opinions, and behaviors, and levels of hypermasculinity among the viewers. To measure hypermasculinity she uses subsets of the *Hypermasculinity Inventory* which statements such as "danger as thrilling" and "violence is manly" (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). The demographic traits for this sample were summarized as young white males (97% are under 40; 73% are white; 98% are male) who are single (78%), college educated (about 80% have at least some college or a college degree) (Cheever, 2009:5). Based upon Cheever's (2009) survey and the survey I conducted, it would appear that most MMA fans have a post-secondary level education.

What draws fans?

The sample population surveyed at the MMA Fan Expo (2009) suggested that they enjoyed the sport for the following reasons (listed in order of frequency): 1) it was exciting, fun and action-packed, 2) they admired the skill required to fight, and 3) they liked the fighters. To gain insight fan perspectives on MMA, the survey also included the questions, ‘Who is your favorite fighter?’ and ‘What makes this person your favorite fighter?’ Responses to ‘who is your favorite fighter’ varied, however George St. Pierre, Randy Couture, and Anderson Silva were frequently cited. Responses to why a particular fighter was favored were grouped into three categories: 1) *Personality Traits and Values*, 2) *Talent/Skill*, 3) *Appearance*, and 4) *Other*. An overwhelming 77% listed *personality* traits such as: “cool, determined, smart, and humble” as their reasoning for liking a particular fighter. Thirteen percent listed the *skill* of the fighter, for example: “toughness, strength, power.” *Appearance* (e.g. cool Mohawk or tattoos) was the response listed by 5% of respondents (although I suspect a couple respondents made these comments in jest). Finally, there were miscellaneous *other* responses such as, “he’s got a cute girlfriend”, or “he’s Brazilian like me.” Miscellaneous responses should also be considered, as three individuals cited the fact that they liked their favorite fighter because he was the same ethnicity as them.

Fans indicated that they felt that being an MMA fighter would be a positive experience. They were asked the question: ‘What do you think is the best thing about being an MMA fighter?’ Responses were grouped into three categories: *Personal*, *Social* and *Material*. Drawing the line between personal and

social was often times difficult as there is admittedly overlap between the categories. *Personal* is defined as individual mental/emotional benefits such as “being the best, accomplishing goals, defending the title.” *Social* refers to relationships and interactions (e.g. “fame, respect, women, and fans”). *Material* describes responses that can be seen as tangible benefits, for example, “money, cars, and free stuff.” Fifty-two percent identified *personal* benefits, 36% identified *social* benefits, and 12% identified *material* benefits (with “money” comprising 90% of these *material* responses). These survey responses indicate that fans see MMA first and foremost as a personally and socially fulfilling endeavor. Fans admired popular professional MMA fighters primarily due to perceived personality traits such as being “brave, smart, or humble,” the skill of the fighter was secondary, and the appearance of the fighter was not especially significant to their admiration.

Ironically, when asked “what do you think are some of the negative aspects of being a professional fighter”, fans suggested that benefits could also be drawbacks. Surprisingly, “fame” was also seen as a drawback to many fans. Fans surveyed also listed injury quite low on the list of negative aspects. When questioned further, fans felt that although MMA fighters did get injured, the injuries they were aware of were not “too serious”. Drawbacks to being an MMA fighter were grouped into four categories: *Personal* (12%), which included aspects such as “pressure and stress,” *Social* (69%) for example, “lack of privacy” and “being away from family,” *Material/Physical* (14%) such as “no insurance” and “injuries,” and *Nothing* (5%). Fans seem to view the life of MMA fighter as

very much as socially driven pursuit. Overall, fans appear to be drawn to MMA due to positive aspects such as the personality and talent of fighters, and watching someone compete to “be the best.” These findings seem to be agreement of those published by Cheever (2009:6) in her aforementioned study on viewing practices:

The number one draw to mixed martial arts is the different styles that come together (80% of the respondents checked) and the competition of the sport (78%). Respondents were also drawn to MMA because it takes more skill than other combat sports, explaining the recent phenomenon of MMA eclipsing boxing as the favored combat sport among young men. Few respondents reported being drawn to the sport because of the violence (22%), the blood (16%), or that it was “like the Roman gladiators” (11%)... The number one aspect of MMA that fans find most entertaining is the skill of the fighters (90%). They also enjoy the range of talent and abilities (81%), the fighting styles (82%), the techniques and moves (82%), and the competition of it (73%). Fans reported being less entertained by seeing someone get hurt (15%), the blood (13%), the violence (17%), or watching the men beat each other up (19%).

Cheever’s (2009) study consisted of over 3,500 respondents, and “80% agreed or strongly agreed that MMA had a positive impact on their lives” and 86% of respondents reportedly “never engaged in aggressive behavior directly after viewing MMA” (ibid:8).

Another interesting aspect of this study is the attempt to measure fans’ *hypermasculinity*. This is another common presumption, that both MMA fighters and MMA fans are hypermasculine males. What exactly is a hypermasculine male? Is this a biological condition, an excess of testosterone? Is it a manifestation of numerous socially perceived aspects of maleness such as violence, aggression or rampant sexual activity? The term *hypermasculinity* is inherently problematic because it is attempting to define a concrete condition of

excessive masculinity when masculinity itself has yet to be adequately investigated. This is the same problem with a scale of hypermasculinity in that the terms of measurement are preconceived characteristics imposed by researchers. In any case, according to Cheever's data this assumption is not realized:

To test hypermasculinity traits in the men, two subscales of the hypermasculinity inventory (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984) were used: "violence as manly," and "danger as thrilling." Respondents were asked to choose between two answers that best described how they felt or responded to a certain situation. The men scored low on the "danger as thrilling" subscale (M=3.2) and moderate on "violence as manly" (M=5.7). It appears that MMA viewers do not possess the typical hypermasculine traits associated with combat sport enthusiasts, according to the two subscales used here (M=4.4).

(Cheever 2009:4)

Media and professional MMA fighters also provided anecdotal evidence that most MMA fans were not the typical, "hypermasculine jock". Eva has been a professional photographer for over five years. She suggests while there are fans that look like "thugs, wearing their *TapOut* and *Affliction* gear, most fans are just everyday guys." She also noted that she has seen the female fan base for MMA grow dramatically over the past five years. MMA website developers and bloggers, Ryan and Noel, divulge that "the real MMA fans aren't the guys with tattoos and Mohawks, they are the nerdy guys with glasses and no girlfriends... They are the true fans that can tell you the record of every pro fighter and date of every MMA fight since UFC 1." Professional fighters I interviewed also stated that MMA fans should not be judged by their appearance.

Jared: Typical fans? I'm not sure who that is anymore. Before, I thought it

was just like frat boys wearing *TapOut* but now...[laughs].

Me: What do you mean?

Jared: My Grandma is so into MMA right now.

Me: You're kidding?

Jared: After my first fight, I explained to her what MMA was. I thought that she would be horrified or not understand. Then a couple months later, she was calling me on the phone asking me if I'd seen the last UFC, or asking what I thought of Mike Brown. I thought she was trying to humor me or she was just watching so that she could talk to me 'bout it. But my Grandpa said, 'Nope, when the fights are on he doesn't dare try to change the channel.'

Although the primary viewing demographic for MMA events has been established as 18-34 year males, as Jared and numerous other fighters and members of the media pointed out, almost anyone could be an MMA fan.

True Fans vs. the Wannabes: Exploring Authenticity and Exclusivity

"Kick his ass!"

"Kill him!"

"Knock his head off!"

These phrases were frequently heard during live MMA events that I attended. What happened to the educated, civilized fans that I encountered prior to the match? Did the mix of excitement and alcohol turn them into the equivalent of the violent, aggressive British football 'hooligan'? (See Armstrong 1998; Brimson 2007.) The fan population that I surveyed and that is outlined in Cheever's (2009) study is clearly educated about the sport and view MMA to observe their favorite

fighters and the skill of MMA athletes. Yet there is no doubt that some fans appear to enjoy the action and aggression of the sport. I suggest that the fans I surveyed and interviewed were what those in the MMA world consider ‘hardcore fans,’ defined by their level of knowledge of the sport. Also, since the UFC 100 Fan Expo was held in Las Vegas, these fans had to spend a significant amount of money to travel to Vegas, purchase food and lodging, and also tickets to the Expo and MMA event. I would estimate that the lodging and ticket alone cost over \$500 per person. This would seem to indicate that it would be the more devoted fan of the sport rather than occasional viewer who would readily incur this cost. I suspect that the fans that Cheever (2009) surveyed in the spring of 2007 were also these ‘hardcore fans’ of MMA. Cheever (2009) chose to use the popular MMA website *Sherdog.com* as a platform to reach MMA fans. She posted the survey in the forum section of the site and members of *Sherdog* volunteered their responses. According to MMA fans and media personnel I spoke with, the fans that take time to post on MMA forums or even join MMA websites (where you must set up a profile) are obviously the more devoted fans, seeking ways of interacting with the sport through social media. Fans and fighters alike spoke of two different sets of MMA fans. There are the ‘hardcore fans’, many of who also train recreationally in MMA, who have followed the sport for numerous years and are more interested in viewing MMA for aspects of skill and admiration. Then, there are also ‘casual fans’ who may be more recent converts to the sport of MMA, do not have much personal physical experience with MMA, and are more interested in seeing a fight for the excitement and aggression. What causes this split in the fan base?

MMA was once an underground subcultural activity that grew into a highly visible, mainstream, sporting pastime. The ‘hardcore fans’ continued to support MMA into this transition, but a new population of casual viewers were now being drawn to the sport. Among both fighters and fans there appears to be some discontent over the sport “going mainstream.” MMA matches can be found on cable television, MMA apparel can be bought at Walmart, and MMA is now sanctioned (2010) in every state of the US except for Vermont. (Sanctioning is currently pending in New York, Connecticut, and West Virginia.) There are MMA events held all over the world from Poland, to Peru, to the United Arab Emirates. There are credit cards sponsored by the UFC where rewards points can be redeemed for UFC tickets and paraphernalia, there are MMA video games on the most popular gaming systems, and there are even children’s classes in MMA. While this has made MMA more accepted among the general public and aided in achieving sanctioning across the United States, many MMA fans resent this process of ‘selling out.’

Marcus [fan]: It used to be really cool, you know? Not many people knew about MMA. It was only the die-hard fans that followed the early UFC’s. We’d gather around a buddy’s basement to watch Royce Gracie beat out everyone.

Me: So how do you feel about the sport becoming mainstream?

Marcus [fan]: It sucks. Now you get every guy off the street wearing *TapOut* or *Affliction* shirts. They watch one fight and they think they know all the fighters. Or even worse they think just cause they watch the show and get into street fights, that makes them an MMA fighter. There’s so many wannabes out there calling themselves fighters and pretending they train in their backyards. It just cheapens the sport. This was our sport...

MMA journalist Thomas Larson has been following in MMA since the early 1990s. He is the creator of a popular MMA website and blog. He states, “Lots of MMA fans are exclusionary, like a gang they are territorial. They don’t want it on ESPN or to have Coca Cola sponsors. They want it to remain non-mainstream. They want it to be marginalized.” I also noticed during my survey of MMA Expo fans that many of them made it a point to tell me how they had been long-time fans or fans since the beginning. As a fan, this level of exclusivity appears key to their identity. They want to be recognized as an authentic fan of the sport and not just someone that had latched onto the coat-tails of the newest ‘cool trend.’

According to some fans, the commercialization and mass appeal has diluted the true sport. Extreme sports such as surfing and snowboarding, and even rock-climbing also share a similar kind of resistance to commercialization. Prominent rock-climber Tim Fairfield describes this negotiation of rebellion and commercialization in extreme sport, he claims that rock-climbing is “packaged radicalism” and “it’s anti-authority” but it is not “anti-money” (Fairfield as quoted in Rinehart and Syndor 2003: 417)

It’s a Love-Hate Relationship: Fan-Fighter Interactions

“Our [UFC] philosophy is to be fan friendly, and this comes right from [president] Dana White. He’ll go—if he’s at a weigh-in, he will not leave or fight until he signs every autograph and takes a picture with anybody who wants one. That permeates down to the fighters, and you’ll see at every event that the fighters in the hotel, they’ll sign autographs and take pictures. We set up autograph tables where the fans line up. That’s part of what they have to do. We believe in giving back. We’re probably as approachable as any sport in the world. A lot of them have Twitter accounts now that we’ve encouraged. I think they all have Facebook. Social media is real important, and we really encourage that.”

(UFC Media Relations Representative, interview 2009)

I chose to include fans in this chapter on representation as there is generally a personal disconnect between a ‘celebrity’ and a fan. What the fan knows of the ‘celebrity’ is usually ascertained third-party, through images, and representations of that individual and these displays are most often not generated by the ‘celebrity’ him/herself. Yet the relationship is still meaningful, especially to the fan. With advancements in Internet social media, such as Myspace or Facebook, this gap decreases and the ‘celebrity’ becomes more accessible. Professional MMA fighters have utilized this medium to increase their visibility, while fans see this as a means to establish ‘real’ relationships.

The professional fighters I interviewed stated that the majority of their time spent interacting with fans happened via social media networks such as Facebook or Myspace. Other sources of interaction included live promotional events to sign autographs or unplanned meetings (e.g. encountering fans while out a restaurant). While 95% of professional fighters interviewed stated that they had a Facebook or Myspace account, 80% had a specific profile used to interact with fans and potential sponsors. The comments received were often positive, but could also negative or strange.

Me: Do you have a fan page on Facebook or Myspace?

Brandon: Yeah, I do.

Me: What kind of feedback do you get?

Brandon: Some people will be like, ‘nice job man’ or sometimes they say things like ‘you suck’, or ‘you’re ugly.’

Me: Really?

Brandon: It’s weird because one day they would be like your biggest fan and the next day they hate you.

Me: Does it hurt your feelings?

Brandon: It definitely takes a little getting used to. But once you’re used to it, like it doesn’t bother me anymore.

Me: I see. Have you had any strange encounters with fans?

Brandon: Oh yeah, like I’ve had some weird things on Myspace, received like messages from some like girl in New York, I don’t know how old she was, and she was like, “oh, I had a bad day today and came out about being molested as a child. What do you think about it?” Why would you even be telling me this? I don’t even know you.

It appears that the anonymity of the Internet emboldens individuals to say things that they may not in real life. Brandon tells me he has never had a fan actually come up to him and make negative comments about his performance or appearance. This kind of critique appears reserved for Internet interactions. Likewise, the female fan’s confession about her childhood molestation is quite shocking, yet with the distance and anonymity of the Internet she felt it was a safe vehicle for revealing her secret. It is strange however that she would choose to share this incredibly personal information with someone she has never met and someone she does not even know. Brandon stated that he had not had any prior interactions with this girl, and this was her first post on his Internet profile. Brandon appeared baffled as to why she wanted his opinion of such a personal matter. He speculates that perhaps she ‘got to know him’ through his time on the

television show *The Ultimate Fighter*. Furthermore his fame from the television turned him into somewhat of a celebrity. As a celebrity, perhaps the young woman felt his opinion was of more value due to his status.

Other professional fighters remarked that it was a common occurrence for fans to speak to them as if “they knew them.” Fans would often call them by personal nicknames, or even tell the fighter to “say hello to your wife and kids for me,” as if they were friendly acquaintances.

Javier: It’s really weird. People think cause they see you on T.V. that they know all about you. They tell me about stuff I said or did that I don’t even remember. This guy followed me to the bathroom to get my autograph. I’m just a regular guy and all of this happened so fast. I appreciate the fans because without them, I don’t really have a job but sometimes they act like you owe them something.

Through social media and the UFC’s unofficial policy, MMA has been made more accessible to fans. In addition, the ideology of the sport adds another dimension of accessibility. Much of the popularity of MMA has rests upon the premise that this sport can turn the average, everyday man into a superstar. Fans can relate to the seemingly ordinary image of a former garbage man, and come to admire the achievements obtained through hard work and sacrifice; it is the re-telling of the American dream. Being able to relate to the former identity of the fighter (e.g. school teacher, accountant, mechanic) makes the fighter more approachable. Unlike football or baseball where one has to basically select the proper channels of training since youth in order to become a professional, many MMA superstars have come to sport relatively late in life, as a second career. Due to *The Ultimate Fighter* reality television show, a number of fighters have gone

from obscurity to stardom in less than a year. It is difficult to name any other professional sports where this could happen. Part of the appeal of MMA is prospect of possibility.

Conclusions

The world of MMA represents a carefully crafted promise of achievement and fame. It offers an image of reality that is for the most part incongruent with the actualized lives of MMA participants. While being a professional MMA fighter can be profitable for some individuals, most who fight professionally must also maintain other sources of employment to support themselves and their families. The slogan of *The Ultimate Fighter* television show is ‘as real as it gets’, yet this reality is quietly manipulated and shaped to produce drama for the benefit of ratings. The reputation and appeal of MMA rests upon its claims of reality. The fighters are not actors and the outcomes of matches are not predetermined. The goal of the UFC was to as closely as possible replicate a ‘real’ fight situation to uncover which combat style would be most effective. The sport, its origins, its image, its discourse, all operate to reproduce ‘reality.’ Yet it must be a profitable reality. MMA is prime example of Dunbar’s *commodified rebellion*. Its beginnings as an underground counterculture activity provided a defiant appeal to those with antiestablishment sentiments, but in gaining immense popularity and entering mainstream American culture, the now legitimated sport boasts bedfellows of corporate America such as *Walmart* and *Burger King*. Though the sport of MMA is sanctioned nearly across the United States and operates under

State Athletic Commissions, its legacy as once branded “human cock-fighting” is certainly not forgotten. The ‘blood-sport’ origins of MMA and the UFC add a seemingly authentically dangerous allure, but at the same time provides the source of stigma that affects the daily lives of MMA fighters and fans. The intricacies of MMA reveal numerous co-existing contradictions that cannot simply be viewed as discrete oppositional states, while the carefully crafted image of MMA illustrates the movable boundaries of a social reality.

PART III. Discussion: Contexts of American Masculinity: Momentous Events of the New Millennium

Connell (1987; 1995; 2005) suggests that hegemonic masculinity is a configuration of gender practices that are constantly in motion. Gender and masculinity are dynamic, rather than a quality to be possessed or universal state. These descriptions would indicate that the contexts of social life, and therefore the political, economic and social factors that comprise culture, are crucial to its manifestation in contemporary culture. In looking at masculinity through the analytical lens of Mixed Martial Arts, it is necessary to look at the conditions that led to its wide-spread popularity and thus ability to disseminate ideas and representations of contemporary American masculinity.

Although Mixed Martial Arts was established in North America in the early 1990s, it did not gain its momentous popularity until nearly a decade later. The rapid transition from an underground, socially unacceptable spectacle, to multi-million dollar, worldwide sport is quite remarkable. Amendments in rules and regulations only supply a small part of the answer. Such a change in what is considered socially acceptable behavior begs the question as to what were the social and political circumstances that allowed for such a dramatic shift to occur. And furthermore, how is this aggressive, male-dominated sport tied to contemporary American gender consciousness? America was founded upon notions of rugged individualism (Kimmel 2006; Rotundo 1993) but over time

there have been trends that dictate which qualities of masculinity are most valued. Around the time that MMA began its ascent to worldwide popularity, two other major occurrences were taking place. The first is the calling upon of Americans to enter the Iraq War, and the second is the explosion of Reality Television.

The Iraq War

It is not surprising that researchers cite war as primarily a masculine domain, and space through which masculinity is defined (Barrett 1996, Hutchings 2008, Kimmel 2007, Lutz 2002, Stemple 2006). Jeffords (1989) suggests that pervasive narratives of masculine valor in the Vietnam War served as building blocks to re-masculinize post-Vietnam American society. Hutchings (2007: 390) points out that the concept of masculinity is anchored through war, and provides a fixed reference point for any (re)negotiation of what masculinity may mean. The comparisons between the Vietnam War and the Iraq War have been a site of analysis for many academics (Danchev 2007, Hoskins 2004, Kalyvas and Kocher 2007, Lutz 2002, Robben 2009). The parallels between the Vietnam War and the Iraq War underlie the importance of Jeffords' (1989) assessments of war as a site for the shaping of American masculine identity. What is of interest is in the contexts of the Vietnam War and the Iraq War, similar archetypes of masculinity are called upon. It is more than rugged individualism, akin to an impulsive, cowboy-type mentality (Kimmel 2006). The attacks of 9-11 required immediate and forceful retaliation. It was a time for action, and hero-building (Boon 2005; Lutz 2002). Staurowsky (2010: 65) suggests that there was an "inherent

masculinism at the core of the response to September 11.” Furthermore, investigative journalist Lorraine Dowler (2002) revealed that although women made up roughly one-third of New York’s Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) and 6000 women were part of New York police force, women were rarely acknowledged as part of the rescue efforts in media coverage of the events of September 11th. The highly ‘macho’ (Kimmel 2007) political atmosphere appears to have provided the fertile social conditions in which the overtly physical and aggressive masculine qualities of MMA were allowed to flourish.

The mythology and symbolism of today’s most popular spectator sports are flooded by dominant themes of: patriotism, militarism, violence and meritocracy (Messner 1990). Klein (1993) suggests that the heroic ideal is certainly central to subculture of bodybuilding. He goes on to state that in American society celebrity is confused with heroism, and that form rather than function succeeds in today’s world (ibid: 274). Yet Klein astutely points out that besides the question of which venues men choose in defining their masculinity, there is the matter of determining why a certain choice is more popular at a certain point in time. In terms of bodybuilding, he ponders whether bodybuilding reflects the surge in nationalism and military muscle flexing in the Persian Gulf War, or if it is a reaction to the humiliation of Vietnam. It is perhaps that the 20th century decline of the practical relevance of physical strength in work and warfare, along with frequent mediated representations of male body as strong, virile and powerful, begin to take on increasingly important ideological and symbolic significance (Messner 1990: 169).

Discourse analysis highlights the pervasiveness of the language of war in MMA. During competitions, the commentators label the fighter's kicks and punches as his "arsenal of weapons." The two athletes were often said to "go to battle" or "war." There are clearly parallels in that both war and the simulated war of MMA appear to be proving grounds for masculinity. As Hutchings (2007: 400) notes, "our understanding and evaluation of war is secured through its association with masculinity." MMA's connections with war and warfare serve to anchor the sport as a contemporary source of masculinity. Jeffords (1989) proposes that societies are in a sense a total sum of their war stories. This effect is accomplished by formalizing a collective identity for those who engage in it and support it. It becomes *our* battle, *our* war and *our* victory. MMA provides a venue for a hero to emerge. There is an immediate and definitive resolution. However, MMA's ties to war are not simply metaphorical. Over the years, the UFC has actively established its relationship to the United States military in a number of ways. The Marine Corp is now a major, paying sponsor of the UFC events. Their recruitment advertisements are shown during commercial breaks, and their ads appear in MMA magazines. In 2008, the UFC held its first *Fight for the Troops* event raising four million dollars for the *Intrepid Heroes Fund*, a charity that supports wounded troops and their families. The mutually beneficial, cross-marketing relationship was further cemented in a statement endorsing MMA in the *Marine Corps Times Online*:

"The ideologies behind UFC and the Marine Corps now are very similar in a lot of ways — not just in the fighting techniques and mixed martial arts aspect, but ... we both share that warrior ethos," said Gunnery Sgt.

Pauline Franklin, a spokeswoman at Marine Corps Recruiting Command. Pro fighters, she added, “are very intense people who like to push their limits, and they focus hard on training and believe in commitment, honor and courage.”²⁰

The characteristics of Marines are now akin to characteristics of MMA athletes and vice versa. The values of honor, courage and dedication of this very American institution become synonymous with the description of MMA fighters and thus by extension MMA appears to be adopted (or co-opted) and Americanized. The relationship between MMA (UFC) and the United States military only seems to be strengthening over time, as both become sites for similarly idealized masculine values.²¹

Reality TV

Television programming in the early 2000s was rife with reality. Competition- based shows such as: *American Idol*, *America’s Next Top Model* and *Survivor* were especially successful in terms of ratings.²² Although the UFC began its comeback a couple years before implementing *The Ultimate Fighter* (2004), it was this reality television show that brought MMA to mainstream America. It was the Spike TV Network’s most popular show by far. Vice President of the UFC, Mark Ratner, insists that this exposure was pivotal to

²⁰ http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2010/02/marine_ufc_020710w/

²¹ The links between MMA, militarism and masculinity this could certainly be a direction for future research. These brief paragraphs only scratch the surface of the complex and historically situated relationships between these aspects of American society.

²² see <http://www.realitytvworld.com> for a list of ratings of reality shows by year.

Zuffa's (UFC parent's company) success. The reality television phenomenon was the launching platform for the MMA phenomenon and therefore central to the widespread discourse of contemporary American masculinity as conceptualized through MMA.

The Ultimate Fighter is about ordinary men who through demonstrations of their physical prowess become heroes and celebrities. The format, in which there is only one winner, one *Ultimate Fighter*, speaks to the glorification of the individual that was, and is, so appealing to television audiences. Like the other successful reality, competition-based shows, *TUF* re-tells the story of the "American dream." It promises how the ordinary, but perhaps gifted and dedicated citizen can achieve wealth and stardom. These television shows are idealized representations, as real life for several professional fighters and former *TUF* participants revealed. The specifics of the reality show proved to be more about manipulation for ratings rather than genuine interaction and the development of MMA skills. The monetary rewards were not nearly as much as fighters (and fans) had imagined. The manipulation of time and editing of individuals to create character types proved disappointing for some who had participated on the show. Furthermore, the glamorous "rock and roll lifestyle" depicted in MMA magazines and websites was a reality only for a small minority of professional fighters. In much the same way that ideals of the body are representations that create a relation to the imaginary (Moore 1999), the promise of luxury and wealth also create a reference point of interpellation (Althusser 1971) for contemporary American identity and successful masculinity. Reality

shows, which frequently offer near instant fame and fortune, suggest that this lifestyle is desirable and achievable by the mere fact that it is labeled as “reality.”

MMA transformed from nearly nationally banned, counter-culture spectacle to being endorsed by a foundational institution of America (the Marine Corp) in a matter of fifteen years. Although representations of masculinity in the sport have changed some, it appears that the contexts of American life surrounding the sport have also changed dramatically.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS: MASCULINITY AS RELATIONAL AND EMBODIED

The goal of this project was to examine contemporary American masculinity through the analytical lens of the new sport phenomenon of Mixed Martial Arts. Using Connell's (1987; 1995; 2000) theory of *hegemonic masculinity* as a starting point, I attempted to look at how hegemony operated on the individual level. How did an individual's actions and perceptions transfer and translate into a shared ideology and vice versa? I turned to notions of embodiment (Merleau-Ponty 1989, Csordas 1999; 1994a; 1994b) as a framework through which to understand how this process may occur. In Part I looked at how masculinity was shaped and embodied through individual participation. Central to this process of identity construction was an understanding of how the body was used in daily activities to produce a sense of self and how this is translated into a masculine domain. The body was certainly more than a link between a material and ideational world: it was deemed to be an equally essential component of conceptualizing existence. The body was integral to participation and to identity, since in many ways it was trained and shaped into a certain idealized form. Daily training and competition were essential to how MMA fighters perceived and represented themselves. Yet the experience for these individuals was not simply rooted in physicality. Participants suggested that the endeavor of MMA required mental stamina, but success in the sport also involved achieving a kind of mind-body-social connection.

In the latter half of Part I examined how MMA participants conceived of their bodies in relation to idealized representations. (At the outset I had imagined these ‘idealized representations’ to be hegemonic masculinity.) Many professional MMA fighters displayed incredible knowledge of their bodies’ functioning (as seen in the practice of cutting weight), yet many were uncomfortable in articulating the relationship they had with their bodies, particularly when in reference to the term masculinity. In trying to ascertain what hegemonic masculinity was associated with the sport and perhaps who possessed this hegemonic masculinity, I found myself constantly being drawn back to the realm of representation rather than actual individuals. The layers and intersections of ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, education, family and even emotion, provided contexts that made hegemonic terms of *dominant*, *subordinant* and *marginalized* insufficient. While oftentimes it was clear that a specific body image or particular characteristic of the male MMA fighter was deemed an ideal, it was visible through the presentation of this ideal (e.g. advertisements) and how individuals perceived their own relations to this ideal. Hegemonic masculinity was far easier to identify and see on a representational level (e.g. advertisements, television shows). In fact, hegemonic masculinity cannot operate without representation (by representation I mean images that positioned with intentionality), because it involves the sharing of ideologies. Where hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; 1995; 2005) was most useful was when applied to the realm of representation.

Part II examined women in the world of MMA. A study of masculinity would not be complete without considering how masculinity functions in relation to other gender-based constructs such as femininity or homosexuality. This section also acted as a bridge between embodiment and representation as it dealt with embodied issues of practice and also how individuals dealt with constraining avenues of representation. Many women in the sport--fighters, members of the media and wives of fighters have to contend with dichotomous representations of women as either 'lesbians' or 'groupies.' *Hegemonic masculinity* is said to be constantly changing. In fact, gender itself is said to be relational. In considering masculinity and gender as represented through the sport of MMA, it became necessary to examine greater contexts and trends of American popular culture. I therefore looked at the popularity of MMA as coeval with what Levy (2005) calls the 'rise of *raunch culture*' and how this corresponds to what some theorists suggest as a new post-feminist era, where it is simply assumed goals of gender equity have already been achieved. Post-feminism discourse highlights gender constructs as increasingly relying on commodification.

Part III examined how masculinity was represented and constructed in a public domain and indeed how this domain in MMA was complicated by an escalating commercialization of the sport. Fighters appeared to be both consumers and commodities in the MMA industry. Furthermore, I questioned how representations of MMA and of fighters affect the lives of those involved in the sport. Participants frequently remarked that they felt they were subject to stereotypes. This tension existing between the individual and social self involved

negotiating one's concept and representation of masculinity. Although the nature of the MMA has not drastically changed, its profitability has recently prompted several states to lift the ban on MMA, illustrating how sport is inextricably intertwined with economics and politics. As Part II led to a consideration of how MMA was situated in popular American culture, Part III also led to an examination of the contexts in which MMA became the a world-wide, multi-million dollar industry and thus an effective transmitter of particular notions of masculinity. One major contributing factor was the aligning of MMA with the Reality TV phenomenon using the television show *The Ultimate Fighter* as a springboard to entering mainstream American culture. The second major event corresponding with the rise in popularity of MMA was the Iraq War. War has long provided a site for masculinity to be enacted and represented. Over time, the affiliation between MMA and the American military has only grown stronger and more intimate. The Marine Corp's sponsorship of the UFC suggests their desire to connect with popular culture and America's youth using MMA as a source to generate excitement. Masculinity is context dependant, changing with time and place. It is important to examine American culture and the socio-political happenings that shaped representations and conceptions of American masculinity that correspond to the rise of the sport. I offer these events not as variables responsible for the popularity of MMA but rather to reveal that masculinity does not arise in a vacuum. In order to understand masculinity as a relational construct it was necessary to interrogate the representations and contextualizations of gender in contemporary American society.

Traditionally, anthropological works addressing masculinity have tended to focus on more remote and indigenous cultures (Godelier 1986; Gregor 1985; Herdt 1994). This project seeks to expand anthropological research on masculinity to contemporary U.S. society, which is often taken as the implicit standard from which to compare masculinities of other cultures. In addition, the majority of research on how gender is constructed, shaped, and commodified centers on women (Bordo 1993; Gremillion 2005; Resischer and Koo 2004). Social science studies of men and masculinity (e.g. Jeffords 1989; Gutmann 1996; Kimmel 2006; Rotundo 1993) provide an important counterpoint to that imbalance in the academic literature, as the disparity in research only serves to make masculinity appear more naturalized. My hope is that this study of the relationships between the outward conditions (such as media representation) that shape a social self, and the corporeal aspects (such as the training of the body) that shape self-identity can contribute to a better understanding of masculinity as both an embodied and relational construct.

REFERENCES CITED

- Alam, H. B., and P. Rhee
2007 New Developments in Fluid Resuscitation. *Surgical Clinic North America* 87(1):55.
- Alter, J. S.
1992 *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Althusser, L.
1971 Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. P.p.127-186. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Anderson, E.
2009 *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*. New York: Routledge.
- 2005 Orthodox and Inclusive Masculinity: Competing Masculinities Among Heterosexual Men in a Feminized Terrain. *Sociological Perspectives* 48(3):337-56.
- Andrews, D. L.
2001 *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Andrews, D., D. Mason and M. Silk
2005 *Qualitative Methods in Sports Studies*. New York: Berg.
- Andrejevic, M.
2004 *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield.
- Archetti, E. P. and N. Dyck
2003 Playing Football and Dancing Tango: Embodying Argentina in Movement, Style, and Identity. In *Dance, Sport, and Embodied Identities*. E. P. Archetti, and N.Dyck (Eds.) Oxford: Berg Press.
- Armstrong, G.
1998 *Football Hooligans: Knowing the Score*. New York: Berg.
- Arvanitis, J.
2003 *Pankration: The Traditional Greek Combat Sport and Modern Mixed Martial Art*. Boulder, Colorado: Paladin Press.

- Augustin, L.M.
2005 New Research Directions: The Cultural Study of Commercial Sex. *Sexualities* 8:618-631.
- Bacigalupo, A.M.
2004 Ritual Gendered Relationships: Kinship, Marriage, Mastery, and Machi Modes of Personhood. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 60/2: 203-229.
- Banet-Weiser, S.
1999 *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barrett, F. J.
1996 The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the U.S. Navy. *Gender, Work, and Organization* 3(3):129-142.
- Becker G.
2000 *The Elusive Embryo: How Women and Men Approach New Reproductive Technologies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bird, S.
1996 Welcome to the Men's Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity. *Gender and Society* (10):120-132.
- Blackshaw, T. and T. Crabbe
2004 *New Perspectives on Sport and 'Deviance': Consumption, Performativity, and Social Control*. London: Routledge.
- Boon, K. A.
2005 Heroes, Metanarratives, and the Paradox of Masculinity in Contemporary Western Culture. *Journal of Men's Studies*. 13(3): 301-312.
- Bordo, S., and A. Jaggar, (Eds.)
1989 *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. New Jersey: Rutgers.
- Bourdieu, P.
2001 *Masculine Domination*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- 1986 The Forms of Capital. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. J. Richardson (Ed.) P.p.241-258. New York: Greenwood.
- 1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Trans. by R. Nice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Brimson, D.
2007 *March of the Hooligans: Soccer's Bloody Fraternity*. New York: Holtzbrink Publishers.
- Burstyn, V.
1999 *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics and the Culture of Sport*. Toronto: University of Toronto Sport.
- Butler, J.
1990 *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Casper, M.J.
1994 At the Margins of Humanity: Fetal Positions in Science and Medicine. *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 19(3): 307-323.
- Chan, J.
2001 *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee*. New York: Routledge.
- Cheever, N.
2009 The Uses and Gratifications of Viewing Mixed Martial Arts. Summary Report.
- Cheng, C.
1996 "We Choose Not to Compete": The "Merit" Discourse in the Selection Process and Asian American and their Masculinity. In *Masculinities in Organizations*. P.p.177-200. C. Cheng (Ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Cockburn, J.
1991 *In the Way of Men: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations*. London: Macmillan.
- Collier, J. Jr. and M. Collier
1986 *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- Connell, R. W.
2000 *The Men and the Boys*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

1995 *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

1987 *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Connell, R. W., and J. W. Messerschmidt
 2005 Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender and Society* 19(6):829-859.
- Cornwall, A., and N. Lindisfarne, (Eds.)
 1994 *Dislocating Masculinities: Comparative Ethnographies*. London: Routledge.
- Crawford, G.
 2004 *Consuming Sport: Fans, Sport, and Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M.
 1990 *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Performance*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Csordas, T. J.
 1999 Embodiment and Cultural Phenomenology. In *Perspectives on Embodiment: The Intersections of Nature and Culture*, G. Weiss and H. F. Haber (Eds.) pp. 143-164. New York: Routledge.
- 1994a Introduction: The Body as Representation and being-in-the-World. In *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. T. J. Csordas, (Ed.) Pp. 1-26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1994b Words from the Holy People: A Case Study in Cultural Phenomenology. In *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. T. J. Csordas, (Ed.) Pp. 269-290. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Curry, T. J.
 2000 Booze and Barfights: A Journey to the Dark Side of College Athletics. In *Masculinities, Gender Relations, and Sport*. J. McKay, M. A. Messner and D. F. Sabo (Eds.) Pp. 162-175. London: Sage Publications.
- Dalla, R.
 2000 Exposing the "Pretty Woman" Myth: A Qualitative Examination of the Lives of Female Street-walking Prostitutes. *Journal of Sex Research* 37:344-353.
- Danielson, W. A., and D. L. Lasorsa.
 1997 Perceptions of Social Change: 100 Years of Front Page Content in the New York Times and Los Angeles Times. In *Text Analysis for the Social Sciences: Methods for Drawing Statistical Inferences from Texts and Transcripts*. C.W. Roberts (Ed.) Pp.103-115. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- DeGaris, L.
 2000 Be a Buddy to Your Body: Male Identity, Aggression, and Intimacy at a Boxing Gym. In *Masculinities, Gender Relations and Sport*. J. McKay, M. A. Messner and D. F. Sabo (Eds.) Pp. 87-107. London: Sage Publications.
- Dowler, L.
 2002 Invisible Mourners Wonder Why the Widowers of 9/11 Are so Hard to See. *Boston Globe*. November 17.
- Downey, G.
 2007 Producing Pain: Techniques and Technologies in no-Holds-Barred Fighting. *Social Studies of Science* 27(2):201-226.
- 2005 *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Duffy, M.
 1994 Body of Evidence: Studying Women and Advertising. *Gender and Utopia in Advertising: A Critical Reader*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Dunbar, M. D.
 2000 Do You Feel Feminine Yet? Black Masculinity, Gender Transgression and Reproductive Rebellion on MTV. In *Masculinities, Gender Relations and Sport*. J. McKay, M.A. Messner and D. F. Sabo (Eds.) Pp. 87-107. London: Sage Publications.
- Faludi, S.
 1999 *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*. New York: Harper-Collins.
- Ferguson, H.
 2001 Men and Masculinities in Late-Modern Ireland. *A Man's World?: Changing Men's Practices in a Globalized World*. B. Pease and K. Pringle (Eds.) London: Zed Books.
- Frank, K.
 2002 *G-Strings and Sympathy: Strip Club Regulars and Male Desire*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Ganahl, D. J., T. J. Prinsen, and S.B. Netzley
 2003 A Content Analysis of Prime Time Commercials: A Contextual Framework of Gender Representation. *Sex Roles* 49:9-10.
- Gramsci, A.
 1972 *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers.

- Guttman, M.
1996 *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goffman, E.
1959 *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Hannerz, U.
2003 Being there... and there .. and there!: Reflection on Multi-sited Ethnography. *Ethnography* 4 (2): 201-216.
- Hearn, J., et al.
2003 Critical Studies on Men in Ten European Countries: (4) Newspaper and Media Representations. *Men and Masculinities* 6: 173-201.
- Heywood, L.
1993 *Bodymakers: A Cultural Anatomy of Women's Bodybuilding*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Halberstam, J.
1998 *Female Masculinity*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Halpert, C.
1997 Tough Enough and Woman Enough: Stereotypes, Discriminations, and Impression Management Among Women Professional Boxers. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 21/1: 7-36.
- Heilbronner, R.L., G. K. Henry, and M.C. Brewer
1991 Neuropsychological Test Performance in Amateur Boxers. *American Journal of Sports Medicine* 91:376-80.
- Hibbins, R.
2003 Male Gender Identities among Chinese Immigrants. *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan*. M. Low (Ed.) Pp. 197-219. New York: Routledge.
- Horne, J.
2006 *Sport in Consumer Culture*. New York: Palgrave MacMillian.
- Hoy, D. C.
1999 Critical Resistance: Foucault and Bourdieu. In *Perspectives on Embodiment: The Intersections of Nature and Culture*. G. Weiss and H. F. Haber (Eds.) Pp. 3-22.

- Humphries, D.
2003 Selling Out Snowboarding: The Alternative Response to Commercial Co-optation. To the Extreme In *Alternative Sports Inside and Out*. Rinehart R.E. and S. Syndor (Eds.) Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Jackson, S.A. and H.W. Marsh
1996 Development and validation of a scale to measure optimal experience: The flow state scale. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 18: 17-35.
- Jackson, P., N. Stevenson, and K. Brooks
2001 *Making Sense of Men's Magazines*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Jeffords, S.
1989 *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Joralemon, D.
1995 Organwars: The Battle for Bodyparts. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 9:335-356.
- Kapchan, D.A.
2008 The Promise of Sonic Translation: Performing the Festive Sacred in Morocco. *American Anthropologist* 110/4: 467-483.
- Kegan-Gardiner, J.
2002 *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory: New Directions*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kennedy, E., and L. Hills
2009 *Sport, Media and Society*. New York: Berg.
- Kidd, B.
1990 The Men's Cultural Center: Sports and the Dynamics of Women's Oppression/Men's Recreation. In *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. M. A. Messner and D.F. Sabo (Eds.). Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Publishing.
- Kimmel, M.S.
2006 *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klein, A.M.
1997 *Baseball on the Border: A Tale of Two Laredos*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University.

- 1993 *Little Big Men: Bodybuilding Subculture and Gender Construction*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Kohn, T.
2003 The Aikido Body: Expressions of Group Identities and Self-Discovery in Martial Arts Training. In *Dance, Sport, and Embodied Identities*. E. P. Archetti, and N. Dyck (Eds.) Pp. 139-155. Oxford: Berg.
- Kraus, E. and B. Aita
2002 *Brawl: A Behind the Scenes Look at Mixed Martial Arts Competition*. Toronto, Canada: ECW Press.
- Kuperberg, A., and P. Stone
2008 The Media Depiction of Women Who Opt Out. *Gender and Society* 22(4):497-517.
- Landa, J.
2004 Journal of Combative Sport. (August) <<http://ejmas.com>>.
- Lehman, P.
2007 *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body*. New Jersey: Wayne State University Press.
- Louie K.
2002 *Theorizing Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martens, R. and D.M. Landers
1970 Motor Performance Under Stress: A Test of the Inverted-U Hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 16: 29-37.
- Martin, P. Y.
1998 Why can't a Man be More Like a Woman? Reflections on Connell's Masculinities. *Gender and Society* 12(4):472-474.
- Martin, E.
1992 The End of the Body? *American Ethnologist* 19/1: 121-140.
- Mauss, M.
1973 (trans.) The Techniques of the Body. *Economy and Society* 2/1: 70-88.
- Mayeda, D.T, and D.E. Ching
2008 *Fighting for Acceptance: Mixed Martial Arts and Violence in American Society*. New York: iUniverse Inc.

- McKay, J., M. A. Messner, and D. F. Sabo (Eds.)
 2000 Studying Sport, Men, and Masculinity from a Feminist Standpoint. In
Masculinities, Gender Relations and Sport. London: Sage Publications.
- Merleau-Ponty, M.
 1989 *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Messerschmidt, J.W.
 1993 *Masculinities and Crime: Critique and Reconceptualization of Theory*.
 Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Messner, M. A.
 1992 *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity*. Boston: Beacon
 Press.
- 1990 Some Epistemological Issues in Sport Sociology. *Sociology of Sport
 Journal* 7. 136-153.
- Messner, M. A., M. Dunbar, and D. Hunt
 2000 The Televised Sports Manhood Formula. *Journal of Sport and Social
 Issues* 24(4):380.
- Messner, M. A., and D. F. Sabo
 1994 *Sex, Violence, and Power in Sports*. Freedom, California: Crossing Press.
- Messner, M. A., and J. Montez de Oca
 2005 The Male Consumer as Loser: Beer and Liquor Ads in Mega Sports Media
 Events. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30:3.1879-1909
- Miller, G.F.
 2000 *The Mating Mind: How Sexual Choice Shaped the Evolution of Human
 Nature*. London: Doubleday.
- Monaghan L.F.
 1999 Creating 'The Perfect Body': A Variable Project. *Body and Society* 5: 267-
 290.
- Moore H.L.
 1994 *A Passion for Difference: Essays in Anthropology and Gender*.
 Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Moriarty J, A. Collie, and D. Olsan
 2004 A Prospective Controlled Study of Cognitive Function During an Amateur
 Boxing Tournament. *Neurology* 62:1497-1502.

- Morrison, T. G., and M. H. Buff
 2009 Tough and Rough: Representations of Muscularity in Action Motion Pictures. *Journal of Men's Studies* 1(17): 57-74.
- Nguyễn, T.H.
 2008 Popular Religion and the Sacred Life of Material Goods in Contemporary Vietnam. *Asian Ethnology* 67/2: 305-321.
- Nishime, R.
 2007 *Current Sports Medicine Reports* 6:162–169.
- Ohnuki-Tiemey E.
 1994 Braindeath and Organ Transplantation: Cultural Bases of Medical Technology. *Current Anthropology* 35:233-254.
- Ots, T.
 2003 The Silenced Body--the Expressive Leib: On the Dialectic of Mind and Life in Chinese Cathartic Healing. In *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. T. J. Csordas (Ed.) Pp. 116-138. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Owens, C.
 1985 The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism. In *Postmodernism*. Hal Foster (Ed.) Pp.57-82. London: Pluto Press.
- Petersen, A.
 1998 *Unmasking the Masculine: 'Men' and 'Identity' in a Skeptical Age*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pleck, J.
 1981 *The Myth of Masculinity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Pope, H. G., R. Olivardia, A. Gruber, and J. Borowiecki
 1999 Evolving Ideals of Male Body Image as seen through Action Toys. *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 26(1):65-72.
- Porter, M.D.
 2003 A 9-Year Controlled Prospective Neuropsychological Assessment of Amateur Boxing. *Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine* 13:339-352.
- Port, M.V.D.
 2005 Circling around the Really Real: Spirit Possession Ceremonies and the Search for Authenticity in Bahian Candomblé. *Ethos* 33: 149–179.

- Pronger, B.
 2000 Homosexuality and Sport: Who's Winning. In *Masculinities, Gender Relations and Sport*. J. McKay, M. A. Messner and D. F. Sabo (Eds.) P.p. 222-244. London: Sage Publications.
- 1992 *The Arena of Masculinity: Sports, Homosexuality, and the Meaning of Sex*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rinehart, R.
 1998 *Players All: Performances in Contemporary Sport*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Robidoux, M.
 2001 *Men at Play: A Working Understanding of Professional Hockey*. McGill: Queen's University Press.
- Rotundo, A. E.
 1993 *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sabo, D.F., and D.F. Gordon (Eds.)
 1995 *Men's Health and Illness: Gender, Power and the Body*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scott, J. W.
 1988 *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Scwalbe, M., and M. Wolkomir
 2001 The Masculine Self as Problem and Resource in Interview Studies of Men. *Men and Masculinities* 40(1):90-103.
- Sekules, K.
 2000 *The Boxer's Heart*. New York: Villard.
- Scheper-Hughes, N., and M.M. Lock
 1987 The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1/1: 6-41.
- Shahidian, H.
 1999 Gender and Sexuality among Immigrant Iranians in Canada. *Sexualities* 2:189-222.
- Sharp, L.A.
 2000 The Commodification of The Body and Its Parts. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29: 287-328.

- Smart, C.
1984 *The Ties That Bind: Marriage and the Reproduction of Patriarchal Relations*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Snow, E.
1989 Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems. *Representations* 25: 30-41.
- Staurowsky, E.J.
2010 Reflections on Sport, Masculinity and Nationalism in the Aftermath of 9/11. In *Sexual Sports Rhetoric: Historical and Media Contexts of Violence*. L.K. Fuller (Ed). P.p.63-76. New York: Peter Lang.
- Svinth, J.R.
2007 Death under the Spotlight: Analyzing the Data. *Journal of Combative Sport*. (November) <<http://ejmas.com>>
- Taga, F.
2003 Rethinking Male Socialization: Life Histories of Japanese Male Youth. *Asian Masculinities*. K. Louie and M. Low (Eds.) London: Routledge Curzon.
- Tobin, J., D. Y. H. Wu, and D. H. Davidson.
1989 *Preschool in Three Cultures: Japan, China and the United States*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Van Bottenburg, M., and J. Helibron
2006 De-Sportization of Fighting Contests: The Origins of no Hold Barred Events and the Theory of Sportization. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 41(3):259-282.
- Wacquant, L.
2004 *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weigman, R., (Ed.)
2002 *Women's Studies on its Own: A Next Wave Reader in Institutional Change*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.
- Weiss, G.
1999 *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*. New York: Routledge.
- Wetherell, M., and N. Edley
1999 Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity: Imaginary Positions and Psycho Discursive Practices. *Feminism and Psychology* 9(3):335-356.

Whitehead, S.M.

2002 *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions*. Cambridge: Polity.

Whitson, D.

1990 Sport and the Social Construction of Masculinity. In *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. M. A. Messner and D. F. Sabo (Eds.) P.p. 19-30. Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics.

Woodward, K.

2007 *Boxing, Masculinity and Identity: The 'I' of the Tiger*. London: Routledge.

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD HUMAN SUBJECTS EXEMPTION

To: Hjorleifur Jonsson

From: *for* Mark Roosa, Chair *MR*
Soc Beh Report

Date: 04/16/2009

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 04/16/2009

IRB Protocol #: 0801002575

Study Title: Embattled Identities: Constructions of self in the world of Mixed Martial Arts

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

INFORMATION LETTER

Constructions of Self in the World of Mixed Martial Arts

Dear Participant:

I am Jaime Holthuysen, a PhD student under the direction of Professor Hjorleifur Jonsson in the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to look at the experiences of male Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) cage-fighters, members of the MMA media, and MMA fans.

I am inviting your participation in interviews that will take up about an hour of your time. I will be asking you questions about your training and perceptions of MMA in the media. You may be asked to participate in another group interview where your responses will be shared with a group of 3-5 participants. In addition you may be photographed and/or videotaped during your training sessions.

You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

Research participants will not be compensated for their participation, but participation in this project will enable the researcher, other academics, and the broader public to learn more about what it means to be a participant in MMA. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

All information gathered during interviews is confidential. The results of this research may be published; but, your identity will be protected and your responses will be kept anonymous. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

I would like to audiotape these interviews. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. If you give permission for this interview to be taped, you have the right to ask for the recording to be stopped. Please indicate whether you give permission for the interview to be taped. Recordings will be immediately deleted off the voice recorder and transcribed into coded files on a password protected computer. Data, both images and transcripts etc. not directly used in potential presentations/publishing will be destroyed following analysis.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: Jaime Holthuysen, *School of Human Evolution and Social Change, Arizona State University. ASU, Tempe, AZ 83287-2402*, Tel: (480) 965-6213, Email Jaime.Holthuysen@asu.edu. You may also contact my advisor and/or my supervisor Associate Professor Dr. Hjorleifur Jonsson at HJonsson@asu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Research Compliance Office, at (480) 965-6788.

Thank you.

Jaime

I agree to be interviewed

I agree to be part of a group interview

I agree to be photographed

I agree to be videotaped

Date _____

APPENDIX B
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I. Basic Information

- a) Age
- b) Ethnicity
- c) Occupation
- d) Educational history, (e.g. high school, college)
- e) Martial status
- f) Children?
- g) Gym you Attend?
- h) Years in MMA?

II. Background

- a) How long have you been training MMA?
- b) Would you classify your self as: 1) recreational MMA participant, 2) amateur MMA fighter, 3) professional MMA fighter?
- c) Please briefly assess your ability in MMA. How many amateur fights? How many professional fights?
- d) Do you plan on becoming a professional fighter? Why or why not?
- e) Tell me about how you got interested in the sport? What motivated you to become a fighter?
- f) How do you see yourself? (fighter first, student first, father etc.)
- g) Is there a big difference between your world here at the gym, and your life as a _____?
- h) How does your experience with MMA influence your daily life? (Does your role as an MMA fighter conflicts with other social roles you have?)

III. Media

- a) Do you watch MMA on television? If so which events?
- b) Do you go to MMA events? Which ones? Local or international?
- c) Why do you think this sport is so popular?
- d) What are some of the ideas/misconceptions or stereotypes that people have of fighters? (positive and negative)
- e) What about the way that fighters are portrayed in the media? (e.g. by the UFC or other organizations, advertising, magazines). Can you point to specific examples?
- f) Do you think that the way fighters have been portrayed by the general public and mass media has changed over time? Give specific examples.
- g) Are you influenced in any way by the media (such as general public or UFC) images of fighters? What do these images make you think about yourself as a fighter and other fighters?
- h) Do you wear any fight company clothing like Tap Out or Affliction? What do you think of people who do?
- i) Who are some of your role models or fighters you admire in MMA?
- j) Why do you choose these specific fighters? What are the qualities that they possess?

- k) Is there an ideal weight or height for an MMA fighter?
- l) Is there an ideal body type for an MMA fighter?
- m) Describe what the ideal MMA fighter looks like?
- n) How old are ideal MMA fighters? (Or what age do you think a fighter is at his peak and why?)

IV. Training

- a) How do you feel when you train? (e.g. what is your mindset like? do you notice physiological cues such as increased heart rate? what do you do if you are tired?)
- b) What is the best part of training?
- c) What is the worst part of training?
- d) Can you describe your mind set when you train? Are you aware of others when you are training? (in the zone, self-conscious?)
- e) How do you feel before you spar?
- f) How do you feel after you spar?
- g) Have you sustaining any injuries participating in MMA?
- h) Are you worried about injuries?

V. Competition

- a) What organizations have you fought in?
- b) How do you feel when you are fighting at an event in front of an audience?
- c) Tell me about your first experience fighting in front of a crowd? What do you remember the most?
- d) What is the best part of fighting?
- e) What is the worst part of fighting?
- f) Can you describe your mind set when you fight?
- g) Are you aware of others when you are fighting? (in the zone, self-conscious? Influenced by the audience reactions?)
- h) How do you feel about demonstrating emotion in the ring? (Have you cried?)
- i) Do you do anything to your body (paint nails, colour hair etc.) before or after a fight?
- j) Do you have any pre-fight rituals that you undergo? (Post-fight?)
 - * (For professional fighters, especially in televised events, do you choose the pre-fight music you use when they enter?
 - * (What do you choose to wear when you enter the venue and why? How much freedom is there in this? (e.g. does the organization put limits on this?)
 - * (Has an organization you have fought for tried to tell you how you should enter, what you should wear?)
- k) Have you sustained any injuries participating in MMA?
- l) Are you worried about injuries?
- m) What do you think about drug use in MMA? Why do you think people use drugs? Have you considered taking any performance enhancing substances?

VI. Females

- a) Do you or how do you feel about training with females?

- b) What do you think of women's MMA?
- c) What are some of the advantages or disadvantages women have in comparison to men?
- d) Why aren't there more female fighters?
- e) How do women respond when they find out you're a fighter?
- f) Do you think being a fighter has helped you in particular social situations such as with women? (Do you think women find you more attractive as a fighter?)
- * (For professional fighters. Do you have groupies? Women who want your attention because of your job as a fighter?)

VII. Misc

- a) From your perspective what do you think in general of other fighters? Do you see any distinctions between people who fight? Are there different motivations?
- b) Do you prefer to have friendships with fighters as opposed to non-fighters? Why or why not?
- c) Are there occasions when you feel a need to demonstrate or identify yourself as a fighter? (e.g. any altercations or fights outside the gym)
- d) Have you heard of Michael Smith*? (Gay fighter) What do you think about this?
- e) In conversations with other people I have heard the words posers, fanboys, and fight bros? What is your take on these terms?
- f) What are 5-10 words or phrases you would use to describe male MMA fighters?
- g) Is there anything you would like to add about your experience in MMA that I have not touched on?
- h) Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX C
MIXED MARTIAL ARTS TIMELINE

TIMELINE

1985: *Shooto*, often credited as the first mixed martial arts organization, forms in Japan.

Sept. 21, 1993: *Pancrase*, a Japanese promotion, debuts in Tokyo, featuring Bas Rutten and Ken Shamrock in separate fights.

Nov. 12, 1993: First *Ultimate Fighting Championship* fights. The pay-per-view card from Denver's McNichols Arena features Royce Gracie and Ken Shamrock.

1996-1997: Sen. John McCain labels the sport "human cockfighting" and sends letters to governors in every state urging its prohibition. Pay-per-view deals dry up. In response, UFC introduces weight classes and mandatory gloves. The organization prohibits several tactics, including hair-pulling, small-joint manipulation, headbutts, groin strikes, kicks to a downed opponent and strikes to the back of the head and neck.

May 8, 1997: Fighter Tank Abbott, announcer Bruce Buffer and referee Big John McCarthy appear on *Friends*, with Abbott pounding would-be fighter Pete (Jon Favreau), then the boyfriend of Monica (Courteney Cox).

Oct. 11, 1997: *PRIDE Fighting Championships*, which would become Japan's largest MMA organization, debuts in Tokyo. Several top American, Brazilian, Russian and European fighters participate over the next decade.

1998: *UFC* all but disappears from the pay-per-view market.

1999: *UFC* switches to five-minute rounds and a boxing-style 10-point system for judging.

September 2000: New Jersey's State Athletic Control Board sanctions the sport while helping to develop the rules now known as the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts. *UFC* holds its first unified-rules event two months later.

2001: Zuffa LLC, a company formed by Dana White, a manager of fighters, and casino moguls Lorenzo and Frank Fertitta III, buys *UFC*. New Jersey formally adopts the Unified Rules, followed by Nevada soon thereafter.

May 2001: Japan's all female MMA organization *Smackgirl* is founded.

June 30, 2001: *World Extreme Cagefighting* (WEC) debuts.

Sept. 28, 2001: *UFC 33* is the first fight card in the company's new deal with pay-per-view company In Demand and the first of many events in Las Vegas, thanks to Nevada sanctioning.

Jan. 17, 2005: The reality series *The Ultimate Fighter* debuts on Spike. The show

features up-and-coming fighters in a tournament. First prize: a UFC contract.

April 9, 2005: Live finale of *The Ultimate Fighter's* first season draws 2.6 million viewers on Spike. *UFC* claims this to be the first live mixed martial arts on a North American network, not including pay-per-view.

March 10, 2006: *Strikeforce*, a longtime kickboxing and martial arts company, makes its MMA debut with Frank Shamrock vs. Cesar Gracie before a sell-out crowd in San Jose's HP Pavilion, the first sanctioned MMA card in California.

April 29, 2006: The *International Fight League* (IFL) debuts with a team event.

July 2006: *PRIDE* loses its contract with Japan's largest TV network after the publication of magazine articles alleging ties between the company's owners and the Japanese underworld.

December 8, 2006: One of the first major female MMA fights, Gina Carano's *Strikeforce* debut against Elaina Maxwell. Carano wins via unanimous decision at *Strikeforce: Triple Threat* in San Jose, California.

December 30, 2006: *UFC 66*, featuring Chuck Liddell vs. Tito Ortiz, draws 1.05 million pay-per-view buys, according to several news reports.

December 2006: *UFC* buys *WEC* and *World Fighting Alliance* (*WFA*) in separate deals.

Feb. 10, 2007: *EliteXC* debuts in Southaven, Miss., with Renzo Gracie defeating Frank Shamrock in the main event.

March 12, 2007: *IFL Battleground* debuts on MyNetworkTV. IFL also has a deal to show fights on Fox Sports Net.

March 27, 2007: Failing to get a new TV deal in Japan and unable to draw enough U.S. pay-per-view customers, *PRIDE* is sold to Zuffa.

August 24, 2007: McCain tells NPR: "They have cleaned up the sport to the point, at least in my view, where it is not human cockfighting any more. I think they've made significant progress. They haven't made me a fan, but they have made progress."

Oct. 25, 2007: Spike and *UFC* extend partnership through 2011, with seasons 9 through 12 of *The Ultimate Fighter*, four live fight cards per year, a new weekly live series and the continued run of older events in *UFC Unleashed*. *TV Week* and *Multichannel News* estimate terms at \$100 million.

Feb. 29, 2008: *IFL*, now featuring a league based on training camps rather than city-based teams, holds bouts in Las Vegas on HDNet. The deal with MyNetworkTV has expired.

March 2008: Debut for a new Japanese promotion, *Dream*, owned by *K-1 Hero's* parent, FEG, and produced by former *PRIDE* officials. A rival Japanese group, *World Victory Road*, also holds its inaugural show.

March 18, 2008: Black Entertainment Television debuts *Iron Ring*, a series featuring hip-hop stars and boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr. as "team owners."

April 12, 2008: *Strikeforce on NBC*, a 52-week series of highlights and profiles, debuts. Within five weeks, the Saturday late-night show (times vary by market) claims better ratings in the male 18-34 demographic than some weeknight talk shows.

December 10, 2008: *UFC's* first *Fight For the Troops* held for audience of over 8000 military personnel in North Carolina. The event raised four million dollars for the Intrepid Heroes Fund that goes to benefit injured troops and their families.

April 19, 2009: *UFC 97* in Montreal, Quebec, Canada sets the North American attendance record with 21,451 attendees.

July 24, 2009: *Affliction* organization disestablished after its headliner fighter Josh Barnett tested positive for steroids. The company announces that it will no longer promote events and go back to manufacturing MMA clothing and sponsoring *UFC* events.

January 11, 2010: Zuffa (owners of *UFC*) sell a ten percent stake of their company to Flash Entertainment of Abu Dhabi in hopes of expanding into the Asia market.

October 28, 2010: *UFC* dissolves *WEC* and merges *WEC* fighters into *UFC* adding bantamweight (135 lbs) and featherweight (145 lbs) fighters to their card.

March 13, 2011: *UFC* buys out main competitor *Strikeforce*.

(http://www.usatoday.com/sports/2008-05-29-mma-timeline_N.htm
supplemented by www.sherdog.com)

APPENDIX D
UFC RULES (2010)

RULES AND REGULATIONS

I. Weight classes

Bantamweight: over 125 lbs. to 135 lbs.

Featherweight: over 135 lbs. to 145 lbs.

Lightweight: over 145 lbs. to 155 lbs.

Welterweight: over 155 lbs. to 170 lbs.

Middleweight: over 170 lbs. to 185 lbs.

Light Heavyweight: over 185 lbs. to 205 lbs.

Heavyweight: over 205 lbs. to 265 lbs.

II. Bout duration

- All non-championship bouts shall be three rounds.
- All championship bouts shall be five rounds.
- Rounds will be five minutes in duration.
- A one-minute rest period will occur between each round.

III. Fouls (actions NOT allowed)

1. Butting with the head.
2. Eye gouging of any kind.
3. Biting.
4. Hair pulling.
5. Fish hooking.
6. Groin attacks of any kind.
7. Putting a finger into any orifice or into any cut or laceration on an opponent.
8. Small joint manipulation.
9. Striking to the spine or the back of the head.
10. Striking downward using the point of the elbow.
11. Throat strikes of any kind, including, without limitation, grabbing the trachea.
12. Clawing, pinching or twisting of the flesh.
13. Grabbing the clavicle.

14. Kicking the head of a grounded opponent.
15. Kneeing the head of a grounded opponent.
16. Stomping a grounded opponent.
17. Kicking to the kidney with the heel.
18. Spiking an opponent to the canvas on his head or neck.
19. Throwing an opponent out of the ring or fenced area.
20. Holding the shorts or gloves of an opponent
21. Spitting at an opponent.
22. Engaging in an unsportsmanlike conduct that causes injury to an opponent.
23. Holding the ropes or the fence.
24. Using abusive language in the ring or fenced area.
25. Attacking an opponent on or during the break.
26. Attacking an opponent who is under the care of the referee.
27. Attacking an opponent after the bell has sounded the end of the period of unarmed combat.
28. Flagrantly disregarding the instructions of the referee.
29. Timidity, including, but without limitation, avoiding contact with an opponent, intentionally or consistently dropping the mouthpiece or faking an injury.
30. Interference by the corner.
31. Throwing in the towel during competition.

IV. Ways to Win

1. Submission by:

- Physical tap out.
- Verbal tap out.

2. Technical knockout by the referee stopping the contest.

3. Decision via scorecards, including:

Unanimous decision: All judges pick the same fighter as the winner.

Split decision: One judge picks one fighter, the other two judges pick the other fighter.

Majority decision: Two of the three judges pick the same fighter as the winner, the final judge says the fight was a draw.

Draw: a) Unanimous draw b) Majority draw c) Split draw

4. Technical decision.

5. Technical draw.

6. Disqualification

7. Forfeit.

8. No contest.

*** Referee may restart the round:**

If the fighters reach a stalemate and do not work to improve position or finish.

(<http://www.ufc.com/about/Rules>)

APPENDIX E
DESERT COMBAT WAIVER

RELEASE OF LIABILITY, WAIVER AND HOLD HARMLESS AGREEMENT

This document limits your legal rights & among other things, it will prevent you from suing Desert Combat, Inc. (including its owner, employees and contractors). Read carefully before you sign. In consideration of being allowed to participate in the activities provided by Desert Combat, Inc. or its facilities, I acknowledge and agree to the following:

Ring or Mat related sports (i.e. boxing, kickboxing, grappling, and jiu jitsu) are activities, which are, by nature dangerous. They involve the actual use of violence, and the individuals with whom I practice and train with will be learning and practicing techniques designed to injure people. Injury or even death may result. KNOWING ALL OF THIS, I HAVE NONETHELESS DECIDED TO ENGAGE IN DESERT COMBAT ACTIVITIES FOR REASONS OF MY OWN. _____.

DESERT COMBAT is not in any respect assuming financial or legal responsibility for any personal injury or other adverse consequences, which may result. I understand that I must obtain my own medical, disability and other insurance, and generally protect myself from the financial consequence of injury. The specific types of physical harm, which may result from my participation in DESERT COMBAT activities are too numerous to list specifically. By way of example they may include: broken bones, serious soft tissue injuries, serious internal injuries (including head and organ damage) and serious cuts. I understand that my participation in DESERT COMBAT activities may result in serious injury, paralysis, or other disabilities, disfigurement or death from these or other causes. I am knowingly and willingly assuming these risks because even though I am aware of the risks, I still choose to participate in DESERT COMBAT activities. _____.

I am also aware that DESERT COMBAT activities are often conducted in close contact with opponents and training partners. I understand that there is a possibility that open wounds and other circumstances that may cause the Transmission of Blood or other fluid-born diseases from others to me, and from me to others. These diseases may include AIDS, Herpes, Hepatitis, and other skin irritants. DESERT COMBAT is making no representations to the probability of any such infection occurring. Even though I am aware of these risks, I still choose to participate in DESERT COMBAT activities. _____.

I consent, and willingly, voluntarily and expressly agree, to assume all of the risks Involved in or arising from participating in DESERT COMBAT activities conducted by DESERT COMBAT or on its premises, including, but not limited to, those risks specifically described above, and further agree to release, discharge and hold harmless DESERT COMBAT (including any director, officer, employees, agent or other representative of DESERT COMBAT) from and

against any and all liability or judgments, described, however described, whether known or unknown, foreseen or unforeseen, which may arise out of or be connected in any way with participation in DESERT COMBAT activities. _____.

I understand that, by signing this document, I am agreeing to discharge DESERT COMBAT for now and forever, from possible claims, which others or I may assert against DESERT COMBAT (or its agents and any other representatives). Its or their negligence, other tortuous conduct, contractual undertaking, breach of any expressed or implied warranties, intentional wrong doings, or any other conductor omission, which may arise to a potential claim. I AGREE THAT IF I DO GET INJURED OR OTHERWISE DAMAGED, NO SUIT WILL BE BROUGHT OR MAINTAINED AGAINST DESERT COMBAT OR ANY OF ITS AGENTS OR REPRESENTATIVES. _____.

It is my intent that if any or part of this Agreement is invalid by a court, the other parts should remain enforceable. I am signing this agreement for myself, for my spouse and any marital community of which I am apart (if I am, or if I get married) for my minor child if my minor child will be involved in DESERT COMBAT activities, and for my heirs, successors, and personal representatives. If the individual participating in DESERT COMBAT is my minor child, any references to me in this agreement shall be deemed references to my child as appropriate to make clear that I understand that my child and I assume the risks which my child will be subject. _____.

I am eighteen years of age or older, of sound mind and I enter into this Agreement of my own free will and voluntary choice and without compulsion or advise from any representative of DESERT COMBAT. DESERT COMBAT has made me no promise or representation to induce me to sign this document. I recognize that this document has serious legal consequences and understand that if I have any questions about its meaning or effect, I should consult an Attorney of my choice. I HAVE FULLY READ AND UNDERSTAND AND AGREE TO EACH AND ALL OF THE ABOVE PARAGHRAGHS, AS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF MY UNDERSTANDING AND AGREEMENT I AM GIVING MY SIGNATURE BELOW.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Legal Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

*Original name of the gym has been substituted with Desert Combat

APPENDIX F

BASIC MIXED MARTIAL ARTS GLOSSARY

GENERAL TERMS

MMA

An abbreviation for Mixed Martial Arts
- A combat sport in which fighters from different martial disciplines compete.

No Holds Barred

A popular term used to describe "mixed martial arts" events. Due to the evolution of the sport and implementation of safety rules, the term "no holds barred" is outdated but remains popular among fans.

Vale Tudo

Portuguese for "anything goes." This term is made in reference to "no holds barred" fighting events that began in Brazil.

Ultimate Fighting Championship(UFC)

Primary MMA organization established in the United States responsible for popularizing MMA.

The Octagon/Cage

An octagonal shaped ring or cage in which mixed martial artists compete. (The "Octagon" is a trademark of the UFC)

WAYS TO WIN

Submission

When a fighter taps out or verbally concedes the match due to pain, to avoid injury, being choked out, or a desire to end the match.

Knock Out

When a fighter is knocked unconscious due to strikes or other impact.

Technical Knock Out

When a fighter is unable to continue, usually due to injury. Reference stops the fight.

Tap Out

A method in which a fighter submits to his opponent by tapping his opponent, himself or the mat. Verbal tap outs are also allowed.

TECHNIQUES OF COMBAT

Muay Thai Kickboxing	A form of kickboxing originating from Thailand. Unlike traditional kickboxing, Muay Thai allows low kicks, elbows, and knees and is considered among the elite striking arts.
Grappling	A general term used to describe wrestling and ground oriented martial arts or fighting on the ground / in close.
Jujitsu	A Japanese martial art premised on creating techniques to use an opponents' against him/herself.
Brazilian JiuJitsu	Modified from Japanese Jujitsu, this art established in Brazil focuses on grappling and ground fighting techniques.
Ground & Pound	This strategy consists of taking a fighter to the ground, placing them in an inferior position, and striking them until they are knocked out, tap out, can be submitted or the match is stopped.
Mount	A control position in which one fighter is on top of another fighter.
SUBMISSIONS	
Rear Naked Choke	A type of choke that is applied behind an opponent, capturing his back. A rear naked choke is the most advantageous type of chokes as far as positioning.

APPENDIX G
MIXED MARTIAL ARTS FAN SURVEY

TABLE G.1 SURVEY PART ONE

#	Sex	Age	Yrs. As Fan?	Do you Train?	Fav. Fighter?	3 Reasons Why Fav. Is Best
1	M	26-36	15	Amateur	Clay Guida	Conditions, Love sport & Wild Man
2	M	26-36	15	N	Uriah Faber	Cool, Laid Back,
3	M	26-36	15	N	Chuck Liddell	Toughness, Determination
4	F	18-25	3	N	Gina C.	Strong, Good Role Model,
5	M	26-36	4	N/A	GSP	Demeanor, Humble, Enjoys
6	M	37-47	15	N	Chuck Liddell	Determination, Crowd
7	M	26-36	10	Recreational	Uriah Faber	Personable, Outgoing
8	M	26-36	6	N	Nate Marquardt	Appreciates Fans,
9	M	18-25	4	N	Anderson Silva	Dominance, Power
10	M	37-47	5	N	Machida	Humble, Personable
11	M	26-36	5	N	GSP	Presentation, Professional,
12	M	26-36	5	N	GSP	Strong, Personable, Looks
13	M	26-36	3	N	Clay Guida	Heart, Dedication, Class
14	M	18-25	5	Amateur	Franklin	Humble, Gives Back, Nice
15	F	26-36	13	N	Chuck Liddell	Sportsman, Cool, Leader
16	M	18-25	14	N	Chuck Liddell	Sportsman, Cool, Leader
17	F	18-25	2	N	GSP	Respectful, Patient
18	M	18-25	11	Amateur	Anderson Silva	Smart, Patient, Disciplined
19	F	18-25	3	Recreational	St. Pierre	Disciplined, Sportsman,
20	M	18-25	5	Professional	Miguel Torres	Smart, Focused, Patient
21	M	18-25	15	Amateur	BJ Penn	Control, Determined,
22	M	18-25	15	Professional	Himself	Humble, Positive, Willing
23	F	26-36	1	N	Rashad Evans	Drinks Efusion, Good
24	M	18-25	4	N	BJ Penn	Laid Back, Relaxed, Calm
25	M	26-36	4	N	BJ Penn	Loves Sport, Passionate
26	M	37-47	15	N/A	Chuck Liddell	Look, Haircuts, Swagger
27	M	18-25	8	N	GSP	Classy, Well Rounded,
28	M	26-36	10	N	Anderson Silva	Don't Know Him
29	M	26-36	15	Amateur	Anderson Silva	Humble, Respectful, Sense
30	F	26-36	4	N	Gina C.	Girl, Cool, Physique
31	M	18-25	15	Amateur	Jose Aldo	Condition, Tenacity,
32	F	18-25	4	Recreational	Carano	Girl, Stage Presence,
33	M	18-25	8	N	Wand Silva	Heart, Aggression, Pleases
34	M	18-25	3	Recreational	BJ Penn	Humble, Hard Working,
35	M	18-25	1	N	Anderson Silva	Humble
36	M	18-25	4	Recreational	GSP	Communicates Well, Good
37	M	18-25	15	Recreational	Forrest Griffin	Heart, Bravery,
38	M	26-36	10	N	Forrest Griffin	Attitude, Laid Back, Sense
39	M	26-36	6	N/A	GSP	Well Rounded, Cool
40	F	26-36	1	N	Gina C.	Personality, Humble, Nice
41	M	18-25	5	N	Forrest Griffin	Humble, Hardworking,
42	M	37-47	15	Teaches	Anderson Silva	Humble, Personality, Real
43	M	26-36	2	N	Wand Silva	Personality, Outgoing,
44	M	26-36	15	Recreational	BJ Penn	Loyalty, Respect,
45	M	26-36	15	N	BJ Penn	Nationality, Heart, Natural
46	M	26-36	15	Professional	BJ Penn	Nationality, Good
47	M	18-25	N/A	N	Tito Ortiz	Cool, Cute Girlfriend
48	M	18-25	3	N	Chuck Liddell	Determination,
49	M	18-25	10	Amateur	Matt Hughes	Personality, Real, Cocky
50	M	18-25	10	N	Lesnar	Man's Man, Outdoorsy,

TABLE G.1 SURVEY PART TWO

#	Sex	Age	Yrs. As Fan?	Do you Train?	Fav. Fighter?	3 Reasons Why Fav. Is Best
51	M	18-25	>1	N	Forrest Griffin	Cool
52	M	37-47	5	N	Kenny Florian	Camera Skill, Good Guy,
53	M	18-25	3	Recreational	Carwin	Spirit, Attitude,
54	M	37-47	10	Recreational	Alves	Committed, Humble, Loves
55	M	18-25	8	Recreational	Rampage	Mentality, Toughness,
56	M	18-25	6	Recreational	Rich Franklin	Humble, Smart, Puts on a
57	M	18-25	2	Recreational	Chuck Liddell	Humble, Modest, Humor
58	M	26-36	4	Amateur	Anderson Silva	Humble, Work Ethic
59	M	18-25	6	Recreational	Uriah Faber	Dedication, Heart, Lifestyle
60	M	26-36	8	Recreational	BJ Penn	Drive, Attitude, Raw
61	M	26-36	10	N	Chuck Liddell	Straight Forward
62	M	<48	20	Amateur	Machida	Real Martial Artist,
63	M	26-36	10	N	GSP	Nationality, Style
64	M	26-36	15	Recreational	BJ Penn	Trash Talks, Sportsman,
65	M	26-36	15	Amateur	Tito Ortiz	Hollywood, Trash Talks,
66	M	26-36	15	Recreational	BJ Penn	Drive, Passion
67	F	<48	3	N	Randy Couture	Attractive
68	M	18-25	3	N	Forrest Griffin	Underdog
69	M	<48	3	Recreational	Machida	Lives in Nearby City, The
70	M	18-25	1	N	Matt Hughes	Good Shape, Trains Hard,
71	F	18-25	1	N	Wand Silva	Attitude
72	M	37-47	4	N	Machida	Nationality, Respectful, No
73	M	26-36	15	N	Shogun	Work Ethic, Humble,
75	M	26-36	12	N	GSP	Smart, Thinks, Well
76	M	26-36	6	Amateur	Machida	Humble, Elusive, Unique
77	M	18-25	3	N	Brock Lesnar	Big, Strong, Powerful
78	F	18-25	4	N	Anderson Silva	Humble, Nationality
79	M	18-25	1	N	Nogueira	Heart
80	F	26-36	5	Recreational	Gina C.	Woman, Well Known
81	M	26-36	15	Professional	Machida	Traditionalist
82	F	26-36	3	N	McCorrie	Good Shape, Builds Drama,
83	M	18-25	6	N	Anderson Silva	Well Rounded, Sense of
84	M	26-36	5	N	Forrest Griffin	Determined, Has Heart
85	M	18-25	2.5	Amateur	Kenny Florian	Motivation, Perseverance,
86	M	26-36	16	N	Shogun	Respectful, Humble, Hard
87	M	18-25	5	N	GSP	Humble, Trains Hard
88	M	18-25	5	N	Machida	Nice, Humble,
89	M	18-25	1	Recreational	Forrest Griffin	Gracious, Humble, Hard
90	M	26-36	10	N	Fedor	Humble, Undefeated,
91	M	18-25	5	Amateur	Wand Silva	Awesome, Powerful, Tattoos
92	M	26-36	15	N	Rampage	Real, "Bad Ass", Best
93	M	18-25	1	N	GSP	Toughness, Determination
94	M	18-25	4	N	Fedor	Powerful, Cool, Level-
95	M	26-36	7	Amateur	Forrest Griffin	Sense of humor, tough,
96	M	18-25	1	N	Rampage	powerful, experienced,
97	F	18-25	1	N	Rampage	talented, bad ass, sense of
98	M	26-36	2	N	Randy Couture	Determination, Heart, Work
99	M	18-25	7	Amateur	GSP	Well Rounded, Cool
100	M	18-25	2	N	Wand Silva	Crazy, Determined, Tattoos

TABLE G.2 SURVEY PART ONE

#	Best Thing About Being Champ	Worst Thing About Being Champ
1	Free Stuff	No Privacy
2	No one Better	Less Notoriety
3	No one Better	Everyone After Title
4	Being World Champ	N/A
5	Fame	No Privacy
6	No one Better	No Privacy
7	No one Better	No Privacy
8	Respect	No Privacy
9	No one Better	Everyone After Title
10	No one Better	No Privacy
11	No one Better	Not Becoming Arrogant
12	No One Better	No Privacy
13	Respect	No Privacy
14	Respect/Notoriety	Training
15	Money	Notoriety
16	Money	Notoriety
17	No One Better	Haters
18	Fans	Fans
19	No One Better	Damages Body
20	No One Better	Everyone After Title
21	Girls	Haters
22	Living a Dream	Damages Body
23	Fans	Damages Body
24	N/A	Pressure
25	N/A	Notoriety
26	Fame	Fame
27	Money	No Privacy
28	Money	Damages Body
29	No One Better	Rank Can Only Go Down
30	No One Better	Fear of Losing Title
31	Fight Best Fighter	Everyone After Title
32	Perks	Fame
33	No One Better	Training
34	No One Better	No Privacy
35	Money	No Privacy
36	No One Better	Bad Talk You
37	No One Better	Little Free Time
38	No One Better	Fame
39	Exposure, Prospects	No Privacy
40	Exposure	No Privacy
41	Respect	Scrutiny
42	Accomplished Goals	Little Free Time
43	Proved Yourself To World	Not Sure if Worst
44	No One Better	Dealing With UFC
45	Accomplished Goals	Pressure
46	Girls, Fame	Everyone After Title
47	Bragging Rights	Women
48	Money	Hospital Bills
49	No one Better	Everyone After Title
50	No one Better	Everyone After Title

TABLE G.2 SURVEY PART TWO

#	Best Thing About Being Champ	Worst Thing About Being Champ
51	Lifestyle	Fans
52	No one Better	No Privacy
53	Being Proud of Sport Success	Everyone After Title
54	Accomplished Goals	Physical Total
55	Opportunity	Damages Body
56	Accomplished Goals	Fans
57	Money	Fans
58	Fans	Everyone After Title
59	Respect	Pressure
60	No one Better	No Privacy
61	Money	Fame
62	Fame	Being Away from Home
63	Fame	Being Away from Home
64	Fame	Damages Body
65	Money	Losing
66	Accomplished Goals	No Privacy
67	Fame	Unapproachable
68	No one Better	Everyone After Title
69	The Conquest	Training
70	Beat Up People	Defending Belt
71	Accomplished Goals	No Privacy
72	No one Better	Everyone After Title
73	Recognition	Party Life
75	No one Better	Everyone After Title
76	Influence	Politics
77	Envy	Pressure
78	Fame	Fans
79	No one Better	Nothing
80	No one Better	Training
81	Pride	Fans
82	Defending Title	Everyone After Title
83	No one Better	Everyone After Title
84	No one Better	Fame
85	No one Better	Pressure
86	No one Better	Everyone After Title
87	Women	Women
88	No one Better	Knock Outs
89	Respect	Everyone After Title
90	Respect	Training
91	Fame	Fame
92	No one Better	Everyone After Title
93	No one Better	Pressure
94	No one Better	Fans
95	Respect/Notoriety	Everyone After Title
96	Fame	Everyone After Title
97	Women	No Privacy
98	No one Better	Nothing
99	Money	Nothing
100	Fame	Nothing