

Can Mixed Martial Arts be Ethically Defended?:
Autonomy, Paternalism and the Harm Principle

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Applied Health Sciences
(Health & Physical Education)

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Abstract

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) and the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) founded in 1993 have been under scrutiny for the past two decades. Unlike boxing, the ethical status of MMA and whether it is morally defensible have rarely been analyzed in the academic literature. I argue that MMA requires such an analysis because it is inherently violent. The purpose of this study was to examine elite-level MMA by referring to the ethical concepts of autonomy, paternalism and the Harm Principle. Findings from interviews with MMA athletes as well as my personal experience of MMA were presented to establish a deeper understanding of the sport and what it means to train and compete in a sport defined as violent. The conceptual analysis and findings of MMA athletes' experiences in this investigation resulted in the conclusion that MMA is ethically defensible. Additional findings, implications and recommendations for further research were also discussed.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Danny Rosenberg. He has been a credit to my development and it was a pleasure to have worked with him. He gave me an opportunity to excel in academics and improve my life. Since my undergraduate years he was a valued educator in my eyes and his positive influence, guidance, encouragement and knowledge allowed me to prosper as a young scholar that exceeded my own expectations. Without him this work could not have been completed. I want to thank him very much for the opportunity to prove myself and I hope I made him proud.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to my committee members Dr. Cathy Van Ingen, Dr. Diane Mack and Dr. Cesar R. Torres, my external examiner. Dr. Van Ingen has been an inspiration to me since I took my first undergraduate course with her and learned what she was interested in and the career she pursued. She was the one who told me I could write about MMA and gave me the confidence to follow through. Although it took me a couple tries I got in with her help, and for this I will never forget her positive influence.

Dr. Mack's expertise and knowledge have been sought after by most graduate students in my program. When I learned she was genuinely interested in MMA I felt fortunate to have her assist me on this research endeavour. She took on this task with a cheerful outlook and aided me throughout the process, and for this I am forever thankful.

I know Dr. Torres mostly by reputation within the sport philosophy community and met him when I attended a sport philosophy conference at the college at Brockport, State University of New York a few years ago. As a leading scholar in the field it is a privilege to have him as a committee member to gain from his invaluable insights and erudition. I am extremely grateful for his contributions that have strengthened my thesis.

I would like to thank all my research participants and the MMA community. From my own coaches and training partners to those I met, trained with, and became friends with, this thesis is for you as much as it is for me.

These acknowledgements could not be complete without sending a special thank you to my family and close friends who have consistently supported me throughout my education. I would especially like to thank my parents Aline and Edward Kent for always being there and being proud of me no matter what; you are my anchors and without you this all would not have been possible.

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Chapter One

Mixed Martial Arts: An Overview

Introduction

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) may be described as the most primitive form of sport competition in society today that offers a spectacle like no other (Spencer, 2012). MMA is a combative style of competition where a variety of fighting disciplines are used between two opponents within the confines of a ring or cage (Mayeda & Ching, 2008). MMA is as violent and taxing a sport that is similar to but different than boxing. Unlike traditional martial arts, which are points-based competitions and promote reduced contact, MMA incorporates Eastern and Western martial arts which are used through integrating the techniques of various styles. As a result, competitors can fight while on the ground or when standing in any number of positions. Table 1 (see Appendix A) identifies the main forms of martial arts including country of origin and techniques used in MMA (adapted from Kochhar, Back, Mann, & Skinner, 2005). This in effect creates a style of combat that may resemble street fights outside the sphere of organized sport.

However, unlike no holds barred fighting that entails ‘anything goes’ (Garcia & Malcolm, 2010), MMA competitions consist of three, five-minute rounds and five, five-minute rounds for championship matches or main events with a one minute rest period between rounds. MMA competitors wear protective equipment including mouth guard, groin protection and four to six ounce gloves where the fingers are exposed for grappling. Bouts are decided by a scoring system, knockout (KO), technical knockout (TKO), corner stoppage or referee stoppage based on fighters’ inability to coherently defend themselves. A match may also be decided by submission tap out (verbal/physical admission of

impending injury), disqualification, medical stoppage or the judge's decision once time has expired (Rainey, 2009).

The Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) is the principal MMA organization in the world that showcases top professional male and female MMA athletes who compete against each other (Spencer, 2009). The UFC and other MMA organizations enforce a range of restrictive rules and regulations including weight classes, time limited rounds, equipment, judges and a referee who holds substantial power in ending competitions. The establishment of these rules has contributed to the increase in popularity of MMA worldwide (Mayeda & Ching, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

There is a need to investigate MMA due to the sport's inherent violence. MMA needs to be investigated at the highest professional level in order to determine whether the sport can be ethically defensible. Violence is most prevalent at the top level where professional MMA athletes encounter a variety of violent situations due to their extensive skills and experience in the sport. The violence present in the UFC is apparent, undeniable and widely depicted in the media. In addition to ending matches via the KO, TKO and submission which incorporate violence, the 10-Point Must System is based on effective striking, grappling, Octagon (UFC cage) control, aggression, and defense (www.ufc.ca, 2012). Although defense may be seen as less violent, athletes are only given a point for defense, but only if they defend and retaliate with offensive strikes following the defensive technique. Therefore the structure of MMA and specifically the UFC seem to favor violent techniques and styles the most.

Over the years, brutal levels of violence have decreased in MMA due to many reforms, yet the public exposure of the sport is growing by leaps and bounds. MMA clubs have mushroomed in many communities for training and competitive pursuits. MMA matches are regular features of mainstream television and the UFC is now on cable and/or pay per view at least once a week, and holds major events throughout North America in the largest city arenas. The violence seen in the sport at the professional ranks is real uncensored violence that is qualitatively different from scripted professional wrestling. The level of violence that is accepted in the Octagon would be criminal in other sports and in society generally, and some have described it as similar to the violence seen in fight-to-the-death gladiatorial contests or medieval melees. Plus, there is an inherent problem with violence in a civilization like ours that champions a more peaceful and less harmful society. The MMA and UFC appear to be contrary to the ideals of peace and reducing social harm and may be doing the very opposite by making violence more socially acceptable. Given the violent nature of the sport under examination here it is imperative that its ethical status be examined and critiqued.

However, a serious examination of the ethical standing of MMA is difficult for at least two reasons. First, there is a lack of knowledge of the sport on an academic level. Little scholarship on MMA exists in the extant literature and hardly any published works exist specifically on the ethics of MMA. Most in the academic community likely view the sport as unnecessarily brutal and grotesque, see virtually nothing of value in the sport that contributes to the public good, and are dismissive of its athletes because they are seen as merely vicious human beings who glorify violence. If such prejudices exist, and I suspect they do, this may be a reasonable explanation for the lack of reliable data on MMA that

critically describes and tries to understand the sport. This lack of scholarship also encourages numerous myths and fabrications about the sport that often float around social circles and in the media.

Another problem with studying the nature and ethics of MMA is its comparison to boxing. The public presentation and image of the two sports when held up side by side creates a tendency to view MMA as far more violent when compared to boxing. This is due to the wide mix and varied skills in MMA which includes punches, holds, kicks and choking, fighting can occur in a standing or lying down position, gloves are minimal coverings and the fingers are exposed, and the cage conjures images of dangerous animals or psychopathic criminals locked in a cell. Boxing of course does not possess these characteristics and as spectacle is perhaps seen as a far more respectable sport. Much more is written about boxing from a scholarly perspective and in the sport ethics and popular culture literature. For decades boxing is shown regularly on television and is showcased in major films and documentaries. The acceptability of boxing is also due to its long and well established history, its heroes, links to gambling and enduring organization for well over 150 years as a most popular sport worldwide. This portrait of boxing overshadows and distorts significantly the way MMA is perceived even though both sports contain expressions of violence. The in-depth analysis, discussion and examination in this study refer to philosophical and ethical writings in boxing, and also clarify and highlight the distinctions between boxing and MMA and the way violence is specifically implicated in the latter.

Violence is defined as the exertion of physical force to deliberately injure or harm another person or persons (Simon, 2004; Young, 2012). Sports like MMA and boxing are

inherently violent. However, the violence in MMA is different than boxing because you can punch, kick, knee, elbow, choke, slam and submit your opponent using numerous techniques. This means there is a wide range of actions that inflict harm to many parts of the body and in several positions. By contrast, the violence in boxing consists of punches exclusively to the upper body and head in an upright position using large gloves which are eight or ten ounces for competition and 12-16 for sparring and practice. The number of punches that specifically target the head is significantly more in boxing than in MMA and this can result in serious damage to the brain which is the most vulnerable part of the human body.

Visually MMA appears much more violent than boxing for a number of reasons. The inclusion of elbows, knees and shin kicks increases the number of cuts and the appearance of blood in a match and this is a common sight. Slamming allows fighters to pick up their opponents and drop them on their bodies and heads with various throws (Judo/Wrestling). Submissions have the capacity to appear the least violent toward the end of matches because one fighter has the other in a choke hold or extremely painful hold. On the other hand, MMA matches can appear gruesome because fighters do not tap at all, or tap fast enough or are not rescued by the referee in time before passing out or becoming seriously injured. Competitors may tap out at any time which allows them to quit before impending injury. For some fighters this option is sometimes ignored in order to attempt escaping the choke, leg lock or arm lock. When this occurs, fighters who refuse to tap out may sustain serious injuries like broken legs, knees, arms and dislocations, or they may suffer unconsciousness. All these scenarios show a particular brutality within MMA that is unique. Yet there is an understanding between competitors

that it is their option to submit or possibly sustain these injuries. While serious injury can and does occur in MMA, technical competency in grappling (BJJ/Sambo/Wrestling/Judo) teaches fighters methods to efficiently execute submissions knowing full well that tapping out is always an option.

The forms of violence described above, as well as many other aspects of MMA, are examined in far more detail in this investigation within practice and training and under competitive conditions. This characterization is derived from the literature and from the personal experiences of elite MMA athletes. With a comprehensive description of the sport in hand, an analysis of the ethical status of MMA follows.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine whether MMA at the UFC level is ethically justifiable by considering the writings on boxing ethics and the ethical concepts of paternalism, autonomy and the Harm Principle. The preceding group of ethical concepts is explained below. To enhance the investigation I also speak to several UFC fighters and ask them pointed questions about the ethics of MMA. Hearing the voices of those in the sport is often overlooked in ethical inquiries. However, in this study the views of MMA fighters may be most important because they are the ones most educated, experienced and knowledgeable about the sport and their thoughts may be most insightful on the question of violence and its ethical standing. Moreover, some researchers insist that to fully understand a practice, one must be exposed to and grasp the context, language and norms of the specific group who engage in the practice (Willis, 2007).

As such, the ethical status of a sport like MMA should be understood and examined in part by listening to the voices of its participants. If certain governments and

the medical community wish to ban MMA to protect athletes from harm (paternalism), shouldn't they consider that the harm being inflicted is by those who freely choose to participate (autonomy)? Advocates of an MMA ban typically argue from a utilitarian, quantitative basis citing the severity and frequency of injury, but rarely do they take into consideration the goals, aspirations and experiences of the athletes. Very little scholarship exists on MMA from an ethical standpoint that also includes the athletes' thoughts and experiences. However, a larger body of scholarly writings is available on the ethics of boxing and this study selectively turns to that work.

This study also clarifies the history, context and training in MMA versus competing in MMA at the highest level. Statistics, discussion and other literature on MMA do not clearly delineate between training experiences and competition experiences (Bledsoe, et al., 2006). This can be a valuable distinction and one that is specified throughout the data collection process to get a full comprehension of the sport. Training and competition are sometimes misrepresented because training time far exceeds the time spent in competition. In other words, the whole experience must be documented in order to fully understand the entire perspective and context of being an MMA athlete at the highest level. We need to comprehend if these athletes are experiencing violence in training as much as in competition or vice versa, and base any ethical conclusions about the sport from a broad perspective.

Research Questions

The main questions of this investigation are the following:

1. Is MMA ethically defensible based on the violence inherent in the UFC?

2. What do MMA athletes at the highest level (UFC) say about the ethical status of MMA?

3. What does the ethical discussion on boxing add to the MMA debate?

Rationale for the Study

Given the inherent violence in MMA contests, the purpose of this study is to examine and determine whether MMA is ethically defensible by considering the concepts of autonomy, paternalism and the Harm Principle. The rationale for this research is a reaction to the increasing ethical concern for the prevalence of MMA violence in society. Growing popularity, exposure and participation in MMA are reasons to investigate ethical concepts surrounding MMA. It is a relatively new sport and a ban on MMA has recently been promoted by medical professionals in addition to the ban on boxing (White, 2007). This ban is similar to the prohibition of professional MMA by many states, countries and provinces where the sport is still deemed illegal. There is a lack of academic literature on MMA especially concerning the ethics of the sport. Authors on MMA suggest there is a need to ethically investigate MMA including the voices of those who participate in it (Mayeda & Ching, 2008). Studying the highest level of MMA which is the UFC is significant because its influence filters down to other organizations and levels of MMA participation. The UFC is also the most prevalent MMA organization in the media. The UFC's estimated worth is over one billion dollars and in 2008 revenue was \$ 250,000,000 and it is estimated they control 90 percent of the MMA industry (Miller, 2008). Moreover, there is a need to clarify the history and context of MMA. The extant literature often portrays an inconsistent and mythical account of the sport that needs to be corrected (Bledsoe, et al., 2009).

In this study I provide a more comprehensive account of the MMA and UFC that is accurate and includes a well-defined and chronological detailed history. I also consider the contexts of training versus competition to understand the subtleties and nuances of violence. UFC athletes spend the majority of their time in training and only compete one to three times a year. Whereas violence is most apparent in matches, training for violence is another important matter when deciding on MMA's ethical status. By speaking to UFC athletes both these dimensions are investigated. Thus a more robust account of MMA and UFC historically, contextually and personally are featured here. In general, the rationale for this investigation is to fill the gaps mentioned above.

Methodology

This study is an ethical inquiry of MMA and specifically the UFC to answer the above questions. The research includes a conceptual analysis of the nature of MMA and how it is similar to and differs from boxing as presented in the literature. The latter is undertaken because the literature on the ethics of boxing is expansive and both are combat sports that involve acts of violence which are inherent to each sport. This study also incorporates various qualitative data collection methods, including a questionnaire (see Appendix B) and interviews (see Appendix C) to gain knowledge about the moral agency of MMA athletes. The focus in this part of the project is on the experiences and perceptions of UFC athletes and whether they think MMA is ethically defensible. The voices of participants are relevant in qualitative research designs and they are helpful to better understand the moral status of MMA.

For this study I apply a moral philosophical approach and utilize three central ethical concepts in the literature which are integral to the ethics debate in boxing. The

three are autonomy, paternalism and the Harm Principle. Both defenders and detractors of boxing make use of these ideas in their respective moral arguments and my interest in part is to see how these constructs apply to MMA. In this sense the study is exploratory conceptually and in practice. Perhaps due to important structural differences between boxing and MMA, these concepts do not apply in the same way in both sports. There are also organizational differences that lead to different risks and harms in each sport and these ethical ideas are applied accordingly. As far as practical consequences surrounding autonomy, paternalism and the Harm Principle as related to MMA, I anticipate the MMA athletes I survey and interview will shed light on these constructs and assist in answering my research questions.

By comparing the results of the conceptual ethical analysis with the questionnaire and interview data greater insights into the ethical nature of MMA are evident, and greater or lesser ethical justification for the sport itself is drawn. Emergent themes through questions posed in the interviews may or may not relate to themes in the boxing debate and so new differences are revealed. Trustworthiness and credibility in my study are achieved by using several suggestions in qualitative methods. These include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, data triangulation, referential adequacy, peer debriefing and review, comparability, monitoring subjectivity and providing thick description (Willis, 2007).

I use purposeful sampling in this investigation because the research targets a specific population, namely male MMA athletes affiliated with the UFC. Random sampling is not effective here because I am interested in hearing from participants in the UFC, a specific population who are interviewed (Thomas, Bloor, & Frankland, 2007).

My sample is identified through my connections in the local MMA community and through a "snowball" effect. Snowball sampling is successful in previous MMA studies and once the word went out about this project I had no difficulties in finding participants (Mayeda & Ching 2008). Since I train and compete in MMA I had contact with athletes willing to participate in the study and they suggested other UFC athletes interested in being interviewed. Coaches and training partners also helped me in the recruitment process and this increased the snowball effect. This is where being involved in the sport of MMA benefits the quality of my study. Overall recruitment is based on social networking over the last six years through training at different MMA gyms and meeting with a multitude of MMA athletes, coaches and trainers. In the end eight MMA (UFC) athletes participated in this research by completing a questionnaire and follow-up interviews.

In carrying out the research, participants are informed about the procedures concerning their anonymity throughout this project. Personal identifiers of the research include the following: participant's ages, number of years in professional MMA competition and years in the UFC. Pseudonyms are used exclusively in order to conceal the identity of the subjects. This is to promote honest answers that are not influenced by the possibility of the general public analyzing and judging their responses which in turn could affect how fans and UFC owners see them. This also deters dishonest answers from athletes if they feel their identities are revealed and leads to corrupt responses. Athletes that are looking to gain fans through character promotion may resort to this type of self-promotion. Personal identifiers are secured electronically under password and only my advisor and I are privy to the raw data. Data hardcopies are disposed by way of shredding

one year after the thesis is completed. The data is kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

Informed consent is outlined in an invitation letter that addresses the purpose of the research, how the research proceeds, potential benefits and risks, confidentiality, and the conditions of participant withdrawal. The definition of violence as it applies to this study is outlined to participants so that they understand the meaning of violence within the questions.

Possible benefits of participation include increase in awareness, publicity, and knowledge of a sport that is relatively misunderstood and misrepresented. Any psychological risks that arise in the interview process are explained and discussed with the participants. Psychological risks like emotional stress are due to the sensitivity and invasiveness of investigating the reasons and experiences of violence among these athletes. Interviewees from other studies similar to this one including boxing studies and other MMA studies with these athletes show personal and deep emotional responses. Interviews involving these high level athletes from various backgrounds promote in depth stories and personal accounts that may cause emotional stress. These psychological risks are managed by halting any further invasive questioning once the participant(s) appear distraught or communicate discomfort. I am not qualified to manage these issues or provide direct assistance; however recommendations for free psychological assistance are given to the participants. The participants are able to withdraw from participation at any time and pass on any questions that make them uncomfortable in order to prevent such psychological risks. There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study other than the aforementioned.

As mentioned, participants may withdraw at any point. They are informed of this in the consent letter and letter of invitation. Data collected from a participant who withdraws is shredded immediately and there are no consequences or penalties for withdrawal. The participants are reminded of their rights to withdraw if signs of ignorance or uncertainty arise.

The questions posed in the interviews and questionnaires are derived from the main research questions I am trying to answer. A questionnaire is selected as a method to obtain an overall representation of those participating in the study. This allows for personal beliefs, perceptions and context of the participants involvement in MMA and the UFC to be outlined. The voices of these athletes, their explanations and perceptions address the issue of moral agency that is significant to any discussion of the ethical standing of MMA.

Discussion regarding the data gathered clearly outlines the difference between training and competition in MMA. These are both experienced by the UFC athlete but consideration of their differences is analyzed. Competition experiences and empirical evidence exist but no discussion on training which is where the majority of the time is spent by a high level MMA athlete in the UFC.

Open coding and inductive analysis are part of my research procedure. Coding is implemented by hand as transcribed interviews and surveys are analyzed to organize the data, themes, and information. I code the information into themes that are shared among participants, theories, concepts, and link them to the ethical concepts derived from the boxing discussion. Emergent themes result from the coding and connections are made through the data collection and analysis phase. I code interviews based on the various

questionnaire and interview questions and answers as well as the varying perspectives and responses regarding violence and moral agency. The experiences and descriptions of violence differ among athletes but similarities and patterns can be grouped together. These result in new emerging themes that are categorized and discussed if differences between MMA participants and boxers arise.

Finally, the data analysis includes a discussion of where and how the ethical constructs of autonomy, paternalism and the Harm Principle figure into the emergent themes and patterns. Discoveries relating or differing MMA from boxing are disclosed through this process. The application here may reveal new aspects of the nature of MMA and set the stage to answer the question of whether MMA is ethically justifiable, the main question of the thesis.

Research Design

This study is an investigation that examines the ethical status of MMA by employing conceptual analysis and ethical principles together with a qualitative research design that asks MMA athletes about their perspective of the ethical standing of MMA. To better comprehend the collected descriptive data, interpretivism is the paradigm I utilize. Interpretivism is most appropriate to better understand MMA violence through an ethical lens. Human beings behave in certain ways because of their perceptions of themselves, others and their environment. Interpretivism is a paradigm that aids in understanding human behaviour in terms of how people make sense of their world. This requires that we observe people in their natural environment and see how they negotiate their everyday lives, or we may speak to people and ask them about the meanings they attribute to the myriad of encounters they experience. Interpretivism takes an inductive,

from the ground up approach and tries to set aside presuppositions of what and who is being examined (Willis, 2007). Its goal is not to search for universal truths and laws, but instead it is concerned primarily on the meanings and explanations of behaviour as understood or interpreted by human agents in specific locales (Willis, 2007). My aim is to provide a fair portrait of MMA that will be informed by the views of participants through interviews and questionnaires (data) and my own account to a limited degree (Creswell, 2007; Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983).

Limitations and Delimitations

The delimitations of the proposed research are those areas I plan to focus on in order for the study to be robust and contain critical depth. As such only UFC athletes participated in the study because they make the greatest commitment to the sport, are highly trained and experienced and are the role models for other MMA participants. Their insights on the ethical character of MMA are revealed and provide substantive research data. Based on the literature, I chose to employ three significant ethical concepts of autonomy, paternalism and the Harm Principle that are subsumed in at least two major ethical theories, consequentialism in the case of harm and deontology in relation to autonomy and paternalism to analyze the ethical standing of MMA. Ethical discussion on boxing as well MMA literature is employed to investigate the ethical status of MMA. This is because boxing is structurally similar to MMA in some respects, both involve acts of violence, and the ethical concepts can and are applied to both sports. The number of interview participants in this study is eight male UFC athletes and each participant interview is between one and three hours long. This ensures I consult with a manageable group and collect relevant, detailed data. In this purposive sample, I chose participants

who were or are UFC athletes from UFC 21, July 16, 1999 (new era) when new management and increased rules and regulations were put into place. This delimitation provides current data about the ethical status of MMA as seen through the eyes of contemporary, active MMA athletes.

The limitations of the study are areas that are out of my control and also set the parameters of this research project. Only English sources of information from the literature are examined because I am not proficient in another language. I also only interview UFC athletes who are English-speakers for similar reasons and this should minimize miscommunication problems. The UFC only employed male athletes at the beginning of this research study but as February 23, 2013, the UFC now has a female division and female competitions are regularly showcased. Due to this recent development that cannot be incorporated, only males are participants in this study. Perhaps a future study could examine female UFC athletes.

Chapter Development

Chapter One introduces the statement of the problem and purpose of the research. Research questions are listed to focus the discussion areas. The rationale for the study and the methodology used to perform the research are described. The research design informs readers in terms of how the research will be conducted. The limitations and delimitations outline the parameters of the research. A table, an interview guide, a questionnaire and several letters and forms are included in the appendix.

Chapter Two discusses in detail the methodology and procedures used in this qualitative study. A description of the sampling process, the research design and data

collection are provided. Chapter three also discusses the participants, instruments and the type of data analysis.

Chapter Three provides a critical and extensive review of literature. I examine the ethical issues brought up in the boxing debate surrounding its ethical status. I also review the current literature on MMA including its history and context, morality and empirical evidence. The ethical concepts of autonomy, paternalism, and the Harm Principle are examined as well.

Chapter Four provides a discussion and analysis of the research questions and ethical inquiry of MMA. A consideration of the ethical debate on boxing ethics in comparison to MMA is outlined. Findings and themes from interviews are explained as they relate to the ethical inquiry and research questions.

Chapter Five concludes the study by restating the purpose of this investigation and briefly summarizes the study. Ethical concepts including autonomy, paternalism and the Harm Principle are used to facilitate the ethical discussion. Other significant points are raised and suggestions for reform or a ban of MMA are provided. Finally, the chapter closes by presenting recommendations for future research.

Reflexivity

As an MMA athlete myself, I try to ensure my bias is kept in check by first acknowledging my status as a researcher and participant of MMA to those involved in the study and the reader. I keep a detailed journal concerning my engagement as a researcher involved in the community being investigated. The notes consist of potential biases, influences and prejudice which may influence my research so that they can be identified

and addressed appropriately. These reflexivity notes are dated and documented in detail throughout the research process.

There are many challenges as an insider which have come to my attention and multiplied this investigative process. Keeping my biases and personal thoughts of MMA as a positive sport is a challenge that I address and work out throughout the research. I take the necessary research approaches like reflexive notes to ensure the research is credible. I want the investigation to be honest in terms of the sport, the athletes and myself no matter what the research reveals.

As an insider, the athletes I interview may see me as one of them which hinders or aids my research. The hindrances are that they refrain from or expose information that other researchers not directly familiar with the community and language have access to. Interview participants may not want to disclose information to me or share their thoughts and beliefs about a sport that I too am involved in. For example they may feel I will reveal their training methods or weaknesses.

Credibility as a researcher may be questioned as participants may feel that an MMA athlete may not be fit to discuss MMA academically. For example they may question my education or experience as a researcher due to the time spent on my own training and my younger age. There are other issues that I am conscious to avoid. Interview participants might say “well, you know what I mean[]” which would cause issues in developing quality interviews and individual depth would be lost. As an insider I am not distracted by the training opportunities, or be star struck by the athletes I interviewed. I work diligently to ensure my professionalism and focus counteracts any such tendencies. A more serious challenge is listening to the emotional and psychological

influences that often arise when interviewing a population that may have atypical views, experience and acceptance of violence and pain.

There are many things that I got out of my research including the enjoyment of this scholarly MMA journey. Digging deeper into the holistic essence of MMA, the UFC and the athletes is invigorating and gives me an opportunity that I will likely appreciate every day. In the beginning of my study I was really hoping to make a positive influence on MMA through my research, which I still am capable of doing, however my opinion has altered slightly. I thought I was going to only portray MMA in a positive light and produce a work that all MMA athletes would appreciate, however this is impossible. Now, I want to aid the sport and athletes whatever conclusions may result and do so by avoiding faulty reasoning and arguments. Above all else I want to create a research project that is of the highest academic quality.

Following the preliminary work towards writing my thesis I have already sensed a transformation overcoming me as an MMA athlete, academic, and person. The culture of MMA which I am deeply invested in is a culture that influences the person as well as the athlete and together they create a lifestyle that molds and reinvents individuals throughout their lives. Specifically, I have changed as an athlete through increased awareness of the risks involved in MMA, such as observing and experiencing horrific injuries. However when one actually sees, analyzes, and understands the statistics of injuries it is very humbling. Realizing that MMA injuries are not always treatable and can alter a participant's life is the reality of this game in training and in competition. I have become more self-aware in the ring and in training in order to be as defensive as possible to decrease the risk of injury. I have matured as an athlete realizing that this is a serious

sport that cannot be taken lightly because you are literally putting your life in the hands of others and vice versa. That responsibility coincidentally enhances the relationships between the athletes and their mutual experiences. I know that I will improve as an athlete, academic and a person as I surround myself with intelligent scholars, impressive athletes and influential people. The scholarly study of the morality of MMA is the most important, fun and life-altering experience of my life to this point.

Chapter Two

Methodology

This study will conduct an ethical inquiry of MMA and specifically the UFC. The investigation will include a conceptual analysis of the nature of MMA and how it is similar to and differs from boxing as presented in the literature. The latter will be undertaken because the literature on the ethics of boxing is expansive and both boxing and MMA are combat sports that involve acts of violence. This study will also incorporate various qualitative data collection methods, including questionnaires and interviews to gain knowledge about the moral agency of MMA athletes. The focus in this part of the project will be on the experiences and perceptions of UFC athletes and whether they think MMA is ethically defensible. The voices of participants are relevant in qualitative research designs and they will be helpful to better understand the moral status of MMA. This study received approval from Brock University Research Ethics Board (#12-079).

For this study I will apply a moral philosophical approach and utilize three central ethical concepts that have emerged in the literature as integral to the ethics debate in boxing. The three are autonomy, paternalism and the Harm Principle. Both defenders and detractors of boxing make use of these ideas in their respective moral arguments and my interest in part is to see how these constructs apply to MMA. In this sense the study is exploratory conceptually and in practice. Perhaps due to important structural differences between boxing and MMA, these concepts do not apply in the same way in both sports. There are also organizational differences that lead to different risks and harms in each sport and these ethical ideas must be applied accordingly. As far as practical

consequences surrounding autonomy, paternalism and the Harm Principle as related to MMA, I anticipate the MMA athletes I survey and interview will shed light on these constructs and assist in answering my research questions.

By comparing the results of the conceptual ethical analysis with the questionnaire and interview data I hope greater insights into the ethical nature of MMA will emerge, and greater or lesser ethical justification for the sport itself may be drawn. Themes may emerge through questions posed in the interviews that may or may not relate to themes in the boxing debate and so new differences may be revealed.

Participants

I sought six to eight male UFC professional MMA athletes as interview participants for this study and acquired eight. The athletes were adults of various ages and each had at least one MMA competition following rule changes after July 16, 1999 that ushered in the modern version of the UFC. Females were not considered for this study because when the research began the UFC did not have female athletes. Female fighters were approved and introduced to the UFC in February 2013 and their recent entry within the UFC organization (UFC 157, Feb. 23, 2013) is a limitation of this study. It is highly recommended that their voices about UFC level competition be part of future research on elite-level MMA and that their absence in this work not be construed as intentional. Therefore, what existed when this research began were male UFC athletes and they were chosen because the UFC is considered the highest level of competition in MMA. The UFC is to MMA like the National Football League (NFL) is to football. By asking professional athletes at the highest level about their experiences and ethics I hope

to elicit serious discussion and insight pertinent to the research questions posed in this investigation.

Purposive sampling was employed due to the specificity of the population. One to three hours were provided for interviews based on participant availability and content. I attempted to interview 'current' UFC fighters, as many of the athletes are only under contract for one to four fights per contract and can be dropped from the contract at any time. Therefore I may have interviewed an athlete that had been released from the UFC either, before, during, or after completion of the study. This did not affect my research because my primary interests are on athlete experiences in the sport and UFC level competition. Being a past or present UFC athlete did not alter the quality of investigation but athlete status was recorded and discussed and precautions were taken to ensure anonymity. My study will therefore locate MMA athletes that competed in the UFC specifically from July 16, 1999 until today. The period after this date will be known as the modern era and reference to the earlier years will only be considered for background and historical reference.

The athletes selected for this study participated in at least one UFC level competition but the range of UFC experience ranged from one to 14 years. Each of these athletes had a range of professional MMA records (e.g., 3-1-3 or 57-5) of competition that took place in the UFC as well as other professional MMA organizations. Many had competed in other organizations for years or had only competed in the UFC demonstrating the range of UFC and MMA experience between participants. Weight, MMA experience/ history, age, race, and other details were not included in the research following the questionnaire to ensure confidentiality and anonymity but the participants

included in the study were from a diverse population. Athlete one through Athlete eight (A1-A8) were used in transcriptions. This was done to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants due to the sensitivity of the moral issues being discussed.

Procedure

Data collection methods were a self-reported questionnaire, individual interviews, a conceptual and ethical analysis as well as input from my own experience and observations as an amateur MMA athlete. Data collection took place over a period of four months (April-July, 2013). During this time some athletes were preparing for a fight while others were not. It is suspected that this will not have an impact on the results of this study as it is based on their experience(s) in the UFC both training and in competition. Therefore as long as they have participated in a modern era UFC event they are qualified to discuss the experiences.

Following ethics approval by my university eight UFC athletes were contacted and delivered or emailed an invitation letter, consent form and questionnaire. I delivered, surveyed, and interviewed some individually at their own respective MMA gyms and others via Skype and email exchange (documents). Visits or Skype and email exchanges occurred on three separate occasions, 1) to distribute the invitation letter, letter of consent and questionnaire, 2) the interview, and 3) follow up review of the transcript. A1, A3, A5, A7, and A8 interviews were conducted using Skype while athletes A2, A4 and A6 were conducted in person. I did not find differences in the quality of interviews and the gathering of data despite using Skype for some of the interviews and others in person. Following the questionnaire completion I completed a short review of preliminary data before the interview began. After transcription was complete member checking was

conducted via email and participants had the opportunity to clarify, add or remove any comments they had said throughout the interview process (Patton, 2002). All the participants agreed that the transcriptions were an accurate representation of their responses and they had no alterations, subtractions or editions to the transcribed material presented to them from their interview.

The questionnaire lasted approximately one half hour while the interviews lasted approximately one hour on average. Member checking took about half hour but was completed via email as the third meeting was deemed unnecessary and difficult to attain. All meetings were allotted a range of time designations but were between one and a half hours to three hours in total for both meetings, for all participants. All interviews were audio- recorded and then transcribed verbatim. All material was transcribed without the use of the participant's names to ensure anonymity. Of the eight athletes contacted eight agreed to participate and completed the required elements of research.

Instruments and Analysis

The questionnaire employed for this research was created to elicit a general understanding of the MMA participants and UFC history to provide a brief athlete background and enhance the interview questions following questionnaire analysis (see Appendix B). Experience, martial arts background, preliminary moral and ethical issues were drawn from the questionnaire in order to get a sense for the participant's thoughts and to invoke ethical contemplation regarding MMA and the UFC prior to the interview. The questionnaire provided the backdrop for the participant and the type of discussion that would follow in detail in the interview process. The purpose was to familiarize myself with the participant and vice versa as well as the participant to be familiarized

with the material under discussion. The questionnaire was developed by me to elicit an ethical discussion about the violence in MMA and allow for the athletes to voice their experiences with it. The questionnaire was developed by examining questions and concepts in the boxing and MMA literature, conducting a pilot study and applying suggested modifications from my supervisor and committee members. The development and modification of the questionnaire continued following a pilot study of four male professional mixed martial artists from various professional MMA organizations. Following questionnaire results review, adaptations were made to the questionnaire based on the following.

Following the four pilots the questionnaire was modified to enhance the quality and focus. Question clarity, repetitiveness, and explanations were further developed to improve the original questionnaire. The word 'feel' was replaced with 'react' in questions 13, 14, and 15 because feel is a difficult word to interpret and the meaning may not promote a detailed account of how they responded to the situations detailed in the questions. Following the pilot study it became clear that there were some words that needed to be clarified in order to ensure the participants knew what I was asking. For example reiteration and clarification of the definition of violence and inherent violence from question 17 was carried out. Although further explanation was needed, modification of the question was unnecessary but the importance of clarification was noted.

There are examples provided in the questionnaire of specific UFC moments that relate to questions, for example question 12 describes a moment with two athletes that may or may not be considered excessive violence. Not all the participants were clear of the example so I provided other examples of violence that may be beyond the scope

required within MMA competition. I also showed the athlete a video of the incident in order to clarify the type of incident the question was referring to. The actual example was not as valuable as the concept under discussion and any type of example similar to these extremely violent moments would elicit this type of discussion.

Other than these minor adjustments the questionnaire served the purpose of gathering preliminary data to inform the interview and allow for familiarity of subject matter and participant - researcher relationship enhancement. Modifications made to the instruments increased reliability (consistency in understanding the questions) and validity (that the questions refer to the information being sought) (Willis, 2007). The interview guide was also modified following the pilot study.

The interview guide was semi-structured and open ended in order to elicit substantive discussion and ask probing questions (see Appendix C). The interview guide was developed and created using the same methods described for the questionnaire. The interview was separated into two types of questions the first asks about training experiences. The second was concerned with competition and this subject was clearly delineated to the participants in each question. This division was meant to further specify and clarify from the shortcomings of other research that did not record the experiences of training versus competition and the differences between the times spent in these two forms of high level MMA participation. These questions promoted discussion on violence in MMA at the UFC level of participation which fostered the experiences and thoughts of athletes that were directly involved with the violence inherent to MMA and the UFC. By hearing the athletes' experiences with participation in this sport further understanding of the sport and the violence within it was developed. Descriptions of experiencing violence

in the sport, the athlete's reactions, intentions, morals and positions revealed important information to respond to the main question of the study which was whether MMA can be ethically defended.

Modifications and additions to the guide were made to reduce repetitiveness, increase clarity and elicit further discussion. Question seven was added in order to get a clear understanding of the participants experience with violence before, during and after MMA involvement to better understand the link between violence, MMA and those who participate in MMA. Question eight was added to comprehend the competence of the athletes concerning the status and risk of the sport. Where and how do these athletes receive information regarding the risks inherent in MMA and whether they are fully informed are pertinent considerations. Two questions that were similar were amalgamated in order to reduce repetitiveness and confusion. Therefore the question concerning the level of violence that would drive them away and the 'redline' that they would not cross in MMA participation was formed into one question as they elicit the same discussion concerning limitations or extremes that may deter further participation. A question was added to facilitate discussion on what should happen if there was a death in order to understand their stance on this topic that could one day play a role in the banning or reform of the sport. A question was added to elicit discussion on general participation in MMA and the rights to participate in MMA as well as an opportunity to add any additional comments which was recommended by Patton (2002).

Other minor additions and editions include changing the order of questions to provide more connection between questions in order to build off previous discussions. In addition the pilot aided the development of the questionnaire and interview guide while

probing questions were formed and improved upon as the pilot study progressed (Berg, 2004). Despite these minor changes the questionnaire and interview guide appeared to promote the type of discussion needed to shed light on the ethics of MMA and answer the research questions of this study.

The main forms of analyses were conceptual and ethical analyses in reference to the review of literature, descriptive analysis of the questionnaire results, and then the formulation of emergent themes through the process of transcribing the interviews, coding and identifying patterns or themes of the interview data through triangulation (comparing the questionnaire and interview results together with my own insights or emic).

All interviews were transcribed excluding the names of participants to ensure anonymity and A1-A8 was used in replacement to identify athletes one to eight. In total there were 156 transcript pages produced which were read thoroughly and critically. The transcribed interviews were coded for common themes in relation to the boxing debate using open coding, inductive analysis and interpretive techniques. In the initial reading of the transcripts some common themes including limitations, risk, entertainment, referees among others were discovered. Autonomy, paternalism, the Harm Principle, violence, and reform were the ethical principles I used to analyze the emergent themes which had similarities to and differences from the boxing discussion. Other themes from the open coding process included training MMA and MMA competition experiences. Emergent themes shared among participants were categorized based on patterns, differences and accounts which were all summarized which is called meaning condensation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Coding was done by hand and in Microsoft Word and data was copied

and pasted to relative categories constructed throughout the process. The coding process could have been conducted in a computer program such as Atlas T.I. but the amount of data derived from these interviews was manageable and the use of a program was deemed unnecessary by my supervisor and me.

Following the open coding process selective coding was used to locate specific examples that related to one or more categories identified in the open coding process. The examination of the transcripts at the macro level with general themes and at the micro level with specific examples provided substantial data to interpret. Transcribed data from the questionnaire and interview transcriptions were examined in close association (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This multi-layered, interpretive approach to analyzing data sets including my own insights and experiences and those within the literature, allowed for triangulation and provided comprehensive data to successfully answer the research questions.

The next chapter will characterize and contextualize MMA and the UFC, identify the distinguishing features between MMA and boxing and explain the central ethical concepts and arguments related to the ethics of boxing debate. The fourth chapter will provide the results of the questionnaire and interview data, introduce, discuss and analyze the emergent themes, and will include quotations from the athletes as evidence of these themes. The final chapter will analyze the findings of chapter four in comparison to and collectively with the conceptual analysis of the boxing ethics debate together with my own emic to present a representation of MMA in order to determine if MMA is ethically defensible.

Chapter Three

Review of Literature

History, Context and Character

The evolution, organization and the history of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) date back to the ancient Greeks and the early Olympic sport of Pankration in which athletes used boxing and wrestling to compete against each other with few rules (Mayeda & Ching, 2008). Since the first martial arts competition during the time of Alexander the Great (circa 325 BCE), masters of multiple martial arts have realised that no one martial art is superior to another and fusing techniques into a hybrid style is most effective (Kochhar, Back, Mann, & Skinner, 2005). More recently the icon Bruce Lee was one of the first to advocate a mixing of styles in order to be most effective in combat whether in sport or real life scenarios. His tremendous influence in the late 1960s and the early 1970s stimulated a martial arts craze in the U.S.A. and around the world (Garcia & Malcolm, 2010).

Beginning in the 1990's the mixing of techniques became more dominant and practiced progressively from full contact karate, to K-1, a mixed striking based organization which led to a mix of all styles, including grappling and striking styles much like the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) (Garcia & Malcolm, 2010). Prior to the UFC however was the Brazilian version of MMA called Vale Tudo ('anything goes') competitions. Vale Tudo was formulated after Mitsuo Mayeda, a Japanese Jiu Jitsu master, taught the Gracie family the art which was modified by Hélio Gracie into the art known today as Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (Bledsoe, 2009). The Gracie's began Vale Tudo matches to prove the superiority of their art, which eventually made waves in the U.S. (Bledsoe, 2009). The UFC emerged in the U.S. when Rorion Gracie offered \$100,000 to

any opponent that could defeat him. The style of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (grappling art) established by the Gracie's led to the emergence of the UFC as the stage to test all martial arts styles against each other. This simultaneously created a platform for MMA to be developed using proven effective styles and discarding ineffective forms in an entertaining spectacle that would eventually shock the world (Garcia & Malcolm, 2010).

The introduction of MMA into the U.S.A. in 1993 (UFC 1) immediately faced scrutiny from legislators and medical professionals. Matches had no time limits, few rules, and no weight classes and were referred to as "human cockfighting," by Senator John McCain (Bledsoe, 2009). The sport was forced underground after losing television cable deals in 1997 but survived through the Internet and dedicated fans. In 2001, the UFC modified its rules and successfully lobbied Nevada and New Jersey athletic commissions to sanction MMA competitions. Cable television contracts and increased popularity ensued once promotional concentration shifted from reckless violence and brutality to legitimizing the sport through increased rules and regulations (Rainey, 2009; Spencer, 2012). The UFC continued to improve safety and reform to appease many more athletic commissions and legislative requests. Moreover, the UFC purchased rival organizations like PRIDE (a Japanese MMA organization) among others to amalgamate MMA as a global sport, increasing standardization of rules and solidifying the UFC as the top MMA organization in the world (Garcia & Malcolm, 2010). The sport continues to expand locally, regionally, nationally and globally and has a promising future, but several matters of concern can be raised regarding MMA.

When a person with no fighting or martial arts knowledge or experience watches MMA for the first time, a number of questions may come to mind. Is MMA unethical?

What is next; fights to the death? How many deaths have occurred, and should the sport be banned? Should MMA be reformed? Is it even a sport or merely a violent spectacle? Will this violence increase overall violence in society? Will MMA negatively impact society? What do MMA athletes consider ethical and unethical conduct to be and how do they experience MMA? These are relevant questions any member of society should be concerned with. Unfortunately the last question is asked the least and may be one of the most important. These are some of the questions I intend to investigate in this study and many are discussed in the literature to some degree.

Spencer (2012) and Mayeda and Ching (2008) examine briefly the ethical debate surrounding MMA through sociological lenses, observations, interviews and as participants. This discourse is relevant because MMA is a relatively new sport, and calls for its ban are at the forefront of the medical community and other agencies. MMA is expanding at an extraordinary rate, yet the focus of its violent nature and ethical status must be addressed even while it is advancing from an economic perspective (Spencer, 2012).

There is a growing concern that increasing the exposure of violence through MMA will increase overall social violence. This theory has been argued but remains inconclusive (Spencer, 2012). Many facts about MMA and MMA athletes are being misrepresented and misinterpreted by the public. The statistics and perceptions of the early days of MMA and the UFC are still being raised in today's discussion although the sport has evolved from a free for all, anything goes competition with few rules, into a legitimate sport with many rules and regulations. Although the sport has gone through substantial reform, organization and legitimization, the early years of the sport still haunt

the perception of the sport today (Spencer, 2012). MMA is now controlled by government legislation and state athletic commissions to ensure proper safety measures are taken. There are those that claim the sport's main goal is to glorify violence however the main objective as described by athletes is to win the competition (Spencer, 2012).

MMA is often considered unique with regard to violence, injury and risk. Contrary to popular belief, other sports contain equal or greater risk including higher levels of injury and death. Among these sports are rugby, football, ice hockey and boxing (Spencer, 2012). Boxing, which is etched in tradition and is accepted in most societies, is another sport some would like to abolish, but it remains accepted despite empirical evidence of death and injury that exceeds MMA (Spencer, 2012). Academics and scholars are included among those whose personal views often misrepresent and alter the perceptions and realities of MMA. Spencer (2012) specifically utilizes interviews, personal accounts and the concept of embodiment as methods to analyze MMA, and in relation to some of the ethical questions noted above, he suggests that MMA be reformed instead of advocating an outright ban.

Mayeda and Ching (2005) employ similar approaches to answering ethical questions surrounding MMA. Sociological inquiry, interviews, observations and personal experience were used to investigate the ethical questions surrounding MMA. These authors agree that reform seems to be the reasonable and most viable way to ethically assess and improve MMA. Fighting contests have existed throughout history suggesting that it will continue, so perhaps greater control and further reform of the sport are the most practical ways policy makers and organizers can ethically develop MMA. Yet the question of violence remains.

As stated in the previous chapter, violence is defined as the exertion of physical force to deliberately injure or harm another person or persons (Simon, 2004; Young, 2012). According to this definition violence can and does exist in many sports but only in an incidental indirect way, however violence in MMA is an intrinsic feature of the sport similar to boxing. In other words, one cannot compete and strive to win without violence in MMA and this is what prompts ethical questions to arise about the sport. It must be made clear that this characterization does not mean that violence in MMA necessarily leads to an increase in overall violence across society. Such a claim has no conclusive proof. For example, exposure to violent sport is the highest in Japan yet it is one of the safest countries in the world (Young, 2012). A general misunderstanding of MMA athletes and the sport is widespread. This error is fueled by society's confusion about individuals who voluntarily take part in MMA while its main goal is to intentionally cause harm.

Intent is a major topic in comprehending the nature of violence in MMA and the morality of the sport. Yet, how can this intent be measured or verified? According to the athletes, this intent is descriptively different than interpreted by the general public (Mayeda & Ching, 2008). Violence is experienced and understood in a much different way according to MMA athletes where it is normalized with years of training. Pain is experienced as a positive experience symbolizing hard work and attaining a heightened sense of belonging and experience (Spencer, 2012). Therefore the abuse and injuries suffered by these athletes may be defined and appreciated much differently than mere observers can understand. Rescuing MMA athletes from themselves on paternalistic grounds by limiting or banning the sport may not be justified depending on these athletes'

personal accounts which I intend to examine. There are also many positive attributes to MMA that go unnoticed including discipline, respect, kindness, sportsmanship, fitness and other honourable values (Mayeda & Ching, 2008).

MMA athletes are regular people in many respects and although their leisure and profession involve violence their behaviour in society does not necessarily increase or decrease the possibility of violence. Although it may appear that increasing the number of trained fighters may be cause for concern it may actually decrease street violence. People may be less likely to start street fights for fear of their victim being a trained MMA athlete. MMA athletes often do not want to get involved in public violence because they are satisfied from training in the gym which may provide them with a cathartic release. They also do not want injuries that could impede training or competition especially if it is their livelihood which is another reason why street fighting is often frowned upon (Mayeda & Ching, 2008).

MMA gyms promote non-violence in certain contexts and specifically educate members to know when it is acceptable to use their MMA skills. It is understood that within competition there is mutual consent between athletes to commit acts of violence but there are other times when using MMA skills are unacceptable. Educational systems, values and programs in the MMA gyms I attend teach anti-bullying, ways to avoid conflict, self defense techniques and an understanding that your skills are for competition and fitness or to save the life of another or your own. There are athletes in the UFC that have actually carried out heroic actions in order to aid fellow citizens from crime and harm. A UFC light heavyweight champion subdued a robber in New Jersey the night before his title fight and Roger Huerta, a UFC lightweight athlete, defended a woman that

was assaulted by a man (Chiappetta, 2011; Graham, 2010). Therefore MMA athletes are taught to employ their skills in suitable times only when they or someone else is in danger, or in sanctioned MMA training facilities and competitions.

Furthermore, since reforms were introduced to the sport in the 1990s MMA has become safer than many other sports (Mayeda & Ching, 2008). Lower numbers and reduced severity of injuries including traumatic brain injury in MMA have been demonstrated through quantitative empirical studies (Bledsoe, 2006; Bledsoe, 2009; Kochhar, 2005; Ngai, 2008). In most societies a certain level of violence is acceptable, and we must take this into consideration when analyzing the ethics of MMA. MMA athletes who pursue their passion mutually agree to engage in a violent sport, yet the media and public glorify this violence through imagery and meanings beyond the experiences of the athletes.

Even though the UFC is culpable in displaying MMA in this way, it has changed significantly over the years and it is time for the organization and sport to be reevaluated and understood accurately by including the current version of competition, training and athletes. Today there are Olympians participating in MMA as well as other professional athletes and injury rates and fatalities are much lower than assumed (Mayeda & Ching, 2008). A serious ethical inquiry of MMA needs to be undertaken that includes a critique of the medical profession and its negative stance toward MMA.

The medical profession has called for a ban on boxing for several decades and most recently MMA and their arguments are not without criticism (White, 2007). The medical profession is in favour of a ban based primarily on empirical evidence which will be discussed later. Research on boxing and MMA that investigate injuries refer to issues

of head trauma, risk and safety which are causes for concern and are used to support a ban on these sports (Buse, 2006). Defenders of boxing and MMA also make ethical arguments based on empirical evidence and this has led to an empirical battle between those who reject and advocate boxing and MMA from a moral point of view.

Another point raised by those who favour a ban is the intent to injure one's opponent in order to win (Lundberg, 2005). Intent to knock out your opponent and possibly cause death within the rules would be indefensible if it were a regular occurrence. However, there have been no deaths in sanctioned MMA events (although others have occurred in non-sanctioned matches) which is contrary to the history of boxing which has several deaths per year (Siegler, 1993). There is no question that acts of violence in MMA would be criminal activity outside the context of sport. For example, you would not be able to punch or knee someone in the street, but within the parameters of MMA the intent to injure is not defined as criminal for a number of reasons (Sokol, 2003).

The Harm Principle and paternalism are valuable ethical concepts that the medical profession employs to support a boxing and MMA ban. The Harm Principle refers to the idea that one is ethically justified to interfere in the lives of members of society against their will only to prevent their harming others. However for some, no such justification exists regarding the infliction of self-harm (Tamburrini, 2011). For example, boxing and MMA involve athletes harming each other, but athlete harm from ski jumping is self-inflicted and would not fall under the Harm Principle. Paternalism is the interference with the liberty of persons against their will in order to protect them from harming themselves because they are not considered fully rational or informed (Simon, 2004). Paternalistic

interference in children's sport is justified and perhaps among adult athletes who are unaware of the risks and dangers of certain sports like MMA. These ethical concepts are often enlisted to intervene on behalf of athletes to secure their safety and claim athletes need protection from harms such as those found in MMA. Critics of MMA add that athletes are often coerced into fighting or they are simply ignorant of the dangers of the sport and so the medical community and some legislators feel they must restrict the liberty of athletes for what is believed to be their own protection (BMA, 2008). However sport ethicists like Simon (2004) assert that constant interference would stunt moral and intellectual growth.

Another argument used to support the medical profession's call to ban MMA concerns the success or lack of negativity from countries that have banned MMA and boxing like Iceland. This argument refutes the idea that a ban would lead to underground fighting which does not appear to be the case in countries that have a ban in place (BMA, 2008). Critics say underground fighting would result if a ban were in place but this may not be a necessary consequence.

The British Medical Association (BMA) and other supporters of reforms ask the question, why are some boxing and MMA blows forbidden, like no hitting to the back of the head but not others? For example, why is it acceptable to forbid blows below the belt because damage is too great or risky, yet a blow to the brain is deemed acceptable even though these blows can cause death or serious debilitation? These are legitimate causes for concern and foster suggestions either for reform or moral justification to impose a ban. The critics do have a response to the argument which can be just as persuasive (Gillon, 1998).

However, there is an issue inherent to the ethics of boxing that is not present in MMA. There is a practice in boxing that increases risk to certain fighters where championship contenders are matched against boxers known as journeyman who are not expected to win. This strategy is used to build fighters' records to impressive statistics and essentially create champions with artificially inflated records. However this disingenuous technique is basically pitting less skilled athletes against higher skilled athletes where there is clearly an increased risk of harm. This approach is practiced, accepted and promoted in boxing. In contrast, the UFC has an opposing practice where fighters try to fight the best, equally matched and similarly motivated opponents which is supported by commissions and promoters alike. MMA athletes' records reflect this as a champion may have a staggered record like 20-15-0, which would not look like a boxing champion's record like Manny Pacquiao's record of 60-4. Boxing referees may add to the harm experienced by boxers with the standing eight count, 'pressing the action,' and not stopping the fight soon enough. Thus, there may be more reasons to curtail, ban or reform boxing by the medical community rather than MMA given the way the former sport is organized.

The Hippocratic Oath is a cardinal ideal that the medical profession upholds, and this oath is sometimes utilized to encourage a ban of boxing and MMA. In brief, the Hippocratic Oath is an ethical oath that holds the practice of medicine to the highest standards regarding patient safety and health in all aspects of life. Since boxing and MMA empirically cause injury and possible death, doctors must not support such sports because it goes against preserving the health and safety of people (Cohen, 1984).

However critics of the ban have a persuasive response to this line of reasoning. Critics argue that autonomy and liberty which are sovereign to human beings would be infringed if a ban were imposed. Just as patients have an absolute right to autonomy in the medical profession; and in fact patients may refuse treatment even if it leads to death, so too with boxers and MMA fighters. The autonomy of patients precedes beneficence (Sokol, 2011). Likewise, boxers and MMA athletes should have the freedom to refuse medical intervention, such as a call for a ban, to pursue their interests.

When supporters of the ban turn to empirical evidence to defend their position their arguments can be sufficiently countered. The empirical evidence that is utilized is limited because some of the statistics are from the early years of MMA, where the rules and legislation were much different than the modern version of MMA and the UFC under examination here (Buse, 2006). The empirical evidence in the literature is at best inconclusive, outdated and not convincingly substantiated. Also, when MMA is compared to other sports it is very similar in favour of empirical evidence of injury and risk (Sokol, 2011). For example a 900-page report describing medical aspects of boxing to support a ban was so inconsistent and unreliable it was considered discredited due to unreliable testing methods. It pointed out that Muhammad Ali is often used to portray the effects boxing may have on the brain based on comments by promoters and media opinions not medical research. In fact, the Mayo clinic reported that Ali does not suffer from boxing related neurological conditions (McCrorry, 2002).

The medical associations are passionate about protecting the athletes from harm but why are MMA and boxing singled out and no other high risk sports? This suggests a grave inconsistency and questions the intentions behind the calls for a ban. The possible

offensiveness of these sports does not justify a ban (Sokol, 2011). Other risk sports lack the intent that supporters argue is the issue with boxing and MMA. The intent in the eyes of boxers and MMA fighters is to win, not kill, maim or injure (Sokol, 2004). Athletes could kill each other within the rules of boxing and MMA which is an argument provided by ban supporters. This argument cannot be sustained as other sports such as cricket could cause death from a ball striking the head of an athlete during competition, which is still within the rules and would not result in penalty (Sokol, 2004). These acts would all result in punishment outside of the sport context. For example just as you would not be able to randomly box someone in the street or engage in MMA combat you would not be able to execute a rugby tackle or wrestling take down against a non-consenting member of society (Sokol, 2004).

Naysayers of boxing and MMA do not need to watch these sports for these spectacles take place in the media and live events which one can ignore (Sokol, 2004). MMA is safe compared to boxing according to empirical comparisons and boxing is safe compared to other sports, and both sports are safer than ever (Bledsoe, 2005; Bledsoe, 2006; Bledsoe, 2009). Still, more ethical investigation and discussion are needed related to the harm the sport may be having on athletes and society. Unfortunately the colourful discourse of these sports is often emphasized over the practice, resulting in an unfair bias and distorted representation of the sport (Sokol, 2004). A pattern emerges from the literature suggesting an overall lack of conclusive knowledge about MMA. With this in mind perhaps the medical community should be limited to providing advice and information in order to maintain the autonomy of athletes who may want to box and participate in MMA (Herrera & Leclerc, 1999).

Empirical Evidence

The empirical evidence on MMA risks and injuries is minimal, inconclusive and mostly displays the sports early more dangerous years. Now MMA is safer, reformed, and overseen by governments and athletic commissions. The following studies have been analyzed in order to add to the moral debate surrounding MMA and clarify some of the reasons why a ban has been ordered.

Risk of cervical injuries in MMA is a concern and such injuries have potentially devastating consequences (Kochar, Back, Mann, & Skinner, 2005). This article analyzed four MMA techniques including the o goshi (hip throw), suplex (takedown), souplesse (takedown), and guillotine (choke). These techniques were shown to have substantial capacity of promoting cervical injuries. These techniques simulate impacts and results from rear impact vehicle collisions.

Buse (2006) who conducted a 10-year review of MMA competition found compelling evidence to promote a ban but the data was taken from early MMA competition before the rules and sanctioning improved. This study used matches from the earliest most brutal form of MMA where rules and equipment were minimal compared to today's version of the sport. Notable findings include the number of athletes that were grapplers compared to strikers. Stoppages due to head impact were higher than any other combat sport including *boxing*. Head trauma was, however, counted if the athlete submitted to strikes not necessarily succumbing to a knockout as the option to surrender is prevalent. An important note to consider is that evidence was assembled from video footage not medical records (Buse, 2006).

In another study, incidence of injury in professional MMA competitions investigated the number of injuries sustained by the athletes. Notable findings include injuries sustained were mainly to the head including facial lacerations which was the primary cause of injury. KO's were not included in the study although these are the most serious form of injury. MMA has undergone substantial reform creating a safer version of MMA which has shown to have less KO's than boxing. However, it was concluded that further research is needed in all areas of MMA (Bledsoe et al., 2006).

A more recent study examined MMA competitions between 2002 and 2007 and found contrasting results when compared to the longitudinal study described above (Ngai, Levy, & Hsu, 2008). These authors found that the KO did not occur as frequently as was noted in the earlier study. Critical injury appeared low similar to other combat sports. Matches ended mostly in decision or submission which resulted in lower risk of critical injury like traumatic brain injury. Plus the researchers found the frequency of referee and physician involvement increased which elevated the level of safety and decreased risk among MMA athletes (Ngai, Levy, & Hsu, 2008).

In a chapter on MMA in the book *Combat Sports Medicine*, Bledsoe (2009) reviewed the current medical literature on MMA. Although more research is needed, MMA appears to be as safe as other striking combat sports and contributors to safety include the option to submit, fewer rounds, and lack of a standing eight count. There have been numerous deaths in other combat sports but none in professional sanctioned MMA matches (Bledsoe, 2009).

Another study determined the prevalence and assessed the severity of injuries among MMA athletes as part of the discussion to decrease trauma noted by earlier

investigations (Rainey, 2009). As such, prevalence, severity, location and type of injury sustained in MMA matches were analyzed. It was found that head injuries were common but their severity was relatively minor while concussions remained statistically low. The study suggested possible benefits to MMA and supports recommendations for reform but stated that drastic rule changes may be premature (Rainey, 2009).

The above studies offer relevant evidence for the overall safety and relatively low prevalence and frequency of serious injury in MMA. Arguments that claim MMA is ethically defensible can be based on such empirical evidence and when compared to other combat and team contact sports the harms and physical risks in MMA are not so alarming. Admittedly, further studies are needed to see if reforms in MMA have increased or reduced the harms and risks in the sport but such inquiries need to be conducted in all sports that contain violence. Rule changes and other structural amendments in MMA over the past decade have resulted in a progressive decrease in injuries and risks. Specifically, fewer rounds, the option to surrender, doctors and referee intervention, no standing eight count, grappling and equipment changes partly explain how MMA is safer but still committed to acts of violence. It is helpful to elaborate on each of these factors.

With fewer rounds MMA fighters stay energized and alert in order to properly defend themselves throughout a match. Fewer rounds also limits the time where blows to the head may accumulate or occur. Boxing allows 12 rounds, three minutes each for a total of 36 minutes every match, while MMA allows three rounds, five minutes each, or five rounds, five minutes each for main event matches, that total 15 or 25 minutes of competition. Overall, more three round fights take place yearly than five, resulting in a

total lower number of minutes MMA athletes are in competition compared to other combat sports like boxing.

The option to tap out or surrender is acceptable and prevalent in MMA allowing for reduced traumatic injury. Surrendering before traumatic injury occurs drastically lowers risk. Tapping out to strikes or submission preserves the health of the athlete and reduces overall violence. This option drastically lowers the amount and severity of physical damage and sets MMA apart from other combat sports.

Doctors and referees frequently stop matches due to damage or the increase risk of injury. Doctors will stop the fight if any sign of fracture, vision impairment, or an increase in sustaining further injury is prevalent in order to protect the athlete from further injury. Referees stop the match to protect the athlete from unnecessary punishment if he is not intelligently defending himself. Such stoppage is at the referee's discretion and early stoppages are more frequent than stoppages that occur late in a match. This is a much different situation than in boxing.

The standing eight count in boxing allows the boxer the opportunity to recover after sustaining head trauma. This recovery is superficial at best and usually results in the boxer suffering further damage and most commonly a knockout. The standing eight count in boxing promotes further violence, knockouts and loss of autonomy. The stoppages and lack of an eight count in MMA foster increased safety, reduced chances for traumatic head injury and the preservation of future autonomy.

Another element in MMA that reduces injury and risk is the extended periods of grappling which include the clinch (standing grappling) or ground grappling. Fighting in these positions reduces the amount of strikes thrown due to oppositional strategies, the

available appendages to strike with, and the force of strikes because competitors are in very close proximity to one another or they are tangled up. Allowing grappling in MMA lowers the chances of serious head injury because the head strikes are less frequent and powerful, and the focus often shifts to submissions and other strategies. The latter encourage tapping out which as discussed previously reduces risk of traumatic injury and harm.

Finally, although equipment is minimal in MMA consisting of lightweight gloves with exposed fingers, mouth-guard and groin protection, what little there is still fosters a certain measure of safety. A number of studies call for equipment changes but specific suggestions and how athletes would respond to such reforms are rarely reported. If one considers boxing gloves, there is evidence today that suggests that the gloves may actually cause more severe head injuries. This is due to the fact that boxing gloves grip the head and cause a whiplash effect on the skull and brain. Boxing gloves allow the boxer to punch harder without damaging the hands and the recipient of punches incurs more repetitive blows which may add to harm and continuous punishment. By contrast, MMA gloves increase the amount of glancing blows which reduce head impact and increase lacerations which in turn increase stoppages. One must also consider that the KO is not the premier objective to stop MMA matches unlike boxing. Plus, the use of elbows is permitted in MMA competitions which increases lacerations and stoppages. Gloves in MMA are primarily designed and worn to reduce hand injuries. Although equipment reforms may include head gear to protect the head, such a change is not a serious consideration at the moment.

In conclusion, the findings of the empirical studies discussed above add and detract from ethical arguments that claim MMA is an ethical or unethical practice. The evidence against MMA safety and the level and severity of harms and risks in the sport are basically inconclusive, although they provide the basis for further continuing investigation. Empirical evidence is a good way to compare MMA to boxing and other high risk sports where violence exists. These articles also provide interesting suggestions for reform which will be expanded upon in the thesis. The articles also demonstrate that the early years of MMA were much more brutal than what is practiced and seen today. Finally, based on empirical evidence, a ban on MMA is difficult to justify from a moral perspective. The harms and physical risks are not overly excessive and intolerable within the sport itself and when compared to boxing and other combative and team contact sports.

Boxing

There are several reasons why I must turn to the literature on boxing ethics to determine whether MMA is ethical. The first reason is because of the lack of ethical research and literature on MMA. Few sport philosophers and ethicists have written about this sport. This is partly due to the short history of the sport, its more recent popularity, and the unpredictable future of MMA. However now that this future seems inevitably promising, more attention will be given to the sport and the ethical issues that surround it. On the other hand, the literature on boxing is extensive considering its long history, organizational stability and wide public acceptance. Moreover, boxing has undergone virtually the same scrutiny and discussion surrounding violence, safety and morality, especially with recent calls to ban the sport by the medical community. There are aspects

inherent to both sports that directly relate to each other on ethical grounds mainly because of the structure and objectives of each sport. For example both sports uniquely share the intent to injure the opponent as a main goal and this is considered the most detrimental and immoral aspect of both sports by some. They both resemble street violence in terms of fighting and have been scrutinized by legislators and the medical profession.

However, there are some inherent differences between boxing and MMA and when compared may reveal different moral questions and answers. Although they share the intent to injure, and have raised fears about the detrimental effects on athletes and society, the differences and similarities between the sports are what make the ethical questions posed in this investigation unique. In MMA there have been far less injury and death, and the methods to attain victory differ dramatically. An athlete may win through a variety of methods in MMA that may not cause the same damage suffered by boxers. Shorter rounds, submission, frequent referee stoppage, styles and empirical medical evidence sets MMA apart from boxing.

Further, the call to ban MMA follows on the heels of those who would like to see boxing abolished even though the latter has a rich history and following. The two sports are similar in their quest, but are the two similar morally or do the differences between them set them apart when discussing their possible abolishment? If boxing should be banned then perhaps MMA should be as well? By examining MMA and the views of MMA athletes in this study I hope to critically highlight and appraise the sport's unique characteristics, ethically and otherwise, but to do so effectively requires that I refer to the literature on the ethics of boxing.

Ethics and Concepts

In the following discussion, a number of authors raise similar ethical questions within their respective arguments and perspectives related to the ethics of boxing and introduce diverse concepts relevant to this study. Autonomy, paternalism, the Harm Principle, violence, legal moralism, utilitarianism, communitarianism, catharsis, intent and reform are ideas that arise when boxing ethics are discussed. These concepts are also elicited to defend or oppose a ban of boxing. Examination of the boxing ethics debate will facilitate the discussion of the ethical status of MMA.

Autonomy

Autonomy, which refers to one's independence, free will to act and right to self-determination, is one of a number of concepts of the highest order in moral philosophy. Without recognition and respect of personal autonomy human beings would not be accorded the ability to pursue their interests and desires relatively unimpeded. For example, a ban of boxing may be viewed as an extreme form of paternalism and infringe on the autonomy of boxers. Denying boxers their freedom to box and express themselves would exceed any physical pain they experience in the ring (Burke, 1998). Boxing is not something these individuals do, it is what they are. A ban on boxing would effectively deny boxers the freedom to control their lives as they see fit within acceptable social parameters (Burke, 1998).

Currently in the medical field, autonomy supersedes beneficence and patients have the absolute right to express their autonomy over the advice of healthcare professionals (Sokol, 2011). This means patients have the right to refuse treatment even if their refusal results in worsening their condition or death. This view however is inconsistent with the British Medical Association's (BMA) effort to ban boxing. Whereas

patients have the autonomy and right to refuse treatment to fulfill their wishes, even to their detriment, the same autonomy and right would not be accorded to boxers if boxing were banned. A critical feature of autonomy also means individuals have sovereignty over themselves, their bodies and minds. Although reasonable limits to personal autonomy can be imposed by society, like the requirement to wear helmets when riding motorcycles, severely restricting autonomy is contrary to the ideals of liberal democratic societies. As it stands, the BMA's proposition to ban boxing is at odds with the respect for autonomy it accords to patients (Sokol, 2011).

Leclerc and Herrera (1999) also discuss the interference of physicians with regard to the autonomy of boxers. Legal restrictions like a ban of boxing would infringe on the autonomy of boxers, but they ask further, how would the medical profession restrict boxers when it is up to legislators to impose this type of intervention? As such medical professionals should do their jobs and educate athletes on the risks in their respective sports which actually enhance the autonomy of boxers to make informed decisions (Leclerc & Herrera, 1999). The autonomy of physicians should also be considered because medical doctors exercise a tremendous amount of freedom in their practices. If they really have a genuine concern for boxers they would recognize that just as they enjoy their autonomy they should not deny the very activity that fulfills the lives of boxers and preserves their autonomy. Physician autonomy is also expressed by some refusing to serve as ringside doctors or giving consent to under age boxers (Leclerc & Herrera, 1999). Autonomy should also be understood in comparison to other high risk sports where no bans are being called for to know why precisely are sports like boxing and MMA targets of bans (Herrera, 2004). The medical profession's role should be

limited to information, education and advice and respect for autonomy should be equal for boxers just as it is for patients (Sokol, 2004).

Some argue that boxing is ethical because boxers mutually consent to practice the sport which in effect means that autonomy is the strongest moral defense of boxing. Boxers consent to violence and all the resulting factors critics find repulsive (Young, 2012). As stated earlier, personal autonomy can sometimes conflict with community standards, but this is not the case in boxing which is an immensely popular sport. If the sport were truly offensive or harmful to the public then a majority of people would likely petition to have the sport banned. Moreover, boxing advocates state that if boxers agree to fight they should be able to do so because they harm no one but themselves. Critics may warn the public of the real and perceived dangers of boxing but beyond that they should not intervene to have the sport abolished. Detractors of boxing also claim that it has a desensitizing effect on society, but there is no evidence to support this (Herrera, 2002; Simon, 2004).

Intervention by the state can only be warranted if protection from harm can be shown to override the decisions of competent adults to participate in high risk sports. If such protection from harm cannot be conclusively demonstrated then no one has the right to interfere with freely chosen activities (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). Boxing therefore may be defended by appealing to ideas like freedom, autonomy, consent and non-interference. In many ways boxing is less harmful than other sports like football and ice hockey, so if harm warrants a ban on boxing maybe these other sports should be banned as well. Plus, the positive attributes of boxing are not given proper consideration. Values such as, discipline, character development, enjoyment and a route out of poverty depict

boxing in a positive light (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). These positive aspects of boxing must be considered including the health benefits, cultural traditions and economic opportunities the sport provides and that adult boxers have the right to participate if they are fully informed about boxing's benefits and risks (Heilbronner et al., 2009). Those opposed to boxing may not fully understand the sport and what it offers its participants, and in turn, what taking it away may do to boxers (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). In this sense, how can a proper judgment and review be conducted if critics do not fully comprehend all aspects of the sport including the experiences of the athletes?

The mere fact certain sports are constituted by or accept fighting is insufficient reason to have them abolished. Fighting exists in professional ice hockey and lacrosse but they do not face a ban. Whereas fighting in these sports is peripheral and could be removed without altering the basic structure of the sports, boxing and MMA have no such solution. Still, any call for a ban of a particular sport would severely limit individual freedom, including sports where participants agree to fight periodically (Warburton, 1998). Adults should be allowed to box, engage in MMA and fight in ice hockey and lacrosse if they choose to, which supports the concept of autonomy (Schneider & Butcher, 2001).

Some argue that autonomy alone may not reveal one is making informed decisions. For example, the mere fact a person chooses to box demonstrates incompetency and a lack of being informed. Boxers may not be educated about the risks of boxing, come from disadvantaged backgrounds and see boxing as their only escape from poverty, which shows they are not fully autonomous (Simon, 2004). The prohibition of boxing is justified because it would not be an option for certain individuals who would

then have to select other means to improve their lives (Simon, 2004). But on this view, who should have the right to determine and control the quality of life of others? The autonomy of even the most impoverished, destitute people should be preserved by providing them with more life choices rather than taking away such options, even ones we may not fully approve of. Lewandowski (2007) also refers to autonomy and being denied the opportunity to choose boxing in the context of constraint theory. On this view, constraints always impact one's autonomy and it is difficult to discern the degree to which autonomy is limited or unimpeded. Although this determination may not be clear and accurate in every case, researchers indicate autonomy ought to be preserved as much as possible despite being constrained.

Current thinking about autonomous decisions also includes the importance of setting the course for one's future self. Thus athletes who choose high risk sports like boxing exercise a high level of autonomy to pursue their immediate interests and the way they wish to organize their lives in the future. Curtailing autonomy would hinder an individual's ability to define who they are and what they wish to become. Such restrictions have nothing to do with harm to society because it focuses on the transformation of individuals as they deem important (Dixon, 2001).

Finally, Tamburrini (2011) discusses the ideas of autonomy and happiness. Each person is their own maker through autonomous actions. Free life experiments, like choosing to box, encourage autonomy by promoting self-knowledge which is conducive to happiness (Tamburrini, 2011). Arguably there can be no happiness without autonomy which means that a ban on boxing not only infringes on one's autonomy but one's potential to seek happiness.

Paternalism

Paternalism refers to limiting the liberty of others for what is believed to be their own good (Heilbrunner et al., 2009). Certain laws are enacted to protect people from themselves and prevent them from making what are presumably bad personal choices (Warburton, 1998). For example, mandatory seat belt laws are paternalistic. Paternalism is a central argument among boxing ban advocates because they are in effect saying they know what is in the best interests of boxers and boxers must be protected from themselves. If boxing is deemed unethical then perhaps actions in the ring should be considered assault with legal consequences and the law must step in to protect boxers from harm (Davis, 1994). If the sport is judged ethical there should be no legal and paternalistic intervention. The idea of protecting people from harm is also questionable. Pain, injury and harm in themselves are not immoral. When people undergo surgery they typically endure a certain level of pain and injury with the goal of eventually leading a healthier, happier life. Even though participating in sport is a voluntary pursuit, unlike a needed surgery, if athletes select sports that include a certain level of harm, there is insufficient reason to protect them from harm and deny their pursuit of happiness. What type and level of injury, how and when do they occur and how should pain be measured and what degree of pain would warrant paternalistic intervention to ban certain sports like boxing (Davis, 1994)?

To answer these questions, paternalists distinguish different types of paternalism. Soft paternalism limits the liberty of and protects people from harm, those who are not fully competent, rational or knowledgeable, for example, children and people with dementia or mental illness. Hard paternalism interferes with the liberty of mature,

competent, rational and informed adults (Dixon, 2001). For example, those who ride motorcycles are required by law to wear helmets. In the case of boxing, soft paternalism is invoked by those who believe it should not be a sport taken up by children. In many cases, such prohibitions may be justified to protect children from harm and promote their well-being. On the other hand, supporters of a boxing ban also enlist a hard paternalistic stance by insisting competent adults require protection from harm and from themselves.

A novel third position is offered by Dixon (2001) who introduces a kind of paternalism, called pre-emptive paternalism, to justify a specific reform in boxing. In order to be fully autonomous one must be aware as much as possible of the information regarding one's decisions. The boxing discussion suggests that there is coercion in the sport because numerous athletes are from disadvantaged backgrounds where boxing may be their only chance to escape their current economic status and deprived life situation (Dixon, 2001). Since brain damage decreases autonomy, pre-emptive paternalism which calls for a ban of punches to the head in boxing is justified to prevent a boxer's future loss of autonomy (Dixon, 2001). The loss of autonomy suffered by boxers is unique to them and cannot be directly compared to patients who decide to end their own life by refusing treatment. However, Dixon argues that autonomous decisions of the current self can be overridden if the possibility of jeopardizing one's future autonomous self is sufficiently high. In this sense, if boxing puts autonomy at risk then it can be restricted for paternalistic reasons, by prohibiting punches to the head for example, in order to protect the future autonomy of boxers.

Another area where paternalism can be invoked is institutional violence where policies or regulations create unjust situations for people who may be exploited or

oppressed (Simon, 2004). Boxing violence may fall under this characterization if it takes advantage of boxers by withholding from them the risks in the sport. Managers, promoters and athletic commissions presumably guide and monitor the welfare of boxers from a paternalistic stance for their own good (Simon, 2004). However, a criticism of paternalism is that it can be inefficient and too restrictive. In this sense, paternalistic decisions may not promote the most utility or good for athletes and it may unreasonably infringe upon and excessively limit the autonomy of athletes.

Restricting the autonomy of adult boxers based on paternalism is not a compelling argument. When this relatively weak argument is coupled with the lack of relevant evidence suggesting that boxing increases violence in society, there is no conclusive moral basis for banning boxing. Moreover, boxers exhibit important virtues that go unaccounted for like discipline, perseverance, courage and heart. Boxers can positively influence people and thus improve society by demonstrating positive traits and being good role models for youth (Simon, 2004).

Another feature of boxing that goes unnoticed is that boxers are a community of people who believe and share many practices, ideologies and rituals (Burke, 1998). Without a collective of like-minded athletes it would be difficult for them to pursue their dreams and share the joy of competition and other personally uplifting characteristics uniquely important to them as athletes. A ban on boxing would eliminate this community publicly and would unfairly deny its member the ability to fulfill their desires and interests. By condemning and abolishing an entire practice community of people for paternalistic reasons that say non-boxers know better, is unjust and foolish (Burke, 1998). Protecting boxers from violence as perceived by outsiders and calling for the elimination

of an entire practice community causes more harm than good by perpetuating myths about boxing and ignoring the virtues of the sport (Burke, 1998).

Paternalistic reasoning employed by organizations like the British Medical Association (BMA) falls short of the companions-in-guilt move because in order to be consistent in their paternalism pronouncements they should admit that smoking, rugby and a whole range of activities should also be banned (Warburton, 1998). The BMA holds a double standard in their paternalistic declarations because they target a ban only on boxing and MMA and no other sports and activities that also cause harm. A ban of boxing based on paternalistic grounds can be considered only if it can be shown conclusively to produce more good than harm and be implemented consistently and not selectively, all things being equal (Warburton, 1998). At the moment, these two conditions have not been met.

Finally, medical experts warn and make restrictions on various issues but where boxing is concerned these experts' warnings are not enough to justify paternalism (Herrera, 2002). It is not clear that paternalism is the key issue to begin with (Herrera, 2002). Paternalism may not be justified because others may not know your best interests, their reasons are not yours for pursuing boxing, their morality should not be imposed upon others, it would lead to too much meddling in peoples' affairs, and all competent adults should have the right to control their lives as they see fit (Herrera, 2002).

Legal Moralism

If paternalism is rejected legal moralism is another concept that must be considered because some people argue that professional boxing and other sports like MMA are morally repugnant due to their primary goal whereby opponents try to

incapacitate one another (Dixon, 2001; Garcia & Malcolm, 2010). Legal moralism refers to the idea that some activities are immoral regardless of any resultant harms and the law has the right to intervene to halt such activities (Warburton, 1998). Legal moralism and harm are principles that must be considered when debating the morality of boxing (Dixon, 2001). Legal moralism permits one to restrict actions on grounds of immorality regardless of whether it is harmless or harmful. The primary idea is to encourage boxers not to treat each other as objects. The consent that boxers provide does not necessarily absolve them from engaging in a public activity where intentional harm is inflicted between two people. For example, moral legalism would prohibit a sport where two athletes consent to go in a ring with swords and fight each other until one was wounded and unable to continue the match simply because this activity would be abhorrent. Similarly, even if spectators enjoyed watching such activities, paid money to see the best sword play, such sadism and bloodlust could be halted for no other reason than the law declares it repulsive and thus illegal. In a similar vein, Dixon (2001) discusses a case if gladiatorial contests were to make a comeback, even if such a development occurred with the consent of athletes and the public, moral legalism could declare such sport hideous and ban it. Although boxing and MMA are not in these categories, legal moralism may be invoked to declare that punches to head are disgusting and should be banned even if sufficient harm is not evident or safety measures are not guaranteed (Dixon, 2001).

Harm Principle

Health and safety, intentional harm, violence and social responsibility are the main ideas within arguments leveled against boxing. At the moment there are no conclusive ethical reasons to ban boxing and if such a ban were enforced the sport might

go underground which would increase rather than deter harm. Besides, there are other dangerous sports like football and ice hockey that flourish uncontested (Jones, 2001). All sports contain a measure of risk, even death. However not all risky sports should be deemed unethical and be banned, yet many people believe that since boxing involves risk it is immoral and should be abolished (Jones, 2001). Harm in boxing is scored through a point system and the winner is usually victorious for causing the greatest harm. Intentionally harming another person in most instances is morally wrong, and since the aim of boxing is to intentionally harm, therefore boxing is unethical (Jones, 2001). Advocates of boxing claim the intent of the sport is to win not harm or maim one's opponent; however with a scoring system that rewards pain and injury boxing may be difficult to justify (Jones, 2001). Other martial and grappling arts may be subject to the same type of argument but the risks and harms in a sport like Jiu Jitsu for example are qualitatively different than boxing (Jones, 2001).

In general and whenever reasonably possible, harm to sport participants and members of society should be minimized and avoided. The harm caused to society is unproven but is often raised in this debate (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). There must be some harm suffered by society in one manner or another for example desensitizing society to violence which can occur in live audiences, television, pay per view, internet and sports bars (Dixon, 2001). Taking pleasure in watching others suffer creates a possible retreat from whatever moral progress we have made in society (Dixon, 2001). Boxing according to some is barbaric and uncivilized behaviour which in itself should justify a ban because our goal in contemporary society is mostly to be non-violent. The Harm Principle, which states that one may interfere in the liberty of people to prevent

them from harming others, can be applied because even if boxers give consent to fight one another, consent by the public to be exposed to such harm is not unanimous (Dixon, 2001). Boxing is also associated with criminal activity like organized crime and gambling which is harmful to society (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). However, the problem with this argument is that no empirical research supports the idea that boxing increases overall harm, violence and anti-social behaviour in society (Dixon, 2001).

As stated, the Harm Principle declares that limiting people's actions is only justified if it is to prevent harm to other individuals (Tamburrini, 2011). What boxers and MMA athletes do is different than other risk and combat sports whose objectives and skills are not directed toward intentionally harming opponents (Burke, 1998). For some, the intent and goal of boxing make it inappropriate and unethical (Schneider & Butcher, 2001; BMA, 2011). Boxing is plagued with evidence of head injury despite the use of gloves which may actually increase trauma to the brain, not to mention eye damage and psychological harm (Schneider & Butcher, 2001; Heilbronner et al., 2009; BMA, 2011). However, boxing must involve a greater level of pain and injury than other sports to be considered immoral or indefensible based on harm (Davis, 1994). The same types of harm can be seen in other sports so perhaps they should be considered immoral and be subject to a ban?

Violence

Violence is defined as the execution of physical force to deliberately injure another person or persons (Simon, 200; Young, 2012). There are many types of violence including wanted and unwanted, violence against the self and others (Young, 2012). In order for violence to be inflicted upon another, others are typically seen as objects and

not subjects (Burke, 1998). Boxers do not consider the normal practice of boxing violent and to reduce a multifaceted practice to a single façade of violence is unfair and prejudiced (Burke, 1998; Spencer, 2012). Fighters see their profession as a skilled bodily craft that involves controlled violence and a site to gain pleasure (Burke, 1998). Many sports include legitimate socially sanctioned forms of violence and the position of the participants on the subject need to be considered (Burke, 1998). Burke suggests boxing is not violent or immoral using various examples and ethical concepts including autonomy, paternalism, and the harm principle. He also argues that boxing is not violent or unethical based on elements such as the media, violence in context, community, and language. He appeals to the experiences of boxers who hone their skills and follow a strict set of rules, yet they also enjoy a certain measure of pain and suffering unique to the sport. Those who criticize boxing fail to appreciate these experiential dimensions and find it easy and convenient to unjustly reject the sport (Burke, 1998).

Another criticism of boxing is the charge that it unnecessarily glorifies and promotes violence in the public domain (Davis, 1994). Society suffers by allowing boxing to exist because it leads to overall moral decay and fosters more violence in society. Davis (1994) discusses a fantasy game called Mayhem where consenting combatants agree to fight to the death in an arena. He discusses the differences of boxing and Mayhem by pointing out boxing has medical supervision, death is rare not inevitable, rules, timed rounds and distinct skills. Boxing contains violence but it is controlled and strictly managed. There is no evidence suggesting that boxing violence increases the overall violence in society nor is there evidence suggesting removal of the sport would decrease overall violence in society (Davis, 1994).

The earlier idea of taking pleasure watching others suffer which might lead to the social acceptance of further violence is apparently evident today. For example, a new sport called Ultimate Taser Ball is a game similar to Swedish handball but uses an oversized ball and allows non-lethal Taser shocks against the person with the ball as a permissible tactic. The fact that this sport has recently come into fruition questions the progression of violence and where sport violence may be heading. This is the type of influence that may lead to increased acceptance of violence and heightened levels of harm due to decreased sensitivity toward violence which ultimately may lead to the playing of games like Mayhem. Although Ultimate Taser Ball is a relatively new sport and played in limited circles it appears to incorporate new forms of violence that inflicts new harms. Whether this sport will promote increased levels of anti-social behaviour is unclear. A similar lack of clarity exists in boxing as an inherently violent sport. (Dixon, 2001).

Unlike sports networks, channels and promoters, the mainstream media portrays boxing, and similarly MMA, in a negative, biased light. However boxing organizations, the UFC and other affiliated associations offer support and also exhibit a positive media image of their respect sports. The popular media places an overemphasis on the violence inherent in boxing, promotes negative stereotypes of the sport's athletes, goals and language. These are entertaining to the average fan and tolerated by the connoisseurs of boxing; as the mainstream media creates a degrading and demoralizing perception of boxing to the public. The most underrepresented view in the media is that of boxers (Burke, 1998).

We live in a society that has violent aspects in many different areas so why do some target violence in boxing specifically? Violence that occurs in normal life is much different from the violence that occurs inside the parameters of boxing. The contextual morality that boxing provides along with the mutual respect that is held amongst boxers redefines the notion of violence that we associate with boxing (Burke, 1998). The description of violence that boxers provide is much different than that among those not within the practice community and this stems from the mutual respect and unique membership they hold dear. Boxers say that boxing is not violent as such and that boxing actually fosters many positive attributes that are highly regarded in life like dedication, honour, hard work, sportsmanship and many other virtues. Although this is what boxers have said it may not necessarily be true or transferable to MMA which could be different or misunderstood. Boxers do not see each other as objects but see one another as subjects, which entails new meanings of the notion of violence (Burke, 1998). This perspective is contrary to an objective view towards boxers which is a necessary component to the violence argument. Moreover, violence poses a threat to the middle class idea of the human body where the body is viewed as tame, disciplined and treated moderately without abuse and excess. This idea contributes to opposition against boxing because it creates a negative view of boxing and misrepresents violence within the sport (Burke, 1998).

The language of boxers and those who oppose them differ greatly and unfortunately such athletes have few opportunities to be heard, and surely we should listen to those who engage in the practice. The essence of fighting may not be captured linguistically or properly by those who box and support the sport. This may drastically

diminish the ability to justify boxing and similar sports like MMA (Burke, 1998). Once we try to comprehend and formulate a description of the violence as best we can using the language of those involved, we will be closer to understanding the participants, as well as the violence that occurs in this unique environment (Burke, 1998).

A person claiming self-defence must prove the level of self-defence was justified. A person who is attacked may use a required level of force to prevent impending injury. Required force is considered the amount of force needed to stop an attack which can take the form of verbal defense to deadly force depending on the threat level. Self-defence need not be violent per se as described by Jones (2001) because it is morally justified and depends on the threat, but self defense or defense within a sport which is a voluntary pursuit is more a tactical procedure. If a boxer attacked an opponent beyond the expectations of the sport a more violent response might be justified. While the idea of self-defence being violent is a possibility, its likelihood in sport is a minimal expectation (Jones, 2001).

The problem with boxing is that violence is a central feature of the sport in the ring and sometimes outside it (Lewandowski, 2007). For example violence is promoted throughout the lead up to the fight with prefight trash talking and goals of the fighters exchanged. "I want to eat your children," a famous quote Mike Tyson said as he taunted his future opponent Lennox Lewis. This exposes a mean spiritedness that is morally unacceptable and uncalled for (Lewandowski, 2007). Such violent episodes only compound the fact that boxing is inherently violent.

Heightened levels of violence were apparent in the early days of MMA but with time and an increase in the variety of techniques these have subsided (Sanchez &

Malcolm, 2010). The development of MMA has been guided by sensitivity to harm and excessive violence. MMA promoters have reduced violence by making rule changes and decreasing spectacular, shocking forms of violence (Sanchez & Malcolm, 2010). For example there are no knees or kicks to the head of a grounded opponent. The early years of MMA involved reckless and uncontrolled violence compared to modern MMA which is still violent but the level of control of the violence has increased due to greater technical skill, rule changes and referee intervention among other factors.

Violence in boxing has been analyzed through scientific and legal investigations which offer unique perspectives into the violence in boxing discussion. Assault and contact sports are separated by consent and public policies (Brayne, Sargeant, & Brayne, 1998). Intent to cause harm even severely injuring or killing another during a boxing match is legal within the sport rules. Promoters must ensure adequate medical care for boxers at matches and if this is not followed then a severely injured boxer may sue the promoter (Brayne, et al., 1998). The courts may also place limits on boxing without government legislation and judges can make new laws when public opinion changes or there is a gap in the law; however no court has ever decided a case regarding the legality of boxing (Brayne, et al., 1998). Keep in mind that regardless of legal issues, the ethical examination of boxing is not the same as its legal status.

The discussion of MMA violence in the literature is brief but some considerations are valuable and when compared to boxing may alter one's understanding of both sports and their moral differences. The fact that MMA has grappling and striking options throughout a match alters the levels of violence which are dependent on a fighter's style and amount of time spent either grappling or striking. Grappling is considered to be less

violent than striking (Hirose & Pih, 2009) and often results in less bloodshed, harm and incapacitation from knockouts. Grappling often leads to matches ending in tap out which is a relatively non-violent method of ending a match in comparison to boxing. As one group of writers exclaimed, “To the uneducated observer MMA appears to be chaotic violence” (Vaccaro, Schrock, & McCabe, 2011, p. 421). In contrast, the educated observer does not see chaotic violence but controlled, skillful, impressive violence that is governed by strict rules and a referee who closely controls a match. The educated observer understands the tactics, language and techniques of MMA and what is necessary to win a match. These important details related to violence are hardly chaotic.

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism states that a course of action is justified only if it contributes more or equally than an alternative action if it produces the greatest happiness or good for the greatest number of people (Tamburrini, 2011). Value is placed on being able to develop as a human being and reach one’s potential to acquire happiness. This teleological approach therefore describes consequences that lead to a justifiable end. Within the ethics of boxing debate utilitarianism may be inconsistent with ethical positions where autonomy takes precedence (Tamburrini, 2011).

For the most part, defenders of boxing claim the sport is a science that requires and demands refined skills, strength, endurance, discipline and other positive qualities. Even though boxers assume significant risks, harm and injuries, from a utilitarian view the advantages of the sport outweigh the disadvantages which opposes a ban of the sport and supports the continuation of boxing (McCormick, 1979). Even if there is agreement

that boxing is brutal, for many the sport is noble and is often described as an artistic expression which further supports a utilitarian perspectives (Jones, 2001).

Still, utilitarianism has its critics and may in fact be shown to lead to unethical consequences when applied to the ethics in boxing discussion (Dixon, 2001). For example, utilitarianism only accounts for the good of a majority of people who consent to participate in or watch boxing. Simply because a majority approves of boxing does not make the sport ethical. Others reasons must be provided independently of what the majority happen to think about the ethical status of boxing. In the southern U.S.A. a majority of people at one time thought slavery was an ethical social system, even when the constitution and bill of rights spoke about equality. In weighing the consequences of an action to determine its ethical standing, it is not always clear that all results are considered to make a complete and thorough assessment. Future and unintended consequences may not enter into the utilitarian calculus which could lead to the approval of unethical behavior. Finally, because utilitarianism generally takes into consideration the good of the collective, it can lead to counterintuitive judgments where individual interests are simply ignored. For example, barring older adults from going to banks might create greater utility because it would allow the majority of younger people to deal with tellers more efficiently and they would spend considerably less time in banks. Such an unusual circumstance, while sound from a utilitarian perspective, would unjustly discriminate and be intolerable. A utilitarian stance may not provide conclusive answers in relation to boxing when it comes to the use of certain drugs if there is a dispute as to the benefits or harms of these drugs (Herrera, 2002).

Finally, there may be conflicts surrounding the idea of whose welfare and happiness should count. For example, in organized boxing, those below the age of consent must have a physician sign a 'fit to box' form. Yet if the doctor does not believe that boxing is in the minor's best interests or is a reasonable path to happiness, she or he has the right to refuse to sign the release. In one particular case a doctor did this after pointing out the inherent risks to a youth and his mother. Both objected to the doctor's refusal even when they understood that the potential harms were very serious. On a utilitarian perspective, a clash of ends as to what constitutes good or happiness may lead to an impasse when determining which course of action is right or preferable (Toon, 1988). Although this case involved a minor, it was unclear who was looking out for the best interests and possible consequences of this young person.

In general, utilitarianism tries to maintain a balance between autonomy and what is best for most people when the consequences of actions are given consideration. However, as shown above, such calculations can be fraught with problems. On the other hand, if a boxing ban were imposed there is no guarantee that greater benefits would ensue on a utilitarian calculation (Simon, 2012). The vision or outcome of what is best for everyone is sometimes murky and inconsistent (Herrera, 2002).

Communitarianism

Another perspective that sometimes objects to boxing is communitarianism. Succinctly put, communitarianism places the bulk of responsibility on the community rather than the individual for setting the standards of what is socially acceptable and unacceptable. Strong proponents of this view even say that individuals are primarily a product of our society, and that our individuality is tethered to our community and

defines who we are. Some communitarian advocates can and do claim that boxing affects society by increasing overall violence, desensitizes us to social violence and elevates our tolerance to violence so it becomes normative. As such, it would adversely influence individuals and might alter their character to accept violence and violent behavior. For these reasons, some communitarians insist boxing should be banned. Boxing undermines community standards, celebrates violence, debases societal good and produces violent communities (Simon, 2004).

The communitarian argument however is not without its flaws. For one, if community standards are the measures by which activities are designated acceptable or unacceptable, then all sorts of deplorable practices could be tolerable like slavery and infanticide merely because the community agreed. Also, if who we are is defined by our society, then personal autonomy and agency are virtually nonexistent. We could never take credit for our personal accomplishments or be blamed for our shortcomings. Finally, by having our individuality tied almost completely to one's community, there is little incentive or room to challenge the status quo of society and try to realize moral progress.

Finally, communitarians mainly consider the broader community and society and are concerned less with smaller communities or subcultures. Since boxing is a subculture it is often dismissed or marginalized for not fitting in to the larger societal picture. In this sense boxing is a relatively small, powerless practice community whose members are rarely listened to and must contend with numerous social myths and misrepresentations (Burke, 1998). Few people take the time to learn about and understand the boxing community because they fail to ask what boxers have to say about their sport. Like any community, boxers share certain values, seek particular goals, demonstrate commitment

and seriousness to their practice and want their activity to thrive and flourish. A ban of boxing for communitarian reasons would discriminate and deny a segment of the larger society from pursuing their interests and aspirations when there is no conclusive evidence that community standards are significantly harmed. Self-description, identity and other individual goals like fulfilling one's potential in boxing would be denied in the name of the larger community whose members have almost no personal experiences of the sport (Burke, 1998; Tamburrini, 2011). Detractors outside the community of boxing rarely see its values which are taught and shared in disciplined and responsible ways for the most part. Boxing teaches sacrifice, heart, courage and proper conduct in and outside of the ring (Burke, 1998). It is a subculture that the larger community ought to try to understand and support in a respectful way.

By doing so, the gym may actually be considered a small scale civilising environment that acts as a place to express controlled violence. It has the potential to act as a safe haven for those who want to learn good morals and be around positive dedicated individuals. Boxing can funnel those from poor, oppressed, disadvantaged areas of our society into a community where they learn, socialize and become respectful citizens (Burke, 1998).

Catharsis

Part of what boxing may provide on a practical level is an outlet for the accumulated frustrations people experience in their daily lives. Rather than release this frustration randomly in society, it is best to channel it in a responsible way in a sport like boxing (Young, 2012). Without a socially tolerated safety valve, greater aggression and

violence may manifest itself in a more dangerous manner. The question is whether boxing and MMA are acceptable as sites of catharsis for violent tendencies.

There is an argument that boxing may actually reduce social violence as it is an outlet for violent members of society which is an aspect of the catharsis principle (Davis, 1994). Despite our civil society, our psychological development has not overcome primeval aggression instinct which if not checked may lead to harmful consequences. For some therefore, boxing may be a necessary and healthy outlet for our aggressive human instincts yet still requires moral deliberation and acceptance (Davis, 1994).

Catharsis theory claims that by providing outlets for aggression and violence, as in boxing and other combat and contact sports, overall violence in society would decrease to controllable and acceptable levels (Dixon, 2001). Whether boxing incites violent behaviour in society or reduces it through a cathartic outlet is difficult to answer because the evidence for this is too difficult to acquire (Dixon, 2001).

A feature of the catharsis perspective is its concern for social responsibility by stressing that violence can be safely channeled in sports like boxing. Violent anti-social behaviour should be outlawed but the constraints of boxing provide an acceptable approach to deal with violent conduct (Jones, 2001). Burke (1998) maintains that there is a significant amount of self-regulation that goes on in boxing to ensure that violence is not out of control and that boxers learn and know the limits of acceptable violence. While no empirical evidence conclusively supports these contentions they make up elements of the catharsis argument in favor of boxing (Simon, 2004).

But the catharsis view says little about the ethics of violence in boxing and whether the sport is ethically justified. Just because boxing restricts violence in a

controlled, regulated environment, it may still be objectionable from a moral point of view (Jones, 2001). Moreover, it may be the case that boxing encourages violent anti-social behaviour outside the ring. It is certainly not uncommon to hear about boxers and other athletes who engage in violent criminal activity (Jones, 2001). Also, if the catharsis theory has merit, why is that we sometimes see boxers in the ring become more vicious as a fight progresses? The veracity of the cathartic thesis is often raised by proponents of boxing, however, as shown in the preceding discussion it contains shortcomings and unsubstantiated claims.

Intent

As discussed previously in this chapter, the issue of intent is a vexing one with regard to the violence inherent in boxing and MMA. A theological point of view, for example, cannot support or morally endorse boxing because of the intentional nature of these sports to inflict physical harm. The premium placed on the KO in boxing is problematic because it goes beyond harm into qualitatively different intentional actions (McCormick, 1979). First, when successful the KO deprives the athlete who is down from possessing conscious, rational faculties. The intentional rendering of such loss is unethical. Defenders of boxing argue this is just a temporary loss. Second, intent in the ring is ambiguous. Is the intent to cause pain and suffering, to win, to win but avoid injury, even death? Theologians state that human beings should not have the right to voluntarily inflict excessive damage to oneself or others for pleasure and entertainment. Even though people have the right to alter their bodies in painful ways without infringement, such as tattoos and piercings, they do so without potentially damaging their brains as in boxing. Third, boxing encourages brutish instincts to be showcased publicly

and debase human dignity (McCormick, 1979). Defenders would argue this is a language problem and that words like brutish and human dignity can mean different things to different people. It is likely boxers would describe themselves as skilled, refined and acting nobly and courageously. Despite such disagreements, the intentional causing of pain and suffering in boxing deems it an immoral practice from a theological perspective and must be condemned (McCormick, 1979).

There are strong moral grounds for objecting to the purpose of boxing which is the intentional infliction of serious harm (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). In everyday circumstances, the intent to incapacitate someone is morally wrong, unless one is under severe threat and must defend oneself (Schneider & Butcher, 2001; Dixon, 2001; Garcia & Malcolm, 2010). Boxing, on the other hand, is a freely chosen sport where to achieve victory one must execute punches that inflict pain on one's opponent. Some argue that the intent to injure in boxing is ethical because boxers mutually consent to this goal, compete under common rules and expect to suffer pain (Schneider & Butcher, 2001; Herrera, 2002).

While the intention to commit violence is central to boxing and MMA, violence in other sports is incidental or occasionally seen. In football, for example, a hard, legal tackle may cause pain and injury, but the execution of a tackle need not include the intent to harm and injure (Simon, 2004). There are of course many instances when it is difficult to know what the intent is of a particular action and this may even elude the athlete. Team contact sports are fraught with accidents where the intent to harm is not evident. But the same cannot be said in a sport like boxing where each punch contains within it the objective to inflict pain and cause harm (Warburton, 1998). Tackling and body checking

in various sports do not necessarily possess this intention. And while injuries do result from the preceding actions, the violent intent in boxing is the heart of what makes boxing unethical according to some (Warburton, 1998). Boxers, on the other hand, state that their intention is to score points, end the fight quickly and win, and that causing damage to their opponent is not their central aim. The issue of intent may call into question the morality of boxing, but the mutual consent given by boxers outweighs such ethical challenges. Further, the intent question is no basis for justifying a ban of boxing, or MMA for that matter. Although the intention to commit violence is inherent in these sports, such violence is rule-governed, regulated and controlled within socially tolerably and acceptable limits similar to other high risk sports (Warburton, 1998).

Reform

Many of the authors cited above make suggestions for reform whether they support or defend a ban on boxing or MMA. Suggestions for reform in boxing include an increase in policing and education, no punches to the head, a points only system and a comprehensive medical exam to be passed by boxers prior to participating (Jones, 2001). Others recommend protective headgear and the awarding of points for light punches that land successfully to minimize crushing blows (Gillon, 1998). One study found that boxers were in favour of earlier stoppages to reduce inevitable injury and noted that strategies shifted to a more point-based future (Ohhashi, 2002).

Reforms should be limited and cautiously implemented because there are types of reform that would impede autonomy (Herrera, 2002). Therefore a balance should be struck between the good and interest boxers wish to pursue and acceptable standards society is willing to tolerate. This type of utilitarian calculation would not endorse a ban

of boxing. However, there may be sufficient justification to restrict minors from participating in organized boxing based on paternalism if reforms are not in place (Herrera, 2002).

Boxing and MMA reforms would likely meet resistance and take time to get used to, but they may also allow fighters to continue their careers for a longer time. Reforms might also decrease public appeal and erode traditions, especially in boxing. We must consider that ongoing reforms in sport occur regularly throughout history and the longevity of a sport does not necessarily make it immune to change. For example, boxing was once practiced without gloves and fewer rules but has evolved to include reforms like no low blows and better protective equipment. Social standards for public entertainment have also changed from public executions and other activities considered immoral in today's society (Herrera, 2002). The fact that these activities are prohibited means that they could not be reformed within the society which does not need to occur in boxing's case. Reforms may save boxing from being abolished and still demonstrate respect for autonomy (Herrera, 2002).

Heilbronner and colleagues (2009) studied neurological affects from boxing and suggested various types of reform from their research. These included improved concussion assessment and management including the evaluations, (baseline, ringside, and post-fight), return to ring and retirement decisions. Considering the empirical evidence and ethical discussion on brain trauma perhaps equipment should be reconsidered? Some recommend reforms may include the use of head gear or helmets (Simon, 2004). Others suggest the elimination of punches to the head (Dixon, 2001). If

punches below the belt are prohibited and intolerable in the ring, perhaps punches that jostle the brain significantly can be disallowed (Gillon, 1998).

Other boxing reforms include a ban for those less than 18 years of age and its removal from the Olympics (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). While this age limit is rather arbitrary, it does endorse a view that makes boxing only an option for relatively mature, competent young adults. Excluding boxing from the Olympics is an attempt to lower its popularity in the media and restrict access for public viewing. On the other hand, these suggested reforms accept that adults be permitted to box if they wish to and those who can pay to watch Olympic boxing are not prohibited from doing so (Schneider & Butcher, 2001).

Even though boxing often takes place in public places it does not prohibit those who object to the sport from ignoring fights and they are free to look away (Sokol, 2011; Herrera, 2002). Reforms limiting the number and length of rounds and giving greater discretionary power to the referee may make boxing more appealing even to detractors (Leclerc & Herrera, 1999). Penalising head shots, scoring changes and educating boxers to reduce risk may improve the public image of boxing. Although a diagnostic assessment after each punch is unrealistic, greater physician evaluation and control of environmental parameters may lead to overall improvement in boxing (Leclerc & Herrera, 1999).

Finally, other reforms go beyond the confines of competition and focus on the environment where boxers spend most of their time and that is the gym. Regulation and inspection of boxing gyms would increase safety and decrease the chance for serious injury (Barry & Jordan, 1988). For example, the monitoring of suspended boxers who are

sparring partners, meeting facility safety codes and constant supervision of training regimens. Boxers should also be given a health insurance plan which would increase their opportunity to seek physician counseling (Barry & Jordan, 1988). These recommendations could be the most valuable and beneficial suggestions for reform because boxers, and MMA athletes, spend most of their time in the gym.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the ethical arguments and concepts that consider the moral status of boxing and the implications of those who call for a ban of boxing. The discussion has relevance to the ethical standing of MMA because both sports are inherently violent and there is now a call for the banning of MMA by the medical community. To ban social practices like boxing and MMA requires more than just a disapproval of these sports. Strong, almost foolproof ethical arguments must be raised to eliminate activities that millions of people find unobjectionable. On the other hand, perhaps these devotees of boxing and MMA are wrong from a moral point of view.

On a practical level if boxing were banned it would likely be practiced underground where a lack of safety, gambling, organized crime and other immoral repercussions might result. A ban would have to be legislated by governments and the boxing industry would fight tooth and nail in court to preserve the sport. Perhaps individuals who boxed underground would be considered criminals after a ban was implemented? A ban on boxing would likely be the first of many activities that would be under review for banning (Jones, 2001).

Aside from the boxing ban issue, the ethical discussion of boxing refers to numerous principles, concepts and evidence that relate to yet are different from the MMA

debate. Specific empirical evidence, the nature of violence, intent, ethos, sport rules, format and history of the sport are among factors that set the MMA and boxing discussion apart. The MMA community including the athletes, referees, officials and doctors have a decidedly different perspective than those in the boxing community.

The relatively new sport of MMA must be critically analyzed and investigated in order to understand it before declaring its ethical status. The sport is in its infancy and has undergone many changes since its beginning. Limited empirical evidence from the sport's early past is still being discussed even though it is mostly outdated, while new scant evidence on MMA suggests it is as safe as and perhaps safer than boxing and other combat and contact sports. There have been no deaths in sanctioned professional MMA matches even when it was more violent 20 years ago.

MMA is significantly different than boxing and also different than college wrestling, two combat sports that vary greatly to MMA but still engage in either direct violence or violent-like behavior. Boxing is violent and empirical evidence shows that serious harm and injuries result, while wrestling injuries are less severe and long-lasting. This may be because one is a grappling art and the other a striking art. So where does this put MMA? MMA is unique because it incorporates grappling and striking into one combat sport. Comparing MMA to boxing alone would not be fully justified because the grappling dimension of MMA adds a distinctive form of fighting. Unlike boxing, MMA can be carried out without any striking and blows to the head and these actions can be drastically reduced. Therefore the discussion surrounding MMA may be unique when trying to utilize ethical principles and concepts from the boxing debate.

The combination of grappling and striking in MMA changes the dynamics of combat, influences injury rates and possibly its moral status. If an MMA athlete is getting punched he has the option of grabbing hold of his opponent without being separated in order to stop or slow down the force and amount of blows he is receiving. This allows him to protect himself from further harm. MMA athletes have numerous options to stop their opponent or simply quit by submitting or tapping out. However, MMA unlike boxing, also allows kicks, elbows and knees to the head and adds to the unique construct of MMA.

The mindset and intent of MMA athletes and the unique nature of the sport requires a separate ethical analysis. The distinct rules and ethos of the sport are significant factors altering the meaning of safety, harm and intent which separates MMA from boxing and all other popular combat sports. Supporters of a boxing ban often debate the negative impact of having the KO as the main objective or at least most impressive and effective way to end a match. However, in MMA this goal is one of several options to win which decreases the opportunities and frequency of KOs. Moreover, the time limits are much shorter in MMA which decreases the risk of serious injury.

Finally, there are numerous structural components of MMA that differ from boxing that needs to be considered to assess the morality of MMA. UFC athletes are matched up evenly according to experience, weight, styles and other areas in order to ensure fair competition. In boxing it is typical to allow a much better fighter to fight a less skilled fighter to build up the better fighter's record which is why one sees boxing champions with lopsided win records when compared to MMA athletes. Boxers typically have many more competitions throughout a career relative to MMA fighters. MMA

encourages early stoppages by referees and doctors and before a fighter is rendered unconscious. Plus, there is no option to return to fighting after an eight count. MMA is in need of an in-depth ethical analysis on its own terms because it is a relatively new evolving sport and there are serious ethical questions about it. Further research is needed to understand the morality of MMA and its athletes before declaring it unethical and deciding whether a ban is justified. The following chapter will describe the findings of the UFC athletes who were interviewed, and the concluding chapter will critically examine the discussion of this chapter and compare it to the findings.

Chapter Four:

Findings

What a lot of people don't understand about MMA is that they think it is brutish behaviour, thugs, violent assholes [] it is hard for them to wrap their heads around it but they really are artists, you are expressing yourself. When I say beautiful it is not because I'm running out of adjectives, when I watch great performances in the octagon it is like a work of art. It is dedication, focus for years and intelligence, learning, adapting and changing and modifying and constantly assessing until you build your skills up to the point where you have extreme competence. People have a hard time accepting the concept of an artist attached to something as violent and damaging to a person but it is just because they are looking at it wrong, it is not a normal act of violence it is a contest of great significance and repercussion. Seems violent because those techniques can be used in a violent act although violent in its description it's not an act of violence it's an act of competition in the expression of character. The best fights move souls, change lives.

(Redban, 2012)

MMA is being examined here to determine the ethical status of the sport and its athletes at the highest level. This chapter will describe, organize, analyze and discuss the findings of data collected from UFC athlete interviews. Many athletes described the violence and experience of MMA as an aspect related to life's risks no more or less

dangerous or morally concerning than day to day events or other sports as suggested by Sokol (2011).

The compilation of research methods in this study greatly added to the richness of the results. The strength of this research comes from the combination of questionnaires, interviews and my own emic based on my experience competing in MMA. This multiple method approach allowed the participants to express their beliefs and respond directly to important ethical questions based on MMA competition at the highest level. My emic will be limited to clarification and areas where my input will enrich the data.

The coding of material was open and allowed connections to be made between the athletes that revealed themes, patterns, and differences concerning the ethical status of MMA. Successive readings of the interview transcripts and questionnaires revealed important sub-themes that are organized and described. These themes were directly connected to the ethical debate of MMA and its ability to be ethically defended or not and will provide a deeper understanding of the morality of MMA.

Theme 1: Similar Athlete Background

The athletes I surveyed expressed and noted the influence of prior combat sport involvement shaping their path toward MMA. Research and observations suggests UFC athletes are former college and university athletes, Olympic wrestlers, traditional martial artists, professional athletes from other sports like professional wrestling, the National Football League or Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) world champions (Mayeda & Ching, 2008). There are few avenues for these and other combat athletes to become professional athletes and establish careers in their particular disciplines. However with the installment of professional MMA these high level athletes now have an organization where they can

pursue their passions and make a living. There are all types of people participating in MMA it is a diverse community and they all enter with different backgrounds, intentions, and goals. Athletes A1, A2, A3, A5, and A6 expressed wrestling as a mutual sport background that undoubtedly played a role in their development as combat athletes that expanded their skills to enter the UFC. Other combat sport involvement including BJJ, Karate, and Taekwondo and other contact sports like football and ice hockey may have desensitized them to the violence involved in MMA but also sheds light on how these individuals end up in MMA and come to terms with violence.

A1: My very first Jiu Jitsu tournament and there was a kid that was a brown belt and I had just started training. But I was a wrestler so I took him down [] and my mom moved to Alaska and her son just got choked out in front of her.

A2: I started really young in martial arts but when I first watched UFC 1 and 2 I saw Royce Gracie win the tournament at 27 so I always wanted to start fighting professionally at 27 for some reason. So I always wanted to accomplish, ahh I had some goals I wanted to accomplish in grappling I got into BJJ and wanted to win an international tournament before I fought MMA and so I won [international tournament identified].

A2: I played [ice] hockey growing up and I got two really big concussions and when your skating full power and somebody sticks an elbow out at you that's when someone told me that's bad for your head and I used to be strong on my feet so I never backed down from anybody and I would feel different flashes in my head. And honestly my worst injuries were from [ice] hockey and they accumulated and transferred over into MMA.

A3: Was I aware of those things, yeah but I also spent a lot of time wrestling. So that was a very physical sport. I grew up with a very physical sport. So it gives you a different context to an idea of what actual injury is I guess.

A3: I think being in wrestling; like I said being in wrestling when you're young you're used to a very physical sport. You're not used to being punched but you're used to butting heads and getting thrown and stuff like that. So there's consequences to the wrestling match or anything like that. Meaning there are more consequences to this but I think there is an aspect of this that prepares your mind for it later.

A4: We're just doing martial arts. We're all trained athletes. We're not just walking off the street saying hey I wanna fight. It takes years to get to the UFC.

A8: I love martial arts!

Theme 2: Encounters with Violence prior to MMA.

Involvement and exposure to violence at a young age or throughout these athletes' lives may have had an effect or influence in their experience, management and involvement in MMA. Similar to boxing each athlete has a unique situation and ethical stance developed from experiences and history (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). Some of the athletes I interviewed expressed their involvement in varying degrees of violence outside their MMA and athletic experiences. These included street fighting and altercations where self defense was needed in order to protect themselves or others. One athlete expressed his enjoyment and active search for these kinds of altercations in order to test his skills as a fighter while others were bullied or in fear of attack.

A1: Oh of course I used to get into a lot of street fights as a kid. I saw the first UFC's and I wanted to do that, I mean that looked like fun. Then I spent the rest of my life getting into fist fights and testing myself and making sure I was a guy that could actually do it.

A3: I have been involved in street fights but predominantly in a protective capacity. I wouldn't necessarily say I get into a lot of altercations and most of them were typical situations. I had a situation with some gang members attacking girls I was with. Another situation was with a kid that was also attacking girls I know [] Yeah. Most of those situations, except maybe when I was you know I guess I admit fights when I was young, so.

A4: Yeah in college I got in my fair share of street fights at the bar. I even went to jail in high school for punching my best friend in the face, broke his jaw over a girl. I've been around it. I had an older brother; he used to beat me up a lot as a kid. It's something I always grew up with. It's just fun to me it's not that I'm trying to intentionally wreck that person's life. It's a competition.

A6: Yeah. Oh my God, yeah, organized and unorganized, ironically. Typically. Um, I've had fights [] let's just say the easy stuff is in the ring. You know or in the cage. But outside of MMA, I remember doing this Shitokan. You can look these matches up, they were crazy!

A7: Okay, yes um when I was young I never trained to become an MMA fighter. I trained only to protect myself on the streets. If you wanna, you know call it violence I guess you could call it violence. But for me a street fight for me wasn't violence because it was just protecting myself or protecting my honor

[]. The repercussions of getting into a street fight, win or lose, is a lot heavier than it was in the past.

A8: Oh yeah, sure. I've had my fair share of confrontations.

A8: Uh I mean no not really. It's like um I mean, I love martial arts. I don't really have a reason why. I love competition, I love sparring. You know but um, I like, a lot of the [] you know where I, I never used to fight. I mean, other than [] you know [] like when I was 17 I got into some fights.

A8: But that's common for boys right [] growing up.

There is a trend involving these individuals' experience with violence pertaining to organized combat sport, street fighting, and self defense. They describe the events as fun, necessary, or the norm. Whether these individuals' MMA involvement is due to their experience with violence prior to MMA participation, previous combat sports, street fighting, or self defense due to violent altercations is unclear. These individuals have more experience with violence prior to MMA involvement than most people and they have built on that experience of violence for individual reasons.

My own MMA journey began early on in my life when defending myself from bullies. I was in more than ten street fights before the age of 14 continually progressing my comfort level, understanding and acceptance of these altercations. This led to learning the arts and rekindling a passion for watching the UFC. At age 14 I began fighting in ice hockey as it became commonplace at the high level of ice hockey that I was competing in. Throughout these teenage years I got into a few street fights, ice hockey fights and even practiced Karate for a short spurt but quit due to the lack of contact and similarity to street fighting and the UFC I craved. I understand that many people can go their whole

lives without being involved in this kind of violence and although my family was not violent and I did not seek these situations out I found myself in them time after time. Gaining the experience and skill to protect myself from serious harm was as valuable as putting on a seatbelt. I became confident in this role, and enjoyed testing myself and always knew I would be involved with MMA when I got the chance. Defending oneself and fighting appears to be consistent throughout the participants' pasts and has most likely shaped their ethical stance on violence and specifically physical confrontations.

Theme 3: The UFC

The exposure to the UFC was not only a memorable childhood moment for me but this experience was noted in positive light by today's UFC athletes as well. Other athletes expressed this same temptation after viewing their first UFC and explained the influence. The UFC was the real version of professional wrestling it was entertaining and the fights were real unscripted martial artist and street fighters testing their skills; no holds barred. For this reason and others it was accepted into our home and lives and became a regular occurrence to watch UFC competitions as a family and with friends. The UFC has not been as morally concerning as legislators promoted. Other athletes had similar stories about the UFC emergence their thoughts on the sport and the influence on their futures

A1: I saw the first UFC's and I wanted to do that I mean that looked like fun!

A2: I started really young in martial arts but when I first watched UFC 1 and 2 I saw Royce Gracie win the tournament at 27 so I always wanted to start fighting professionally at 27 for some reason.

A2 later describes the influence of the UFC and that of Gracie's in more detail. Shedding some light on specifically why he began the quest for the UFC and his combat sport influence.

A2: The UFC was a breath of fresh air go in there and fight no more talking and do this and fight the Gracie family came from Brazil and shocked the world and showed that you could win fights and not even punch the guy in the head just with submission holds so as an instructor that's one of the things that gets you excited to get involved in MMA not because I'm a violent person but because I wanted to test myself in self defense and test myself.

The revealing aspect of the previous comments from the athletes brought forth the notion of continuing their athletic pursuit. Wrestlers, Jiu Jitsu competitors, and even street fighters have no institution that can pay them money to continue to compete at a high level that is comparable to the UFC. Therefore these former combat athletes are lost with no formal venue to compete, test their skills, selves, and support their families the way other athletes have the opportunity too. The UFC has allowed these athletes to continue their life pursuit and make a living from it as professionals and role models. Providing for their families and testing themselves were among the most prevalent comments referenced throughout the data between all participants when discussing their involvement in MMA. The athletes are describing attainment of self-knowledge and reaching one's potential that fosters autonomy which is what Tamburrini (2011) noted and related to happiness.

A1: "Ultimate test of man" (repeated 3 times) "provide for my daughter" (repeated 2 times).

A2: Put to the test []. I wanted to test myself in self defense and test myself []. Push myself as an athlete and as a person []. I have a job I teach martial arts []. I think that is what the UFC has brought to the table is that there are no more fakers anymore if you want to test yourself and prove yourself then it has given us that avenue to do that.

These individuals are trained MMA athletes that enjoy fighting and the UFC may provide a safe outlet for such trained fighters to consent to fight each other in a decreased risk environment. These athletes may consent to fight each other with or without a league and legislation so perhaps a cathartic effect occurs by funnelling these athletes into their appropriate places (Young, 2012).

A3: It's like so many things in life; it's another thing that helps you discover yourself.

A5: Well for me personally some guys do it to win the belt some guys do it to win and some guys do it make money and pay their bills. For me personally it is more of a I have an image projection of what I want to be in the ring and the type of fighter I want to be the type of character I want to show in the ring and I want to feel that when I have that fight I will feel very content as a fighter, what I see as the perfect fight is my goal to have that perfect fight. It is like a personal journey.

A8: I make a living with mixed martial arts you know and um without mixed martial arts, I'll probably just go back to the mill. The stereotypical American job, working at a little office, desk or something and I'd probably hate my life.

Athletes A2 and A3 both provide for themselves and their families by coaching MMA and self defense. They provide for their families by teaching others the skills they learned which has been passed down and there is resemblance to tradition in their descriptions. They make their incomes because they are good trainers and athletes that competed in the UFC. Competing in the UFC and being a UFC veteran brings notoriety and a wealth of experience that is sought after. Therefore your gym attracts more members and the former UFC competitors become prosperous and remain involved in the sport they love. Competing in the UFC creates benefits beyond the immediate that may affect choosing to compete at a high level. These and other positive attributes go unaccounted for when discussing the ethics of MMA (Mayeda & Ching, 2008).

Theme 4: Referees

In order for fighting to be professional it must have rules and regulations which are welcomed and appreciated by all the athletes I interviewed. Athletes believe the morality of MMA to be based around rules, regulations and the judgement of the referee. Regulations and rules are good for the audience and athletes by making the sport safe however they are difficult to improve or change and only offer initial protection. Placing more discretionary power on the referee appears valued and was suggested as a method of reform from the medical community (Leclerc & Herrera, 1999). There are unacceptable avenues of violence attainable within the rules but there is a safety arbiter there to prevent unnecessary harm and violence. The referees play a major role in this junction and the appreciation and importance of the referee's involvement was stressed numerous times from all athletes within the questionnaire and interview. The morals of the referee become a key aspect in MMA discussion as their discretion of the level of

violence or harm is what often ends a match. The referee's moral judgement becomes the single most important part in maintaining safety and moral balance within the competition. He manages what athletes cannot in such an environment. Referee intervention increases safety and decreases risk (Ngai, Levi & Hsu, 2008).

A1: You don't stop until you get pulled off them; you go for it until he stops you.

A2: The ref must do his job well to keep things safe. It's great to win knowing that the opponent is going to be fine because the referee stepped in to stop the fight. I have confidence in the referee and in the system, medical staff, and in the organization that everything is going to be done to keep it as safe as it has been before and the UFC has a stellar record with health and safety and I know that everybody is going to do their part to keep me safe and so my job is to do enough until the ref stops the fight. You are arm locking someone that understands an arm lock so it is his duty to tap if he doesn't tap out that is his problem so it is up to him and the ref is there as well to watch for safety so there's multiple facets there that keeps it safe, so if he doesn't tap and it breaks I think it is on him. I think it is up to the referee and they are probably underappreciated and the pressure they are under and they have to keep in good position and keep it safe. And until the referee stops it I think it is pretty much fair game.

A3: In most shows nowadays you have qualified refs, people are gonna stop the fight. So that's why there refs there, there's other people there, safeguards. I think that hopefully it's a situation that can be monitored and stopped by a qualified ref []. I guess that's why you have the safety there of a qualified ref because they are able to stop the situation.

A4: If you watch my second knockout, I hit that guy [with] the first punch, I knew he was out cold, but I couldn't stop hitting him. Like I hit him and he dropped but I had to start hitting him because the referee didn't stop it. I was like in panic and you know you're fighting. Your job is to fight until the ref stops it.

A7: So if any fighter goes in the ring they're both willing to get into the ring, they're both professionals in training in what they're doing. I don't see it as violence as far as uh people tapping out or breaking their arm, if the person refuses to tap out and you break his arm, that's not considered violence that's considered a consequence to your decision of not tapping out. As far as attacking someone and someone's out, that's why we have referees. My decision is to go as hard as I can until I finish the fight and that's why we have ring doctors, we have corner men on his side, the opponent's side, and we have referees to stop the fight when they feel it's getting dangerous. My job is not to be concerned about my opponents safety, my job is to put him out anyway I can. The job of the referees, ring doctors and his corner is to make sure he's safe.

A8: And you know there's a referee. And you know the rules are made to keep the fighter safe.

The athlete is stressing the importance of the referee to halting the match and acting morally on the behalf of the fighters. Without the referee, more violence and unsportsmanlike behaviour would occur. These are degrees beyond the realm of sport unwanted by the athletes and educated fans. The referee has the single most import job in the ring: he/she stops the fight before there is unnecessary damage and literally saves the life and evidently the future autonomy of the losing competitor. Some athletes stop before

the referee intervenes showing moral consciousness but others continue beyond referee intervention displaying viciousness and unsportsmanlike behaviour.

This type of conduct is taken seriously by the UFC and expulsion has been the result. All three of these outcomes should be considered. Although MMA referees appear to decrease violence and harm in the ring compared to boxing referees, the context needs clarification that could add to MMA reform. MMA referees do stand athletes back up that are on the ground if they do not improve positions or score points which then puts the athletes back into striking range and thus increase the possibility of more head trauma.

MMA referees seem to decrease harm and danger in comparison to boxing referees by stopping the match when a fighter is not intelligently defending themselves before a knockout, concussion, or serious injury occurs. This means a fighter may not be protecting themselves well enough according to MMA/self defense requirements known by a knowledgeable neutral guardian of conduct who knows when an athlete is in danger whether he is on the ground, standing or in a clinch position. Therefore there is room for improvement and reform by ensuring these referees are fully knowledgeable and have practiced in all areas of the sport, keep up to date with new techniques and understand human mechanics while maintaining moral integrity with reducing the amount of harm done to the athletes. Training these referees becomes invaluable and is supported by Leclerc and Herrera (1999).

Theme 5: MMA Context

Burke (1998) describes the contextual morality of boxing and the mutual respect boxers have for each other which characterize the sport and the notion of violence. These features are relevant for MMA because they are commonly expressed by athletes that

shed light on the context of MMA participation. The athletes in this study described the UFC and MMA participation clarifying the experience and the reason for participating in MMA at the highest level. When the athletes described their experiences of MMA violence it altered the perception of MMA and its practitioners. Athletes described the positive and negative aspects of MMA that are not seen by the general public which go unaccounted for (Mayeda & Ching, 2008). The athletes also suggested there is an issue with the context or portrayal of MMA. Critics of MMA do not often speak from experience and therefore they have a different perception of combat sports. The context of MMA is seldom accounted for from the perspective of the athletes involved at the highest level. Such an account would provide an opportunity for the athletes to tell their story and experiences with the sport to lay people and those familiar with the sport which can shed light on the morality of the sport.

A1: We are just a sport you know we aren't barbarians [] we are the best athletes in the world.

A2: [] MMA has given me everything good in my life, it has enabled me to feel and stay young and in good shape where people my age from high school may be out of shape and not very healthy and doing something every day they don't like to do as a job[].

A2: [] you have to think about the good things the winning the self-development and if you think of the negative it tends to happen so I don't worry about the injuries until after [] my skills against their skills. You know if it were [ice] hockey I would have a goal scored against me but in this I get punched in the face but I totally know why I got punched in the face what makes it scary is not

knowing why you got punched in the face. If someone punches you in the face and you know nothing about kickboxing or boxing that's when it is so scary because you don't know what you did wrong or what happened or why I couldn't defend it. But I know exactly ok I messed up and the exact moment where I screwed up and got caught with that punch or submission hold so it's just ah. I don't look at it in terms of them being violent towards me but in terms of me messing up technically. So it takes the fear away because if you know what caused it there is no fear and you know what to do next time.

A3: Was I aware of those things, yeah but I also spent a lot of time wrestling. So that was a very physical sport. I grew up with a very physical sport. So it gives you a different context to an idea of what actual injury is I guess. Most of the population can't believe that someone would do that, when in all reality it's an aspect of, you know, it's like building a callus on the hand[]. Obviously if you train long enough, you're aware of what happens in most situations. Choking somebody is not dangerous. They are going to be disoriented for half a second then they're gonna be fine. You know that if you applied the choke correctly, there should be really limited danger to that person.

A4: In my career I can probably count. In 15 fights, I've probably only been hit ten. I just don't get it. Just my fighting style. I play a lot of movements and stuff like that to try and avoid getting punched in the face. Nobody likes to get punched.

A5: You know the sport has changed tremendously since back in the nineties. And unfortunately most people that are against the sport are stuck in that time frame I

bet if you asked ahh you know ten medical personnel or guys trying to ban MMA half of them would probably think eye gouging and groin shots is still legal. I think it is important to know the facts get familiar with the people fighting and the organization and then make your decision.

A6: Yeah I really do believe it's going into a safer direction. You know I mean hell you have one [] who was that dude that was sponsored by Head & Shoulders, God damn.

A6 describes a UFC athlete from the previous event and there is something to be said about a reputable company such as Head and Shoulders which is a Procter and Gamble product indicating its acceptance into mainstream.

A7: I mean anything, any fear or any thoughts of it being too violent, is mostly, a lack of understanding. When you see a choke or an arm bar happening, they have to realize we are trained to experience this. We are trained to turn our elbows to the slightest degree to release the pressure on the arm[] a misunderstanding is that the lack of knowledge of the sport and of the techniques that are being applied that make it look violent or make it seem violent. MMA is like any other sport []. And you train to avoid the situations that could get you injured in the sport. MMA fighters train extensively on not getting hurt [] I really believe it's not like any other sport. It's not more dangerous than football, basketball or baseball.

A8: Okay yeah, at first glance mixed martial arts seems very gruesome. You know but the more you research the more intense you get into mixed martial arts. You realize it's a very beautiful sport. That too, the difference between street

fighting and competing in an event it is not two drunk mad guys. You've got two professional athletes that are world trained competing against each other.

The athletes referred to why they participate in various forms but all suggested the reason as fun and made references to various phrases like "test myself" as reasons to participate in MMA. This transfers into the reason for testing oneself which varied between athletes but led to their intentions and reason to compete at a high level. A 'fun test' is not typically what you think of when viewing these athletes in competition.

A1: I saw the first UFC's and I [] wanted to do that I mean that looked like fun. Then I spent the rest of my life getting into fist fights and testing myself and making sure I was a guy that could actually do it [] That's what I get off on, that's the excitement factor, that's why we do this because it is the ultimate test of man you go in there and someone is trying to kill you, and you are trying to beat them to death. No realistically that is what it is. Because it's the ultimate test of man we are modern day gladiators you know people want to watch us.

A2:[] such a fun life for me [] so as an instructor that's one of the things that gets you excited to get involved in MMA not because I'm a violent person but because I wanted to test myself in self defense and test myself. If you are constantly defending yourself in training and in fights then ah I think that is what the UFC has brought to the table is that there is no more fakers anymore if you want to test yourself and prove yourself then it has given us that avenue to do that []. I teach martial arts and I was doing UFC fighting for fun and to push myself as an athlete and as a person []. So damn addicting and fun!

A3: It's like so many things in life; it's another thing that helps you discover yourself.

A5: Well for me personally some guys do it to win the belt some guys do it to win and some guys do it make money and pay their bills. For me personally it is more of a I have an image projection of what I want to be in the ring and the type of fighter I want to be the type of character I want to show in the ring and I want to feel that when I have that fight I will feel very content as a fighter, what I see as the perfect fight is my goal to have that perfect fight. It is like a personal journey.

The athletes explain why they compete in MMA which is entirely self-motivated. Coercion does not seem to be the case of the MMA athlete as it is with boxers. The BMA (2008) suggests all fighters are coerced into fighting sports but this does not seem to be the case for MMA. They are athletes testing the boundaries of their skills, will and athleticism among other healthy characteristics. They do acknowledge the risks but describe the violence as separated from the experience distanced from their goals of expressing and challenging themselves. Burke (1998) described boxers seeing their profession as a skilled bodily craft distanced from violence where they gain pleasure and seems to be the case for the MMA athlete as well. It does not appear they are out to injure or hurt or that they have ill intentions toward themselves or their opponent.

Theme 6: Training versus Competing

Athletes shed light on the differences between training and competing which has never been addressed including the empirical research from the early years of the UFC. The time spent training far exceeds competition and the athletes describe the experience,

consequences, and explain their ethos behind training and competing in MMA. There may be ethical considerations or context that may be revealed when differentiating between the experience and practices of one compared to the other. When discussing the ethics of a sport it is wise to include all its dimensions especially when participation in the sport is primarily seen competitively but experienced mostly in training. I would say that 95% of MMA participation is involved in training where the other 5% or less is competition. Athletes train approximately eight weeks for a competition two to three times a day six days a week for one competition that may last less than 15 or 25 minutes depending on whether it is a main event/title or not. MMA competition differs from training because the intent to inflict more damage on your opponent without restraint increases exponentially compared to training sessions which are carried out with more restraint, equipment and less pressure or follow through to incapacitate the opponent. What people see on television or at live events is the most extreme display of MMA and the level of violence is dramatically reduced in training resembling a slower fragmented and softer form than seen in competition.

Training for MMA may consist of focussing on one or two aspects of MMA like Jiu Jitsu or it may entail all of MMA in a sparring session that greatly resembles a real competition. However more control, equipment, guidelines and restrictions are practiced during training sessions. For example when landing a punch to your sparring partners face you would try not to follow through and completely finish the technique, you would 'pull back' touching your opponent so they know you had them but not making them 'pay the price' of receiving a fully connected punch. Or during a submission athletes will

hold the position allowing more defending and deliberation to tap safely before submission follow through injures the training partner.

The athletes in this investigation explained through their narrative the differences and nuances of this aspect of MMA. Athletes' responses varied and individual training methods and ethos differed but shed light on the less described training experience. Burke (1998) describes the boxer as the most underrepresented view in the media and if this is true for boxing then the same is most probably true for MMA fighters.

A1: You just can't be stupid you can't hurt each other []. You have to understand I beat my best friends up on a daily basis. It's not a big step to go from training to competition. It is a little different if it is a current training partner that makes it a little weird but at the same time if there is a title on the line then you train in the morning and you train at night. Or or train together I don't really see a problem with it, I'll fight my friends for a world title.

A2: Well when you train you have to understand that anything that could potential be violent can be controlled using proper training methods so when training jiu-jitsu and you are going for a choke or arm lock they are tapping quickly and you let go so you are not getting anything that you know would ah break or anything or put them unconscious as it would in self defense in the street because of the ability to tap out. You have training partners that are skilled, they are going to be in control and the most dangerous people on the mats are white belts they are the ones you got to watch out for because they will flop around on the mats and hit ya with an elbow and we all been there a few times.

In sparring it is always controlled in terms of wearing big gloves and gear I have never been hit with MMA gloves outside of the cage or ring; I don't know I mean I guess some places train with small gloves but uh maybe they just lack the education but I have never been hit outside pro fighting it is always done safe and I always have a coach there to supervise because it is a dangerous it is human nature when you get hit you get pissed off and no one ever backs down so you have to have a coach present even at the UFC level keeping things safe. So ya it's all about proper training methods []. I think it depends on the art because in Jiu Jitsu you can go full out and if you are both skilled you are not going to get hurt. Striking though uh I think I went pretty hard though in training you know I went pretty hard and you get injuries here and there but ah the problem with MMA is that you are not just training [] well look at it like this if you are a boxer you are training boxing []ok so the issue is if you are a boxer you can box and then go lift weights or running or something. But in MMA you have to do boxing, wrestling and Jiu Jitsu so you are going from boxing practice to wrestling to Jiu Jitsu the next day then you are weight lifting so you are never doing the same.

So essentially you are doing three professional sports at once if you wanna be good some guys don't and they do one MMA training session a day but I feel they don't evolve with the sport so I don't know if our bodies can take the uh. But I definitely [think] there's a lot of injuries but I don't think it's from being violent or aggressive I think it's from the body trying to keep up and the wear and tear from training so many different sports.

A3: Um, well, hopefully you're good at what you're doing. I mean typically if you have better control [] you can avoid hurting people because if you're working technically, more often you have more control, and less likely to hurt somebody.

A4: Basically you have to have good training partners. You have to have respect for each other. Let the person do the move that they're doing and don't let them try to fight or have resistance too hard. It's a mutual thing. You just have to train smart. I try to; I'm a little older than most guys so I try to spend a lot more time working on technique and cardio and getting ready for a fight, sparring hard and stuff like that. Just too much injury, don't get paid so I'd rather be a little unprepared and still get my paycheck.

A4 also stated a multitude of injuries including shoulder and neck injuries. He continued by informing me that they all had come from training and none had come from competition. The only injury he sustained during competition was a small laceration. I have had a similar experience with injuries withstanding various knee injuries and others in training but literally no injuries in two MMA bouts.

A5: Well the big thing when it comes to training is trust. Ummm you know you come across a lot of different guys in the training room and some are safe to train with while others are not. The trusting of your partner is the biggest thing and the second thing is basic which is maintaining control at all times.

A6 described briefly that during training sessions techniques are much more controlled but surviving countless training sessions without injury is still lucky. He

described how a particular technique like throwing partners is controlled which is done by being extremely proficient.

A6: I have this []this weird Pavlov dog response to throwing people but throughout the years of doing it I have become proficient even have you land on a pillow or have you land on a pile of bricks when throwing. And that's because drill over and over. The first time I thrown someone, it was on a pile of bricks obviously. Throughout the years, I fall on a pillow.

A7: Well when I'm training I usually don't practice a lot of violent techniques to its full force. I usually do it kind of like 70%. Of course my partners who were used to training me already accepting the fact that things would hurt and be real painful. But um as far as going full on each other, we've never um gone full on with violent techniques.

A8: Oh it's um, you have to have good training partners that's the thing. Not only that but people that aren't so um [] like foreign, and not so new to the sport. And um you gotta have like no ego. So it's not only about like winning and it's just practice and you're trying to improve. And um, I mean but even then it's tough you know. To train for a fight you've got to go hard, to be as realistic as possible. I mean the only thing I think you can do is have very umm experienced training partners to correct that. Oh and one more thing is, I think the fighter himself has to know his body. He has to know whether hey man I'm pushing too hard I need to back off a little bit.

Although training for competition resembles real competition, there are training nuances and practices that promote better positive outcomes. During the interviews for

this study athletes described various aspects of training sessions that encouraged greater safety and reduced harm. Two points they mentioned were that actions should display more control and one should spar with more experienced partners. Some also stated that one should leave his ego at the door. This referred to negative features of human character that should have no place in the training facility. Bringing to the gym feelings of self-righteousness, superiority and narcissism could fuel unwanted emotional outbursts like anger and retaliation which would increase the possibility of injury and decrease the learning and team building efforts needed in training. The ego in this sense is a common topic in MMA circles and in my experience. Most MMA athletes contend that an inflated ego is a damaging, dangerous factor and minimizing the ego is what makes MMA athletes great as competitors, sparring partners and human beings. When the ego is held in check then machismo, self-promotion and a kind of brutishness are removed from one's athletic and everyday personality. In the early years of MMA many of these negative qualities were exploited to promote the sport, however today, such factors are seen less often and have contributed to a decrease in serious injuries both in training and competition. The contemporary MMA athletes I interviewed were mostly humble, soft-spoken, caring fathers who were dedicated to their families and sport.

Athletes suggest entering an altered state during competition that is described by various phrases such as “autopilot” which suggests altered consciousness within competition which may not be actualized during training sessions. The implications of entering this state and alternatively leaving a state of conscious choice or moral cognition may affect the discussion of morality in MMA. Are they entering a state of flow

described by other pro athletes or something else and is it morally concerning for UFC athletes due to the nature of their competition?

A1: You know if it is a fight []. I [] don't know man I would like to tell myself that I wouldn't tap but in the 'heat of the moment' who knows ya know []. Oh breaking arms is 'part of the game' we all know the risks I mean you could die. Enson Inoie used to write a letter to his wife and kids every time because he knew he might not come back []. It's just the name of the game that's just it.

A2: Like a fire you can turn it on and off, and like a fire you can turn it on when it counts, a switch turns on when you are in a fight. I think we are on 'autopilot' as fighters and everybody's autopilot fires a little differently []. That's all 'part of the game' []. As a fighter it is all autopilot and everybody's autopilot fires a little differently so that may be harder to channel and control []. When you are fighting you are 'in the moment' [].

A7: If I'm in the mode, when I fight I get into the mode of kill or be killed. And if I'm in the mode of kill or be killed then sometimes it's very hard to turn it off and on like a light switch. It's not a sport for me, it's a game of survival, it's a game of kill or be killed.

The description of entering an altered state during competition is repeated and enforced through my own experiences. It seems as though you instinctually revert to the training experiences and techniques learned in order to better increase your chances of winning and remaining safe. Whether this is 'autopilot' or a realm of flow achieved when a person is a master of their body and sport is difficult to tell, but it feels instinctual.

There is no time to make conscious choices but reactions to external cues of the opponent.

Does this mean the moral thought of committing the future violence to the opponent is non-existent and thus the extent to violence is limitless? Or by reverting to training MMA ethos instincts in competition actually allows for control and conscious moral reasoning? Athletes suggest there are limitations to their violence within and outside the rules which have been formulated within the community of practitioners as well as personal ethos. There are examples of conscious moral choices made in split seconds showing signs of caution, care, concern and an attempt to preserve the health of opponents before outside intervention (ref, corner, doctor). These actions are revered and honoured among MMA aficionados and athletes. This supports Burke's (1998) claim that boxers see each other as subjects not objects which appears to be the case in MMA.

Theme 7: Limitations

Athletes describe that there limits to violence within the realm of MMA and the UFC. In other words within or outside the rules of the UFC and governing athletic commission each athlete had physical violence boundaries they would not cross over for numerous reasons including significant increases in risk to themselves or their opponent, loss of autonomy or moral consciousness. Their responses are unique but offer a glimpse into what is acceptable among practitioners regardless of the rules. The spectrum of limitations ranges substantially but similarities are abundant. There are levels of violence that would drive them away from participation in the UFC and MMA.

A1: I would love to fight Pride rules, I'm totally down for head kicking somebody it would be awesome. Hahahah jump on their face.

Athlete 1 describes the limit that he is comfortable exceeding by comparing a level of competition formerly operating in Japan that had a significant decrease in rules and regulations as well as an increase in violence. There may be other factors other than the increase in method of attacks including head stomping a grounded opponent that may account for this change for example Pride used to have the largest crowds and most devout fans. He candidly describes this aspect as being amusing. However other athletes described their distain or discomfort with previous rules of the UFC and Pride.

A2: Oh yeah like even groin shots would be a little weird back in the day people we're doing that it was crazy back then I don't know if I would go into that.

Athlete 2 describes his journey of post-concussion syndrome and retiring from the UFC and competitive MMA which can be seen as a limit to participation. Once he began noticing the effects of the head trauma received over a lifetime of contact sports including ice hockey and karate he retires in order to save his future autonomous self.

A3: Um, throat punches. I guess situations where you have a high probability of killing somebody. People are targeting the eyes, stuff like that. Those things, they're not controllable situations, so that person has more of a probability of dying or severely maimed. So that type of violence would probably turn me away.

A3: I mean, outside of looking at what's necessarily acceptable. You can't make the world completely safe, you know? If the UFC suddenly becomes you know only fifty of the UFC fighters make it past twenty then you probably need to reconsider stuff [] If there is something in particular that's caused three deaths, then there should probably be a rule implemented to make sure that doesn't happen. Maybe, and obviously I think there's you know, power slams to the top

of the head could cause something like that. You can't pile drive a person, stuff like that. There is a lot of stuff, rules that have already been implemented to stop things from occurring.

The only other thing is you get a fighter with so much punching power that they're knocking people out but they're killing somebody but that would happen in boxing too[]If someone randomly was to die, I think you should look at the situation and all the criteria, was there underline symptoms that weren't looked at? Because there is an aspect of chance, and life happens to people. People die in their sleep so. So you have to take into consideration perspective because of the perception of the UFC if someone died while fighting, it's gonna be looked at poorly.

A4: Allowing things that would deliberately ruin people's lives [] you can poke a guy's eye out or you can bite or rip his ear off, things like that then I would probably stay away. It'd be pretty hard because it's how I make my living to support my family. If people were diagnosed by the UFC or if people we're starting to die in the UFC, people wouldn't want to do it. I wouldn't want to go in there and fight if there is a possibility of death.

A5: So stomps and things like that are allowed it would make me think twice if it is worth the risk to take that fight.

A6: If they allowed punching in the pee pee.

A7: If you can finish your opponent physically without any weapons, I don't see anything that can be too violent.

A8: You can't fix a spine. And that's a big deal I mean you know breaks someone's spine, you can't walk anymore []hit some guy in the balls, that's not fun, right? And you can't kick really toward the knee. You know these are just basic things to keep the fighter safe but still you know, it's really simple you just have to keep it close to fighting[]. I wouldn't with no weight classes []. I wouldn't do that. I mean, you know I think I am a decent fighter but I'm not gonna fight Brock Lesnar, you know? [] With no weight class I don't like that. I think they should keep the referee. I'm glad there's a time limit; I wouldn't want to fight for like hours. You know? Yeah so basic old school stuff that changed to what it is today.

The level of violence some of these athletes would not tolerate and would end their participation is exactly what the earlier versions of UFC consisted of. This further expands on my reasoning for investigating the latest version of the UFC because it is far removed from that of the earliest versions which were clearly more violent suggested by the predicted withdrawal from UFC participation if the sport devolved to an earlier more violent rendition of the sport. This also suggests that these athletes would not participate in a version of the sport described by Simon (2004) as Mayhem. However a decrease in viewership may bring these versions back in order to increase popularity. It is a business and until that happens MMA like all other sports historically reform to more safe versions (Sanchez & Malcolm, 2010).

Theme 8: Entertainment

The UFC is a business and this must be taken into account when interviewing these athletes and examining the sport from an ethical standpoint. The athletes are

participating in a sport that is promoted as entertainment and they participate within that sphere which may affect the level of violence, morals and depiction of MMA and the UFC. Their characters are often falsely represented and they often represent themselves falsely much like professional wrestling with its characterization (e.g., good guy vs. bad guy). This was explained in detail by A3 and will be expanded on later. Blood, sex and guts sell much like action movies and other forms of entertainment once it enters production it appears to be scripted and visually disturbing images are the ones that are presented and stored in the minds of those in favour of a ban and the uneducated viewer. The UFC as an entertainment business was restated throughout each athlete's testimony and played a role in their responses regarding their actions and the UFC in general.

A1: [] I haven't won a fight in the UFC but it is obvious that I am the most loved and marketable out there []. All the celebrities want to watch us, the other sports athletes want to watch us we are like the new toys in the world and everybody wants to play with us, hang out with us and get to know us. And it is weird cuz you know all these people want to hang out or put you in a movie/ TV or hangout or whatever but we still are not getting the exposure of the mainstream media that we should[]. I just go in there to make money, you gotta work the crowd, the boss and if you can't do those things that's your own problem you know. I am good at it and I do it in my own way which is nice it's not cheesy or anything and you have to learn to work your way around it all because it is entertainment.

Athlete 2 describes his quest to join the show "The Ultimate Fighter" which is a reality television show for UFC prospects to enter and participate in the UFC by winning

a contract through competing in MMA on the television show against roommates living under the same house. This show has been accredited with launching the popularity of the UFC into the mainstream. He was not outgoing enough for the show and thus had a decreased entertainment value suggesting the value of entertainment in the UFC and the grooming process which may differ from the show but ultimately those winning the show are in the UFC.

A2: I sent my ultimate fighter tape in for season two 170 and they called me and said we like your video are you outgoing? And I said well cuz I'm kind of a quiet guy, average I guess and I think that is what screwed it up. They gave me the times to fly to Vegas and they put ya in a hotel for further testing and they asked me if my schedule was clear. Then they asked me and I said I was sort of outgoing and they never called me back so that was kind of brutal and a disappointment.

A2: I think as a fighter there is something to be said about uh winning a fight in impressive fashion []you know as a pro fighter I never wanted to be you know just for the win I really wanted to be exciting and I always used to ask my coach was it exciting was it exciting [] I didn't want it to be boring right.

A2: Getting head butted, I lost my two front teeth so they pop out now which opened up a movie roll for me so not all bad; I was a redneck psycho guy.

A3: [] building my name up and becoming known []. Value added by media and promotions [] been told what to say. [] So, if you don't say that then you're uh not marketable correct? [] There are aspects of the media's involvement.

A3: I mean I guess maybe if their viewership ever starts dropping they might try to implement something to spark the audience.

A3: Affirmative, guttural responses. Something to shock. I've also seen people be let into things. They're groomed a certain way. They respond a certain way eventually to questions because it makes a good tag lines, it creates an aspect of a spectacle for the event. I guess it's just something; watching it seen how contrived it is. For me, it also just seems kind of stupid. There's certain people that it's better because they're actually entertainers and they're good at it. Sometimes the way that they push you into it or I've seen other people pushed into it. It's kind of contrived. It's dictating what they want the person to become or the image they wanna create for the person.

A4: You put on an exciting fight you know you make more money. Fans want to see you make more money. The more popular they are the more peoples sponsors pay.

A5: For me personally it is more of a I have an image projection of what I want to be in the ring and the type of fighter I want to be the type of character I want to show in the ring[].

A6: Because in America it's called entertainment. I mean it's called sports, you know. I mean we like to drug test people and all that shit []. I was one of the architect designing construction workers, what it is that y'all call now, mixed martial arts entertainment[]. Well at the end of the day its business.

A8: But at the end of the day it's business []. Try to be as entertaining as possible.

McCormick (1979) discussed that human beings should not have the right to voluntarily inflict damage to oneself or others for pleasure and entertainment but people have unnecessary surgery, and tattoos without a ban or ethical infringement. Social standards for public entertainment have changed from public executions and other activities considered immoral in today's society (Herrera, 2002). The fact that these activities are prohibited means that they could not be reformed within the society which does not need to occur in boxing's case and perhaps in MMA as well.

Theme 9: Risk

Athletes reported risk factors throughout the interviews indicating the degree varying from death to minor injury and commented on the experiences, possibilities, context and management of those risks. Risk was compared to everyday life, other sports and were uniquely described and experienced but there were similarities as well. Athletes showed that they are fully informed of the risks of MMA and are confused as to the notion of banning a sport that empirically is less harmful than other risk sports (Mayeda & Ching, 2008; Bledsoe, 2009; Kochhar, 2005; Ngai, 2008).

A1: I can die doing this it is apparent []. I just knew it's kind of common sense []. We all know the risks I mean you could die. This is my job, I love my job to death, I am very lucky but at the same time it is dangerous as fuck it is very dangerous.

A1: There are numerous deaths in boxing [].we all sign up knowing what could happen and nothing is going to change just because someone dies does not mean the UFC is going to stop putting on shows. It will be a shame cuz nobody wants to see someone die but that's just how it goes.

A2: You know I think there is a risk anytime we do anything but you have to look to see if the benefits outweigh the risks; MMA has given me everything good in my life[].

A2: No I don't think it gets addressed really it is just about preparation and preparing to be your best and whatever happens you know happens and it never seemed you know from karate tournaments, wrestling practices, Jiu Jitsu I never really seen anything too severe in terms of injuries and nothing different from ice hockey or football. You know I would be more nervous if you put me on the football field than if you put me in the cage.

A2: I would just say that ahhh it is well regulated and run in a very professional way, and that it is safer than a lot of sports out there that are commonplace. Just as safe as [ice] hockey or football you know all these other sports. And there is crazy numbers like look at all the people that die in cheerleading a year, and nobody has ever died in the UFC so its ahhh there are a lot of other things that are equally if not more dangerous and not as regulated so.

A2: It's scary if you think about it you know, when you take the time to think about it you could die in the ring or cage. But then you can think of that every time you get in an airplane or drive your car you know if you dwell in the negative you are going to miss out on a lot of the positive things you can do[]. You know just tell your family you love them, pray and then I think if you worry about the negative then you're going to miss out on so many positives in life so you can't think about that and it can happen to any of us it can happen driving or through sickness so you just have to live your life you know your life is

meant to be lived so set your goals and go for your dreams and enjoy every moment because we don't know how long we have here.

Athlete 2 describes the risks of returning to competition after post-concussion syndrome and adds to the discussion from an important perspective. As an athlete that is concerned for his future autonomous self.

A2: I think even today I could jump back in there and do very well. I feel better than ever but it is not worth the risk [].

A3: Um, yes there is some dangerous, but there's danger in any aspect of life so. I've seen people injured, and you know I've had quite a few fights, most of the injuries are, you know, mild.

A3: Most people coming into it are already aware, unless they're not of age or something. But typically in the past I don't teach kids and if I do teach, I'll teach like throws or wrestling. We don't choke each other very much, wouldn't necessarily hit each other. I mean something later on, that's up to their parents. But I guess if I had an adolescent, maybe if it was my kid and it was early on trying to teach him, I would probably try to make him conscious of what could go wrong.

A4: Yeah, fully aware of it. I've never even thought twice about being hurt in a fight. It doesn't even cross my mind. The thought of losing is more of an ego thing and for your friends, family and fans and to me. Like I've never been hurt in a fight, I've never felt any pain right after a fight. I had stitches once but I didn't feel it.

A5: Absolutely I am aware of them now and I think about them on a daily basis. You know I realize there may be a point in my life when it won't be worth the risk anymore. And when I first started fighting it wasn't that I wasn't aware as in I didn't know of them I just didn't think of them. When you get further along in your career you start to think about your life, and yourself, and your health. So at the beginning I was a lot less concerned than I am now []. You know it is all relative to money, what risk are you willing to take for money[] and how much money will it take to lead you to a fight where there is eye gouge or use a baseball bat against me. It is all a sliding scale for each person.

A6: Yes. I mean []you know I'm gonna have to say yes but I didn't give a shit because I was fresh out of the marines [] I think UFC, the potential for injury is higher, but the fact is, throughout the years, MMA is a much better sport as far as health and fighter injury you know concerns, because in boxing the head is a primary target [] I mean you can get guys that can get arm barred; triangle choked, and get up and go to the after party []. Whereas you get hit in eight count, and you know and you get three full set in eight count in the boxing match, you have concussion after concussion after concussion. Whereas if I was to kick you in the leg, you might lose (tells funny story about how a guy lost because of leg kicks but no brain damage occurred).

A7: At any sport you play there are dangers. You train to protect yourself. Just MMA because there is so much farther aspects that you can get hurt in I think the MMA professionals they train a lot more in a lot more detail to protect themselves there's just different areas. I teach my students to realize when they

get caught especially in practice, tap in class it's not a problem. So that they can know where their limits are and when they're actually reaching their points of uh getting hurt. I believe the risks in MMA isn't as bad as people make it seem. MMA fighters train for MMA and train to avoid the dangers of MMA []. I think the possibilities of getting killed or being permanently injured in MMA is the same as football, baseball, basketball, F1 driving or even jumping in your car and driving to the shopping mall. People just see it as such a violent and dangerous sport is because not many people in this day, this society train to protect themselves from an attack [].

What people fail to understand is that we as MMA professionals we train every single day to protect ourselves from these. I mean yes they can kick you or punch you in the head as hard they can, we are trained to avoid those. We are trained to avoid those hits and punches. We are trained to, how to flow the punches. Um yes you can get thrown on your neck and can get body slams on your head. We are trained not to be slammed down; we are trained to have balance so we don't get thrown into that awkward position []we have corner man that are trained to throw in the towel[]. There's referees in there. Joint locks you know we know our own arms, we know when our arms gonna break, we know if we want to deal with a broken arm. Your corner also knows the extension that your arm can possibly go. They can throw in the towel. I mean there's the chances of being killed or permanently injured in MMA is not any higher than any other sport.

A8: Oh of course man! You crazy! I mean, I love it! I wanted to get into it.

Athletes describe risk and the relationship experience plays in training and MMA competition. Risk is experienced and understood differently within this community and they describe it in the following excerpts. Skill increases and risk decreases as described by athletes because it creates an awareness and knowledge of contact and vulnerability from experiencing and gaining knowledge of violent techniques. This questions consequences of being an amateur in the sport gives rationale for further ethical review.

A2: You have training partners that are skilled, they are going to be in control and the most dangerous people on the mats are white belts they are the ones you got to watch out for because they will flop around on the mats and hit ya with an elbow and we all been there a few times.

A2: I think it depends on the art because in Jiu Jitsu you can go full out and if you are both skilled you are not going to get hurt [] well look at it like this [] if you are a boxer you can box and then go lift weights or running or something [] But in MMA you have to do boxing, wrestling and Jiu Jitsu so you are going from boxing practice to wrestling to Jiu Jitsu the next day then you are weight lifting so you are never doing the same so essentially you are doing three professional sports at once if you wanna be good [] I don't know if our bodies can take the uh but I definitely there's a lot of injuries but I don't think it's from being violent or aggressive I think it's from the body trying to keep up and the wear and tear from training so many different sports.

A2: As professionals they have to understand what is happening to them it isn't like you are arm locking someone outside [] that's training or new. You are arm locking someone that understands an arm lock so it is his duty to tap if he

doesn't tap out that is his problem so it is up to him and the ref is there as well to watch for safety so there's multiple facets there that keeps it safe, so if he doesn't tap and it breaks I think it is on him.

A3: Um, well, hopefully you're good at what you're doing. I mean typically if you have better control; the better you're at something, the more control you're gonna have regardless, so your uh, a lot of times then you can avoid hurting people because if you're working technically, more often you have more control, and less likely to hurt somebody.

A4: If you're going to get your arm broken, it's your fault for not tapping right []. A lot of it has to do with stubbornness on the other guy's part. You have to take the thought of it, am I going to be able to fight again in three months from now? Or am I going to be off for a year trying to get surgery to get my arm fixed? I think a lot of guys do it to themselves.

A5: I think it is kind of common sense, I mean we get medicals all the time, eyes and heart tests and blood and everything so it automatically kind of clicking because it's like oh why am I getting an MRI? So you just learn along the way.

A6: Dude I would rather do an MMA fight than take a freaking snowmobile shoot down the slope on to a quarter pipe trying to do a back flip[]. I would rather have a cracked rib or a dislocated elbow than a concussion that would not allow me to write my name and poop for myself.

A8: I mean the only thing I think you can do is have very umm experienced training partners to correct that.

MMA is often considered unique with regard to violence, injury and risk. Contrary to popular belief, other sports contain equal or greater risk including higher levels of injury and death. Among these sports are rugby, football, ice hockey and boxing (Spencer, 2012). Also, when MMA is compared to other sports it is very similar in terms of empirical evidence of injury and risk (Sokol, 2011). Athletes described nuances to MMA that change the landscape of what MMA risk appears to be on the surface.

Summary

This chapter described what the athletes had to say about the ethical status of MMA at the highest level. This added to the discussion in chapter five on whether MMA is ethically defensible based on the violence in the UFC when compared to the boxing ethics debate. The themes described above included early experiences of violence, UFC, referees, context, and training vs. competing, limitations, entertainment, and risk. These are the main themes MMA athletes at the highest level refer to when they reflect on the moral aspect of MMA. The themes and subthemes that emerged described the experience of violence inherent to MMA at the highest level of the UFC. The commentary from athletes provided context to the sport that is often judged and described by those without experience, knowledge or understanding of MMA. The athlete interviews formulated patterns that allowed athletes to discuss the various aspects surrounding MMA participation and the UFC providing insight into a community that has had a limited voice when discussing these concepts.

There is something that is described within the interviews that sheds light on participation in MMA. The athletes try to explain their participation in a sport that seems nonsensical, unjustifiable, and inherently violent. There is a lack of negative emotion

toward the opponent during the match and a very positive emotion including camaraderie that occurs between two combatants. Having violence committed against the self and others is described much differently than the lay person would perceive it. There is an opponent facing you but he is a mere reflection of the other because both athletes have trained to compete and express themselves through their art and without each other they cannot test their skills and share their love for MMA. This is why I appreciate my opponent and have nothing but respect for him win or lose. The following chapter will critically relate these findings to the ethical concepts and principles examined in chapter three and draw conclusions from this relationship to answer my main and secondary research questions including many quotations from athletes.

Chapter Five

Discussion & Conclusion

A Characterization of Violence in Sport

Violence is defined as the exertion of physical force to deliberately injure or harm another person or persons (Simon, 2004; Young, 2012). In most social circumstances violence reflects unethical behavior and is illegitimate and often illegal. On the other hand, some violence is legitimate and legal as in the case of self-defence. While violence can be found in many sports, especially contact sports, one has to differentiate between harming others intentionally and unintentionally. In sports like ice hockey, North American football and rugby that involve body checking and tackling, these moves need not have any motive to harm others. Although it is argued that these sports only incidentally cause harm there are instances when athletes show intent to harm in these professional sports leagues. Kicking someone deliberately in these sports would count as an act of violence. On the other hand everyday assault and contact sports are separated by mutual consent and adherence to rules in the latter case (Sargeant & Brayne, 1998). Sports like boxing and MMA are by their very nature violent activities because the constitutive physical skills of these sports set out to and do deliberately inflict harm and produce pain. It is for this reason that some people and organizations like various medical associations consider boxing and MMA unethical and call for the ban of these sports. The centrality of violence is the ethical problem with MMA (Lewandowski, 2007).

Violence in MMA

Violence in MMA appears to be chaotic to the uneducated observer (Vaccaro, Schrock, & McCabe, 2011). The definition of violence as proposed by Simon (2004)

above is described and experienced differently according to MMA athletes. MMA much like boxing is violent but this is why it is monitored by strict management (Davis, 1994). Deliberately injuring or harming is not actually the goal or intent of the athletes. Harm and pain are merely the outcomes in relation to the skills and techniques needed to win. Moreover, physical injury is only an outward sign that encompasses the injured self. Other factors not included in Simon's (2004) definition are discussed by athletes in this study relating to violence that go beyond the physical.

MMA athletes do not see one another as objects but as subjects and the sports practiced as a bodily craft distanced from violence where they gain pleasure which is concurrent with Burke's (1998) boxing discussion. The intent as described as problematic within the sport of boxing and MMA has been refuted by the UFC participants I interviewed. Their comments added a sense of sportsmanship to the tactics seen and although violent the intent to purposely harm beyond the realm of acceptability within the community practitioners is experienced much differently among the athletes then seen and described by those without a deep understanding of the sport. Athlete A6 best defined the perspectives athletes have for each other which is not as objects but subjects.

A6: You know I have enough sense not to break your damn neck. I remember having a guy [] [in] a key lock from side control and I remember meeting his baby mama and holding his baby before the fight. And they could say, well how could you do that? And then go fight him [] well because it's a job. And I'm not gonna break this guy's arm knowing that he has to go to work that Monday after the fight. And he even appreciated it because I even said; please, I told him to please tap, I don't want you to fight this []. But I'm not going to you

know hit you again when you're asleep. I remember when I fought _____ when he was 22-0. And I broke his arm throwing him. I celebrated a little bit and I went and made sure he was okay. I remember kicking _____ in the body and it buckled his knee. And I actually helped him out of the cage; I carried him out of the cage.

A6 clearly delineates how MMA athletes view each other which are distanced from objects and closer to subjects. They clearly understand one another and there is much more concern for each other than most people even MMA connoisseurs do not get to view. Athletes further describe the camaraderie, friendship and mutual respect amongst each other. Spencer (2012) and Burke (1998) note that boxers do not see the practice as violent and to reduce it to a single façade of violence is reprehensible which can be argued for MMA as well.

The Meaning and a Critique of Autonomy

Most dictionaries define autonomy as having the freedom, liberty or independence to determine one's actions and conduct. From a philosophical perspective, autonomy often refers to the human will being governed by its own laws and principles. In this sense, self-determination and self-sufficiency are other ways to describe personal autonomy. Provided we harm no one, we cherish personal freedom to make unfettered independent decisions and control our own lives as we see fit like participating in MMA (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). In most liberal democracies, autonomy is championed to counter the restrictions and burdens imposed by governments, institutions and society at large. Freedom of will and choice are wholly basic to our nature as human beings and that without these ideas no legal system could be established, creativity would be stifled, no

obligations and responsibilities could be identified, and ethical and unethical judgments could not be distinguished. Still, freedom of choice or autonomy is a concept that is not without limits. One may be constrained by what is physically and spatially possible, social conditioning, legal limits, fiscal restraints, restrictive political circumstances, religious ideologies and many other parameters. A serious question then is how much autonomy or personal freedom is or should be granted or warranted for individuals to lead the kind of lives they wish to pursue? Pertinent as well, should individuals be given the autonomy to engage in a sport like MMA that is by definition violent? Does the experience and differentiated view of this violence described by the athletes in this study alter the morality and permissibility of MMA? Does the intent in context or consent alter the deliberation?

The Concept of Autonomy in Relation to MMA

MMA is a voluntary pursuit; it is governed by extensive rules that regulate the sport generally and each match very strictly on an individual basis. MMA athletes sufficiently know the risks and harms in the sport and willingly accept these. MMA athletes freely consent and want to experience pain and suffering more than most people and should not be denied this opportunity. Burke (1998) suggests that denying boxers their freedom to box exceeds any pain from injury they may face which can be said for MMA athletes as well. There is no conclusive proof that MMA significantly directly or indirectly harms society when the sport is publicly displayed in the media (Dixon, 2001). Furthermore those that are repulsed by MMA are free to look away as suggested in the boxing literature (Sokol, 2011; Herrera, 2002). Within the rules of MMA the sport promotes legitimate violence that is gaining wide public and governmental approval

including recently allowing professional MMA to be legal in all of Canada on June 5, 2013 based on provincial legislation.

Those in the medical community who currently champion patient autonomy and rights and call for a ban of MMA are inconsistent for not granting MMA athletes the same level of autonomy and rights (Warburton, 1998). Just as patients have an absolute right to autonomy in the medical profession; and in fact patients may refuse treatment even if it leads to death, MMA fighters should also be given the right to control their lives as they see fit. According to current standards in the medical community, the autonomy of patients precedes beneficence (Sokol, 2011). This means that patient rights and liberty are given priority over whatever good medical personnel determine to be in a patient's interests, provided the patient is a competent, rational adult. MMA athletes that were interviewed in this study have cherished their autonomy to pursue a professional MMA career. MMA athletes should have the freedom to control their lives, yet a call for a ban of their sport would deny them the liberty to pursue their interests.

Moreover, just because a patient may be ill and requires medical attention and treatment or one happens to be a healthy MMA athlete is insufficient grounds to grant personal autonomy to one person and deny it to the other (Sokol, 2004). According to John Stuart Mill, a leading 19th century philosopher who championed personal liberty, the individual is sovereign over oneself, one's body and mind. This means that autonomy is an integral feature of our identity and integrity as human beings and must be upheld as much as possible. Even though there are limits to autonomy as mentioned previously, autonomy must be preserved and be made a priority when there is inconclusive proof that restricting autonomy creates greater social good (Sokol, 2011). Therefore, the medical

community's proposition to ban MMA is at odds with the importance of respecting autonomy. By calling for a ban of MMA, MMA athletes would be denied the opportunity to control and live their lives as they see fit. Interfering with consenting competent adults is not warranted because no one has the right to interfere with freely chosen activities (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). Further, there is no conclusive evidence that boxing or MMA poses harm to society to restrict the autonomy of boxers and MMA athletes (Dixon, 2001).

Where the medical profession can be useful is to educate MMA athletes on the risks and harms of their chosen sport which would not infringe on their autonomy but give them further knowledge to make better informed decisions (Leclerc & Herrera, 1999). The medical profession's role should be limited to advice and information and respect for autonomy should be equal for athletes and patients alike (Sokol, 2004). The medical professionals should be knowledgeable and have up to date statistics concerning current MMA practices excluding those of previous years. Delivering false or out of date information is misleading and could be damaging to the sport and individuals who choose to participate.

Tamburrini (2011) discusses John Stuart Mill's notion of autonomy and happiness. Self-determination can only be achieved by making autonomous decisions and removing as much as possible constraints that limit behavior. Free life experiments are encouraged by the expression of autonomy toward the promotion of self-knowledge which is conducive to happiness (Tamburrini, 2011). Arguably there can be no happiness without autonomy which means that a ban on MMA would not only infringe on one's autonomy but would curtail one's happiness and ability to be happy. MMA athletes make

an autonomous decision to seek happiness by voluntarily engaging in a sport where pain and suffering is experienced by mutual consent. Denying MMA athletes their freedom to engage in their sport and express themselves would exceed any physical pain they experience in the ring. In this sense, MMA is not something these individuals do, it is what they are (Burke, 1998). Happiness and the importance of mutual consent are described and offer a profound look into the value and positive outlook MMA brings to both competitors despite its violent nature.

A2: I think we are all grown men and woman and we can choose to follow the dream to fight in the UFC and if you want I feel you have the right to do that. I think we make our decisions based on all the things that can happen in positive and negative ways and we assess it and decide if it is worth it. For me the journey of being a MMA artist has been worth it 100% even though I had to retire with an injury I would do it all over again in a heartbeat because it has brought me no stress in my life because I have always been able to take it out on the heavy bag and sparring and made so many great friends and travelling all over the world and there is a lot of people that wouldn't be able to say they did that. I look forward to doing martial arts the rest of my life; keeping me in the best shape of my life and sharing my knowledge with other people so that they can experience the same benefits that I experienced in the sport and I wouldn't change a thing for sure[]. MMA has given me everything good in my life []. It really has been such a fun life for me and I have been very lucky.

A2 also mentions a cathartic effect being a valuable asset to his happiness.

“Always been able to take it out on a heavy bag.” He is referring to stress being expended

through his training which will be discussed in more detail. Young (2012) describes MMA as a channel to responsibly release frustrations that accumulate. Such stress may be manifested dangerously elsewhere but MMA and boxing are ethical ways to release pent up anxieties (Davis, 1994). Although this argument is not substantial my own experiences and positive changes are concerned with my ability to release energy, concentration, ability and athleticism in MMA.

A4: They're taking away my life is one thing. Years of my life I have dedicated. Over twenty years of martial arts. You're telling me I can't do something that I've put twenty years of my life into. I wouldn't be happy about it at all. Just go to a place where I could do it. I just don't see why they would.

A5: Ya I mean it is a legal sport and you know if someone can show up and play basketball then play, I can fight and I should be able to. Until it is illegal I'm fighting!

A6: Yeah so I mean me being in mixed modern martial arts, I appreciate the fact that its saved my life. And I appreciate everything, all of the camaraderie, the fans that love me, the fans that hated me because it was like, you came to see me win and to cheer me or you came to see me hopefully lose and boo me.

A7: You know, you live in America the freedom that we have to enter into a sport you know it's a legitimate sport. [] I don't feel lucky to be able to participate in it, I just think it's a given because MMA is a legitimate sport. To participate is like participating in a community activity, to participate to anything that's open to the public. I don't feel like it's a lucky opportunity to be able to participate. I think it's a given that everyone should be able to.

A8: Oh man I live in America; free country. I love that. I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have MMA. You know, I love Jiu Jitsu, you know I'm proud of Jiu Jitsu. You know []. I started doing boxing but the leg feels, the strategies, it's definitely my passion. I make a living with mixed martial arts you know and um without mixed martial arts, I'll probably just go back to the mill. The stereotypical American job, working at a little office, desk or something and I'd probably hate my life.

Finally, in order to make autonomous decisions one must be knowledgeable and aware of all the facts and contingencies of one's circumstances as much as possible. In this sense MMA may differ as facts surrounding the sport and empirical data has transformed over the recent evolution of the sport and data may not be current and accurate. Boxing data has been relatively similar for years by comparison. However athletes appear aware of earlier risks and empirical evidence suggests knowledge of risks is evident despite a possible decrease in those risks in recent years. In the boxing literature, some sport ethicists contend that boxers might be coerced into the sport because many athletes are from disadvantaged backgrounds where boxing may be their only chance to escape their relatively poor socio-economic status (Dixon, 2001). Given the seriousness and prevalence of post-career brain damage among boxers, which would diminish their status as autonomous beings later in life, there are those who argue that pre-emptive intervention to ban punches to the head is needed to preserve and maintain personal autonomy. Such a restriction of autonomy is unlike terminal patients who wish to end their lives because of severe pain and suffering. The proposed autonomous pre-emptive intervention of one's current self should override the future possibility of losing

one's capacity to be autonomous (Dixon, 2001). Whereas this argument has considerable merit in the case of boxing, there is insufficient evidence about the risks and harms in MMA and their adverse future consequences to reform the sport as suggested in boxing. The relatively short history of MMA in comparison to boxing is a factor to be considered when discussing trends as effects on athletes may not be as abundant as boxing. Nevertheless according to the athletes I interviewed coercion and coming from disadvantaged backgrounds is not the trend which may refute the claim to pre-emptively intervene to preserve MMA athletes' future autonomy.

Throughout the interviews, questionnaires, research and my personal experience it seems MMA has high level athletes from advantaged backgrounds contrary to the boxing's history. There are wealthy people, school teachers, and highly educated individuals participating in the UFC among my participants as well. It is not to say there are not people from disadvantaged backgrounds however it is apparent that there is a multitude of educated, competent, fully informed and rational adults that have advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds.

One of the athletes (A2) described his pre-emptive intervention in order to save his own future autonomy. There are athletes willing to retire in order to preserve their autonomy but what of those that refuse to step away, should they be restricted from engaging in MMA? I think there should be this sort of imposition once an athlete shows signs described by this athlete and if they don't retire voluntarily they should be stripped of their licenses to fight. There are other options described by these athletes including passing on the knowledge of MMA gained through their experiences at the highest level and making a living coaching MMA.

A2: Well my worst one was post-concussion syndrome and that is by far the worst one and that is from an accumulation of a lifetime of contact sports. In [ice] hockey I got my two worst concussions, as a thirteen year old and that progressed into seven minor concussions but I was never knocked out[]I never even really got knocked down except for the head butt with _____ but other than that even in training. Just a lot of shots over the years and that just made me feel very spacey for many years. I couldn't exercise for a year and a half after my last concussion I couldn't even do one move on the mats so it felt it was definitely the worst time of my life. It felt like a massive hangover but you know when you have a hangover you know you are going to be better but this doesn't go away for a year and a half. When I got better I decided to stop fighting and stop getting hit in the head. I was just thinking of my family and I am kind of a deep thinking guy so you know when I couldn't do the things I wanted outside of the cage I decided it was not worth it you know I have a job I teach martial arts and I was doing UFC fighting for fun and to push myself as an athlete and as a person.

Concluding Remarks

A general misunderstanding of MMA athletes and the sport is widespread (Spencer, 2012). Such misconception is fueled by society's confusion about individuals who voluntarily take part in MMA where the main goal is to intentionally cause harm to one's opponent (Mayeda & Ching, 2008). Unfortunately the colourful discourse of this sport in the media is often emphasized over the practice, resulting in an unfair bias and distorted representation of the sport (Sokol, 2004). A pattern emerges from the literature

suggesting an overall lack of conclusive knowledge about MMA. With this in mind, the ethical status of MMA is critically examined by using the knowledge proposed by the most experienced in it; MMA athletes in the UFC.

I argue that personal autonomy is a core element of our identity and integrity as human beings that give expression in the choices we make to lead the lives we wish to pursue in order to achieve happiness. As a fundamental aspect of our humanity and for the moment, athletes should have opportunity to exercise their liberty and freedom to choose to participate in MMA. Such consent must be mutual and informed, and as much knowledge as possible must be passed on to MMA athletes about the risks and harms of the sport.

I make the disclaimer of “for the moment” in my argument for two reasons. First, it may turn out that serious and prevalent long-term suffering in MMA might curtail future individual autonomy which may warrant some kind of pre-emptive intervention to restrict personal liberty now. Current empirical studies do not suggest these adverse long-term effects in MMA. Second, if the goals and rules of MMA were to transform into consistent near-death or death competitions, then no amount of taking pleasure in pain and suffering can be ethically justifiable under such circumstances. This day has not yet arrived and if it did arrive the athletes in this study described this as extremely problematic and would not participate if MMA reached these levels.

Despite the recent exponential growth of MMA, deaths in sanctioned and regulated professional MMA are low (reported 8 or less) but these deaths are unsubstantiated. There have been zero deaths in the UFC. Death in amateur and unsanctioned MMA matches have occurred including one death in the league I compete

in but these deaths may be a result of the omission of said commissions and legislative authorities. Despite the few deaths that have occurred one would imagine such an exponential growth in a violent sport deemed unethical by medical professionals would produce a drastic increase in death and serious injury but reports remain low. Comments concerning the possibility of death produced suggestions from athletes to investigate the issue and solved it by introducing more legislation, rules, regulations and reform to prevent near death or death circumstances.

Finally, contrary to those who call for a ban of MMA, like many in the medical community and others, I have shown that their position is inconsistent because they champion patient autonomy and rights and wish to deny these same conditions to MMA athletes. MMA athletes have shown to be fully informed giving them the right to participate (Heilbronner, et al; 2009). Athletes consent to the harm they experience that critics find repulsive while these same critics may not fully understand the consequences of abolishing MMA. The consequences and limitations this would create would be absurd (Warburton, 1998). I believe therefore I have presented a strong argument to show that MMA is ethically justifiable on the basis of autonomy.

Perhaps the medical community should be limited to providing advice and information in order to maintain the autonomy of athletes who may want to box and participate in MMA (Herrera & Leclerc, 1999). If government officials and the medical community intend to protect these athletes from harm to self (paternalism) then shouldn't they understand the harm a ban would produce against those who freely choose to participate (autonomy)?

Paternalism

Paternalism restricts the liberty of people from harm and bad choices for what is believed to be their own good (Heilbrunner et al; 2009 & Warburton, 1998). Determining whether MMA athletes need protection or whether they are fully autonomous is questioned by some. There are areas within the sport where paternalism can and should be used adding restrictions and referee intervention is valued as described earlier. However, many critics of MMA utilize paternalistic arguments yet they do not fully understand the language and ideologies of those within the MMA community. There are objections to the sport and a paternalistic call to ban MMA is often made due to the level of pain and injury, but the athletes here do not describe the same level of pain and injury as viewed and described by those in favour of a ban. Furthermore how would we measure pain (Davis, 1994)? This situation may be due to the fact that MMA athletes do not experience pain or violence the same as it is interpreted by others. The level of pain may not be the same for MMA athletes at the highest level and is managed differently than most people. The violence and harm in MMA is experienced, understood and normalized allowing pain to even be recognized as positive (Spencer, 2012). Therefore rescuing MMA athletes from a paternalistic stance may not be warranted. What level of pain and tolerance is acceptable in sport and how do we measure this or gauge its morality? Paternalism seems to fall short due to its inconsistency (Warburton, 1998).

Coercion within MMA does not seem to be similar to that discussed in the boxing literature where some disadvantaged people feel forced to box to free themselves of their impoverished state. Paternalism is concerned with coercion of MMA athletes because they will not be making fully informed, consensual, autonomous decisions to participate in a violent sport that may jeopardize their future autonomy (Dixon, 2001). Nonetheless

MMA athletes seem to differ from coercion described in the boxing literature because there is less money in professional MMA and no champions are millionaires as there are in boxing. Further, many MMA athletes come from advantaged and educated backgrounds including the UFC athletes I interviewed and those in the MMA community who I am familiar with. The boxing literature suggests that the boxing population has a high number of disadvantaged athletes presumably coerced into the sport. The MMA athletes interviewed in this study have been practicing martial arts or grappling since a young age. They also have college diplomas and university degrees including one who holds a master's degree and was a former educator. Fame and fortune are not yet lucrative enough to cause a coercive effect in MMA but the sport is slowly becoming popular and the rewards larger. Even without fame and fortune autonomy is championed to minimize the coercion evident in MMA.

Paternalism is contrary to the interests of MMA athletes and the sport in general, yet the motives for making such claims by some are influenced by their own morality and a number of other factors (Herrera, 2002). These factors could be anything from personal beliefs, experiences with violence or involvement in government and the new emergence of such a profitable new sport and business. There have been notable appearances of government officials in favour of banning MMA including Senator John McCain who has recently retracted his statements saying they have cleaned up the sport to the point where it is not human cock fighting adding they haven't made me a fan, but they have made progress (Smith, 2008).

Pre-emptive paternalism is one version of paternalism that shows concern for the future of the autonomous self (Dixon, 2001). Based on A2 describing the loss of his

future autonomy this form of paternalism may be warranted. However if the athletes are informed enough to recognize the potential of losing their future autonomy and it is not entirely due to their participation in MMA and retire before loss of autonomy then acting paternalistically may be unnecessary.

Burke (1998) describes boxers as a community with their own practices, rituals, and ideologies which can be said for MMA as well. To condemn or ban an entire community is foolish (Burke, 1998). To completely reject a community as complex, and new as MMA would be unjust paternalistic grounds that shows itself to be inefficient and inconsistent (Simon, 2004; Warburton, 1998).

Legal Moralism

Legal moralism deems MMA immoral regardless of any resulting harm which questions the acceptability of other contact sports. Beyond this perhaps just because a sport is immoral there should not be repercussions in every circumstance which is supported by allowing other immoral activities to exist despite legal moralism. There is also the debate of harm which was previously mentioned that threatens this concept. There is an issue with bloodlust and sadism that should be of concern such that any sport that promotes these ought to be opposed whether or not they produce real harm and injury (Dixon, 2001). However athletes here described their MMA experience without these characteristics. The concern for bloodlust and sadism is more prevalent in fans of MMA than actual practitioners.

MMA continues to be legalized across the United States of America and recently (June 5, 2013) in all of Canada. A new bill (S-209) was passed to amend the criminal code, Section 83 (1), which only included boxing as a legal sport as long as it was

governed by an athletic commission. S-209 expands the code to include prize fighting, including MMA making the sport legal as long as an athletic commission provides oversight (www.justice.gc.ca, 2013).

The consent given by these athletes does not concern legal moralists because consent does not forgive its inherent wrongness (Dixon, 2001). An example is described by Simon (2004) with his idea of Mayhem which would never be allowed despite consent. Athletes did provide responses that would refute their participation in matches that ended in death or allowed weapons like Simon's Mayhem principle would suggest. Despite the theory of legal moralism being sound in some cases, it has no applicability at the moment to the legality of boxing and in addition MMA (Brayne, Sargeant, & Brayne, 1998).

The Harm Principle

According to the Harm Principle one is justified to intervene with the liberty of people if they intentionally harm others (Tamburrini, 2011). MMA athletes in this study described harming others but mostly the experience is concerned with the self. Without the consent of others they would not be able to test themselves against one another and this bond fosters mutual respect and camaraderie. The athletes here reported the level of harm as minimal especially in competition. Opponents of MMA want competition banned yet the most harm occurs outside of competition during the grueling hours of training multiple disciples at once. Also, the majority of harm is described as occurring by accident or due to over training outside of competition as well. In a competitive sport that requires physical contact like MMA there are bound to be horrendous injuries but

these injuries are not all attributed to the infliction or acts of violence between athletes but occurs as just regular sports injuries or from other causes like degradation of tissue.

Despite what MMA athletes experience the sport may create possible social harm by desensitizing society. This occurs because the UFC is viewed live on television, internet, PPV and in sports bars and the general public does not formally consent to this possible harm (Dixon, 2001). Although there is no substantial proof for this claim those who wish to avoid watching the UFC may do so easily. One does not have to buy a ticket and go to a live match or competition. Watching MMA on TV is limited to specific channels and times on networks like Spike, Fox, and Sportsnet and these can be avoided. UFC airs on these channels but some are ordered have specific times (late) that can be managed or a change in networks is always possible. Going online and ordering the fights are clearly not infringing on people who do not want to watch MMA. If the UFC is playing at a bar there is a good chance there are places at that bar where you could watch other sports or one can go to another bar to avoid the UFC. However there may be an argument for the harm that occurs from the possible promotion of criminal activity (Dixon, 2001). This is suggested in the boxing literature but could transfer into MMA as the UFC is held in Las Vegas and you can gamble on events. This may harm society or benefit it depending on how you analyze gambling but at the moment there is no proof of criminal harm in the UFC.

There are more dangerous sports that cause more harm than MMA (Jones, 2001). Other risk sports or combat sports remain unquestioned, yet MMA is targeted for censure. Davis (1994) declares that boxing must be conclusively shown to involve greater pain levels than other sports to be immoral based on harm, which would extend into the MMA

debate which arguably produces less harm than boxing. Jones (2001) adds the harm concept gains strength in the unique intentions held in MMA and it is this intent that is inappropriate and immoral (Burke, 1998; Schneider & Butcher, 2001; BMA 2011). The following will examine this point.

Intent

The intention to harm may be absent as described by the athletes here which may alter the ethical status of MMA according to the Harm Principle. Athletes say they are trying to win and the intent is victory but accidents happen in MMA which is a physical and mental contest full of body contorting techniques aimed at subduing your opponent (Jones, 2001). This is parallel with the boxing discussion (McCormick, 1979).

There are strong moral grounds based on harm to condemn boxing as well as MMA (Schneider & Butcher, 2001). Warburton (1998) describes as central feature of boxing as the intent to injure which is an effective way to win and this differs from other sports. According to Warburton (1998) contends there are no accidents that cause injury in boxing because all punches have the intent to harm. This sort of intent may be similar in MMA although context and structural differences in MMA make it distinctive from boxing. I would disagree with Warburton that every injury in boxing results from intent to harm and that accidents do occur. Athletes admit to accidentally hurting themselves and others while freak accidents are bound to occur in any contact sport including ones with intent to harm. Therefore not every injury was caused with intent. Warburton (1998) states that boxing can be morally condemned but a ban cannot be justified. This is not to say the MMA discussion is the

same but their own history, unique situation and ethical stance and thoughts on intent should be considered before condemning or banning it.

A2: You could win fights and not even punch the guy in the head []. I don't look at it in terms of them being violent towards me but in terms of me messing up technically.

A3: I mean a lot of people might come forward saying I wanna finish and I only wanna finish. But if it came down to the choice of finishing or winning, they'd probably choose to win []. If you would say that you know if you're going to the fight, your controlled competitor person if no longer defending themselves, you're probably gonna be able to pull back, because the intention is not to kill the person[]. I don't necessarily want to hear someone's arm snap, you know, so I would hope to avoid that []. Or if you could prove that you could see something, like purposely poke someone in the eye, but some of that stuff you can never, it'd be impossible to prove to somebody.

There was a fight years ago where this kid was actually beating the kid and he bit him. So yeah in that situation I think you should be fined. And probably never be allowed to fight again []. But you're not purposely trying to hurt someone in a fight. You're purposely trying to win []. I mean I'm not thinking like in MMA, God I'd love to see someone's head split open so how could I make that happen? I'm not thinking in that frame of mind []. The person wants to win but most of the people you're fighting don't want to kill you. Not saying there isn't individuals that are that way but most people wanna win but

they don't wanna necessarily see the person that they are fighting severely injured or hospitalized.

A4: That's just the nature of the sport. I'm not intentionally trying to end his career but at that moment I am trying to inflict as much pain on him as possible to get him out of there []. It's just fun to me it's not that I'm trying to intentionally wreck that person's life. It's a competition []. If you're going to get your arm broken, it's your fault for not tapping right. I don't think guys are intentionally really trying to hurt the guy a lot of it has to do with stubbornness on the others guys part [] I really don't think a lot of athletes are trying to physically injure someone.

A5: No I mean there probably are some guys that have the intent but I would personally say that 95% of all fighters want to win and it is not about [] I mean there is very limited bad intentions [] I mean you want to hurt the guy you want to knock him out but it's not personal like I want to break his arm or break his jaw.

A6: I've never purposely with that mind set of [] I'm a break his damn arm [] I won't do that with intent []. You know I mean I'm not gonna kick you in the nuts on purpose. If I apply a choke and if you go out I'm not gonna hold the choke []. But I don't try to, you know, cripple somebody.

A7: In a competition how do you make sense of the fact that your success often comes from finishing. Well in a fight your opponent's trying to hurt you so as far as me injuring my opponent I have no problem with that point I have no problem. It's not my objective. My objective is to make him quit. When I'm trying to

finish him I'm trying to hurt him, put him in pain enough that he wants to quit, so if he gets hurt while in the process then I'm really not too concerned about that. So I mean to make sense of successfully finishing an opponent or injuring him is two separate things. I think injuring an opponent is not the main objective but finishing him is and sometimes that has to do with injuring him too.

A8: Uh I think the main goal is to win right?

The athletes in this study provided some context to the harm discussion based on the fact that intentional actions in MMA produce violence. The athletes described harm in a peculiar and specific way that differentiates between pain and injury, and this distinction may be inconsistent. They said they wanted to hurt their opponent as much as possible by inflicting a considerable amount of pain against their adversary. This is what each competitor consented to and fully understood. However, what they did not want to do was to severely injure their opponent. Thus, as they perceived the harm issue producing pain is separate from causing serious injury. This distinction requires further analysis.

In many situations in MMA there exists a fine line between hurting one's opponent and injuring him, as well as knowing the goal of bringing an opponent to this juncture. In an arm hold for example, one wants to exert a significant amount of pain and suffering to the opponent's arm to make him quit by tapping out. If the opponent does not quit and his arm snaps then he is mostly culpable for his own injury. The reason for this is that he is the only one who can evaluate the level of pain, condition and position of his arm to withstand the pain and know when his arm will break. The MMA fighters in this study who described similar circumstances all said that they could not be held responsible

for such injuries. They did not feel they should be blamed for these sorts of injuries because all they were doing was causing pain. If anyone should be blamed they pointed mainly to the injured athlete and others like the referee, the athlete's coach and other officials.

The perception that one can divorce certain actions from direct, almost inevitable consequences is a difficult issue from a moral point of view. In the example above, can one really place virtually all the blame onto the athlete whose arm breaks? To do so requires that one assumes his opponent (and others) has full and accurate knowledge of the pain he is experiencing, the density of his bones and the precise moment his arm will snap. Absolving oneself from responsibility for breaking another person's arm by claiming one was only trying to inflict a considerable amount of pain is disingenuous at best and is more like a rationalization for bad behavior. This is so because removing oneself from being accountable in such a situation is self-serving, morally arbitrary and inconsistent. Sometimes people want to convince themselves they did not do wrong in order to sleep better at night and not think too much about the terrible outcomes they have caused. On occasion people also like to think of themselves as morally privileged for no good reason as though their moral status is somehow superior to that of others. However, at times and due to our vulnerability as human beings, we require the protection of others. In this case, the opponent inflicting the pain must acknowledge the vulnerability of his opponent who by virtue of his being human must be accorded protection. Finally, all people, including the MMA fighters in this study, know that one's actions often lead to imminent consequences in many everyday situations and there is no compelling reason to conclude that in MMA this connection is suddenly severed when it

comes to inflicting pain and arm breaking.

The discussion of pain and injury has shown that violence and harm as perceived by MMA athletes and in MMA generally contains a moral grey area. This is not a surprise given the inherent violence in the sport. It is important to acknowledge the fine distinction between pain and injury, but it is quite another thing to deny any moral responsibility for a resultant injury when hurting an opponent through the exertion of extreme levels of pain. Such moral callousness and insensitivity are revealing and ethically questionable.

Suggestions for Reform

Suggestions for reform have been drawn from the research I have conducted and expanded beyond that to include my own emic based on personal experience competing in the cage as an amateur MMA athlete with a record of 2-0. I have spent time in this practice community beyond the scope of research as a devout fan since the UFC inception and a practitioner for eight years approaching a professional career of my own. Detractors and supporters of MMA offer some suggestions for reform advising the need for change which may suggest the sport may have some unethical components. The evolution of the sport and the open mind of individuals involved in it allowed for reforms and increased safety measures as risks become more pertinent and knowledge about the sport grows. This allows for moral growth as constant interference may decrease progress (Simon, 2004). Participants chimed in on some aspects they felt needed change or improvement which I will expand upon, explain and further develop. One common theme derived from the investigation was that there was a general satisfaction with the current framework of the UFC.

When asked about reform and the status of the current UFC format some athletes' responses showed that they were satisfied and would not change the format. The responses shifted in the interview process to include a broader area of reform that expanded to include judging and scoring. Athletes 1, 2, 5, and 8 provide these responses in the questionnaire when asked about an increase in safety and reform.

A1: Not really UFC, uhhh they could but they already do everything necessary.

They could triple up scans and EKG MRI's. They do take care of us.

A2: I think the rules currently in place have proven to keep things as safe as any contact sport can be.

Participants offered suggestions for the sport and specifically the UFC to be reformed based on their personal experiences. There were few major changes that the athletes thought were pertinent and most suggestions for reform were minor and related to judging, scoring and equipment but did not necessarily change the format of the sport dramatically. The suggestions were minor and very realistic suggesting the possible reality and functionality of these changes. This is what athletes had to say about reforming the sport.

A2: I think the model they have now is working really well, I think it has proven to be very safe, um I would probably change the scoring system a bit because you could make the takedowns count as a little bit less I mean how can you judge how do these guys figure out what is worth more is a takedown worth three punches to the head is it worth seven punches in the head like some of these guys are just taken a person down and going I yes I won that round. [] So maybe

something like that but I don't know it is really tough to see how they would score it.

A3: I'd like to see maybe judges get paid more and be more qualified and possibly held more to a higher standard, maybe. I don't know, whether that's training, the way they view the fight, you know they're rings right? Should they be rings? Should they have different angles of the camera? Should they have this? Should certain fights be able to be looked at again. I've never been a fan of fights being overturned to a win but there are justifiable situations where things could be moved to a no contest now. So when there is enough evidence that the decision was bad, not necessarily overturn the decision but turn it into a no contest because I've seen some pretty horribly shit through the years.

A3: [] leather around the wrists, I think that could be changed into some kind of, maybe thinner material, or some kind of []. And then taped on and some of the padding changed.

A5: Ya I mean I don't have a big laundry list of things but I definitely think that the judging can be improved. Pretty much everyone in the sport can agree that the judges, you know that there are some fights that are legitimately you are blown away by the results. When it comes to the rules no I don't really think there is anything to be changed for anything else.

A8: The fight rules aren't so bad. It's the judges. The judges.

MMA and UFC judging was one suggestion offered by participants. It is very controversial and inconsistent from one fight to the next and from one judge to the next based on scoring that is announced following decision matches. It is inconsistent in the

fact that one judge may see one athlete decisively winning a match while another sees the athlete losing the match decisively. This is detrimental to the sport and athlete and a clear delineation of point distribution will aid in what judges deem valuable and most important in winning. Whether the judges see grappling or striking as most valuable may alter the sport in the following ways: If judges deem grappling more valuable a reduction in head trauma may result as submissions from grappling may be more important thus reducing the importance of strikes to the head or body. This however may increase injuries to the limbs or provide a safe outlet to the athlete being defeated as they may tap out and avoid being struck at all. Consistency and knowledge of what is most pertinent to a MMA match is needed in order to determine what martial arts and techniques are valued most. This could alter the empirical data of injuries, stoppages and the overall appearance of MMA in the UFC.

Athletes suggested that the sport's format is acceptable in its current state but some athletes said they could adapt rules that promoted more violence. Athlete 1 and A7 suggest support for the UFC to adapt rules from the previously mentioned Pride organization which allowed kicks and knees to a grounded opponent which would potentially add to the violence and harm of athletes suggesting a reduction of reform.

A1: I would love to fight Pride rules, I 'm totally down for kicking somebody it would be awesome. Hahaha jump on their face.

A7: I personally would like to see the fights go further and not be stopped as soon. I personally would like the knee in the turtle position to be legal.

Athletes acknowledged some other similar suggestions for reform that should be considered when discussing MMA ethically and contextually. The athletes were in favour

of adding some restrictions like elbows which cause cuts, bleeding and early stoppages by doctors. Eliminating elbows would clearly decrease risk and increase safety. Adding more weight divisions, rules and consideration for eliminating weight cutting were suggested as well.

A1: I think foot stomping is cheap it's just a cheap shot. You know that front push kick _____ does to the knee joint I think that is pretty chicken shit. I don't like it.

A2: Trying to purposely spike someone on their head I don't really like that move where guys dive forward when there is someone on their back you know that one. That is kind of bad and a few guys have broken their necks diving forward like that. And it can hurt the other guy as well so I think that is a move that can be looked at.

A3: I guess I would be somewhat opposed to like joint destructions. Against another qualified fighter, there is very few opportunities for stuff like that. But something like that would be like someone punching someone in the throat on purpose.

A3: Yeah, I would look at it as unacceptable but I don't know if you can [] make rules for that, yeah know.

A3: Power slams to the top of the head []. You can't pile drive a person, stuff like that. There is a lot of stuff, rules that have already been implemented to stop things from occurring.

A4: I don't like elbows getting done to me. I'll do them to somebody in an instant. Get out of there as soon as possible. I'm a pretty guy and don't like having scars

on my face. There's a lot of elbows but very rarely do you see somebody actually get hurt. Most of the time you just mark up his face. I would almost rather see them kick someone around as opposed to stomps. Or I mean as opposed to elbows. Very rarely do you actually land a kick on the ground. The guy pretty much has to be sitting still. He's cutting you off and grabbing your legs. There's less chance of it actually working.

A4: Especially on the ground.

A4: I think that the blood in the cage too stops a lot of fights. So I think that if they stopped letting elbows happen. You know people watch the fight, there's been some blood in fights but not awful. The guys not really hurt he's just bleeding a lot because he's got a cut on his head and it's usually from an elbow. But I think that would put a better look on the fight. But if it's on TV and it's not live, cut it out.

A4: I think there's a big demand in weight class changes in same day weigh ins. I think weigh ins make it a big difference in playing field. Some guys are capable of cutting so much weight and other guys aren't. It all depends on your body type. Put a guy like me, I can make 160 no problem, but I can't really make 155. So in order for me to fight at 170 I'm playin' guys that are like five inches taller than me. I'd rather see same day weigh ins, maybe add more weight classes like boxing.

A8: added shortly to the same suggestion for reform adding this following his suggestion about judging.

A8: That's it, or maybe more divisions.

A6: The safety equipment I think it needs to be universally accepted on the amateur level. Because you know, I think the rules should have to be followed no matter whether you're California, Washington, New Mexico, New York, Florida or Mississippi. And I've been in states, different states in the Midwest and nobody has the same set of rules. And I laugh because I listen to what these commissioners say versus what I know is the truth. [] Out of respect I won't critique in front of everybody. So I especially bite my lip and go okay but; let's be absolutely honest, it's bullshit, because every promoter has a different set of rules.

There are a number of things that I would like to see reformed in MMA and specifically the UFC. Referee training could improve, monitoring training sessions/ gym, attacking the knee joint, and weight divisions are among some of the most pertinent issues needing reform according to my observations and experiences. There are areas to improve the safety of this sport which would increase acceptability, reduce violence, risk, and improve its overall structure which would allow the sport to grow in a morally acceptable way. The sport is continuously showing this trend and is a promising direction even for those in favour of a ban.

Referees could intervene sooner and more effectively by tackling the athlete that is attacking and not just stepping in between which often allows the attacker to land additional blows that should be prevented. Athletic commissions should monitor training camps and MMA facilities where upcoming athletes are training in order to see if proper methods and equipment are being used (Jones, 2001). Banning minors also has moral justification based on paternalism (Herrera, 2002). Boxers agreed to earlier stoppages

therefore an increase in points base (Ohhashi, 2002). Although this may be too soon for MMA it could be next in the evolving reform of the UFC's history. Athletes should not be able to attack the knee joint as it is highly vulnerable to serious injury that could result in permanent damage and loss of employment. Weight divisions need to be added so athletes can compete at a more natural weight class. Weight categories should begin at 120 pounds for males and a new class should be available every five pounds up to 240 for the time being. This can be encouraged by having the athletes weigh in the day of competition and not the day before competition which allows athletes to drop tremendous amounts of weight in order to be in a smaller category and then they put this weight back on before the fight the next night. Some athletes can cut around twenty pounds. Rapid weight cutting in wrestling is physiological and psychologically detrimental to individuals (Brownell, Steen & Wilmore, 1987). The effects of this drastic dehydration and rehydration is relatively unknown but it is obvious that this experience is unhealthy and the most awful and violent aspect of MMA competition from my experience. The personal harm inflicted on the self in these harsh conditions of cutting weight needs attention. These are some of the aspects needing a more detailed look concerning the possibility of reform in the UFC and MMA.

Suggestions for Further Research

Considering the infancy and evolution of MMA and UFC research, suggestions for further research are quite substantive. First I would recommend that research be expanded to include female MMA athletes especially considering their current rise to the upper echelons of the UFC and an increase in popularity and participation. Empirical evidence regarding injuries, concussions, grappling time vs. striking time and other

factors that will be expanded upon should be updated and studied based on the new era of the UFC. MMA gyms should be investigated whether there are amateur, professional, or both participating at these gyms. Recreational athletes and children are mainly involved away from the eyes of commissions, legislators and physician's, research of this particular environment should be further investigated. A particular area of concern for athletes including myself is the practice of weight cutting that is relatively unknown but seen as unethical due to the dangers and detrimental effects it may have on the body according to athletes and health care professionals. Here is one athlete's account.

A4: And it's not healthy. My wife is a nurse so I have to hear about how bad cutting weight is.

A4: I fought John _____, I got a new strength and conditioning coach to lose all this weight. I went to the fight, I got there, I was 196 and I had to weigh 170. So in two days I cut from 196 to 170, so 26 pounds. I weighed in, ended up cutting under, two pounds under at 168. So I cut 28 pounds in two days. Three days later I weighed 214 pounds. I ended up in the hospital. I had a fluid overload. My body wouldn't release any fluid. So I was basically drowning in my own body. I couldn't lay down. I would jump up and my body was just full of fluids.

A4: Had to go to the hospital. Gave me diuretics, had to get a cat scan for my heart. The thing was that's when I had had the elbow surgery on the Monday, the very next day I blew up so I thought something had happened during the surgery. I thought maybe I had a blood clot. Scared the hell outta me.

Furthermore research should expand to other professional MMA leagues as rules and regulations vary slightly and may affect the results. While some leagues allow elbows and others do not it is questioned whether the reasoning behind this curtails further ethical assessment. Beyond the professional league a more concerning area in need of research may be that of the amateur leagues.

Professional MMA especially the UFC as described by the athletes in this work presents a perspective that sheds light on the context and experience of competing in MMA at the highest level. The UFC has shown signs of ethical advancement and debate but the issues that lie before becoming a professional; out of the lime light and control of the government is a darker side of MMA that most athletes searching for a future as a professional must first surpass. The risks are higher due to a lack of government supervision, legislation, medical supervision, decrease in control, and the list trickles down to everything the athletes discussed and much more. A fighter died in the league I compete in prior to my last MMA competition and the reasons are vast but among those reasons are the lack of medical supervision and care outside the cage.

Since training time is much more than competition, those involved at the recreational level may be affected most because they do not compete and take time off or compete in the cage which is safer than the actual training according to athletes. UFC athletes are constantly training with few extended breaks and according to athletes this is where most injuries occur. Not only that, but this is where regulation is non-existent and in a sport such as MMA maybe there should be some monitoring within the gym regardless of the level at which the participant is involved. Such regulation may be paternalistic but it may be warranted to promote moral conduct and safety within MMA.

Amateurs are often training at amateur clubs where the supervision and training methods may not be experienced and regulated as the professionals described in this study. In my experience amateur clubs are much more dangerous and some need oversight.

Amateur leagues vary greatly in rules and regulations and are mostly unsanctioned events which are cause for concern. Little to no research has been conducted in this area which is a concern because although death rates are zero in the UFC and few and far between in the professional leagues overall this is not the case in the amateur leagues. Noting the recent death of a Hamilton MMA athlete in the Amateur Fighting Club (AFC) in Michigan and the prevalence and severity of this issue is very close to home. I compete in the AFC and I would like to see events be regulated much like the professionals not only for safety but to prepare athletes for the professional leagues much like other sports. With the increase in MMA participation so has increases in the participation of younger adults, teens, and children.

Participation in MMA has spread to include younger athletes including children and this area needs exploration before possible detrimental effects occur. There have been amateur MMA events including children all over the world and these events are also subject to the lack of regulations other amateur leagues may follow. Research on these children and their participation in MMA is clearly an issue that needs reporting. These athletes may not be fully informed and their parents giving consent also may not be fully informed of the risks.

A more in depth analysis of various aspects surrounding MMA is necessary due to the infancy of the sport. Empirical data are outdated and mostly includes earlier years of the sport prior to improvements of the rules and regulations. Studies in other fields

including psychology and other disciplines should be explored by scholars to better understand the sport and the athletes that participate in MMA.

An analysis of retired MMA athletes should be conducted to understand the effects of a career in the early years of MMA. This can be used to compare, contrast and predict future issues or precautions that should be taken to better protect the athletes and improve the safety of the sport.

There are countless areas of research and discussion that needs to take place surrounding MMA. I understand that as the sport continues to gain notoriety academic attention will increase and hopefully my research is a stepping stone to future directions and an overall expansion of MMA literature.

There was extensive speculation and debate throughout the boxing and MMA literature surrounding their equipment. In particular there were notes describing the boxing glove as less safe than in MMA. Both were discussed however empirical evidence on this and other equipment like headgear or helmets seems controversial at best. It is argued that bare knuckle or MMA reduce the amount of blows sustained during a bout by reducing surface area, increasing cuts and stoppages while the boxing glove allows many blows to the head which may damage the brain more is through recoiling and sustaining repetitive trauma. Even the decision to use headgear may not be fully informed and this direction may not be warranted as the amateur boxing association recently changed the rules concerning the use of headgear. Now the AIBA (International Boxing Association) has approved the removal of headgear for elite men boxers (O'Neill, 2013). This refutes the claim added in the boxing debate that headgear should be added as reform (Simon, 2004). The theory is based on empirical evidence and a recent article from the British

medical journal that found there is no conclusive evidence that headgear or mouth guards deter traumatic brain injury (Wang, 2013). There are other considerations like better vision as headgear tends to blind the fighter allowing them to be hit with more of the most dangerous punches which are the ones athletes sometimes do not see.

Final Thoughts

The final thoughts of participants and my own thinking reflect similarities suggesting participation, observation, and education of those questioning MMA. It is difficult to appreciate, comprehend, and determine the ethical status of a sport from a broad overview. Before judging the sport and those that participate in it, people should experience it hands on in order to confirm their fears or exalt them. Athletes had this to say:

A1: Try it! You are a bunch of dying fossils and if you are not going to get on board the umm what the future is then uh []. No matter what sport you play people can get hurt, and die ok just cuz this is a violent sport, it's new and are afraid of it if you don't want to watch it they don't have to but listen this sport is not going anywhere.

A2: I think for anybody that doesn't know why we fight, and why the UFC is so popular, is that you have to try it and train in it at a recreational level, see how much technique is even at a white belt level in BJJ. I got guys coming off the street saying when can I be in the UFC but then they can't beat a white belt for the first two years, then you see that white belt get tapped by a blue belt than that blue belt by a purple belt etc., then you're like the more you know, the more you realize you don't know. Just get out there and practice it and do it at the

rec level and see what type of shape these guys are in when you can't last 2 minutes on a heavy bag then you see these guys doing 15-20 minutes of fighting against a real opponent you begin to understand the skill involved.

It's like me talking about golf, oh what's golf so easy right but now I understand that it is very very difficult then you appreciate the skill and until you have tried it you shouldn't speak about the sport because once you try it you will have an appreciation for everything we do on the mats and in the ring and you will see why it is so damn addicting and fun!

A3: I mean that's an aspect of any words can't necessarily [describe] you know; I guess; would be if someone wants to come to a better perspective of it the best way of doing it would be to become involved. It's hard to come to a judgement on something that you're completely separated from. I guess from that perspective, if someone has been an academic their whole life and not been very physical then you know they're going to have a different view of the world and life. So how would I necessarily state that? Maybe they should experience some of the things involved in it before they come to judge it.

Doesn't mean they need to fight but they could come to an understanding of the technical aspects of Jiu Jitsu or the technical aspects of wrestling. Then maybe they'd have a greater perspective to make judgements on what they're seeing.

A6: I train not to hopefully get back into a fight; I train because it is a part of me, a large part of me.

A7: Anything I'd like to add [] yeah. I mean anything, any fear or any thoughts of it being too violent, is mostly, a lack of understanding. When you see a choke or

an armbar happening, they have to realize we are trained to experience this. We are trained to turn our elbows to the slightest degree to release the pressure on the arm. It's a misunderstanding is that the lack of knowledge of the sport and of the techniques that are being applied that make it look violent or make it seem violent. MMA is like any other sport.

A8: Okay yeah, at first glance mixed martial arts seem very gruesome. You know but the more you research the more intense you get into mixed martial arts. You realize it's a very beautiful sport. That too, the difference between street fighting and competing in an event it is not two drunk mad guys. You've got two professional athletes that are world trained competing against each other. And you know there's a referee. And you know the rules are made to keep the fighter safe. You know, if you are not educated and you live there and you can't tell, because you live in a ball. But the more that you [] I'd really like to encourage everyone to research anything and everything they don't understand about it to see what it's about before looking at it context about what may be mixed martial arts.

These athletes added important details because I have witnessed individuals repulsed by MMA change their views, respect, appreciation and outlook of the sport and athletes by simply watching MMA, talking to athletes or participating at a recreational level. There are many levels, types, and reasons people get involved in MMA. The culture and language is a difficult one to learn but the more you learn the more understanding and acceptance for it you develop. This study has provided insight into

how these athletes perceive and experience MMA and their moral consciousness surrounding MMA at the highest level.

Conclusion

MMA has existed for a short time but has managed to grow into a culture and practice community that share a passion for something that is not fully understood but is building traditions of their own similar to boxing. Traditional martial arts do have a lot to offer and I feel as though a lot of the good from martial arts has transferred to MMA and the negative aspects of martial arts have not. There is an argument to suggest MMA is now a traditional martial art of its own. A6 had this to say about MMA being its own tradition.

A6: So I mean I'm a martial artist who took on modern martial arts. I don't call it mixed I call it modern. I would say how in the hell you gonna ban something that's a traditional martial art? It's modern martial art. That's like trying to get rid of Olympic wrestling. Yeah so I mean me being in mixed modern martial arts, I appreciate the fact that it's saved my life.

MMA is now its own traditional martial art. It is all the traditional martial arts and Olympic combat sports centuries old put together into one new martial art etched in traditions of the past, present and future. At first it looks undesirable and damaging to societal growth but broken down with a knowledgeable eye this is not street fighting but it is 'as real as it gets' (UFC motto). It could be described as street fighting with trained professionals in a context where the possibility or probability of death or serious injury has been removed. Other martial arts and Olympic sports have been going on and continue too alongside MMA without moral questioning. This is disheartening because

MMA should be given the same consideration. If other high risk sports are deemed ethical due to tradition, safety and acceptance then so should MMA. After all, MMA athletes are traditional martial artist, boxers, and Olympians with the same motives, moral conduct, and intentions present in those sports MMA is just a beautiful combination of them all.

These are professional athletes that have tested their instincts of fight or flight their entire lives. They are masters of their bodies and minds and they display their mastery in the rawest sport form. There are male, female, transgendered, gay, lesbian, physically and mentally disabled MMA athletes. All of them have conditioned their bodies and minds to absorb, recognize, manage and assess various levels of violence, emotion, and pain and should be respected. Athletes respect each other and the hatred people assume is shared between MMA athletes is either entertainment hype or simply not there. The level of sportsmanship and camaraderie shown throughout MMA must count for something.

When discussing the wrongness or rightness of an activity concerning morals there are personal, community, provincial, national and global voices to be heard. It appears that there is a general acceptance in 2013 of MMA and the UFC and this includes a moral acceptance among various groups and areas in the U.S.A. and Canada. Even though the UFC is absent in New York State and certain organizations call for a ban of MMA, the sports full capacity must be comprehended to fairly judge its ethical status. Since no conclusive arguments demonstrate MMA and the UFC are unethical, they must be permitted to continue to develop.

This conclusion holds even though there is a lack of accurate empirical data about the harms in the sport and no MMA athlete is fully informed of all the risks. The mere short history and lack of formal data does not allow an academic assessment of all the risks and harms so I hope to encourage, support and develop this research to ensure athletes' safety and the prosperity of MMA and the UFC flourishes.

This work then concludes that MMA at the highest level in the form of the UFC is ethically defensible despite the inherent violence in the sport. MMA athletes have voiced their opinion on the ethical status of the sport and have provided substantial support in opposition to a ban of MMA which was expected. The ethical discussion concerning boxing added to the MMA debate by categorizing MMA with moral concepts from the boxing literature, comparing them ethically by taking into consideration their differences and what the athletes had to say. MMA and the UFC are ethically defensible based on autonomy, limited paternalistic interference, and not falling under the harm principle. An explanation of the context of MMA and the UFC has also shown that a ban of the sport is not warranted but suggestions for reform are welcomed. As in all sports, change in MMA and the UFC improves the ethical status of the sport and its athletes should be viewed as praiseworthy by advocates and detractors alike.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Different Combative Sports that Constitute Aspects of MMA

Name	Description
Boxing	American: punches
Brancaille	French: wrestling
Brazilian Jiu Jitsu	Brazilian: grappling, submissions, self defense
Capoeira	Native Brazilian: dance/martial art
Judo	Japanese: grappling, throws, strikes
Jujitsu	Japanese: 750 styles, throws, submissions
Karate	Japanese: striking (punches/kicks)
Kenpo	First American: strikes to vitals (punches/kicks)
Kickboxing	Japanese/American: striking (punches/kicks)
Muay Thai	Thailand: striking (punch, knee, elbow, kick, sweeps)
Pencak Silat	Indonesia: leg attacks
Pit Fighting	American: street fighting/brawling
Sambo	Russian: grappling, submissions, leg locks
Savate	French: striking
Shootfighting	American: derived from Vale Tudo
Tae Kwon Do	Korea: striking (kicks, punches)
Vale Tudo	Brazilian: 'anything goes'
Wrestling	American: grappling, throws, submissions

Appendix B

Questionnaire

1. Age.
 24 or under 25-30 30-35 35-40
 40 or over

2. Residence.
Country: _____ State: _____ City: _____

3. Years of professional MMA experience.
 5 or under 5-10 10-15 15 or over

4. Years of UFC experience.
 1 or under 2-5 5-10 10 or over

5. Sport involvement prior to MMA.
 Boxing Karate Hockey Wrestling
 Taekwondo Football Judo Soccer

 Baseball Other

6. Primary martial art utilized in your style as a mixed martial artist.
 Wrestling Karate Boxing Judo
 Taekwondo
 MMA BJJ Kickboxing Muay Thai
 Other

7. Which, if any of the following are problems in MMA that should be addressed more aggressively?
 Medical intervention Equipment Weight Divisions
 Rules/Regulations Time Limits Medical Testing
 Violence Drug Testing Match Duration
 Fights per year Weight cutting

8. If (Rules/Regulations) was previously selected describe the problem(s) and make suggestions.

9. Are the UFC and their athletes fairly represented in the media? Explain.

10. What is the 'goal' of a fighter in a UFC match?
 Winning Income Fame
 Violence against another
 Violence against self Skill test Fun Competitive Outlet

- Catharsis
- Profession
- Entertainment
- Performance Improvement

11. Would you encourage your children to participate in MMA or are they in MMA? Boxing? Explain.
12. Should there be fines or suspensions for excessive violence? (i.e., extra punch after opponent is unconscious Dan Henderson vs. Michael Bisping UFC100)
13. How do you react after a judge's decision or think you would react after a judge's decision?
14. What are your thoughts and reactions after a referee stoppage?
15. How do you react or think you would react after being knocked out, injured, choked unconscious, judge's decision or referee stoppage? (ask each individually)
16. Is there room for reform or an increase in safety measures? Describe your safety as an MMA (UFC) athlete.
17. Can a sport that has violence as an inherent feature, be morally acceptable?

Appendix C

Interview guide

1. How would you describe your experience of becoming a UFC athlete? Describe the journey.
2. When training violent techniques and MMA how do you prevent injuring and hurting your training partner (s)?
3. Is it possible to train hard and prepare for competition and not go full out and injure training partners?
4. Now I would like to talk about competition. What does it mean to say that someone not only likes to win, but they like to finish? [have them explain the difference as they understand it and provide examples if possible to clarify]
5. In a competition how do you approach the fight – do you look to win, do you look to finish? [ask follow up questions here]
6. In a competition how do you make sense of the fact that your success often comes from “finishing” and likely injuring your opponent?
7. Have you been involved in violence prior to MMA involvement and what? During or after? For example street fights, abuse, etc.
8. Are you fully aware of the risks of MMA? Were you when you started? Were you taught this and do you teach it in your classes?
9. I would like to talk to you about the ‘code of violence’ in the UFC. By a “code” I mean what is accepted as normal and what is not. The UFC rules determine what is acceptable but I want to know how you understand these rules in specific situations. In your experience what is acceptable violence? Example: tap out vs breaking a bone, attacking when someone is ‘out’, etc.
10. Within the rules, is there any unacceptable violence? (You’re not doing anything prohibited but you are absolutely going to cause injury ie. Foot stomps/neck cranks) is this acceptable? Explain.
11. Explain positions or examples where fighters could do violent acts (beyond the realm of necessity) but choose to or not.
12. What are your thoughts about the violence committed against yourself?
13. Describe some of your injuries. Did they occur in training or competition?
14. Describe some injuries you have given out. Did they occur in training or competition?
15. What are your thoughts on competing against friends/past training partners?
16. Is there a difference between being a skilled and aggressive MMA athlete as opposed to a violent one? Can you explain this difference?
17. Is there demand for reform in the UFC from athletes?
18. What?
19. Should there be fines for ‘excessive’ violence? (ie. Bisping vs. Henderson)
20. Tell me about an episode where an opponent crossed the line in terms of violence.
21. Have you ever crossed the line?
22. Why?
23. Explain.
24. What level of violence in the UFC would drive you away; what is your ‘red line’?
25. If MMA is inherently violent, why should the UFC exist?

26. If the UFC and MMA were banned what reasons would you give to oppose such a ban?
27. What would you do?
28. What is the difference between UFC violence and boxing violence?
29. Could the violence in the UFC increase?
30. To what extent?
31. Discuss being choked unconscious. Explain the experience of choking someone out and being choked out.
32. Discuss being submitted with a lock that causes injury (armbar broken arm). Explain the experience of breaking someone and being broken.
33. Explain the possibility of being killed or permanently injured and vice versa.
34. Give me an example of when you knocked someone out, submitted someone, etc. and how that was experienced? Vice versa.
35. What would your response to Senator John McCain claiming the UFC is 'human cockfighting'?
36. What are you uncomfortable with but still perform because you are a pro fighter in the UFC? Increased violence for Dana White/bonus/popularity? Guilt? Why, how?
37. What should happen if there is a death/numerous?
38. Describe your thoughts on participating in MMA; for example our rights to participate?
39. Final comments?

Appendix D

Consent letter

Informed Consent

Date:

Project Title: Can Mixed Martial Arts Be Ethically Defended?: Autonomy, Paternalism, and the Harm Principle

Principal Investigator (PI): Cody Kent

Department of Kinesiology

Brock University

519-428-8783, ck06ny@brocku.ca

Faculty Supervisor:

Danny Rosenberg, Faculty

Student Principal Investigator (SPI):

Cody Kent, Student

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is to investigate if MMA in the UFC is ethically justifiable considering boxing ethics, paternalism, autonomy and the Harm Principal.

WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and interviews discussing your participation and ethical considerations about engaging in a sport where violence is inherent. Participation will take approximately one to three hours of your time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

Possible benefits of participation include increase in awareness, publicity, and knowledge of a sport that is relatively misunderstood and misrepresented. There are psychological risks that may arise in the interview process and will be explained and discussed in the following.

Psychological risks like embarrassment and emotional stress may arise due to the sensitivity and

invasiveness of investigating the reasons and experiences of violence among these athletes. Interviewees from other studies similar to this one including boxing studies and other MMA studies have shown to surface personal and deep emotional responses from past experiences. It can be assumed that interviews involving these high level athletes from various backgrounds may promote in depth stories and personal accounts that could cause emotional stress. These psychological risks will be managed by halting any further invasive questioning once the participant(s) appear distraught. I am not qualified to manage these issues nor will there be any provided assistance, however there will be recommendations for psychological assistance given to the participants. The participants will be able to withdraw from participation at any time and pass on any questions that may make the participant uncomfortable in order to prevent such psychological risks. There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this study other than the aforementioned.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Personal identifiers that will be collected during the course of the research include the following. Participant's ages, number of years in professional MMA competition, years in the UFC, weight class, gender, UFC ranking and /or status (i.e. former champion). Pseudonyms will only be used in order to conceal the identity of the subjects. Personal identifiers will be secured electronically under password and only my advisor (Danny Rosenberg) and I will be privy to the raw data. Data hardcopies will be disposed of by shredding one year after the thesis is completed. The data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Written records, audio tapes, interview guides, and questionnaires will be secured electronically under password and only my advisor and I will be privy to the raw data. Electronic data will be deleted and removed from drives one year after the thesis is completed. Data hardcopies will be disposed of by shredding one year after the thesis is completed. Audio tape recording will be deleted electronically by me. The data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty.

PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available to you via email once publication of results is available.

CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact Cody Kent (ck06ny@brocku.ca) or Danny Rosenberg (drosenberg@brocku.ca). This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University **File Number:** _____. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Confidentiality statements:

Confidential survey/questionnaire:

All information you provide is considered confidential; your name will not be included or, in any other way, associated with the data collected in the study. Furthermore, because our interest is in the average responses of the entire group of participants, you will not be identified individually in any way in written reports of this research.

Interview with Member Check:

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish.

Appendix E

Letter of Invitation

Date:

Title of Study: Can Mixed Martial Arts Be Ethically Defended?: Autonomy, Paternalism, and the Harm Principle

Student Principal Investigator: Cody, student, Department of Kinesiology, Brock University

Faculty Supervisor: Danny Rosenberg, Faculty, Department of Kinesiology, Brock University

I, Cody Kent from the Department of Kinesiology, Brock University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled Can Mixed Martial Arts Be Ethically Defended?: Autonomy, Paternalism, and the Harm Principle.

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is to investigate if MMA in the UFC is ethically justifiable considering, boxing ethics, paternalism, autonomy, the Harm Principle and violence. For the purpose of this study participants should understand violence is defined as the exertion of physical force to deliberately injure or harm another person or persons (Simon, 2004; Young, 2012).

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and interviews discussing your participation and ethical considerations about engaging in a sport where violence is inherent.

Participation will take approximately one to three hours of your time. Possible benefits of participation include increase in awareness, publicity, and knowledge of a sport that is relatively misunderstood and misrepresented.

There are psychological risks that may arise in the interview process and will be explained and discussed in the following. Psychological risks like embarrassment and emotional stress may arise due to the sensitivity and invasiveness of investigating the reasons and experiences of violence among these athletes. Interviewees from other studies similar to this one including boxing studies and other MMA studies have shown to surface personal and deep emotional responses from past experiences. It can be assumed that interviews involving these

high level athletes from various backgrounds may promote in depth stories and personal accounts that could cause emotional stress.

These psychological risks will be managed by halting any further invasive questioning once the participant(s) appear distraught. I am not qualified to manage these issues nor will there be any provided assistance by me, however there will be recommendations for psychological assistance given to the participants. The participants will be able to withdraw from participation at any time and pass on any questions that may make the participant uncomfortable in order to minimize such psychological risks.

There are no companies or agencies that may be sponsoring the research. This is a multi-center project that will take place in various sites including MMA gyms of the interviewed athletes.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, reb@brocku.ca)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,

Cody Kent
Student Principal Investigator
519-428-8783
ck06ny@brocku.ca

Danny Rosenberg
Supervisor
905-688-5550 ext. 4289
drosenberg@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board **File Number: 12-079**

Appendix F

Thank you letter.

Brock University
500 Glenridge Ave.
L2S 3A1
905-688-5550
St.Catharines, Ontario

Date:

Dear _____,

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study entitled, Can Mixed Martial Arts Be Ethically Defended?: Autonomy, Paternalism, and the Harm Principle. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to investigate the ethics of MMA and the athletes at the highest level (UFC). Autonomy, paternalism and the Harm principle will guide the ethical discussion promoting discussion of the most pertinent ethical theories applicable to this study.

Showing participants the interview transcripts to check for accuracy and sharing the findings of the thesis as I progressed as well as after the first draft of the thesis was completed giving them a summary of the results allowed for depth and accuracy. Giving the participants an opportunity to provide input on these aspects of the thesis strengthened the overall manuscript in terms of clarifying ideas, improving explanations and describing examples with greater detail.

The data collected during interviews will contribute to a better understanding of MMA at its highest level (UFC). The interviews will contribute to the ethical discussion by allowing the voice of the athletes in these moral situation and who have the best understanding of the sport.

Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or would like a summary of the results, please provide your email address, and when the study is completed, anticipated by [insert date], I will send you the information. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or telephone as noted below. As with all Brock University projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Board at Brock University. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation

in this study, please contact Brock Research Ethics Office (905-688-5550, ext. 3035) or reb@brocku.ca.

Cody Kent
Brock University
Department of Kinesiology
519-428-8783
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