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## Two Analyses of Gender from Ethnographic Field Data on the Sport of Mixed Martial Arts

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THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PUBLIC POLICY

TWO ANALYSES OF GENDER FROM ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD DATA ON THE SPORT  
OF MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

By

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For my doting mother Linda, here is one final homework assignment for you to proudly hang on  
your refrigerator

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I could talk about here, but in keeping with the theme of this manuscript I'd like to use the majority of this space to acknowledge one man that has influenced my interest in masculinity the most. This man is my father, Paul John Vaccaro II, whose life was cut short in 1982 at the age of thirty by a massive heart attack. At the time he died, Paul was a young professional with the trappings of a man destined to reach the middle class if not higher; a car, a house, a wife, a child, and a stable income in the print and radio advertising profession. As I turn thirty now, I come to the time in my life where I will surpass him in age. I wasn't yet two years old at the time he died and I don't remember his voice, although I know he talked to me, or his touch, although I know he held me. Despite my lack of memory of him he has haunted me for nearly all my life in my musings of who he would have become and how my family would have been different if he were alive. Paul's health problems were congenital, but he hated the doctor's office and knowing more about how gender norms affect behavior I can't help but wonder about the ways they impacted the course of his life and ultimately his death. The loss of a person who was both a father and someone with great potential has driven my desire to obtain success early and in some ways the degree that this manuscript will confer confirms his influence. I just wish he was here to enjoy it with me.

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## **ABSTRACT**

I examine data from a two year ethnographic study on the sport of mixed martial arts (abbreviated MMA) to contribute to the sociological understanding of gender. The structure of this dissertation is in the form of two stand-alone articles that include their own conceptual frameworks, methods sections, analyses, and conclusions. I preface these two articles in chapter 1 by providing contextual information on mixed martial arts as a sport and its usefulness for the study of gender, providing greater details of the ethnographic study than entailed in the chapters following, and broadly overview both articles. In chapter 2, I examine how definitions of men's violence in the sport of MMA are transformed or "keyed" by different institutional actors as a "real fight" and a "contest" and demonstrate how these findings extend Risman's (2004) theory of gender as a social structure. In chapter 3, I show how the men's training in the MMA gym resembles a "gendered embodiment cycle" which culminates in a public performance of masculinity and also note how gender is embedded in each phase of this cycle. In chapter 4, I offer some general thoughts about what a study of MMA tell us about gender, review implications for specific findings in each chapter, and discuss the possibility for findings to inform other types of social inequality.



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

In 1993, organizer Art Davie and Semaphore Entertainment Group premiered on pay-per-view cable a new form of martial arts competition, held at McNichols Sports Arena in Denver, and dubbed the “The Ultimate Fighting Championship: The Most Controversial Event of The Decade.”<sup>1</sup> Organizers developed this event to be a one-time exposition that pitted expert-fighters at the pinnacle of their various martial arts backgrounds against one another, but it unintentionally spurred a sport later dubbed “Mixed Martial Arts” (abbreviate as MMA). The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) was a sensational hit at first, later drew a heavy backlash from politicians who called it “human cockfighting,” underwent restructuring to make it more palatable, and now holds the all-time pay-per-view buy record for a single year, surpassing the sport of boxing and World Wrestling Entertainment.

The popularity of the new sport generated demand for MMA gyms in cities throughout the United States. Participants who take part in the sport usually join a gym that specializes in training MMA fighters, which is similar to a boxing gym or a karate dojo.<sup>2</sup> Participants join in structured classes where they are introduced to combat sports skills including boxing, submission wrestling (ju-jitsu), judo, kick-boxing, and karate. Similarly, they frequently spar and wrestle with each other. In addition, they participate in a series of rigorous group calisthenics which includes exercises such as lifting and dragging tractor-tires, swinging sledge-hammers, hitting heavy bags, carrying one another, lifting kettle-bells, jumping ropes, and performing acrobatics.

There has also been a proliferation of local MMA competitive events that allow participants to test their skills in front of an audience. Instructors typically invite advanced gym members to fight in one of these events, scheduling the bout with a local promoter whom they usually know. Fighters spend much time preparing, which includes an average of five hours per day for four to six weeks training, sparring, and wrestling; time researching their opponent and strategizing a “game plan;” and controlling their weight. Regardless of such preparation time, events vary widely in level of quality and most fighters are unpaid. When training is taken into account, those participating at the regional level of competition that are paid make equivalent to

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<sup>1</sup> Slogan taken from the original event poster.

<sup>2</sup> Because of their similarity in equipment many boxing gyms and karate dojos adapted their business models to satisfy demand by offering MMA classes as well. Critics pejoratively label gyms that offer classes without qualified instructors as “McDojos.”

the minimum hourly wage of a restaurant server without tips.<sup>3</sup> In addition, injuries are a normalized part of participating in MMA practice and competition, which can range from nagging pains to traumatic damage to bones, muscles, tendons, and internal organs. The extent to which these injuries cause long term health effects have yet to be assessed.

So why do MMA participants put themselves through grueling workouts and suffer through injury, with little or no pay, just to compete? It is because they enjoy a form of idolization from their supporters, which is linked to masculinity. In fact, the UFC organization, from its very beginning, purposefully created elements of the sport that are linked to dominant notions of manhood. In this context, men don thin open-fingered gloves, lock themselves in a caged enclosure, and slug it out in a fight with few rules to see who comes out on top. This all occurs while “ring girls” in high-heels and skin-tight shirts and shorts stride around outside the cage holding signs and peddling t-shirts. The sport of mixed martial arts is a rich and intriguing space where the construction of gender can be explored.

Whether it is called an inequality regime, an institution, a system of subordination, a hegemony, a primary frame, an interactional achievement, or a structure, gender is a complex system of inequality which sociology is tasked to understand. Why is gender so complex? Because gender is more than a system that identifies difference (Ridgeway 2009), it is an intertwined system of power relations that is constructed and contested in cultural ideology; socialized, modeled, and taught, overtly and covertly, in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood; embedded in organizational and institutional norms, practices, and positions; produced as identity and recognized as a social status during social interaction; and internalized as part of subjective experience. To further complicate this entanglement, gender is also embodied, which is to say that it is related to embodied characteristics that are recognized, socialized, and self-referenced to naturalize gender difference and justify the unequal social relations embedded in the processes above. Two tasks for gender scholars follow from these insights. First, scholars must explain how a multitude of social forces interact to create and reproduce gender inequality. Second, scholars must identify and explain social processes involved in embodying gender.

Through examination of the sport of mixed martial arts, my dissertation makes contributions to both tasks in the form of two stand-alone articles. First, I explain how the sport of mixed martial arts gets “keyed” (Goffman 1974) by institutional actors as a “real fight” and as

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<sup>3</sup> Analysis is not shown in this dissertation but available upon request.

a “contest” on varying levels of the gender structure, for different ends. In doing so, I demonstrate how gendered keying builds on existing theoretical frameworks (Risman 2004; Ridgeway 2009). Second, by examining the training process gym members undergo, I forward the concept of “gendered embodiment cycles.” This analysis shows how gendered embodiment can be a cyclical rather than, as is more commonly assumed, linear process.

Data for this dissertation was derived from 24 months of fieldwork in a local MMA gym which I call “Steel Hangar Gym,” observations of 10 competitions, and 121 recorded interviews (long and short form) with fighters as well as trainers, promoters, and officials. Along with this I filed and organized for the purpose of data analysis a multitude of news articles about local and national mixed martial artists, online discussion boards on the topic of MMA, and web pages of individual fighters, gyms, and organizations.

Over the two years, I regularly attended evening practices at Steel Hangar Gym observing workouts and sparring matches. I recorded copious field jottings and later fleshed them into full field notes of interactions with fighters, trainers, officials, promoters, and fans. In my time in the field, I completed observations at 10 competitions and 104<sup>4</sup> independent observations at the gym, for which I estimate totals over 300 hours, approximately 100 spent at competitions and 200 spent in the gym. From this field work I filled approximately 2 composition books<sup>5</sup> with field jottings and fleshed them out into 55 instances of full field notes totaling approximately 400 single-spaced pages and include detailed observational notes, diagrams, and excerpts of conversation. I estimate that my field notes include observations and interactions with over 200 participants involved the sport of mixed martial arts.

Observations differed according to context in two major ways. First, my observations at the MMA gym were markedly shorter, only lasting an average of two hours in length. In contrast, observations at MMA competitions lasted longer, usually between 6 and 12 hours in length with two observations stretching as long as two full 24 hour periods. Second, I conducted my observations in the gym setting from a single vantage point that allowed me to see all of the activity occurring, focusing my attention on the most interesting action at the moment and with

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<sup>4</sup> I completed 104 field observations at the gym to correspond to each week in the 24 month period. However, I only fleshed out half into full field notes. Another note is that observations were not done on a strict weekly basis. I was able to observe at least once for every month at the gym with exception of July 2008, where I took time off from the field to write a first draft of my Master’s thesis.

<sup>5</sup> I entered notes in three composition books and one small moleskin notebook with field jottings, drawings, and verbatim discussions.

the ability to motion to fighters if I wanted to inquire about action that just occurred. This was different for the competitions where the setting was too large to view all the action from a single vantage point and the frantic pace typically kept me from interrupting action. As such, I tried to spend time observing action in the different areas at competitions including the locker rooms, backstage, and at different places within the audience. Through this technique, I was able to note how the event unfolded differently from different points of vantage and knowledge.

I conducted 24 long form interviews with MMA participants. These interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour in length and covered four main topical areas of inquiry. First, I asked a series of background questions about each fighter leading up to their participation in the sport. Second, I asked fighters about techniques they used to gain control over their emotions during competitions. Third, I asked questions about their experience as they came to learn the embodied techniques necessary for participating in the sport. In addition, I asked questions about the injuries they faced, and how they dealt with them during their time participating in the sport. Finally, I asked the men how they felt they benefited from the sport both in and out of the gym setting. These interviews provided me with rich descriptions of what it is like to be a participant as well as gave insight into how the men became involved in the sport and what they get out of it.

I also conducted 97 informal interviews with fighters, promoters, and trainers at competitions. These informal interviews lasted between 5 and 15 minutes in length and were taken at three points in time during competitions. Interviews were held either the night before the fight at the “weigh-in” event, shortly before the competitor’s event, or shortly after their fight. For many of the fighters I was able to record interviews at multiple points during a single event and for some I was able to get interviews over multiple events. Interview questions varied according to context and exploration of emergent topics, but tended to be abridged versions of the longer interviews. They often included questions about the fighter’s physical and emotional preparations for the fight, explanations (play-by-play) or plans (game-plan) for their fight, and reactions to taking part in the competition.

In all, the ethnographer interviewed 83 MMA participants including, fighters (n=68), trainers (n=11), promoters (n=3), and officials (n=1) in both long and/or short form, which were transcribed in full. Sixty-seven percent of interviewees (n=56) were white, nineteen percent (n=16) were black, eight percent (n=7) were Hispanic, two percent (n=2) were Asian, and two

percent (n=2) no record of race was kept. They ranged in age from 19 to 45 years of age (Mean = 28, Median = 28). Detailed information on these participants can be found in Appendix B of this dissertation.

In addition I used data collected from online discussion forums and web pages dedicated to the sport of mixed martial arts for my analyses. Within my time in the field I was often referred by fighters to their own personal websites, team or gym websites, and discussion boards on the sport. These websites include hundreds of thousands of pages of discussion threads, thousands of videos of fighter interviews, and large data bases documenting details of fight results. I kept record of this information, filing it away for later use during data analysis. This information was useful because it allowed me to see how some processes that occurred in the gym were linked to the broader subculture. This type of information also helped to construct rounded characters of participants who I did not regularly see. Similarly, it helped in its use as a cross-checking device for accounts of participants.

In Chapter 2, I show how a variety of institutional actors worked to construct violence in the sport of mixed martial arts as socially appropriate. In doing so, I contribute to Risman's (2004) gender structure theory by proposing how Goffman's (1974) concept of "keying" modifies gender as a "primary frame" (Ridgeway 2009). I propose that keys, which are types of definitional transformations of context and actor, are useful for understanding how gender is a social structure. Specifically, I demonstrate how social actors keyed the sport of mixed martial arts both as a "real fight" and a "contest," to impact perceptions of men's participation as "dangerous" and "safe," which were also signifiers of manhood. I demonstrate how this occurred differently and to service different objectives on the multiple dimensions of the gender structure. On the cultural level, keying balanced the profit motive of the Ultimate Fighting Championship with political efforts to reduce television violence, on the organizational level to balance the men's desire for an authentic fighting experience with the need to recruit and retain members, and on the individual level to balance the desire of participants to be seen as "real men" while hedging against being labeled as barbarians. I end by discussing the added utility that this concept brings to gender structure theory and identify how it sheds light on Risman's (2004) call for "theory to wrestle with activism."

In chapter 3, through an analysis of MMA gym members' training, I examine how embodiment can be both a cyclical process and gendered. I forward the concept of "gendered

embodiment cycles,” which are a repeated sequence of interactions intended to shape bodies so they align with culturally ideal gender standards and is accompanied by related subjective experience. Specifically, I show how MMA gym members’ embodiment was an interpersonally constructed cycle sequenced as (1) skilling, (2) aggrandizing, (3) specializing, (4) advantaging, and (5) testing and resting; and how it was tied to both signifying the status of manhood and the positive emotions accompanying feeling like a “real man.” Whereas previous research on gender and embodiment has typically conceived the process as linear, static, or contextually achieved, I show how it can also be cyclical. I end by drawing out implications for research on gendered socialization of bodies and gendered identity, as well as the literature on embodiment more generally.

Chapter 4 entails a review of findings from the previous two chapters and then briefly discusses how they, when taken together, extend sociological understanding of gender. I conclude with some thoughts on what these findings mean for the study of inequality more generally.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **A “CONTEST” AND A “REAL FIGHT”: KEYING(S) OF MIXED MARTIAL ARTS, A GENDER STRUCTURE ANALYSIS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sociological theories explaining gender inequality are diverse with some emphasizing a macro focus on institutional and organizational factors (Fuch-Epstein 1988; Kanter 1977; Martin 2003) and others a micro focus on interactional processes (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009; West and Zimmerman 1989). Evidence supporting both perspectives is ample (see Ridgeway 1997 for a review). Yet in recent years some scholars have shed a strict adherence to either macro or micro approaches and have instead attempted to combine them to explain, holistically, how gender inequality is reproduced (Acker 1990; Lorber 1994; Martin 2004; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). Although this line of work opens the possibility for a more complete understanding of how gender inequality persists, very little work has been done to forward concepts useful for bridging macro and micro perspectives in empirical analyses. I take on this task through empirical examination of men’s violent behavior in the sport of mixed martial arts (abbreviated as MMA) on the cultural, organizational, and individual levels.

Using mixed martial arts as a case-study, a sport pitting martial arts experts against one another in a “no-holds-barred” fight, I extend the use of frame analysis (Goffman 1974) as a conceptual tool for explaining the reinforcing interrelationship between the various levels of the gender structure (Risman’s 2004). Specifically, I draw on Goffman’s (1974) concept of “keying” and apply it to Ridgeway’s (2009) insight that gender is a universal “primary frame” for organizing social relations and assigning meaning to individuals. I demonstrate how social actors on cultural, organizational, and individual levels keyed mixed martial arts as either a “real fight” or a “competition” and show how this differentially primes gendered notions about the men’s actions. Furthermore, I show how social actors use similar keys but for different purposes on various levels of the gender structure.

### **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Recent scholarship has brought to the foreground the notion that gender inequality is more than the result of macro structural constraints or micro interactional accomplishments; it a complex system of “mutually reinforcing and contradicting processes” (Acker 2006: 442).

Gender scholars have contributed to our understanding of this complex system in different ways. For instance, Lorber (1994) showed how gender gets socially constructed as a type of difference, which, in turn, is used to justify a system of subordination, answering the question – what purpose does gender stratification serve? Similarly, Connell (1987) has theorized how different masculinities and femininities get ordered into a type of hierarchical power structure, answering the question – who is benefitting from gender stratification? Martin (2004) importantly delineated the various ways that gender is a “social institution,” answering the question – what are the attributes of this system? Collectively, these contributions give gender scholars a better understanding of how gender is a multifaceted system that is constructed and reinforced in ways that generally benefit men at the expense of women. However, for the purpose of this analysis, I favor Barbara Risman’s (2004) integrative theory of gender because it articulates various dimensions of a “gender structure” and theorizes that they mutually interact and reinforce one another so that inequality is maintained, which tasks us to answer the question – how do social processes dynamically create gender inequality within and across various dimensions of the social structure?

In her theory of gender structure, Risman (2004) argues that empirical research should be directed towards the ways that gender is complexly embedded in persons, organizations, and culture. She tasks gender scholars to “build on our knowledge and progress to understand the . . . processes within a multidimensional recursive theory” (Risman 2004: 447). In this way, an empirical approach to gender structure theory must demonstrate two key points, it must show (1) multidimensional aspects of gendered phenomenon, which is how social processes on different levels reproduce gender inequality, and (2) demonstrate how these different dimensions are recursive, which is how the various levels enmesh one another in reinforcing ways. Risman (2004) provides some direction for empirical analysis by identifying concepts of interest for each level, such as identity work and socialization on the micro-level and organizational practices and distribution of resources on the macro-level. However, these concepts, unique to particular dimensions, likely isolate analyses and may impede full examination of the multidimensional and recursive aspects of the gender structure.

One way researchers have utilized Risman’s (2004) theory is to focus on how gender ideology spans across institutional contexts to influence inequalities in resource distribution, which importantly highlights how the gender structure is recursive but at the expense of a full



explanation of the multidimensional processes. In this line of research, scholars have focused on the conflict and confluence of gendered norms in work and family life. For instance, research by Santos and Cabral-Carsado (2008) showed how, for Portuguese women, work life in academia conflicts with traditional gender roles and causes problems at home. Similarly, research on domestic violence by Anderson (2007) demonstrated how breadwinner status differentially impacts the likelihood of divorcing an abusive spouse, increasing it for women breadwinners and moderately decreasing it for men breadwinners. Research by Glaubner (2007) examined how gender and race ideology intersect to decrease the “fatherhood premium” of pay raises for black fathers when compared to whites. Similarly, work by Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny (2010) observed that the gender wage-gap is differentially impacted in different nations by the degree to which men in each country both avoid routine house work and institutional labor policy. Importantly, these analyses show how gender ideology spans across institutions to impact resource distribution, demonstrating how dimensions of the gender structure are recursive. Yet, analyses in this line are encumbered when explaining how specific interactional processes in each dimension converge to produce these inequalities, limiting our understanding of why and how recursion across dimensions occurs.

Another line of research focuses on explaining processes within each level of the gender structure, giving us a better understanding of how the gender structure is multidimensional, but at the expense of understanding how it is recursive. This line of research tends to focus on how processes on each level, when taken together, have the effect of reproducing gender inequality. Such analyses often explain the processes on each level much like puzzle pieces that fit together. For instance, Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeny (2006) found college women’s desire to interact with college men combined with university policies to create the conditions that push students off campus to male-controlled fraternity “party scenes,” increased the likelihood of campus-related sexual assault. Similarly, Tichenor (2005) demonstrated how norms and practices within the institutions of labor and family fit together in ways that result in women breadwinners doing more domestic labor and parenting, and less financial decision-making than lesser earning husbands. Messner (2000) importantly applied Risman’s (2004) theory to his research on children’s soccer. He demonstrated how culturally gendered types of play, organizational structure, and interactions between children, parents, and coaches fit together in ways that boys’ and girls’ behavior becomes constructed as naturally different from one another. This important

line of research focuses on the various processes within the multidimensional levels of analysis and provides explanation for how these levels fit together as pieces of a larger puzzle. However, such research stops short of a full explanation of how these processes enmesh in reinforcing ways; that is, it leaves out a full explanation of their recursive entanglement.

Recent work by Ridgeway (2009: 2) addresses the trouble of explaining gender as a multidimensional and recursive phenomenon noting that “the remaining difficulty is . . . to explicate how these multilevel processes affect one another, beyond simply saying that they generally but not always reinforce one another.” To remedy this, Ridgeway (2009) draws on the work of Erving Goffman to forward gender as a “primary frame,” which defines gender as a type of identifier for cuing common cultural knowledge that individuals use to organize social relations and coordinate action. Ridgeway (2009) explains that gender is both embedded within the defined roles and expected relations of organizations as “institutional frames” and in the status characteristics of individuals as “people frames.” To clarify, “people frames” are stereotypes held for how an individual will behave and assessed through observation of status characteristics. “Institutional frames” are the embedded expectations for what type of people are best for fulfilling certain institutional roles. Individuals’ behavior is guided by the interaction between these two frameworks, organizational context and status traits, to create gender inequality. Ridgeway’s definition of gender is multidimensional and recursive since it is easily recognizable and used in organizing relations at all levels of the gender structure. Ridgeway’s (2009) theory is promising, yet some concern lies in the perceived assumption of stability in gendered cultural meanings for contexts and people. Although it is true that meanings, including gendered ones, often seem stable because “empirically, there is considerable regularity in what people do” (Stryker 1977: 155), it is also true, as interactionists have long emphasized (Blumer 1969), that meanings of objects and people are often fluid.

Goffman’s concept of keying emphasizes the fluidity of meaning, and thus may be a useful in building on Ridgeway’s (2009) approach to understanding the mechanisms that underlie the gender structure. Keying involves the transformation of something defined as “real, actual, and literal . . . into something patterned [on the] activity but seen as something quite else” (Goffman 1974: 44-47). To illustrate this, Goffman (1974) shows how an audience may interpret two people attacking each other as a fight, a play, a contest, or a demonstration depending on the symbolic cues that participants or the context provides. In fact, Goffman (1974, p. 57) notes that

one common type of keying is a “contest” and addresses how it directly related to violent sports stating “consider sports such as boxing . . . the literal model seems to be fighting of some kind, and the rules of the sport supply restriction of degree and mode of aggression . . . Some sports then can be identified as keying of elementary combative activity.” For Goffman (1974), both “fighting,” as unacceptable violence, and the “contest” of boxing, as acceptable violence, are similar activities but viewed as quite different from one another because they are keyed differently. Although Goffman (1974) recognized that keying is important in transforming the meanings of a fight, he did not connect the concept of keying to analysis of gender.

This study specifically looks at how men’s violence in the sport of mixed martial arts is keyed as a “real fight” or as a “contest.” Despite disagreement on what constitutes men’s acceptable violence (Dekersedy and Schwartz 2005), because culture is not monolithic (Sewell 1999), there is some consensus that, at least for sports activity, the perception that it is safe or dangerous impacts whether it will be considered acceptable (Lyng 1990), and gender is an important factor in this process (Lois 2003).

In fact, a prominent theme in masculinity scholarship is the dangerous risk-taking that men both create and seek in order to demonstrate they can handle it “like a man.” For instance, popular media offers an entire genre of high-grossing action films where male protagonists, such as James Bond, Rambo, and John McClane, bravely escape multiple dangerous events and become the hero (Messner 2007; Katz 1999). Similarly, the workplace is another site for men to draw attention to how they handle danger whether it be escaping from a fighter-plane crash (Barrett 1996), repairing oil rigs without a safety harness (Hirshcorn and Young 1993), or by making expensive high-risk financial investments (Lewis 1989). Research on contact sports such football and lacrosse also notes danger as a prominent theme for men (Bird 1996; Messner 1989; Schyfter 2008). Other research focuses on why danger is important, which is namely because it allows men an opportunity to demonstrate that their control over it makes it safe (Connell 1995). For instance, research on occupations illustrates how men emphasize that their control renders the situation safe, such as when working with heavy equipment (Pringle and Winning 1998), walking on high construction ironwork (Haas 1979), bouncing rowdy patrons out of night clubs (Monaghan 2002), or during firefights (Chetkovich 1997). However, it is also noted that both danger and safety can be overemphasized and men might find that in doing so their behavior is deemed inappropriate and themselves characterized in the case of dangerous actions not as “real

men” but instead a drunkard (Peralta 2007; Mullaney 2007) or criminal (Messerschmidt 2000) or in the case of attention to safety as a nerd (Kendall 1999), pussy (Connell 1995), vulnerable woman (Hollander 2001), or fag (Pascoe 2007). This research suggests that danger and safety might be important for keying (Goffman 1974) contexts to signify them as a space for masculine performance.

My analysis demonstrates how social actors on cultural, organizational, and individual levels of the gender structure key the sport of mixed martial arts as a “contest” and a “real fight.” In doing so, they also characterize men’s actions in the sport both as being either safe or dangerous and this effort has impact on whether the men are appraised by others or perceive themselves as “real men” or “barbarians.” My research contributes to Risman’s (2004) theory by demonstrating how this conceptual tool can be used to accomplish analyses of gender that are both multidimensional and recursive. I do this through extending Ridgeway’s (2009) notion of gender as a “primary frame;” showing how framed contexts get keyed (1) across all levels of the gender structure, (2) to service different objectives, (3) in ways that allow the same context to have multiple meaning transformations, and (4) to the effect they change gendered meanings of “person frames” as well as contextual “institutional frames.”

## **METHODS**

Data are derived from fieldwork, interviews, and MMA documents. Over a two year period, I regularly attended evening practices at “Steel Hangar Gym” and observed workouts and sparring matches as well as ten competitions in the southeast. While in the field, I jotted notes openly and later fleshed them into full field notes. I also conversed with fighters in the gym about the progression of my research and about their own training and fights as they took breaks during workouts. I spent a period of two months – approximately months eight and nine of the ethnography – working out and sparring with gym members.

I also conducted twenty-four long form and ninety-seven short form interviews with MMA participants. Long form interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour and covered their experiences of participating in the sport and how their participation shaped relationships. Short form interviews lasted between five and fifteen minutes in length and were taken at three points in time during competitions; before the fight at the “weigh-in” event, shortly prior to the competitor’s fight, or shortly after their fight. For many of the fighters I was able to record interviews at multiple points during a single event and for others I was able to get

interviews over multiple events. Short form interview questions varied according to context, but tended to be abridged versions of the longer interviews. These interviews provided me with rich description of what it is like to be a participant in the sport as well as insight into how participants talked about danger and safety.

In addition to fieldwork and interviews, I collected data from online discussion forums, web pages, and books on the sport of mixed martial arts. Fighters often referred me to their own personal websites, team or gym websites, books about fighting, and MMA oriented discussion boards. These websites include hundreds of thousands of pages of discussion threads, thousands of videos of fighter interviews, and large data bases documenting details of fight results across the country. I collected and filed these data for their usefulness in connecting what I found occurring in the immediate context of the gym and competition setting to the broader subculture. Previous research on mixed martial arts has also found this type of data to be useful because it functions in ways similar to contemporaneous oral histories about mixed martial arts (Hopton 2007).

My analysis developed in an inductive fashion using previous sociological theory and research about manhood to guide the inquiry. I began my analysis using the interview and field note data with my attention towards the type of talk that men use to describe their participation in the sport of MMA. At first, I concentrated on how men talked about the danger of injuries in the sport, but soon discovered that fighters also took great measures in interviews to emphasize that the sport was not dangerous but instead that they were in control and the sport was safe. As I reviewed historical data, forums, and books on mixed martial arts it became even clearer to me that the pattern of explaining the safeness and dangerousness in the sport extended outside the immediate context of the gym. As I compared and contrasted talk about safety and danger as it emerged in the larger MMA sub-culture, the local gym, and interviews, I noticed variations that I sought to unpack. Only later, when trying to make sense of the larger story, did I come to see how contemporary theory on gender structure and classic work on framing informed my analysis.

### **KEYING ON THE CULTURAL LEVEL**

In this section I first show how organizers of the sport of mixed martial arts initially keyed the sport as a “real fight,” drawing on notions of danger in order to engross a young male audience and make a profit. I then examine how they later keyed the sport as a “contest,”

drawing on notions of safety in order to temper a backlash from politicians seeking to regulate television violence. By doing so, I demonstrate how organizers on the cultural level had to strike a balance between keying MMA in ways that cast fighters as tough athletes or deviant barbarians.

Producers of “The Ultimate Fighting Championship” developed the idea from a “hundred-thousand dollar” challenge made by martial artist Rorion Gracie in a 1989 *Playboy* magazine article in which the first line reads “Rorion Gracie is willing to fight to the death to prove he is the toughest man in the west” (Jordan 1989: np). Organizers made efforts to design the sport as a symbol of masculine individuality, going as far as recruiting John Milius, a film producer most notably known for work on the movies *Dirty Harry*, *Apocalypse Now*, and *Conan the Barbarian*, to design the caged enclosure known as the “Octagon” (Gentry 2005). Organizers looked to attract a young male audience to buy their pay-per-view event but were faced with the dilemma of promoting it on a shoe string budget at a time when the common sense understanding for success was that they would need ample television media saturation.

Hedging that they would attract free media attention through requests for interviews by the press, early promotion of the event keyed the sport as a “real fight” and participants as extremely dangerous men (Snowden 2008). Organizers were quoted saying the event features “Excitement. Non-stop action. Suspense. Blood and guts.” (Mooneyham 1995: C20) and “16 guys you would like to have over for a kegger on a Saturday night, if you were trying to bust your lease and all your furniture. These hunks have more testosterone than a herd of water buffalo” (Kreck 1994: B1). In press releases, organizers emphasized that the event had “no rules” with “eight of the most deadliest fighters in the world” and dubbed the event with the taglines “The Most Controversial Event of the Decade” proclaiming that “the ethos of the coliseum is back with a bloody vengeance” and promising that paying viewers would see a sport where “Two Men Enter, One Man Leaves.” Similarly, to further key the sport as a real fight and participants as dangerous men, marketing director Cambell McLaren was quoted as saying “It might be good for the [pay-per-view] buy rate. But I don’t want anyone to die” (Sandomir 1994: 13). Indeed, keying the context as a real fight had implications for how its participants were viewed as men by constructing them as dangerous testosterone laden gladiators.

Organizers also directly keyed specific participants as dangerous people. For instance promoters emphasized marquee fighter Ken Shamrock’s reputation as a dangerous man by

highlighting how he whispered in opponents' ears "I'm going to kill you" before choking them into unconsciousness (Shamrock and Hanner 1998). Organizers promoted another fighter, Tank Abbott, as a brawler known for "making a habit of causing as much havoc outside the cage as he did in it" (Snowden 2008: 82) including instigating fights in bars, hotel lobbies, and in the stands at UFC events. One journalist's account of an early event's press conference reported promoters' attempts to key the men as dangerous went to the extent that one part "was devoted to a demonstration by one of the participants . . . smash[ing] various construction materials into shorter lengths" (Kreck 1994: B1). Directly keying the "person frame" (Ridgeway 2009) of the participants gave additional meaning to the event and organizers' attempts to do so for these early events were a success as pay-per-view buys reached above 200,000 (Rist 1994, Mooneyham 1995). The message was clear, that "The Ultimate Fighting Championship" is an entertainment event, or "context frame," to watch because it is an opportunity to view real men facing physical danger and the possibility of death in a real fight with absolutely no rules. These men were constructed as hyper-masculine gladiators whose dangerous no-holds-barred fighting can only be contained in a steel cage.

"The Ultimate Fighting Championship" with its bold strategy of keying the sport as a real fight by emphasizing the context and participants as dangerous, premiered on pay-per-view at the same time that policy makers in Washington were crafting legislation to regulate television violence that would eventually become the Television Decency Act, as part of the broader Telecommunications Act of 1996. Republican lawmakers sought to deregulate media ownership while at the same time promising constituents of part of the broader religious "Culture Wars" (Hunter 1991) that they would seek regulation of media content to reduce instances of pornography and violence (Crouteau and Hoynes 2003).

Politicians seized on the UFC promoters' keying of the "The Ultimate Fighting Championship" as a dangerous real fight to highlight how they believed U.S. media had crossed a line and fueled a backlash that nearly sent MMA into obscurity (Plotz 1999).

One of the most notable opponents of the sport was Arizona Senator John McCain, who sat on the committee designing the Telecommunications Act of 1996. McCain called MMA "human cockfighting" (Beato 2007: 16) and characterized it as "so brutal it nauseates people, even hardened individuals are repelled [by watching it]" (King 1995: np). McCain did more than criticize, he took actions to ban the sport including writing letters to all U.S. Governors to enact

legislation on the state level, particularly targeting those states where organizers had scheduled upcoming events (Plotz 1999). He lobbied Nevada Athletic Commissioner Marc Ratzner, the head of the Association of Athletic Commissions, to agree to a voluntary ban of the sport in thirty-six states. When McCain became Chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee he lobbied the incoming president of TCI Cable Corporation, Leo Hindery, to ban the sport from its pay-per-view outlet (Sanderson 2010; Plotz 1999). Hindery acquiesced and stated in an interview with the press that “I came [to TCI], found out where the bathrooms are, and [then] cancelled Ultimate Fighting” (Snowden 2008: 94). Shortly after, other cable companies got the message and did the same stating that they would no longer broadcast “The Ultimate Fighting Championship” (Sanderson 2010). To sum, keying the sport as a dangerous “real fight,” although having the effect of engrossing young men willing to pay to watch it, unintentionally gave symbolic ammunition to cultural warriors seeking to ban it. Fall-out from the backlash resulted in significant cuts to revenue which nearly sent the organization into bankruptcy (Snowden 2008; Plotz 1999).

In order to make the sport profitable again, organizers also made efforts to “rekey” their gendered framing from the notion that the sport was a dangerous real fight to the notion that it was a contest. Such keying implied that the sport was relatively safe and that the fighters were not barbarians but rational and competent professional athletes. In an interview with Larry King (1995), for example, such rekeying was accomplished by the head organizer of the sport Bob Meyrowitz and “dangerous” fighter Ken Shamrock who debated Senator John McCain and Nevada Athletic Commissioner Marc Ratzner. Shamrock contrasted McCain’s characterization of the men as brutes by emphasizing them as professional athletes, rational and competent, who practice the sport safely: “To me brutality is when a person beats up another person on the street . . . you are talking about two professional athletes . . . I take it as an insult when they say that it’s barbaric and that we’re animals” (King 1995: np). Meyrowitz similarly countered McCain’s and others’ criticism by saying that brutes wouldn’t be competent to do this type of professional work “we’ve never had a bruiser who has won . . . people who fight in this are most definitely highly skilled and very well trained athletes” (King 1995: np). Meyrowitz and Shamrock thus both keyed the sport as a contest by emphasizing that fighters were simply athletes.

The telling exchanges in the Larry King (1995) interview were part of a broader effort to key the context of the “The Ultimate Fighting Championship” as a contest and the participants as



safe professionals. Other efforts included developing the “Unified Rules of Martial Arts Competition.” Promoters worked in conjunction with influential athletic commissions on this set of rules which in its preamble states:

The State Athletic Control Board had been hesitant to sanction mixed martial arts due to the lack of formal rules in the sport which created health and safety concerns . . . the proposed new rules will increase the public trust and confidence in the integrity of the sport (NJSACB 2002: np).

Similar keyings proliferated when Lorenzo and Frank Fertitta and Dana White purchased the UFC. They spent considerable money on rebranding the sport as a safe contest (Miller 2008) and tightly controlled their media messages so as not to make the mistakes of the past. One prominent reporter covering the sport noted in an interview that:

The UFC has banned media from events if they feel that they don’t cover them exactly the way they want them to be covered. . . I am totally on the outside, banned around 2005 . . . We were in a group and went right up to Dana White and said, “Why did you ban us?” Dana said, “I have no problem with you two, it’s just your outlet.” . . . He said – your bosses are scumbags.

Dana White, the face of the organization, continually keyed the sport as a safe contest to reporters noting that he and the new owners had cleaned up the sport even to the extent that they thanked John McCain. White was quoted in one news outlet stating of McCain that,

People think he was saying, “This stuff should be banned. It shouldn’t happen.” That’s not what he was saying. What he was saying to the old owner, “You can’t put on unregulated fights. You can’t just put on a fight in some state that doesn’t have a commission. You have to be regulated.” The old owner ran from regulations. We ran toward it, and we credit John McCain (Varsallone 2010: np).

The focus on rules, safety, and rational and professional practitioners helped key the sport as a contest and the efforts proved to work as criticism of the sport significantly diminished.

Organizers also eventually learned to manage a type of balancing act by keying the sport as a safe contest while at the same time a dangerous real fight in order to continue to attract a young male audience. For instance, they notably created a highly successful reality television show for Spike TV, a channel with dedicated programming for a young male demographic. The show mixes fighting and grueling workouts of fighters with the male drama of fraternity house

pranks, alcohol induced rages, and angry feuds that are settled in the Octagon. As a prominent reporter in the sport I interviewed noted, “they found the right formula with the show, they have the drama that occurs in the fighters’ house and just enough violence with the fights at the end to keep the audience satisfied without turning them off.” Another reporter noted the changes when he said:

Today, the UFC is a sanitized, bureaucratized, more genteelly marketed version of its former self, yet it’s also more popular than ever. As much as we like violence, we apparently like it even more when it’s tempered by a sense of order . . . as much as we might like human cockfighting, we like humane cockfighting even more (Beato 2007: 18).

In sum, on the cultural level the UFC organizers learned how to use both keys of contest and real fight simultaneously. They used the real fight keying of the sport to promote it to a young male audience and the contest key to media outlets and those who might be critical of the sport. Such keying was important for how the participants were characterized as men whether they are “hunks with more testosterone than a water buffalo” or “highly skilled and very well trained athletes.” As a result of this balance, the UFC and mixed martial arts has gained enough popularity to be regularly called “the fastest growing sport in the United States” and “The Ultimate Fighting Championship” is now worth over two billion dollars (Miller 2008), suggesting that such that keying on the cultural level has been a success.

### **KEYING ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL**

As “The Ultimate Fighting Championship” became a media spectacle, it sparked an interest in many people to become participants, which has driven demand for mixed martial arts gyms and smaller competitive events in cities throughout the United States. In this section, I analyze the organizational level, focusing on how a MMA gym also balanced keying participation in the sport as a real fight and contest. Similar to the cultural level, invoking notions of danger and safety was central to such keying, which had implications for how participants were symbolically gendered. First, in order to appeal to the men who sought an authentic experience like they saw on television, the gym in some ways keyed MMA as a “real authentic experience” which could involve danger. At the same time, in order to appeal to members who might be reticent to join an organization filled with barbarians eager to hurt them and, gym

leaders also keyed gym activities as safe and geared toward professionally run contests. As I will explain, balancing such keying was crucial for maintaining a financially viable organization.

Members of the MMA gyms I interviewed often said that they were initially attracted to MMA by the opportunity to engage in an authentic experience of fighting that other martial arts did not offer. For instance, Jimmy said of other martial arts gyms: “I wasn’t getting real experience . . . there was never any element of actually wrestling with someone or grappling with someone . . . [just] an instructor telling me to punch the air.” Scotty said that he got “sick of the karate stuff because it wasn’t realistic . . . it was just kind of boring” and joined Steel Hangar Gym because he “thought it would [include] more contact [fighting].” Marcel, dissatisfied with other gyms said disparagingly that they “were saying that they do mixed martial arts, but that wasn’t the case,” adding that joining Steel Hangar Gym was “my chance to actually compete.” Garrett said that he joined an MMA gym because he was looking to “satisfy his competitive side” and mixed martial arts offered him that type of an “outlet.” Isaac became interested in mixed martial arts because he saw it as a “more intense version” of wrestling and boxing that “simulates as much real-life action without being real life.” In sum, members adopted, to various extents, the keying of MMA fighting as an authentic fighting experience to explain why they joined.

However, the men’s desire for an authentic real fight also made them worry about facing potentially dangerous people eager to hurt them, and thus needed some reassurance of safety. Many of the men I interviewed said that they did not know what to expect walking into the gym, which could foster this aversion. Felix said, “I was worried that there was going to be a bunch of tough guys who were going to be like, ‘Hey, we are going to beat you up’ or whatever.” Jimmy said similarly, “When I first walked in I was a little apprehensive cause there is that stereotype of the kind of people you would think do it . . . a bunch of meatheads . . . that just want to kick my ass.” Steven’s hesitancy stemmed from referencing the frame of dangerous fighters in the UFC when he signed the consent form to join the gym,

I signed the waiver and consent form. And I remembered a documentary on a [UFC fighter] where he was talking about if anybody that doesn’t believe in the dominance and superiority of his style of fighting is open to come in and they’d be happy to break an arm or a nose [to prove it]. I signed off and I’m thinking okay, I’m probably going to get my arm or my nose broken.

In all, new participants although enthralled by the prospect of getting a real authentic fighting experience had worries of being embarrassed or injured, which might have impacted their decision to join.<sup>6</sup>

The same hesitancy new members had from keying MMA as dangerous created difficulty in keeping members after they signed up. Dominic expressed the sentiment that many members who initially join will leave when he said,

Every person that came in here talking about how they want to compete is no longer here. We had a fighter that came in and sparring with one of our amateur fighters and got beat soundly all the way through. He went in the back and threw-up and we have never seen him again.

Buster said of the attrition at his gym that “Other than the main guys we see a lot of new guys but a lot of people leave.” Rocky made the point explicit by demonstrating the amount of attrition in the gym during a field observation when he said: “We usually get new guys in here every week. About four of them show up once and never come back. We keep track of that. We have waivers to sign and we have a list of people who pay us for the month.” He then took me in the back of the gym and showed me a massive stack of several hundred waivers and compared it to the paying membership roles which at the time were slightly more than one-hundred. He said, “You can see that the list of people who are paying us is a lot smaller than the pile of waivers.” Thus, those overseeing the gym had to find ways to retain the appeal that keying participation as real and authentic fighting generated, yet also alleviate the fears that pushed newcomers away. To strike this balance, managers and instructors at Steel Hangar Gym conveyed to members that their participation was a dangerous “real experience” and at the same time that it was a contest safe to practice.

One notable opportunity that the owner of Steel Hangar Gym, Bruce, had to strike this balance in keying was the annual open house in which members volunteered to give live sparring demonstrations to the public, free of charge. During my time at Steel Hangar, I learned that members of the gym gave similar demonstrations to facilitate contact with the public at different venues including fraternity and sorority houses, university and community centers, and other martial arts facilities. Bruce said that he held these events for the public to demonstrate sparring

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<sup>6</sup> An autoethnographic side note to this is that it took time to conjure up the bravery to seek out a MMA gym to collect ethnographic field data. I worried that I would be shamefully “chased out” of the gym by a bunch of dangerous men when asking if I could use it as a site for research. This, of course, did not happen.

of gym members at “staggered levels of skill” so as not to “scare the public” and to “turn the audience into customers.” As one open house took place, Bruce pulled aside some of the fighters for a pep-talk before the sparring sessions and said “I want you to go hard, to put on a real show for them. But not near real fighting.” He then set some ground rules for each of the fights before he turned back to the audience that was now assembled and waiting eagerly. He took the center of the area where the sparring session would soon take place and began by discussing the various rules of mixed martial arts including what is allowed and not allowed in a typical match. Emphasizing safety, he pointed out to the audience the protective equipment that they would be wearing including the head-gear, the mouth-piece, wrist-wraps, the gloves, shin-pads, and then joked about wearing “the most important gear of all” – a protective athletic cup. Focusing in on the gym’s attention to safety, he noted that this was required equipment in the gym for sparring sessions as well as competitions, although it was not required for regular training.

After the talk, Bruce announced the first two fighters, Buddy and John-Boy. Members of the crowd, apparently hoping to see a “real fight,” started to cheer for violence as the sparring session began. “Knock him out!” yelled one member of the audience. “Kick his ass!” yelled another. At this point John-Boy landed a punch that cut the flesh above Buddy’s eye. Buddy paused, wiped some blood away, and mumbled “I’m good” to Bruce, who in-turn nodded. Buddy then delivered several fierce leg kicks to John-Boy’s head. The fight continued and the crowd, more engrossed than before, cheered and shouted louder until Bruce stepped in to stop it after time had expired.

Bruce’s actions are telling in this instance and are exemplary of using safety and danger to balance the organizational keying. Bruce first used safety when he reminded participants not to get overzealous, explained the rules of the sport to the audience, and noted the safety equipment. At the same time he allowed for demonstration of the danger in a real fight when he encouraged the men to give the audience “a show,” disregarded the audience’s encouragement of violence, and failed to cool off the situation when the men became overaggressive during sparring. Such keying seemed to satisfy the audience who likely sought cues on what the experience of becoming a gym member would entail. Bruce used both the danger of an authentic fighting experience and the safety precautions of highly trained professionals to aid his goal of turning an audience at these events into paying customers.

Another way that instructors and managers in charge at Steel Hangar Gym used danger and safety to balance keying the sport was through official communication on their website. Steel Hangar's website contained a variety of information about the organization including class schedules, frequently asked questions, the biographies of the instructors, news articles about its members, photographs and videos, and an "instructor's weblog" which was updated regularly by the trainer Dominic. Many of the topics he wrote about on the site provided directions on how to ensure safety when practicing in the gym, which characterized the instructors as professionals who were attentive to safety. For instance, an answer to a frequently asked question on age limitations to the sport explains that: "MMA is a physically involved sport. However, classes are not structured to wear your body away. Many of our students are professionals with families and fulltime jobs. People in their 40s, if not beyond, are capable of taking part in training." Another quote in Dominic's weblog keyed the gym context as safe by comparing it to fishing, "Any sport is dangerous. In fact, studies point to fishing as being the most dangerous sport there is . . . However, let's be realistic, any sport that involves contact will demand your attention to safety." In another blog post about having the "right attitude" the instructor warns members that the desire for "real fighting" does not usurp the need to remain safe, "Don't ever come into the gym with the goal of hurting anyone. That is a dangerous mentality." The instructor notes that being too aggressive is a "dangerous mentality" in the gym that poses problems that can lead to the "downfall of many members and even an entire gym." Indeed, the website postings drew attention to the instructors as trained professionals, ready to dispense advice for making the gym context as "safe" as possible. Potential gym members who were reticent to join the organization for fear of being beaten by deviant barbarian men could rest assured that the gym instructors were in control of this possibility of danger.

Yet, the website also encouraged an organizational keying of gym participation as connected to an authentic real fight experience. Most notably, the tagline on all pages of the website read "ELEVATE YOUR THREAT LEVEL!" Similarly, the home page of the website included an animation feature of the head instructor throwing a punch as if to hit the computer screen monitor. The media page on the website was filled with photographs and video of fighters participating in competitions and many of the photos were taken in the midst of the fighters violently hitting, kicking, or slamming their opponents. No video or photographs on the site showed instructors teaching a class or talking about safety. Conversely, an entire page is

dedicated to the “fight team” which features the photographs of gym members who actively took part in the authentic competitive events that made the sport so appealing in the first place. And a statement on the frequently asked question page reads that “we encourage fighters to begin training with the mindset that they wish to go into competition.” Although the website couches training in the language of a contest, the photographic representation of such “competitions” as a real fight is a symbolic nod to potential members that the work done in gym is not just to have a good workout. Instead, joining the gym means being involved in the training for the dangerous scenario of being locked in a cage to slug it out with an opponent in a competitive event. Indeed, the official communication provided by instructors on the website also included keying participation as a chance at a real fight and was a counterbalance to keying it as a safe contest. Thus, through the messaging on the website, instructors were also able to signal to potential recruits that the gym training would entail readying them to prove their manhood through a real fight experience.

To summarize, at the level of organizations, instructors at Steel Hangar Gym were faced with a dilemma which they resolved through different keying of gym participation as a real fight and contest. They needed to structure the organization of Steel Hangar Gym in a way to entice young males who were interested in the prospects of a real fighting experience yet hesitant to participate, and likely to attrite, if they were embarrassed or injured from gym activities. To counter this, instructors and the owner at Steel Hangar Gym keyed participation as safe in demonstrations to the public and official communication on their website to temper any hesitancy that potential recruits and new members would have. At the same time, instructors keyed participation as a chance at an “authentic experience” that could be dangerous, which participants desired.

### **KEYING ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

Members who maintained commitment to their training at Steel Hangar Gym were sometimes given the opportunity to compete in front of an audience, which essentially anointed them as legitimate “MMA fighters.” Although competing in smaller regional events, they were like the hyper-masculine gladiators in the UFC. This might evoke admiration among fans, but also the possibility of being “barbarians” to others. Similar to resolving dilemmas on the cultural and organizational levels, the fighters generally resolved this individual level dilemma by

sometimes keying MMA as contest and, at other times, a real fight. By doing so, the men learned how they could both benefit from their actions being seen as undertaking danger like a real man while stemming criticism that what they were doing is inappropriate violence.

Despite the fact that fighters received positive recognition as “real MMA fighters” from adoring and supportive fans at competitions and elsewhere, some fighters noted that some outsiders, including family members and friends, were not very supportive of the sport and might view their fights in mixed martial arts events as violence in a negative sense. They often stated their worries that outsiders misunderstood their participation in the sport as deviant barbarism similar to the “Culture War” politicians. For instance, Steven recounted that he was worried his wife would view his actions as a fighter as inappropriate and possibly insist he stop. He explained during an interview the lengths he went to ensure that his wife would remain supportive,

I told my wife, “this is what I am involved in . . . I don’t want you to have any misconceptions . . . if you say, ‘My husband . . . wants to become one of those fighters’ and then one of your colleagues say [makes a feminine singsong voice] ‘Oh, you know, it’s gruesome and bloody. Tell him to stop’” . . . [I said], “If you don’t approve of it, that’s fine, but you need to be educated . . . And that goes a long way if she ever finds herself in a place where you know where there’s a bunch of idiots that are screaming you know, ‘Rip his head off!’”

Here, Steven worried that his wife would be convinced by others who adopted the real fight keying but thought that if he “educated” here, presumably by keying the sport as a professional contest, she would see him in a better light, perhaps as a professional athlete. Steven’s worries about how outsiders may view his participation as a fighter in mixed martial arts echoed many others, who often expressed the similar sentiment that “people think were crazy that we do this stuff.” As this shows, fighters would have to work to strike a balance of keying their participation in the sport as fighters if they were to reap the benefits of being called a real man and avoid the cost of being labeled a barbarian.

One way that fighters keyed their participation as a relatively safe contest was by comparing it with other contact sports such as boxing and football. Comments such as these often came from questions about what they would like others to know about the sport from the perspective of an insider. For instance, after winning a championship belt, Gary frankly



dismissed the notion that fighters are brutal savages by drawing a comparison of the sport's safety with boxing, "There is a big misconception of [MMA] fighters being barbarians who just want to fight anybody, [however,] in a lot of people's opinion it's a lot safer than boxing." Nicky drew similar comparisons when I talked to him after winning an event, "Don't be discouraged by what you see. It looks like it is really harmful and violent but that is just not the case. It is much safer than a lot of other sports out there such as football and boxing." Promoter Keith noted that "[other sports] may have a wonderful reputation . . . but several people each year die doing boxing or even skiing." Sydney said after one fight that "boxers get hurt a lot worse than MMA fighters. A twelve round boxing match is a lot worse than twenty minutes in the cage." Buster said that "the sport is not as dangerous as boxing. It is not as dangerous as most people think." Donovan gave a direct example of how the rules of boxing make MMA competitions safer stating "It's a lot safer than boxing because with boxing you can get knocked around longer because of the standing eight-count . . . The knock-outs might look worse since they are usually flash knock-outs and the fight is stopped but it is usually better for your brain and your body. It might look worse but it's not." Indeed, fighters gave positive accounts of their participation by keying it as a contest safer men's than other contact sports, most notably boxing, to diminish the notion that what they were doing was "brutal" violence. They acknowledge although the sport may look dangerous to the untrained eye, but from their perspective as "professionals" there was no need to worry. When the men were asked to give the insider perspective to an outsider they drew heavily on keying their participation as a contest. The men wanted outsiders to know that, as professionals, they were in control of the perceived chaos of a cage fight. In fact, their professionalism made it as safe as other legitimate sports, if not safer.

Fighters also keyed the sport as a contest by highlighting that there is danger in every sport and thus dismissed the notion that mixed martial arts was somehow qualitatively worse. They did this most often when confronted with questions about the injuries that frequently occur in the sport, which could have the effect on keying their participation as a safe "contest." For instance, when I asked Scotty about injuries in the sport he generally dismissed danger by saying "in every sport they have injuries." Marcel said similarly of the danger of injury that "injury is part of every sport." Dominic deemphasized danger by saying, "a pro-fighter in here with fifteen fights . . . actually had a career ending knee injury playing softball." And Rocky rebuffed a question about injury when he said "Injury is part of the sport as in any. You can't participate in

it and bitch about the consequences.” When questioned about danger and injury, which could trigger keying competitions as real fights, fighters brought up MMA in relation to other sports, subtly keying MMA as a contest. In doing so, they presented themselves as tough athletes willing to risk injury for victory, rather than ignorant barbarians heedlessly risking life and limb.

Another way that fighters keyed their participation in the sport as a contest was by drawing attention to the rules and how they allegedly made the sport safe to practice. For instance, during my interview with Jimmy he chastised me for calling a competition a “fight” instead of a “match” and expanded on how this control made participation safe,

It’s a controlled environment, there is a referee and there are no misunderstandings in a match, you know that someone is not going to pull out a knife, or hit you with a rock, or throw sand in your face. I wouldn’t call it a fight because it is a controlled situation.

Donovan said that the rules of mixed martial arts allow “you have the ability to submit people and nine times out of ten the fight is going to end before anything serious happens.” Promoter Keith was quick to point out to me during an interview—which took place after an especially detailed series of medical check-ups for fighters the day before a competition—that “the number one thing is the fighter’s safety. We don’t want anybody getting hurt.” Lou said of the same series of medical exams “It was a bit excessive but you got to understand that they are looking out for the safety of the fighters.” Indeed, fighters often highlighted rules to key the sport as a contest which, at least symbolically, made the sport safe.

It is important to point out, that keying participation as a contest by focusing on safety most often occurred on the “front stage” when interacting with individuals who might question the sport’s legitimacy. Fighters often took a different approach when dealing with the officials who enforced them behind closed doors. This is no better illustrated than instances of the “fighter’s meetings” that are held shortly before the beginning of the event. These meetings traditionally take place in the locker-room where all the fighters for the night’s event are called to gather with the officials to review the rules. The fighters and their coaches usually sit-down or take a knee as the commissioner and the head referee stand and read the list of rules, which is generally met with individual fighters’ resistance.

During one such event, the head referee began by stating in somewhat of an exasperated tone—suggesting he anticipated the coming debate—that, “Now I love MMA. I probably love it more than every single one of you in this room. But it is my job to ensure that the fights are fair

and that we all have an understanding of the rules.” He then proceeded to read the first rule, “No knees to the top of the head” and then one or two hands went up from the fighters. One fighter said, “Can we use the upper part of our shin near the knee? . . . Will you disqualify us if the knee to the head is accidental?” The referee then spent time qualifying the questions as the side conversations and grumblings from the fighters amplified the noise in the room. He then moved on to state the next rule, “For amateurs, no slams to the ground.” Unanimous groans of disapproval came from crowd of men. The referee quieted the group of men and qualified the statement that if you pick a person up above your waistline that qualifies as a slam and if you pick a person up that high you need to “place them – do not slam them on the ground.” A fighter in the back exclaimed “You got to be kidding me! How is this even going to be a *fight*?!” The argument continued in the same way over rule after rule until the head commissioner finally screamed, “Now is not the time for this you guys! We hold open meetings to review our rules at the state capital four times a year and you should come and make your case then.” Despite this, the message the fighters collectively gave the referee and commissioner was clear, it would be just fine by them if he decides to turn a blind eye to safety and allow them some more room to key their participation as a real fight; and at the same time assert their manhood through their actions in the cage.

Fighters also paid careful attention to developing and managing their “onstage” personas, which largely made them look more dangerous to the audience, which de-emphasized keying the event as a contest with professional athletes. Fighters’ T-shirts often had catch phrases signifying their dangerousness. For instance, Steel Hangar Gym’s T-shirt’s print echoed its website: “Elevate Your Threat Level.” Another gym’s read “It’s Either Tap, Snap, or Nap” referring to the fighter’s ability to make an opponent submit, break their bones, or knock them out cold. A more colorful fighter, Stanislav, wore an orange jumpsuit, handcuffs, and the print on his shirt read in black letters “Psycho-Ward” as to convey that he was an escapee mental patient. Similarly, another fighter, Taylor, wore a black sweatsuit, dark sunglasses, and a blue bandana covering his face as if he was a member of the Crips. Other fighters colored their hair bright orange, green, or red, styled them into Mohawks or wrote or shaved messages such as “Quik Killer” into their head. Similarly, fighter’s “entrance music” that played as they left the backstage area into the keyed them as dangerous men getting ready for a real fight as well, with the selections being mostly from the heavy metal and rap metal genres. They were also aided by

props from the promoters such as in one event where the men entered into the audience from what looked like a smoke-filled gorilla cage. Men used these symbols to convey the message to the audience that they were dangerous men doing dangerous acts, keying their participation as a “real fight.”

To summarize, men faced the dilemma on the individual level to key their participation as dangerous to their adoring fans and each other yet as safe to those skeptical of them on the outside. Men did so by keying the sport as a contest and emphasizing that it is safer than other contact sports such as boxing and football, or by more generally referring to the danger of injury in other “contests,” and how the rules of the contest made it safe for them to participate. Yet behind closed doors the men routinely tried to argue with the referees and commissioners over the rules and urged them to be as lackadaisical as they possibly could in following them so they could key their participation as a “real fight.” They also paid careful attention to managing their onstage personas as tough and dangerous men. As such, men on the level of interaction learned to balance their keying both as trained professionals participating in a safe contest and as dangerous men engaging in a real fight, which had the effect of encouraging their admiration as real men while stemming criticism of them as barbarians.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

My analysis shows how actors keyed the MMA as a real fight or contest on cultural, organizational, and individual levels of the gender structure (Risman 2004). Importantly, these different keys shaped how participants were defined within the situation, either as dangerous barbarians or safety conscious professional athletes, which had implications for their signification of gendered selfhood as real men. Also important to note is that keying processes on each level were done in service of different goals. On the cultural level actors either keyed the sport as a dangerous real fight to attract a young male audience and make money or a safe contest to stave off criticism from politicians desiring to fuel the “Culture Wars.” On the organizational level actors balanced keying to satisfy recruits’ desire for authentic fighting and the need to temper worries that would hamper the recruitment and retaining of paying members. On the individual level fighters balanced keying to receive reverence from supportive others as “real men” engaging in the dangerous scenario of a real fight while distancing themselves from being altercast as deviant barbarians by critical friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors.

My study of mixed martial arts contributes to the gender structure perspective (Risman 2004). I do this by offering Goffman's concept of "keying frames," which extends the previous work of Ridgeway (2009) to demonstrate how people's actions and the context in which those actions take place is an interactive and inter-relational process of definitional cueing, and is related to gender. Furthermore, an examination of this process shows how it entails qualities of being both (1) multidimensional and (2) recursive. First, keying is a multidimensional process because each level of analysis included the similar keying of MMA as a "contest" and a "real fight," but the process of how the keying was deployed and what goals it serviced differed for each level of analysis. Second, keying is a recursive process because successful keying on one level became a symbolic resource on other levels as well as being linked to the outcome of other levels' success. For instance, the keying I analyzed likely began on the cultural level where it ensured the success of the UFC as an organization, was reinforced by participants on the local level where it was also successful, and successfully adopted as a framework for gym recruitment and embedded in training. In turn, gym organizations use this keying with new recruits, who adopt it by the time they become participants at the regional level, in which some eventually move up to the UFC.<sup>7</sup> Unifying this concept with previous gender theory better illustrates the dynamic forces at work on the various levels of the gender structure and gives insight to how they constrain and enable gendered actors in gendered contexts.

To further illustrate the utility of my contribution on the gender structure approach (Risman 2004), I offer three insights about keying that may be useful to sociologists of gender. First, for any activity there will be some limits to how it can be keyed to accentuate gender, which depend on the (a) cultural availability of a key, (b) contextual applicability of a key, and (c) group resistance or acceptance of a key. In the case of my study the keys of contest and real fight were culturally available as signifiers of manhood, they applied to the context of fighting on all levels, and there was some resistance to each alone, but a balance was struck between them in this case. Second, there are incentives and disincentives for keying which may include (a) its effect on distribution of resources, (b) the likelihood of failure through contestation, and (c) its effectiveness in resolving a situational dilemma. In my study, both cultural and organizational

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<sup>7</sup> Although none of the participants in my study made it to the UFC, many UFC competitors frequented these local events and some coached local fighters. Personal face-to-face communication between elite and regional level fighters occurred with regular frequency.

analysis reveals a financial incentive in the keying. In addition, my analysis shows how keying was contested on the cultural and interactional levels but did not fail.

In addition, my analysis suggests that keying may strengthen the gender structure if they are highly recursive. In other words, when the same keys become symbolic resources in service of objectives on multiple levels of the gender structure the more likely they will reinforce each level. In the case of keys of real fight and contest in MMA, with minor modifications, the convergence in the use for similar keys to service different goals on each level of the gender structure was near perfect. Organizers of the UFC used these keys on the cultural level where they suppressed political backlash and helped the sport turn a profit. On the individual level, fighters saw the benefits of these keys on the cultural level as they played out in the media which might have led them to conclude that similar keying would work on skeptical family members and friends. On the level of organizations, the originators of Steel Hangar Gym, who first met informally, might have thought about how well these keys worked on their skeptics and surmised that they could be used to effectively advertise their “fight club” as a business. When similar keys service differing objectives on multiple levels of the gender structure this likely strengthens their use on each level because it provides a unified framework for definitional cuing.

Risman’s (2004) work was importantly subtitled “theory wrestling with activism” to remind scholars that our work may service social change. In answering her call, my research offers several rays of hope. First, my research on mixed martial arts demonstrates that the gender structure is an incentivized one. On each level, actors were motivated to key and re-key, not by unconscious drives, but instead by incentives to act the way that they did to either solve a dilemma of interaction, secure resources, or both. Hence, my analysis suggests that activists can work to de-incentivize keying with gendered meanings which are oppressive and incentivize the opposite. Some research suggests the usefulness of this approach. For example, Ely and Meyerson (2010) show how oil platform workers created a culture that de-incentivized eschewing safety regulations on the rig by creating a work culture that disassociated violations with manhood, which freed men from traditional gender performances. Second, my research illustrates that elements of gender structure are not impervious, but instead vulnerable. On the cultural level, the sport of mixed martial arts was nearly wiped-out, not by a hurricane of outcry from opponents, but by one senator’s strategic keying. On the organizational level, Steel Hangar Gym was not an economic ocean liner, but owners worried about staying afloat financially. On

the individual level, fighters didn't stand tall as hegemonic men, but instead fretted about how outsiders perceived them. Here activists may use this insight to know that although systems of inequality look unchangeable, they are vulnerable to change because actions need to be continually reinforced through keying. For instance, if the keying done in mixed martial arts is viewed in terms of a reaction to the "crisis of masculinity" (Kimmel 2006) from the broader gains made by women since the 1960's, an activist might focus on how the weaknesses of such keying is a sign that men as a social group are having greater difficulty in justifying patriarchal ideology. Related, my research on the gender structure may draw attention to the notion that people, both viewing and participating, have to "buy into the hype" of a keying for it to be effective support for an underlying gender ideology. An example from my field notes shows how one engrossed in the real fight keying of a competition might view themselves as watching "badass motherfucking men" "fighting" in context of a "gladiatorial arena." However, when not buying into the hype of the keying, one can find themselves instead watching "young adult men" "flailing around" in a "county fairground building usually reserved for auctioning livestock." This research suggests that a way for activists to dismantle the gender structure would thus be in identifying incentives for keying, to disrupt the ideological reinforcement of keying by identifying and targeting its vulnerabilities, and on an everyday basis pointing out when the "emperor has no clothes" when it comes to keying.

It is indeed true that as Acker (2006, p. 442) says that gender is a "mutually reinforcing and contradicting processes," and interestingly the example of keying mixed martial arts as both a real fight and a contest highlights how contradictions can be reinforcements. Although done in different ways, cultural, organizational, and individual actors balanced keying to create a symbolic space for men to align their actions in the sport with the norms of manhood and signify themselves as real men. Paying attention to keying gives us insight to the nuanced processes occurring within each dimension of the gender structure and how those processes are enmeshed (Risman 2004) which has the net effect of maintaining the gender inequality.

# CHAPTER 3

## GENDERED EMBODIMENT CYCLES IN MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

### INTRODUCTION

Garrett,<sup>8</sup> a young, athletic, college-aged man, noted to me “I want to make something out of my life” and “be somebody,” which led him to join a Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) gym. MMA is a competitive combat sport where two fighters prepare themselves for a fifteen minute bout that includes the use of kicks, knees, punches, elbows, slams, chokes, and skeletomuscular locks. Garrett’s decision to join was not speculative because, like other contact sports (Messner 1990), audiences revere MMA fighters as “real men” (Schwalbe 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe). Each time he was offered a fight he intensively trained, changed his diet and increased his workout routine to daily gym trips and five-mile runs. By event time he looked trim, fit, and tough. After each competition he ceased attending the gym for a month, took up smoking, and gained weight by eating high fat and high calorie foods he “missed.” Garrett began this routine again once he received confirmation from his trainer of another fight. Later, when I observed and interviewed 121 participants in the sport of MMA over a two year period, I found that most had similar routines.

Understanding MMA fighters’ workout routines has implications for the burgeoning research on gendered embodiment. Scholars of gendered embodiment focus on understanding the interplay between the body and the social world as it pertains to gendered selfhood (Howson 2004). To clarify; gendered embodiment is the social processes performed by self and others on the human body to signify a specific gender. Research on gender has revealed (1) how socialization processes play a role in gendering bodies (e.g., Martin 1998), but tends to characterize these processes as linear and (2) how bodies are used to signify gender identity and reproduce gender inequality (e.g., Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; West and Zimmerman 1987), but tends to characterize processes as interactional achievements or as static status traits. I contribute to these two lines of research by demonstrating how they can be informed by conceptualizing some forms of gendered embodiment as a cyclical process.

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<sup>8</sup> All names are pseudonyms



I extend the literature on gendered embodiment by offering the concept of a “gendered embodiment cycle,” which is a recurrent sequence of acts intended to shape bodies so they align with culturally ideal gender standards, are accompanied by related subjective experience, and is followed by a period of bodily declination. Previous research has demonstrated the utility of understanding social processes as cycles, whether it be addiction (Prochaska and DiClemente 1982; Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross 1992), weight loss (Rossi et al. 1994), exercise (Glanz et al. 1994), or diabetes control (Jones et al. 2003). I build on this research by applying the concept of cycles more explicitly to research and theory on gender and embodiment. Through my research on the workout routines, competitive training, and competition of mixed martial arts participants, I demonstrate how this process followed a repeated cycle and also related to signifying manhood. While MMA gym members’ training is in many ways unique to their particular subculture, I suggest that, more generally, the concept of gendered embodiment cycles can be applied to a variety of practices, contexts, and populations and has significance for the study of gendered embodiment and, more generally, the sociology of the body.

### **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Gender is embodied, which is to say that men and women inhabit and experience their bodies differently. Sociologists interested in its study are tasked to understand what social factors create and naturalize embodied gender difference. Until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sociologists typically understood differences in embodiment between men and women to be a result of biology and posited this as a causal source for differing sex-roles (Howson 2004). Since that time however, scholars have demonstrated the inadequacy of this model and replaced it with the understanding that gendered behavior, subjective experience, and inhabiting of the body is largely influenced by social factors (Connell 1995; Lorber 1994; Oakley 1972; West and Zimmerman 1987). In recent years, gender scholarship on embodiment without adherence to essentializing it as stemming from biology has flourished. Research in this line has informed debates about how bodily difference between men and women is, to a large extent, both socially constructed and implicated in gender stratification. However, because of its co-presence with biological growth and decay, scholars often encounter difficulty in teasing out the extent to which gendered bodily difference is socialized. Similarly, other research conceptualizes the gendered body as an achievement in context specific social interactions or as a static status trait; largely ignoring whether, how, and to what extent biology might be involved in these processes.

These difficulties in teasing out and fully distinguishing social factors from biological ones have allowed for some lines of research in psychology (Buss and Schmidt 1993) and sociology (Wilson 1975) to once again argue that biological factors play a larger role in determining gendered behavior than they likely do (for details see McCaughey 2007). My research adopts a constructionist framework to shed further light on understanding the extent to which social factors determine gendered embodiment. I argue for more attention to be paid on gendered embodiment processes, including the sequencing and timing of social interactions entailed therein, as a site where our understanding gendered embodiment processes can be explored and extended.

One line of research examines gender socialization processes that occur at home, in schools, and in sports shows how boys and girls are taught to adorn and comport their bodies in ways that convey gender. Boys' bodies are socialized to be a source of efficacy and action, while girls' bodies are socialized to be a source of self-reference and objectification (Young 1990). Boys learn to use their bodies to convey dominance and girls to convey passivity, which reproduces gender inequality (Lorber and Martin 2011). For instance, research by Goldberg and Lewis (1969) and Fagot (1978) noted parents' role in gendering the body of young children by reinforcing sex-appropriate play behaviors including allowing for more independence, exploratory, and active behaviors in boys compared to girls of the same age (see also Caldera et al 1989; MacDonald and Park 1986; Ross and Taylor 1989). Lever (1978) demonstrated how the socialized independence and physicality of boys leads to increasingly complex levels of play when compared to girls. Messner (1990b, 2002) observed that the institution of sports provides a context where boys learn to turn their bodies into weapons, both symbolic and real, to be used as violent instruments of force against others – reinforced by approving cheers from spectators and congratulations from coaches and teammates (Schlyter 2008; Thorne 1993). Conversely, girls and women are socialized to shape, adorn, and comport their bodies in ways that support their objectification. Although this research has noted the importance of socialization processes throughout the life-course into gendered patterns of bodily comportment, adornment, and display, it tends to characterize these processes as occurring in a linear fashion and often neglects consideration of how the timing of socialization agent interactions are important.

Another line of gender scholarship recognizes the important role that bodies play in both the achievement and perception of gender identities, which are implicated in reproducing gender

inequality. Lorber and Martin (2001, p. 230) note how important gendered body identifiers are during social interaction when they say that the “gender-neutral or androgynous or ‘unisexual’ body is anathema in a world in which people must know quickly and precisely where to place others they encounter for the first time or in brief, face-to-face interactions.” The body is used in the interactional achievement of gender identification (West and Zimmerman 1987) as males and females work through use of make-up, clothing, hair-style, jewelry, exercise, diet, and comportment to signify they are men and women (Bordo 1989; 1999). For instance, females tend to wear make-up (Dellinger and Williams 1997), males tend to sculpt their bodies in the gym (Klein 1993), and both use cosmetic surgery (Gagne and McGaughey 2002; Davis 2002; Boyd 2007) to emphasize their bodies as either more womanly or manly. In turn, these gendered bodily characteristics become salient background identity markers in almost all social contexts and institutions and have the effect of implicitly priming gender stereotypes that shape social interactions in unequal ways (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin; Correll and Ridgeway 2004; Ridgeway 2009). However, whether gender identity is conceptualized as a gender performance or a status characteristic, both tend to neglect the importance of the sequencing and timing of actions for creating the body in gendered ways. One exception to this is Williams’ (2002) research on how adolescent girls “tried on gender,” meaning they explored differing possibilities and in variable phases for presenting themselves as gendered in differing ways. She demonstrated how young women engaged in phases of tenuous playfulness with gendered performance, resistance to gendered ways of being, and compliance with gendered expectations for behavior, which although not explicitly focused on them; entailed embodiment processes. Her findings open the possibility that gender embodiment processes also “involves multiple phases and contingencies” (Williams 2002 p. 30).

I build on Williams’ (2002) notion that gender can be a phased and contingent process with an explicit focus on embodiment in my research on mixed martial arts training. I show how MMA fighters engage in an embodiment process within the context of the sport that brings their bodies to approximate standards associated with ideal masculinity which is then followed by a period of bodily declination away from those ideals, and takes the form of a type of cycle. I term this process a “gendered embodiment cycle” to emphasize (1) it is a recurrent sequence, (2) interaction is a central component, (3) social meanings embedded within are key to the signification of a gendered selfhood, and (4) it is accompanied by related subjective experience.

By examining the gendered embodiment cycle of men in mixed martial arts we gain insight to socialized embodiment of gender and gender embodiment as a status signifier. In conclusion, I explore how gendered embodiment cycles may be studied in other social arenas.

### **SETTING AND METHODS**

The sport of mixed martial arts is an ideal area to study embodying gender because it is a subculture rich with masculine symbolism. MMA fans idolize fighters as modern day gladiators (Gentry 2005). In fact, the UFC organization, from its very beginning, has purposefully created elements that invoke notions of manhood – such as marketing the sport as dangerous and the winners as “ultimate” men (Snowden 2008). Furthermore, the names given to fighters including “The Beast,” “The Machine,” “Iron Man,” and “Superman” associate them with toughness and invulnerability central to idealized manhood. Indeed, mixed martial arts competitions as gendered organizations (Acker 2006) are an intriguing new space where our knowledge about the embodied gender can be further explored and extended.

For over two years, I regularly attended evening practices at Steel Hangar Gym where I observed workouts and sparring matches. I also talked to fighters in the gym as they took breaks, often about the progression of my research and about their own training and fights. For a period of two months, at approximately months eight and nine of the ethnography, I spent time working out and sparring with gym members. I also attended ten regional competitive events where I watched and talked to fighters as they prepared and fought, as well as interacted with others in the setting such as trainers, officials, promoters, and fans. During the ethnography I recorded copious field jottings and later fleshed them into full field notes (Emerson et al. 1995), which I estimate includes observations and interactions with over 200 participants involved in mixed martial arts.

I conducted twenty-four long form interviews with MMA participants. These interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour in length and covered their experience as they learned to embody techniques necessary for participating in the sport and questions about the injuries they dealt with during their time participating in the sport. I also asked the men how they benefited from the sport both inside and outside of the gym setting. From the interviews, I gained insight to what it is like to be a participant in the sport as well how participants talk about their bodies in relation to manhood.

I also conducted ninety-seven short form interviews with fighters, promoters, and trainers at competitions. These informal interviews lasted between five and fifteen minutes in length and were taken at three points in time during competitions. Interviews were held either the night before the fight at the “weigh-in” event, shortly prior to the competitor’s fight, or shortly after their fight. For many of the fighters I was able to record interviews at multiple points during a single event and for others I was able to get interviews over multiple events. Interview questions varied according to context and exploration of emergent topics, but tended to be abridged versions of the longer interviews. They often included questions about the fighter’s physical and emotional preparations for the fight, explanations (play-by-play) or plans (game-plan) for their fight, and the reactions to taking part in the competition.

I conducted my analysis in an inductive fashion with the goal of understanding how the physical work done by fighters in the context of the sport sheds light on the embodiment of gender. I started my analysis by reviewing my field notes and interview transcripts with an eye towards data that informed me about this process. While still in the field, I noted that much of the competitive training of fighters in the gym follows a type of cycle that included varying levels of increased embodied learning, preparation, and dieting followed by scaling back training, resting, and even in some cases long periods of non-activity. The following is an analysis of these processes as men in the MMA gym interactively align their bodies with ideals of manhood.

### **GENDERED EMBODIMENT CYCLE**

Participating in MMA competitions are means of accruing masculine status. As Rocky said “It is every heterosexual guy’s dream to be a fucking cage fighter who is able to beat anybody up . . . I’m sure of it.” Fighters viewed fighting in a competition as not just as a performance of manhood, but also a test of manhood. For instance, Keith said, “When you’re in battle and you got that hot blood running down your face and you can’t breathe and you [still] keep going that is when you find out what kind of person you are.” Similarly, Ray highlights how competitions detect those fraudulent claims to this manhood, “In the ring there is total honesty, there is no image, no projections, it is just you.” Jimmy explains that training as a key in this test, “A one on one sport [such as MMA], you’re completely accountable for the outcome. It’s all what you did or didn’t do in that [fight] . . . It is training yourself to your best possible ability and then testing it . . . We are all striving for our personal best.” Taylor brings these notions together, “The bottom line is [that] nobody can get in that cage with you . . . There is no

hiding. If you go out there and lose; you lost. There is no other excuse. And for that simple fact, I focus much harder [on my training] . . . to get it right for the fight.” Indeed, fighters cast competitions as a test of manhood where they could prove their authenticity as real men. This test of manhood was to enter a situation, in public view, where they would have to rely on their selves to dominate another person. Key to their success, they said, was the training they received for weeks and months prior in the MMA gym.

Gym members who desired to test themselves as real men in a competitive fight had to do more than just ask. They had to prove to other gym members, instructors, and themselves that they had what it takes to compete. Training for a fight took the form of a type of cycle of embodiment that all members aspiring for a fight underwent. This cycle included five distinct phases; skilling, aggrandizing, specializing, advantaging, and testing and resting. In the first phase, members generally disregarded the thought of competing and instead spent time learning and refining their MMA skills with other members, which generally was cooperative and collegial gym work. Next, when members felt confident about their MMA skills they would aggrandize themselves by increasing their intensity of training and acting more competitive during practice in hopes of garnering the attention of instructors and being deemed worthy to fight. Once a gym member was offered a fight they specialized their training, once again cooperatively, with an eye towards countering their opponent’s strengths and capitalizing on his weaknesses. After the training period ended, members would spend the final week before the fight losing weight in an effort to competitively gain the advantage of fighting in a lower weight-class. Finally, they tested their bodies in a public MMA event and then rested their bodies for a period which had the effect of a declination of embodiment. As alluded to, this process took place over time and included interpersonal work with a variety of others – importantly it was also gendered.

### **PHASE 1: SKILLING**

The first phase of MMA fighter’s gendered embodiment cycle was the work done to learn or refine MMA skills without the immediate intent of garnering a spot in a competitive event, which I term “skilling.” Gym members aspiring for a fight, both novice and advanced, would go through this phase. Many novice members never exit and some veteran fighters who did not altogether quit after a competition usually ended their career in this phase. New gym members who aspired to garner an MMA fight had to go through the skilling phase first because they were

viewed as either unworthy or inept for the bodily challenges entailed in a competition. Veteran members, who fought in previous competitions, self-regulated their work in the gym through skilling in an effort to prevent previous injuries from recurring or persisting.<sup>9</sup> Some common injuries such as dislocated ribs, torn ligaments, and back injuries lasted months and kept veteran members away from more intensive training of later phases. For those aspiring to fight, novice and veteran, their ability to test their manhood in an event was a distant goal.

Interactional work in this phase included members and instructors in the gym working with each other to learn, “work on,” or perfect particular MMA techniques. In general, this activity was collegial and included lots of joking and horseplay.<sup>10</sup> However, underlying the collegial interactions was the activity of men teaching one another how to enact violence with the goal of efficiently making others “submit” or knocking them out in competitions (and elsewhere). Thus, learning to embody MMA skills is consistent with the notion of gaining deference which is a key to signifying manhood (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

The most basic part of the skilling phase involved structured classes. Part of each class was dedicated to working on a particular MMA skill. Instructors would use this time to explain, model, and correct techniques of members who would engage by watching, participating, and practicing. Underlying these lessons was a hidden curriculum (Grioux and Penna 1979) with the messages that these skills were effective at dominating others. For instance, during one class I attended, Dominic, the instructor, brought us into a circle on the mat and said, “learning how to jab is fundamental to a fight.” Dominic then demonstrated how to throw a jab, noting that “you should aim the fist so it ends up right underneath your line of sight.” He then took a member and demonstrated how a “good jabbing technique” aids a fighter. He then threw a series of jabs, backing up a member, while saying, “see how your jabbing can back your opponent up even if you’re not hitting him.” Dominic motioned to the member to start moving again, and started to jab at him again saying “A jab is also a good screen. You pay attention to things flying at your face, which leaves you ignoring the rest of your body.” At this point Dominic threw a flurry of jabs followed by a powerful leg kick, which sent the member to the matted floor. After the demonstration we donned head-gear and paired off to practice our jabbing with each other while

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<sup>9</sup> Veteran members in this phase differed from novice members in the amount of supervision that gym instructors provided. Newer members were supervised more closely and given less freedom in the gym than veteran members.

<sup>10</sup> Text appearing in quotations without proper attribution to a speaker denotes terminology, phrasing, or adages that was overheard frequently in the field and is analytically considered both as part of sub-cultural vernacular and/or for its significance of sub-cultural meaning.

Dominic milled around making specific comments and adjustments to each of us. In sum, instructors taught lessons during structured classes aimed at allowing members to learn to embody particular MMA techniques as well as how they would be useful when trying to dominate others, which is a form of social power central to manhood (Connell 1995).

The skilling phase also included gym members seeking out instructors and other members, who were accomplished at particular MMA skills, to teach them it. Gym members were expected to learn a myriad of skills from other combat sports such as boxing, wrestling, and other martial arts and no one particular member or instructor is masterfully skilled at them all. As such, adeptness at particular MMA skills was a status marker in the gym. Some gym members even became known for their particular skill, such as Colby for Karate, Anderson for Ju-jitsu, Robbie for wrestling, Buddy for kick-boxing, Kenneth for grappling, Rocky for street fighting, and Kareem for Detroit-style boxing. These MMA “experts” were in high demand as much of the informal gym work occurred in small groups with members “picking up some pointers” from these men. On occasion other gym members would come in proclaiming they learned a “cool new move” or an innovative twist on a skill from information they garnered from a book they read, video they watched, or workshop they attended. This attracted attention from others who would gather to watch, debate, and discuss the new skill. Afterwards, members often took turns practicing the skill with the member in an effort to learn it themselves. Much like in Waquant’s (2005) study of boxers, skills in the gym was a type of social capital that increased members’ gym status. Members learned during their time in the gym that higher status is accredited to those who embody MMA technique as experts which likely incentivized members aspiring to prove their manhood to strive to do the same.

Another part of the skilling phase included combining particular skills into a fighting repertoire. Although most MMA techniques were initially learned in isolation from each other (see example of learning a jab above), they needed to merge moves together into quick successions of “combos” of punches, kicks, and grappling moves. Fighters worked together on their hitting “combos” through the use of “pad work.” Pad work required one member to don or hold pads of various sizes known as “Mitts,” “Thai Pads,” or “Kick Shields” and to rapidly call out “combos” for the other fighter to perform. They did this while moving the pads to make them a more difficult target to hit. For example, during one practice Buddy held pads for Kenneth and called out commands like “jab, jab, right-cross, upper-cut, round house.” While Buddy moved



around on the mat and also moved the pads around, Kenneth responded in-turn with the appropriate punches and kicks to the pads. After a certain time, Buddy exchanged roles with Kenneth for a chance to practice his own pad work.

In addition to pad work, members practiced combinations by participating in collaborative “grappling chains.” This training involved one member taking the role of an aggressor who attempts a musculoskeletal lock or choke, known as a submission, on the other, who takes the role of a defender. Scotty explained to me that “grappling chains” are based on the notion that a fighter should “always be thinking one step ahead” in knowing how to deploy the “best options he has for submissions for the position he is in.” When practicing chaining, the aggressor tries to “get a submission without forcing it” on the defender who, in turn, tries earnestly to stop him. When a “submission attempt” fails, the aggressor attempts another until he “gets a submission” or a stalemate occurs.

Both pad work and chaining were means of skilling and members were reminded of this point through the often reiterated phrase that “the focus should be on technique, not strength.” More experienced members at Steel Hangar Gym were able to accomplish “grappling chains” with ease which was termed “flowing” and was reflected in the way their bodies moved from attempt to attempt with great fluidity and speed. Similarly, with pad work the intricacies and speed of the interaction among more advanced members took the form of a type of extemporaneous dance.

In all, much of the work done in the skilling phase at the gym was done interpersonally. In this phase, veteran members refreshed their MMA skills and new members learned them for the first time. Although embodied learning in this phase was generally open to everyone in a collegial environment at low levels of intensity, two lessons from a hidden curriculum (Giroux and Penna 1979) that was gendered were clear. First, men gained status in the gym by learning MMA skills. Those with more or specialized skills in the gym also were afforded more status, which likely incentivized other members to learn as much as they could. Second, what was that the lessons taught linked to the signification of manhood because these skills were associated with “toughness” that enables men to elicit deference from others.

## **PHASE 2: AGGRANDIZING**

The second phase of the embodiment cycle, which I term “aggrandizing,” entailed gym members pushing the level of intensity of their training so they stood out to instructors. The

focus of embodiment in this part of the cycle shifted from gaining skill to intensifying its use in order to garner support for a spot in a competition. Competing was important for insider status in the gym. Members often talked pejoratively about men who joined the gym for a short period of time to boost their status, extolling their membership credentials outside, but never having gone through the test of competition. After skilling their bodies for a period of time, many new members turned their attention to getting the chance at the authentic status that competing would bring. Likewise, veteran members who engaged in skilling long enough to heal from their previous fight once again turned their attention towards reaffirming their status through competition. Because there were a limited number of competitive events each year and new and veteran members needed to demonstrate that they deserved to compete, this phase of the embodiment cycle was much more competitive than cooperative.

Instructors made it no secret that if gym members wanted to compete they had to show they could train with more intensity than other members in the gym. Showing one's competitive resilience also signified manhood (Messner 1990; Schyfter 2008; Young, Mcteer, and White 1994). For instance, when I asked instructor, Reginald, how he selected fighters for competitions, he said,

[For a fighter to be ready] he's got to hold his own and be at a higher level than everybody else in the gym . . . if a guy wants to go and go and go, you hit him hard and he shakes it off and comes back again then he is ready . . . just a hunger to fight . . . training and never missing a day . . . If he wants to train it means he wants to fight.

Reginald said that the focus of instructors' attention for selecting a fighter is on their ability to work harder than others the gym which he viewed as a "hunger" to become a competitive fighter. This was also clear in the often repeated axiom of instructors during practice that "you need to push yourselves harder if you think you are going to last more than thirty seconds in an all out fight!"

Gym members who were granted a fight attributed their bodily aggrandizing to this fortunate opportunity. For instance, when I asked Hawk about why he thought he was chosen by his instructor to compete in an event he responded "I try to train hard and I think that the owner and instructors, they see that I train hard. So I think that I've shown some progress since I've been here and he thought I was good enough for me to show." Similarly, after talking about how his instructor congratulated him for the extra effort he gave while wrestling, Garrett

acknowledged that his efforts were fueled by his desire to impress his trainer. He said, “I was hoping that they were going to ask me to do a fight. I would never go up and ask . . . I was kind of hoping that they would think that I would be ready.” Gym members recognized that if they wanted to become fighters they would need to impress their coaches by aggrandizing and linked this notion to being offered a fight.

Fighters also emphasized their desire to excel when talking about their training, confirming they understood that such aggrandizing was necessary to compete. For instance, Danilo said, “No matter what level I reach, I always feel like there is another higher level and someday hopefully [I will reach it].” Tobias said similarly, “every time I get out on the mat I want to work and always improve. I never want to take a step back. I always want to get better and better . . . to continue to work and work and work.” Allan said “I try to remind myself to learn something new every time . . . [That is] the only way to keep on progressing is to keep getting better and better.” Felix, an advanced fighter, summed up the notion that fighters must continue to push themselves if they want to advance in the sport when he said, “No matter what I look like in the mirror I think, ‘this could be better or that could be better.’ As far as training, I could win by a mile and still think ‘I could have done this better.’ So from every angle it is a never ending pursuit of perfection.” Indeed, members conveyed that pushing the envelope of their embodiment projects was important to them.

During the aggrandizing phase of the cycle, fighters did not just emphasize their desire to excel in their accounts; they actually pushed their training intensity in ways that were visibly and audibly apparent. Members looking to garner a fight were more likely to spend extra time in the gym, some staying for several hours and participating in multiple classes. During classes, they were typically the first on the mat and the last to leave it, the first to volunteer, and practiced techniques with greater intensity than others. During group exercises, these members tried earnestly to be the first to finish race-type exercises, such as mat crawling,<sup>11</sup> and the last to finish endurance exercises, such as wall-sits.<sup>12</sup> They were more likely to “full” wrestle and spar, meaning they didn’t hold back the intensity of their hits or grappling moves. They would be the ones to hit the punching bags the loudest and would be more vocal in their grunts and groans as

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<sup>11</sup> Mat crawling involved members laying on their stomachs or backs and moving themselves along the length of the mat floor.

<sup>12</sup> Wall sitting involved members leaning against a wall with their knees bent as if they were sitting on a chair for an extended period of time. This exercise was intended to exhaust the leg muscles.

they worked through exercises. In short, in almost all ways they tried to stand out as violent and dominant men.

Members in the aggrandizing phase of the embodiment cycle could cause problems for other gym members. First, aggrandizing members' overt intensity could be viewed negatively as rate-busting by other members (Heckert and Heckert 2002). Some gym members, mostly those not in the aggrandizing phase, said that they wouldn't work with aggrandizing members because they felt they were loose cannons. After Rocky "wrenched" Scotty's back during wrestling one day Scotty refused to work with him again, stating:

Rocky isn't concerned with technique. All he cares about is muscling his way through a match. Sure he is bigger than me so of course he can overpower me. I am not risking getting injured just so he can impress someone.

Rocky was not the only member who faced these tensions, but interestingly he was viewed by the gym owner as one of his premier fighters who went as far as to hang a picture of him on the gym wall as well as use his image in advertisements. Second, as the above example also illustrates, the intensity of training for aggrandizing members meant they were more likely to get injured or injure others. Finally, aggrandizing could become problematic if making oneself look good meant making someone else look bad. For instance, during one observation two members practiced sparring in front of an instructor in a corner of the gym with the intensity characteristic of aggrandizing. One of the two members was particularly adept at sparring and was besting his partner for the majority of the session. At several points during the session the losing partner stopped to warn the other saying, "You're going too hard. If you want this to be an all out fight we can go to that level." To which the other responded, "You think I'm going hard? If you want to take it to another level, we can, I'll hit you ten times before you hit me once." Intermittent bickering as well as the intensity of sparring between the two continued for some time until tensions heated up to the point that the instructor finally stepped in to break them up. In sum, aggrandizing was problematic for other gym members because members this phase shifted from a cooperative to competitive stance of embodied practice. Such activities were gendered in that they resonated with what is, culturally speaking, referred to one-upmanship.

While, members' intensity and competitiveness in the aggrandizing phase could be problematic, it was not without its institutional remedies. First, instructors tried to remedy tensions by designing non-combat oriented exercises that allowed aggrandizing members some

opportunity to show off. For instance, one practice I took part in included over a quarter-mile<sup>13</sup> race of mat crawling in which only three of the ten students finished. The instructor congratulated these three students, which included referring their intensity to the ability “lasting in a fight.” Second, although this was not the only route to a competition, the gym held formal tryouts to be considered as a member of its “fight team.” Try-outs included a grueling full-day workout of sprinting, distance running, stair-climbing, sparring, wrestling, and jujitsu which suited members in the aggrandizing phase of the embodiment cycle well.<sup>14</sup> Third, instructors often invited aggrandizing fighters to participate in competitive events less intense than an MMA fight but more intense than practice. For instance, Issac gave an example of how instructors prepare members for fights by first offering them to compete in less intense “jujitsu” tournaments stating, “Our gym has a philosophy to get people ready to succeed and not just throw them in the ring or cage and let them learn as they fight.” Similarly, I observed at Steel Hangar the way that the instructor, Dominic, congratulated an aggrandizing member by saying “keep working as hard as you are and we are going to have to get you a fight pretty soon.” To which the member responded “I really want to fight. I’ll do anything to get one.” Dominic took the member aside and told him to continue to show improvement in skills and toughness in the gym, take part in weekend wrestling and jujitsu tournaments, and help out as an assistant for other fighters at upcoming competitions. Dominic reiterated part of this process later in an interview stating, “For guys considering fighting, usually I like for them to help train a fighter. Then from there they can see what it takes to get prepared for a fight.” In sum, instructors had several institutional remedies to allow aggrandizing members to demonstrate to them that they were tough, resilient, and competitive which could alleviate some tensions that this phase caused for other members in the gym.

In all, the embodiment work that members in the aggrandizing phase underwent included a shift from cooperative work with other members to competitive. Instructors made it clear, and members got the message, that aggrandizing was needed to prove that a member deserved one of the limited opportunities to compete. However, this work could cause tensions in the gym between members and included the possibility of increasing gym injuries. Instructors tried to

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<sup>13</sup> The gym mat was approximately 50 feet in length and the mat race included 36 passes for a total distance of 1800 feet.

<sup>14</sup> The tryouts for the fight team were modeled after those conducted by Lion’s Den gym owner and UFC champion Frank Shamrock (Snowden 2008) and were also much like the initiation rites of “Project Mayhem” detailed in the book *Fight Club* (Palahniuk 1996).

remedy this by giving aggrandizing members unique opportunities to demonstrate their toughness. Although problematic, aggrandizing members' status was raised in the gym because they received more attention from instructors, were taken into insider spaces, and given resource-limited opportunities to further their embodiment. In short, competitiveness through the body – a sign of manhood (Connell 1995) – paid dividends, which also linked this phase of the cycle to gender.

### **PHASE 3: SPECIALIZING**

Once a member was offered and accepted a fight they most often entered yet another phase of the gendered embodiment cycle with the focus their training shifting to the goal of winning against their opponent, which I term “specializing.” Both novice and veteran members went through the specializing phase of the embodiment cycle because they viewed each competitor they faced as a unique set of challenges. Similarly, instructors viewed each member of the gym as having unique talents to cultivate and deficiencies in need of bolstering to ensure success. And this observation is consistent with previous research on embodiment in mixed martial arts (Spencer 2009). Unlike the competitiveness that was characteristic of the aggrandizing phase, specializing members took a cooperative orientation to their embodiment once again. Gym instructors and other members helped specializing members by giving feedback on their embodiment, identifying their embodiment as belonging to certain style-types, and helping them collect intelligence on their opponent to help them shore up their strategy. The goal of this phase, which was to embody skills specific to beating an opponent boosted the men's confidence that they would win, which made them feel powerful and also made this part of the process gendered (Schwalbe et al. 2000; Vaccaro, Schrock, and McCabe 2011).

One part of the specializing phase was for instructors and other gym members to assess and give the specializing member feedback on their embodiment. For instance, instructor Dominic emphasized the need to assess when he said, “I need to realize what allows you to perform your best. That is what is hard [to do] when you're training a guy because you got to start gauging where that person performs the best.” Similarly, Donovan offered an example of getting feedback from his instructors when specializing for a fight, “They'll say, ‘Don't worry about [the fight]. You got great hands. Just make sure you keep your hands up and keep your chin down. You can take this guy down, you know. If you have to, you can submit him.’” I observed that when Armand was offered a fight, Anderson, the head instructor, along with

members Lou and Scotty gathered and commented on Armand's preparation for the upcoming fight. Anderson first paid Armand a complement, "You keep getting those take-downs and throwing those elbows like you've been in practice you'll make it [to the UFC<sup>15</sup>] eventually." Anderson then recounted a story about how Armand shattered someone's nose with his elbow at a prior event saying "I could just hear the sound of bones crushing and it made me want to go to the other side of the cage and throw in the towel." Scotty then joined in with encouragement "[Opponent's name] is tall but that's about it and he's got no ground game. It's going to be easy for you to just take him down and dominate." Lou chimed in with, "You got to use your [superior] wrestling skills" drawing attention to Armand's background as a state champion wrestler. Anderson then said, "ground and pound him, use those elbows" before turning to an area where he felt Armand needed improvement "you need to work on your stamina and built up your wind." Sessions such as these where a fighter was given detailed feedback on their embodiment projects through complements and criticism was not uncommon during the specializing phase and played a role letting the member know what to work on as well as having the added effect of making them feel confident that they had a team of experts backing them up.

Stemming from this first part of the specializing phase, another part included instructors grouping gym members based on three embodied skills; kicking and punching while standing up, punching on the ground from on top of an opponent, and submission, which were colloquially known as "striking," "ground-and-pound," and "grappling." Members obliged such labeling and incorporated these typological characteristics into their subjectivities as fighters. Tanner said of himself that, "I'm very much a guard player [e.g., grappler]." Rocky said similarly, "I would be considered more of a striker because I have more knock-out wins . . . The striking to me is what's more exciting. When I watch fighting I want to see striking. I want to see people getting knocked out." Teddy also said, "I love standing up and throwing blows . . . it's just me. It's just the way I've always been. I like to get in there, be rough, be violent and try to take care of business." Interestingly, these labels were not unique to the gym, but were instead part of the broader sub-cultural vernacular as Elite fighters in the UFC were labeled similarly.<sup>16</sup> One reason that could be inferred why members were so accepting of these labels is they allowed members a common link to these elite men, which relates to research demonstrating how sports participation

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<sup>15</sup> UFC is the premiere mixed martial arts organization in the United States.

<sup>16</sup> For instance Ken Shamrock is a grappler, Chuck Liddell is a striker, and Mark Coleman is a ground-and-pounder.

provides a context for men to be linked to “public masculine status” (Messner 1989, p. 80). These labels also provided men with a standard means for social comparisons, a source of self-concept appraisal that men tend to prefer more than women (Schwalbe and Staples 1991) which is likely linked to the external, rather than internal, bodily orientation (Young 1990).

In this phase, specializing members also modified their embodiment regimens to focus on mastering MMA skills that they felt would give them an advantage against a particular opponent. I found that members that were offered to compete would, early on, search the internet for intelligence on their competitors including official decisions of previous bouts, websites, and video. They would then use this information when developing their own training regimen. For instance, Marcel alluded to this type of shift in training for a fight during an interview, “If you are a boxer and you are about to fight a ju-jitsu guy you want to learn to defend submissions.” Kenneth also said of this type of training,

The second you are told you have a fight everything changes. Because it is so different than training in general, just going in and taking classes . . . The second you are told that you have a fight you are immediately in a competition with the person you are fighting . . . You are always trying to give yourself every conceivable advantage and you are always thinking about what they are doing.

Taylor echoed that he specializes his training to focus attention on countering his opponent’s strengths, “when I have a fight, I change my mode. Everything I do is in preparation for the fight . . . I want to know who I’m fighting. Who is he? What does he look like? How tall is he? What handed is he – right or left?” Rocky talked similarly about how he uses the information gained from watching video on his opponent to change his training,

I look at how he’s lost his fights . . . If I’m fighting the kick boxer who wins all his fights by knock outs I’m going to be damn sure I’m practicing my striking . . . At the same time, I’m also practicing my grappling and what not just to make sure that I can beat him when it does go to the ground. But it’s as you imagine, you know if I know I’m fighting a wrestler, I’m going to be working on my kick-down defenses and my knock-out punches. As Marcel, Kenneth, Teddy, and Rocky point out, gym members specialized their focus of their training once they got a fight. They attempted to find information about their opponent and studied it closely in order to develop training that would work against their opponent’s strengths.



To sum up the specializing phase, members shifted the orientation of their embodiment from competitiveness to cooperation. However, unlike cooperation in the skilling phase, specializing had the added twist of orienting the gym member to embodiment that favored their competencies, linking them with general types of MMA embodiment, and focusing them on training for a specific competitor. In doing so, this phase of the process was gendered in that it had the added effect of boosting men's confidence that they could win (Schwalbe et al. 2000), provided the link to elite manhood (Messner 1989), and tailoring the feedback that favor men's preferred means of self-assessment (Schwalbe and Staples 1991).

#### **PHASE 4: ADVANTAGING**

I term the next phase of MMA gym members' gendered embodiment cycle "advantaging" because its focus on embodiment is aimed at giving men a hidden advantage in the competition. Similar to wrestling and boxing matches, fighters were divided according to their weight-classes. However, different than some sports with weight classification,<sup>17</sup> officials didn't impose restrictions on weight-loss and gave fighters a twenty-four hour period between the time they "weighed-in" and when they competed, which led men to attempt to try to game the system by fighting in a weight class lower than their actual "walking around" weight. Fighters offered that cutting weight could give them a distinct bodily advantage over their opponent because dropping to a lower weight category and then quickly gaining back that weight before the fight could mean masking advantages of size and strength until they entered the ring. This phase began about one week before a fight whereby fighters changed both their diet and exercise, shvitzed to cut additional weight on the "weigh-in day," and attempted to gain their lost weight back after they weighed-in. Although fighters expected that their opponent would attempt to do the same thing, they approached this phase competitively which made it distinct from the strategizing phase. Cutting weight was also significant because the physical and emotional tumult it entailed provided a test of control for gym members, which is also a key in asserting manhood (Schwalbe 2005; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

This phase of MMA gym members gendered embodiment cycle came in two distinct stages; cutting and gaining back. First, one week prior to a competition, fighters would cease almost all of their training activity with exception of exercises focused on losing weight. For

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<sup>17</sup> National Federation of State High School Associations limits weight loss for wrestles to no less than seven percent body fat content for males.

instance, many fighters would only distance run or bicycle the week before the competition. At Steel Hangar Gym a stationary “Schwinn Airdyne” bicycle was often rode by gym members – who also often donned garbage bags under their clothing to induce sweating – to lose weight before a competition. During this time fighters also cut down on their eating and drinking habits, trying to consume as little as possible before the fight. For instance, to lose twenty pounds before a fight, Felix mentioned his reliance on both exercise and diet, “[I’m] working out like three times a day and eating like 1200 calories.”

Fighters in the advantaging phase increased their attention to cutting twenty-four hours prior to competition known as the “weigh-in day” as fighters would spend the day sweating out any extra water weight they still needed to lose. Some fighters were skilled at this such as Buster who said, “the morning [of the fight] I wake up and weigh 215 pounds and I want to be at 205 pounds, I jump in the sauna and lose ten pounds of water weight.” Other fighters would remain in the sauna just prior to the time they needed to step on the scale.

Fighters confessed that the process of cutting weight before a fight constituted a significant time emotionally for them; many likening it to a test of will-power. Danilo said of losing weight before a fight, “It never gets easier. Every time you cut weight you get cotton mouth. You’re always hungry and that never feels comfortable.” Buster said similarly, “Man it sucks while you’re doing it . . . It sucks. You feel like you’re about to pass out. You’re drained. You’re dead.” Tobias lamented of cutting “I’m sick of salads and I’m sick of chicken.” Buddy said of this phase in the cycle, “[It’s] the worst thing about fighting, hands down . . . your mind starts to play tricks on you. It makes you say ‘well fuck this, I don’t want to do this anymore.’ You start to get moody.” Here Buddy mentions how losing weight casts doubts on his desire to compete. Similarly, when Kenneth talked about cutting weight he elaborated on what Buddy’s comments alluded to,

I don’t think that there is any time that is worse than when you are cutting weight . . . the weaker you feel, the more vulnerable you feel . . . You are sitting there and really bad thoughts start coming in your head . . . I am so weak. I am so injured. I can’t even sit in this sauna. This is horrible. I can’t even do this for fifteen minutes . . . Why am I fighting. Indeed, as Kenneth states, when losing weight a gym member feels vulnerable about himself and he is even doubtful that he can continue to the final test. Feeling vulnerable, that is to feel the opposite of powerful, is antithetical to the emotional norms of manhood (Vaccaro, Schrock, and

McCabe 2011), which was much similar to the non-gender conforming emotions of anger that some women experience and express during the peak of child labor (K. Martin 2003). As such, the men needed to overcome this test if they were to face the real test of the impending competition.

Men in the advantaging phase not only controlled their weight to give them an advantage, they controlled their emotions to their advantage as well. Emotional struggle in this phase acted as a type of ritual of pain and self-doubt for which they needed to control if they were to achieve the ideals associated with manhood that a fight could bestow (Connell 1995). Rocky captured the importance that the suffering from cutting weight when he said, “when I’m cutting weigh . . . It’s a personal struggle. It’s not exterior. It’s volunteer and it’s about self will and all those virtues that everyone seeks.” Similarly, Kenneth affirmed how undergoing this emotional laden challenge prepares for the next step when he said,

It is all different after you weigh-in. Because after you weigh-in and get your water back and you get your food back and you’re strong and you’re ready to go. I think that’s when you feel most amped [for the fight] is after you have had the meal after you’ve weighed in. That’s when you are the most ready.

Both Rocky and Kenneth talked about how cutting weight caused them to have doubts, yet after passing the emotional test they knew they were virtuous men, prepared for the competition coming next.

Finally, after the weigh-ins, fighters would try to gain their weight back again. Fighters and instructors had various methods for maximizing weight gaining. For instance, many fighters and trainers swore that drinking child’s anti-dehydration medicine “Pedialyte” aided this process. Others drank water a cap-full at a time and ate multiple small meals, and yet others relied on power-bars and sports drinks to replenish their weight loss. Following weigh-ins at one competition, members of Steel Hangar Gym invited me to a dinner at a barbeque restaurant where I observed Armand and Lou, who were both scheduled to fight the next day, eat large plates of pork ribs, corn muffins, and baked beans and drank sodas to gain back their weight. Despite the large variation in methods, all these activities were intended to get fluid and energy back to the fighter.

To sum, the advantaging phase started around a week before a fight as a gym members attempted to lose and gain weight to give them an edge over their opponent. During this time

they lost weight by dieting, exercise, and sweating in a sauna only to attempt to gain it back as quickly as they can. While doing so, they go through emotional struggles associated with lack of food and water which includes self-doubt and vulnerability, which was antithetical to the emotion norms of manhood (Vaccaro, Schrock, and McCabe 2011). This part of the process acts as a type of embodiment ritual associated with the control of self that is also key component of manhood (Schwalbe 2004; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

### **PHASE 5: TESTING AND RESTING**

The final phase in MMA members gendered embodiment cycle is testing their embodiment in front of a crowd at an MMA event and then prolonged resting afterwards. In my time spent backstage at events, I observed a general collective heightening of activity and loudness from fighters, coaches, and corner men during the hour prior to an event. The men backstage made their final preparations before their fight including taping their hands, warming up and, “breaking the first sweat” with some final sparring, wrestling, and pad work. During this brief time that usually lasted no more than a few hours, the embodiment turns from competition to cooperative which differs from the previous advantaging stage. Once it was their turn to fight, fighters would enter from their staging area with music blaring over the sound system and walk down through the audience with their trainers proudly in tow behind. They’d enter the ring, touch gloves, and then give their best attempt at beating their opponent, switching their orientation to competitive one final and important time. Over the course of the events, I watched along with the cheering audience as fighters were bloodied, bruised, broken, and beaten. The fights evoked in me feelings of both delight and horror, they had elements that were both unsurprising and unpredictable, and were both captivating and dull.

When interviewed after their fight, fighters, but especially winners, talked about the wonderful emotions that came from testing themselves and their embodiment cycle played a central role in these accounts. For instance, after winning his fight Aydenn said of the experience “It’s just like I felt like I conquered something. I felt like I did it. I felt like I’ve achieved. Months, well a little over a year I’ve been training and it all comes down to these fifteen minutes. To see it all come together, it’s an amazing feeling.” Doug said similarly of his win, “There is nothing that I take more pride in doing what I do here today. To train every day, in fact, to get beat up [by others] to come here after all that to show what you are made of and what you’ve been dedicating your life to do . . . It is the best thing I have ever done.” Dean said, “victory is a

huge excitement, like an adrenalin rush that's incomparable to anything I've done before in my life . . . You know the ultimate happiness. You worked you ass off for it and you got what you deserve." The embodiment that occurred in the gym, indeed, allowed the men to become "real men" which they acknowledged as central to the greatly rewarding feelings they had after they finished.

Ultimately, the body work that is needed for competitions requires too much effort for it to be easily sustainable over a long period of time. Fighters recognized that this type of embodiment can lead to injury and burnout and thus needed to rest for an extended time afterwards. For instance, I found burnout to be the cause of many fighters dropping out after their first competition. This was so prevalent that members of Steel Hangar Gym pejoratively nicknamed these fighters "one fight wonders." Fighters who returned to the gym later still experienced a level of burnout and needed a period to rest after the long process they had just undergone. It was normative and encouraged that fighters would take a break away from the gym after they competed. Similarly, my observations of competition also confirms that injuries were abundant with contusions and lacerations most prevalent, while broken bones, concussions, and organ damage less frequent but still present at nearly every competition. Fighters that were injured during their competition often had to take extended time off to recover. Dominic took months off for a detached retina, Garrett took off a full year after he had bone fragments removed from his elbows. Gary related his story of injury to time away from the gym when he said "I've been doing nothing since my last fight in July."<sup>18</sup> I broke my hand and I had to heal up fully." Similarly, Rocky, who took six months off for a back injury in 2008 and another six months for surgery on an MMA related thrombosis in his thigh in 2009 noted this point best when he said "You can't be in fighting shape twenty-four-seven or all year round . . . You can only train hard for so many weeks before your body starts to feel the effects." I observed this phenomenon frequently at Steel Hangar Gym as some men spent time, often months, away from the gym before returning. Others scaled back their training regimen spending much of their time in the gym simply hanging around.

Fighters also liked to indulge themselves after fights which kept them from the gym. This started almost immediately after the competition ended at the "after-party," which usually included drinking and eating, where I found many competitors liked to hedonistically indulge

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<sup>18</sup> Interview occurred in December of 2008

themselves. Scotty confessed that he enjoys spoiling himself after a fight by “laying in bed watching *Predator* movies all day long” and eating “purple slushees and chips.” Similarly, Garrett ritualistically avoided the gym for a month after each fight to engage in “extreme gluttony” including “sitting on the couch all day-long, smoking, and watching TV,” abandoning his diet, and instead opting to intentionally consume copious amounts of foods that are unhealthy such as ice cream and bacon.

For fighters that stayed away from the gym for reasons of injury, rest, or indulgence found that once they returned they were faced with a diminished embodiment which was known colloquially known as “ring rust.” They also found that gym life continued without them as other members became the focus of instructors’ attention. As such, fighters that decided to once again look towards a goal of embodiment for competition needed to embark on a similar process as to the one described above. The embodiment cycle would need to begin anew.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

As members began to acclimate to the MMA gym they oriented themselves to a social process I dub “gendered embodiment cycles,” which denotes a recurrent sequence of actions intended to bring the body close to ideal gender standards, is related to accompanying subjective experience, and is followed by a period of decline away from the ideal. Interestingly, it reveals not only how men shape their bodies for competition at a “manly” MMA event, but also how each stage of the embodiment process also links to gender. In the first phase members worked together, cooperatively, teaching each other how to embody skills necessary for the sport of MMA and gained status as “real men” because these skills were for enacting violence as dominants. In an effort to demonstrate their ambition to instructors, the second phase entailed members taking a competitive orientation towards others and pushing their intensity of training in the gym to prove their worth and garner a fight. When offered a fight, members moved to yet another phase where they worked cooperatively specializing skills to become certain types of fighters and to counter what they felt was their opponent’s strengths and gained further status by being labeled similar to the elite men in the sport. A week prior to competition, the men tried to gain advantage over their competitors by losing and gaining substantial weight and underwent an emotional test that affirmed they were ready to fight like real men. Finally, members tested their bodies publically in front of an audience of family, peers, and friends, and this served as confirmation that they were real men, which brought them great satisfaction and allowed them to

rest. Ultimately, this embodiment proved to be unsustainable over long periods of time and fighters' time off to rest and recover led to "ring rust." Thus, when members returned they had to start the cycle over.

In recent years, scholars have turned their attention to processes of embodying gender without essentializing it as originating from biology. In doing so, gender scholarship has focused on how socialization processes shape the ways men and women inhabit and experience the body (Goldberg and Lewis 1968; Thorne 1993; Martin 1998; Messner 1989) how the body is used to achieve a gendered presentation of self (Boyd 2006; Klein 1993; West and Zimmerman 1987), and how others use the body to identify gender as a status characteristic (Correll and Ridgeway 2004; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Ridgeway 2009). However, research in these lines either have ignored or had difficulty delineating the role that biology plays in these processes. I contribute to these lines by offering the concept of a "gendered embodiment cycle" which demonstrates how embodiment of gender is (1) a recurrent sequence, (2) that is interactional, (3) embedded with gendered meanings, and (4) accompanied with subjective experience. In doing so, I strengthen the constructionist perspective on gendered embodiment by providing a framework that illustrate how social factors are involved in embodiment in phased and contingent ways (Williams 2002).

Although MMA participants' gendered embodiment cycles are in many ways unique, other empirical research is suggestive that gendered embodiment cycles exist elsewhere, such as women models' bodily preparations for auditions (Mears and Finlay 2005), men's and women's weight loss (Granberg 2011), men's "pregaming" preparations for a night out of "girl hunting" (Grazian 2007), women's embodied preparations before going to fraternity parties (Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeny 2006) or bikini season (Collins 2002) and transgendered folks' preparations before entering public places (Schrock, Reid, and Boyd 2005). Further research is likely to find that many contexts and organizations (Acker 2006) include men and women undergoing cycles of embodiment in an effort to accentuate their gender and it is also likely that these processes will contextually vary in their duration, complexity, specificity, and persistence of results.

The gendered embodiment cycle as an active process attunes us to the notion that a male or a female may work – for prolonged or curtailed periods – to accentuate gendered bodily characteristics so they signify their selves as being more or less manly or womanly. As men in

my study moved through each phase of this process they were accredited status as men in a cumulative way, with each phase accompanied by a higher status token as “real men,” which was then diminished through a period of resting. This insight can be applicable to current gender scholarship in two ways. First, focusing on the important role that the gendered body plays in identifying gender as a status characteristic (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Ridgeway 2009), my research adds the insight that gendered embodiment can vary over time and this variation will likely impact placement in group hierarchies. Second, my research reframes Connell’s (1987) observation that few men and women achieve culturally ideal gender standards by demonstrating how standards can be approximated periodically through a phased, contingent, and recurrent embodiment process. Future research may focus on how other gendered embodiment processes, as well as gendered processes aside from embodiment, that resemble a cycle impact placement with status hierarchies, either group or societal, and create or shift inequalities.

In addition, turning our attention to the concept of gendered embodiment cycles extends the socialization and embodiment literature by forwarding a more nuanced depiction of the interplay between the bodily socialization and gender identity. Importantly, my study identifies nuances in both the timing and individual agents involved in socializing the body. For instance, peer relationships within the MMA gym play a dominant role in bodily socialization at the beginning of the cycle, coaches and instructors move to this central role during the middle of the cycle, and fighters’ competitors play a dominant role in the final phases of the cycle. Similarly, the men’s the orientation of their embodiment changed from cooperative to competitive at different stages in the process. Previous research has demonstrated how sports, especially team sports, provides a context where men can learn to be both cooperative with insider teammates and competitive against other outsiders (Messner 1989), yet the focus in this study demonstrates how different stages of embodiment aid in shifting the orientation of subjectivity from cooperative to competitive. Uniquely, this study also demonstrates a process whereby cooperative and competitive subjective orientation is variably present in a non-team oriented sport. A focus on gendered embodiment cycles brings attention to how social institutions can be formally and informally organized in ways that a multitude of actors in differing roles and at differing times can act collaboratively as agents of bodily socialization. An area for future research may focus on how gendered embodiment cycles can better inform our understanding of



how bodily socialization occurs within and across various contexts in phased, intermittent, and cyclical ways.

In addition to the embodiment of gender, my research may have implications for embodiment literature more generally. Currently, the dominant line of literature on expert performance, known as the “deliberate practice” perspective, conceptualizes the embodied attainment of skill as a linear process stemming from prolonged efforts to achieve expertise (Ericsson et al. 1993). While the notion that prolonged “practice makes perfect” is partially true, this line of research fails to fully address the notion that embodied skill is achieved through interaction with variably skilled others within specific contexts that constrain the extent of embodied socialization (Chambliss 1989) and that even within these contexts interactants’ status performance expectation states will dictate an unequal distribution of these resources for furthering embodiment (Correll and Ridgeway 2003). My research on the gender embodiment cycle of MMA fighters demonstrates how (1) embodiment involves an interactive socialization process with a multitude of others of variable skills and ability to transfer them and (2) the social status of gender accompanies access to the resources necessary for advancement in this type of embodiment. To successfully garner a fight, MMA participants had to navigate a social process embedded with meanings central to the status of manhood, which included bodily aggressiveness, toughness, and control. Accomplishment of each phase of the cycle increased the men’s status as “real men” along with access to further resources<sup>19</sup> necessary for success, including attention, guidance, and advocacy. Future research may attempt to further integrate these perspectives to give a better understanding of how embodiment, social status, and opportunity structures intersect in consonant and dissonant ways.

Scholars taking the constructionist approach to gender have long pointed out that social factors are critically involved in gendered embodiment and increasingly they are turning their attention to understanding the details of these processes. My research is intended to extend the current literature on gendered embodiment by offering the concept of gendered embodiment cycles. Through the study of how MMA participants train, test, and rest themselves, I bring attention to the notion that males and females learn and engage in cyclical processes to bring

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<sup>19</sup> The elite fighters I interviewed had greater amounts of resources than the fighters in the gym I observed. For instance, MMA bantam weight champion, Brian Bowles had full-time access to eight “champion level” coaches located in gyms in Atlanta, Orlando, and Las Vegas. He noted that he “built up” his access to these coaches by winning fights. This was true as well for the fighter Rocky who, after winning several fights, was able to garner access to a “better” coach in a gym three hours away from Steel Hangar Gym.

their bodies and subjectivities, at least for a period of time, into closer approximation of ideal gender standards.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Mixed martial arts, as an emerging sport, is a rich and intriguing new space for the study of gender. The sport's history includes a contest of gender ideology as organizers tried to push the limits of what constitutes "appropriate" violence of men in order to attract a male audience and make a profit. Gender is also embedded in the organization of Steel Hangar Gym both coded within its advertisements to participants and in the embodiment processes at the gym. In addition, men's individual gendered subjectivities were shaped in the gym in different ways as well. First, they were shaped as they variably switched from cooperative to competitive orientation during phases of their training. Second, the men's subjectivities were shaped as they dealt with worries about what outsiders felt about them as competitors. Third, they were shaped the men struggled with their "womanly" vulnerabilities from hunger and thirst before the fight. And finally, they were shaped as the men became filled with elation from making it to the pinnacle of the gendered embodiment cycle to test themselves as real men. Rocky said it best, "It's every heterosexual guy's dream to be a fucking fighter," and this is because gender is so deeply embedded within this context.

Findings from Chapter 2 demonstrate how actors keyed the sport as a "real fight" and "contest" through drawing on notions of danger and safety at the cultural, organizational, and individual levels (Risman 2004). I showed how this process entailed qualities of being both (1) multidimensional, which is to say that characteristics of the process differ and service different objectives on each level, and (2) recursive, which is to say that the processes occurring on multiple levels are interrelated and reinforced by each other. First, keying is a multidimensional process because each level of analysis included the similar keying of MMA as a "contest" and a "real fight," but the process of how the keying was deployed and what goals it serviced differed for each level of analysis. Second, keying is a recursive process because successful keying on one level likely provided the framework for keying on other levels as well as being linked to the outcome of other levels' success.

I concluded that my research offers three insights about keying that could be important for understanding how gender inequality is reproduced in contexts. More specifically, (a) for any activity there will be some limits to how it can be keyed to accentuate gender, which is to say

that keying men's violence as "contest" and "real fight" worked well, but it might be less likely that the alternative keys of "make-believe" and "reenactment" would work in the same fashion. (b) There are incentives and disincentives for gendered keying, which is to say a reason is required for transforming something into something patterned on something else. (c) Keys will strengthen the gender structure if they increase recursion, which is to say the greater degree to which there is convergence in use of similar keys in service of objectives on each level the more useful they are. I ended by "wrestling with activism" by suggesting that my study highlights for activists that (i) they can work to dis-incentivized keying with gendered meanings that create inequality, (ii) although systems of inequality look unchangeable, they are vulnerable to change, and (iii) they should work to point out when the "emperor has no clothes" when it comes to keying.

Findings from chapter 3 demonstrate that gym members oriented themselves to a social process I dub "gendered embodiment cycles" to shape their bodies for competition at a "manly" MMA event. I showed how each stage of the embodiment process also links to gender and how ultimately, this embodiment proved to be unsustainable and thus required the men to start the cycle over. Through this process, I illustrated a nuanced depiction of the interplay between the body and gender identity including the timing and individual agents involved in socializing the body. I also showed how orientation of their embodiment changed from cooperative to competitive at different stages. Similarly, I demonstrated how men were accredited status as real men in a cumulative way as they moved through the phases in the cycle. Finally, and more generally, I showed how social institutions can be formally and informally organized in ways that a multitude of actors in differing roles and at differing times can act collaboratively as agents of bodily socialization. In addition to my contribution to the gendered embodiment literature, my research may have implications for embodiment literature more generally by showing that embodied skill is achieved thorough interaction with variably skilled others within specific contexts that constrain the extent of embodied socialization (Chambliss 1989) and that even within these contexts interactants' status performance expectation states will dictate an unequal distribution of these resources for furthering embodiment (Correll and Ridgeway 2003). I concluded by suggesting that the process of gendered embodiment cycles that is entailed in this chapter can likely be applied as a sensitizing concept to a diverse set of groups and contexts (Blumer 1969).

To summarize, through an examination of mixed martial arts, I have forwarded two concepts useful for furthering sociological understanding of gender. First, I've offered keying as a conceptual framework for explaining how a multitude of social forces on various level of the social structure work synthetically to reproduce gender inequality. Second, I've offered gendered embodiment cycles to give insight to how bodies can be gendered in a recurrent and interactive process, embedded with gendered meanings, and accompanied by related subjective experience. When taken together, these two concepts attempt to demarcate a middle ground between conceptualizing gender as a fixed status trait and as a fluid interactional accomplishment, giving nods to the strengths of both formulations while simultaneously wrestling to overcome their limits. Although, admittedly, these two concepts fall short of fully doing so, they move us in that general direction and provide us with footholds for future empirical investigation along these lines.

Overall, when comparing how these chapters are interrelated it is worth noting that both are about men's violence. Whereas the analysis in chapter 2 is about how men negotiate meanings of their violence, chapter 3 is about how men produce bodies ideal for enacting violence. From studying MMA we can gain insight to how gendered organizations (Acker 2006) such as these help to sustain the perception of men's "natural" ability to act aggressively and violently towards others, which is implicated in their standing as a high status and dominant social group (Hollander 2001). While it is possible the social processes explicated above are unique to gender inequality, I think that their transference to other "inequality regimes" is worth exploration in future study (Acker 2006). Risman (2004, p. 443) cautions however that "While various axes of domination are always intersecting, the systems of inequality are not necessarily produced or re-created with identical social processes." From this caution, I suggest that further empirical study would be needed to determine if the preceding processes are applicable for also understanding inequalities of race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, religious affiliation, disability, nationality, as well as in other social groups not listed here where inequality exists.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **EXAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE**

Interview Guide:

1. Basic Demographic/Warm Up Questions Questions(Age, Education, Occupation, Marital Status, Competition Record, Length of Participation in MMA, Other Hobbies, Tell me a little bit about yourself)
2. Can you tell me how you started to become interested in MMA
3. Can you tell me how you became active in MMA
4. What are some of the reasons why you wanted to join a sport such as MMA?
5. What motivated you to join?
6. How did you learn about the sport?
7. Were you apprehensive when you started? Why or why not?
8. How do you feel about the sport in general?
9. Is the sport what you expected it to be? Has your perceptions changed?
10. Have you participated in competitions? If so how many? Outcomes?
11. How do you feel before you fight?
12. Can you tell me what it is like to fight? What are your feelings?
13. What is going through your head when you are doing well in a fight? Do you feel in control? What is that like?
14. What is going on in your head when you are not doing well in a fight? Do you feel in control? What is that like?
15. How do you feel after a fight in general? (right after, later that night, the next day, next week)
16. How does wins and losses affect you? (right after, later that night, the next day, next week)

17. What is your relationship with the people you train with? How close are you with them?
18. What does being a fighter mean for you? How does that add to you as a person?
19. How does it add to your self esteem? Sense of manliness (if male)? Sense of womanliness (if female)?
20. What else can you tell me about MMA? Is there anything important that I should know that I didn't ask you?

## APPENDIX B

### PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

**TABLE 1: List of participant pseudonyms and accompanying information**

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Wins/Loss</i>	<i>Interview Type</i>	<i>Observed At Fight</i>	<i>Observed In Gym</i>
<i>Anderson</i>	45	White	-		Short	No	Yes
<i>Kenton</i>	23	Black	Community College		None	No	Yes
<i>Armand</i>	27	Hispanic	High School	4/5	Short	Yes	Yes
<i>Louis</i>	40	White	College		None	No	Yes
<i>Jamison</i>	25	White	-		None	No	Yes
<i>Rico</i>	21	Hispanic	College	0/1	None	Yes	Yes
<i>Bruce</i>	40	White	Professional Degree		None	No	Yes
<i>Jude</i>	34	White	Community College	11/8	None	Yes	Yes
<i>Colby</i>	28	White	-	2/6	None	Yes	Yes
<i>Dominic</i>	31	Hispanic	College	4/2	Long	Yes	Yes
<i>Scotty</i>	25	White	High School	2/8	Long	Yes	Yes
<i>Marcel</i>	25	Black	High School		Long	No	Yes
<i>Kenneth</i>	24	Asian	College	2/2	Long	Yes	Yes
<i>Rocky</i>	22	White	Community College	8/3	Long	Yes	Yes
<i>Dean</i>	22	White	Community College	10/8	Long	Yes	Yes
<i>Buster</i>	23	White	Community College	18/10	Long	Yes	Yes
<i>Felix</i>	29	White	College	3/3	Long	Yes	Yes
<i>Garrett</i>	28	White	Professional Degree	6/2	Long	Yes	Yes
<i>Geoff</i>	23	White	College		Long	No	No
<i>Lou</i>	30	White	College	1/1	Long	Yes	Yes
<i>Allan</i>	22	White	College		Long	No	Yes
<i>Forrest</i>	25	White	College	3/3	Long	Yes	Yes
<i>Donovan</i>	23	White	College	9/5	Long	No	No
<i>Issac</i>	38	White	College		Long	No	No
<i>Casey</i>	23	White	-		Long	No	No
<i>Steven</i>	36	Black	College	0/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Alonso</i>	22	Hispanic	-	0/4	Short	Yes	No
<i>Hugo</i>	41	White	Professional Degree	3/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Gary</i>	25	White	Community College	9/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Robin</i>	23	White	-	1/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Leonardo</i>	27	Black	-	6/2	Short	Yes	No
<i>Herb</i>		White	Community College		Short	Yes	No



**TABLE 1 – Continued**

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Wins/Loss</i>	<i>Interview Type</i>	<i>Observed At Fight</i>	<i>Observed In Gym</i>
<i>Galen</i>	33	Black	-		Short	Yes	No
<i>Ed</i>	38	White	-		Short	Yes	No
<i>Cecil</i>	29	Black	-	9/2	Short	Yes	No
<i>Ray</i>	34	White	-	2/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Stan</i>	27	White	College	11/2	Short	Yes	No
<i>Mike</i>	25	White	-	7/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Danilo</i>	27	Hispanic	-	3/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Emil</i>	27	White	-	2/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Larry</i>	29	White	-	5/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Nick</i>	25	White	-	0/2	Short	Yes	No
<i>Phil</i>	24	White	-	3/4	Short	Yes	No
<i>Troy</i>	27	-	-	8/4	Short	Yes	No
<i>Dana</i>	40	White	-		Short	No	No
<i>Raphael</i>	40	Hispanic	-		Short	No	No
<i>Mac</i>	28	Asian	-	0/2	Short	Yes	No
<i>Tanner</i>	37	White	-		Long	No	No
<i>Juan</i>	27	Hispanic	-	3/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Keith</i>	29	White	-		Short	Yes	No
<i>Dustin</i>	20	White	-		Long	No	No
<i>Taylor</i>	37	Black	-	6/3	Long	Yes	No
<i>Headley</i>	19	White	-	3/0	Short	Yes	No
<i>Terry</i>	30	Black	-	5/2	Short	Yes	No
<i>Victor</i>	28	White	-	7/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Dion</i>	25	Black	-	7/0	Long	Yes	No
<i>Blake</i>	23	White	-		Short	Yes	No
<i>Henry</i>	37	White	-	1/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Syd</i>	30	White	-	5/0	Short	Yes	No
<i>Arden</i>	28	White	-	12/6	Short	Yes	No
<i>Colin</i>	28	White	-	4/1	Short	Yes	No
<i>Guillermo</i>	-	Hispanic	-		Short	Yes	No
<i>Preston</i>	40	Black	-	3/3	Short	Yes	No
<i>Aydenn</i>	20	Black	-	2/2	Short	Yes	No
<i>Benny</i>	30	White	-	0/1	Short	No	No
<i>Rickey</i>	32	White	-	5/5	Short	Yes	No
<i>Marciale</i>	32	Black	-	1/0	Short	Yes	No
<i>Todd</i>	-	White	-	0/3	Short	Yes	No
<i>Bill</i>	26	White	-	1/2	Short	Yes	No
<i>Scooter</i>	29	White	-	2/2	Short	Yes	No
<i>Daniel</i>	28	White	-	2/1	Short	Yes	No

**TABLE 1 – Continued**

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Wins/Loss</i>	<i>Interview Type</i>	<i>Observed At Fight</i>	<i>Observed In Gym</i>
<b><i>John</i></b>	26	White	-	5/0	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Patrick</i></b>	21	White	-	4/4	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Michael</i></b>	32	Black	-	0/2	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Donald</i></b>	19	White	-	0/1	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Chuck</i></b>	-	White	-	1/2	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Hawk</i></b>	-	Black	-		Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Teddy</i></b>	38	White	-	0/1	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>David</i></b>	-	Black	-		Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Sonny</i></b>	-	White	-		Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Reginald</i></b>	-	Black	-	2/3	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Doug</i></b>	27	Black	-	3/0	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Oliver</i></b>	29	White	-	1/0	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Tommy</i></b>	28	-	-	1/2	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Fred</i></b>	27	White	-	0/1	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Gabe</i></b>	31	White	-	7/23	Short	Yes	No
<b><i>Drew</i></b>	29	-	-	3/0	None	Yes	No
<b><i>Ted</i></b>	23	White	Community College		Long	No	Yes
<b><i>Jimmy</i></b>	21	White	-		Long	No	No
<b><i>Mac</i></b>	29	White	College	9/1	Short	No	Yes
<b><i>Jessie</i></b>	19	White	-		Short	No	No

## APPENDIX C

### HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE APPROVAL LETTER

Date: 12/6/2007  
To: Christian Vaccaro  
Address:  
Dept.: SOCIOLOGY  
From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair  
Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research  
Mixed Martial Arts Study

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR § 46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 12/2/2008 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Doug Schrock, Advisor  
HSC No. 2007.872

## **APPENDIX D**

### **HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE RENEWAL LETTER**

Office of the Vice President For Research  
Human Subjects Committee  
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742  
(850) 644-8673 • FAX (850) 644-4392  
RE-APPROVAL MEMORANDUM  
Date: 11/10/2008  
To: Christian Vaccaro  
Address:  
Dept.: SOCIOLOGY  
From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair  
Re: Re-approval of Use of Human subjects in Research  
Mixed Martial Arts Study

Your request to continue the research project listed above involving human subjects has been approved by the Human Subjects Committee. If your project has not been completed by 11/4/2009, you are must request renewed approval by the Committee.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your renewal request, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this re-approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting of research subjects. You are reminded that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report in writing, any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor are reminded of their responsibility for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in their department. They are advised to review the protocols as often as necessary to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

Cc: Doug Schrock, Advisor  
HSC No. 2008.1917

# APPENDIX E

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT:

Christian Vaccaro, who is Primary Researcher, has requested my participation in a research study at Florida State University. The purpose of the research is to examine the reasons why people choose to participate in mixed martial arts, the meanings created by those who participate in the sport, how it feels to enter into competition and training, how self-identity is shaped by participation in the sport, and the techniques use to maintain a sense of control in MMA competition.

My participation will involve an in-depth interview that will consist of at least 20 questions and will last around one hour. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to discontinue the interview at anytime without adverse consequence.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts if I agree to participate in this study.

Although there may be no direct benefits to me, the possible benefits of my participation in the research will include help to dispel popular myths about those who participate in Mixed Martial Arts. It will also provide a framework for understanding the motives for participating in such a seemingly dangerous subculture. Findings will be transferable to other similar sub-cultural phenomena. This research will contribute to adding to the body of sociological literature including edgework activity.

The results of this research study may be published but my name or identity will not be revealed. The researcher will do the following to maintain anonymity of my records:

(1) The primary researcher, Christian Vaccaro, will omit all personal identifiers from recorded transcripts. (2) He will assign pseudonym identifiers in place of my name along with any other information that may divulge or disclose my identity. (3) He will keep transcript data under password encoded files and will limit access to the maximum extent allowed by law. These measures will ensure that the primary researcher will only have access to the confidential information. (4) Finally, all master lists and recordings will be destroyed after subject codes are assigned or by September 10, 2011. (5) Confidentiality/Anonymity will be maintained to the maximum extent allowed by law.

I will receive a 10 dollar gasoline gift card immediately after the interview ends as compensation for my participation in the research.

Any questions I have concerning the research study or my participation in it, before or after my consent, will be answered by Christian Vaccaro (Principle Investigator) or Doug Schrock (Advisor) Department of Sociology Florida State University, 526 Bellamy Building Tallahassee, Florida 32306. Telephone: Email:

If I have questions about my rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if I feel I have been placed at risk, I can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Office of the Vice President for Research, at (850) 644-8633.

I have read the above informed consent form. I understand that I will be audio recorded by the researcher. These files will be kept by the researcher in password encoded files. I understand that only the researcher will have access to these tapes and that they will be destroyed by September 10, 2011. I understand that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. In signing this consent form, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be offered to me.

Subject's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_

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Young, Kevin, William Mcteer, and Philip White 1994. "Body Talk Male-Athletes Reflect on Sport, Injury, and Pain." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 11:175-194.

# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

AUGUST 2011

## EDUCATION

- 2011-2012 Expected Doctor of Philosophy, Sociology  
The Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL  
*Dissertation:* Mixed Martial Arts Competitors' Embodiment of Manhood:  
Body-Talk and Embodied Practice  
*Dissertation Committee:* Doug Schrock (chair), Janice McCabe, Deana  
Rohlinger, and Amy Koehlinger  
*Qualifying Exam:* Sociological Social Psychology
- 2009 Master of Science, Sociology  
The Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL  
*Thesis:* Fighting Fear: Emotion Work in Manhood Acts (winner of 2009  
ASA Emotion Section Best Graduate Paper Award)
- 2005 Master of Arts, Sociology  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA  
*Qualifying Exam:* Sociology of Work and Organizations
- 2004 Bachelor of Arts, Philosophy (with highest distinction)  
Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA  
*Thesis:* History, Social Class, Spirituality: An Inquiry into Marxist  
Alienation

## TEACHING AND RESEARCH INTERESTS

Sociological Social Psychology, Gender, Emotion, Social Inequalities, Social Identity,  
Embodiment, Deviance, Media and Culture, Theory, Research Methods

## ACADEMIC POSITIONS HELD

- 2011-Present Visiting Assistant Professor (Full-Time), Department of Sociology  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- 2010 Adjunct Faculty (Part-Time), Department of Sociology  
University of North Florida
- 2005-2007 Adjunct Faculty (Full-Time), Department of Sociology  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
- 2007 Adjunct Faculty (Part-Time), Division of Undergraduate Studies  
Pennsylvania State University
- 2005 Adjunct Faculty (Part-Time), Department of Sociology

## Clarion University of Pennsylvania

### COURSES TAUGHT

Introduction to Sociology – 9 sections, 45 students per  
Social Problems – 5 sections, 35 students per  
Sociology of Mass Media (Online) – 5 sections, 105 students per  
Delinquency and Youth – 5 sections, 35 students per  
Sociology of Deviance – 3 sections, 25 students per  
Theories of Sociological Social Psychology (Graduate) – 1 section, 15 students per

### PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Schrock, Doug, Janice McCabe, and Christian Vaccaro (Under Review 2011) “The ‘Other’ in Self-Narratives: Batterer Intervention Program Graduates’ Construction of Blameworthy Victims” *Qualitative Sociology*

Christian Vaccaro, Doug Schrock, and Janice McCabe (Forthcoming 2011) “Emotionalizing Manhood: Fighting and Fostering Fear in Mixed Martial Arts.” *Social Psychology Quarterly*

Christian Vaccaro 2011 “Male Bodies in Manhood Acts: The Role of Body-Talk and Embodied Practice in Signifying Culturally Dominant Notions of Manhood” *Sociology Compass*. 5(1): 65-76.

### OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Deana Rohlinger and Christian Vaccaro (Forthcoming) “Mass Media and Social Movements” in *The Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* edit by David Snow.

Christian Vaccaro 2011 “Inclusive Masculinities: The Changing Nature of Masculinity” by Eric Anderson. Book Review for *Gender and Society*. 25(1): 124-125.

### WORKS IN PROGRESS

Vendula Belakova and Christian Vaccaro “Marijuana Users’ Constructions of Friendship in the Role of Creating Illicit Drug Markets” *Deviant Behavior* (Word Count: 13,628 - Prepared for Submission within 1 Month)

Miriam Sessions, Heather Mauney, Christian Vaccaro, Deana Rohlinger “Please Mr. Bush: The Strategic Use of Role-Identities in Political Communication” (Word Count: 9,550 - Prepared for Submission within 3 Months)

Christian Vaccaro “Gender Structure, Keying Frames, and Men’s Negotiated Signification of their Actions as Dangerous and Safe in the Sport of Mixed Martial Arts” (Word Count: 12,540 - Analytical Chapter 1 of Dissertation to be submitted to *Gender and Society*)



Christian Vaccaro “The Gender Embodiment Cycle and the Sport of Mixed Martial Arts” (Word Count: 11,621 - Analytical Chapter 2 of Dissertation to be submitted to *Body and Society*)

#### PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS

2011 Christian Vaccaro “Gender Structure and Framing Men’s Actions in the Sport of Mixed Martial Arts” Pennsylvania Sociological Society Meeting. Greensburg, PA (Accepted)

2011 Christian Vaccaro “Sociology for the Purpose of Service: Assimilating, Agitating, and Leading.” Invited Lecture for Alpha Kappa Delta Induction Ceremony. Indiana, PA

2011 Christian Vaccaro, Doug Schrock, Janice McCabe “Emotionalizing Manhood: Fighting and Fostering Fear in Mixed Martial Arts” Symposium on Gender and Sexuality. Indiana, PA

2011 Christian Vaccaro “Walking the Tight-Rope: Manhood Acts, Gender Structure, and Men’s Negotiated Signification of their Actions as Dangerous and Safe in the Sport of Mixed Martial Arts” Eastern Sociological Society. Philadelphia, PA

2011 Christian Vaccaro, Kyle Rogers, Serkan Erdemli, Deana Rohlinger, “How are Emotions Linked to Social Movement Framing?: The Case of Terri Schiavo” Eastern Sociological Society. Philadelphia, PA

2011 Christian Vaccaro “Walking the Tight-Rope: Manhood Acts, Gender Structure, and Men’s Negotiated Signification of their Actions as Dangerous and Safe in the Sport of Mixed Martial Arts” Southern Sociological Society. Jacksonville, FL

2010 Vendula Belakova, Tomas Zabransky, and Christian Vaccaro “Marijuana Markets in The Czech Republic and the United States: Different Drug Policies, Markets, and Harms” Mid-Southern Sociological Association. Baton Rouge, LA

2010 Doug Schrock, Janice McCabe, and Christian Vaccaro “‘Reformed’ Batterers’ Tragic Narratives: Othering Women, Transforming Genres, and Reproducing Men’s Violence” American Sociological Association. Atlanta, GA

2010 Christian Vaccaro, Kyle Rogers, Serkan Erdemli, and Deana Rohlinger “Media Framing, Emotion Resonance, and Political Activism: The Case of Terri Schiavo” Southern Sociological Society. Atlanta, GA.

2010 Christian Vaccaro “Using Online Materials to Supplement Ethnographic Research” Southern Sociological Society. Atlanta, GA.

2009 Schrock, Doug, Janice McCabe, and Christian Vaccaro “The ‘Other’ in Self-Narratives: Batterer Intervention Program Graduates’ Construction of Blameworthy Victims” Society for the Study of Symbolic Interactionism. San Francisco, CA.

2009 Christian Vaccaro “Fighting Fear: Emotion Work in Manhood Acts” Southern Sociological Society, New Orleans, LA.

2009 Christian Vaccaro “Inconsistent applications: Comparing Connell’s definition of hegemonic masculinity to others’ use of the term” Southern Sociological Society, New Orleans, LA.

2009 Christian Vaccaro “Integrating Vertical, Horizontal, and Group-Process Models of Expertise: Developing a Symbolic Interactionist Approach to Embodiment Processes” Florida Society of Social Science, Gainesville, FL

2008 Christian Vaccaro “Mixed Martial Arts and Masculine Emotion Work” Southern Sociological Society, Richmond, VA.

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2008-2010 “Mixed Martial Arts Project” PI: Christian Vaccaro, Co-PI: Doug Schrock. Collected ethnographic field data in south-eastern U.S. for the purpose of understanding the group processes of mixed martial arts fighters.

2008-2011 “Terri’s Schaivo Project Media Analysis Project” Graduate Research Coordinator. PI: Deana Rohlinger. Involved in collection, design, and reliability measure for content analysis. Supervised the coding of eight graduate research assistants for project.

2008 “Examining Perception of Users Transaction in Local Marijuana Markets” PI: Vendula Belakova. Used inductive analysis of interviews of marijuana buyers and sellers to derive themes on how they socially construct meaning around the transaction.

## AWARDS AND HONORS

2010 FSU Dissertation Improvement Grant  
2009 ASA Emotion Section Graduate Student Paper Award  
2009 Klar-Allen Paper Award  
2005 Chancey Rawleigh Award, Alpha Kappa Delta  
2005 Alpha Kappa Delta, President Theta Chapter  
2005 Alpha Kappa Delta Honors Society  
2004 Phi Beta Kappa  
2003 Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society  
2003 Ray Dotterer Scholarship in Philosophy, Pennsylvania State University

## MEMBERSHIPS

2005-Present American Sociological Association  
2007-Present Southern Sociological Society

2007-Present FSU Qualitative Research Group, co-chair  
2006 Pennsylvania Sociological Society  
2006 Pacific Sociological Society

#### DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

Departmental Awards Committee 2009-10	Florida State University
Colloquium Committee 2008-09	Florida State University
Graduate Program Committee 2008-09	Florida State University

#### SERVICE TO PROFESSION

Reviewer for *The Sociological Quarterly*  
Reviewer for *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*

#### GRADUATE STUDENTS MENTORED

Lindsay Kahle, MA (in preparation) Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
James Martin, MA (in preparation) Indiana University of Pennsylvania

#### PROGRAM PROFICIENCY

MS Excel      SPSS      STATA      Nvivo      Atlas-Ti